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An Initiative to end the Standstill

Desirable Security Policy Objectives
of a United EU



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Summary

Since Ursula von der Leyen assumed the role of President of the European Commission, the European Union has shown stronger aspirations in security policy. The EU wants to take on a larger share of global responsibility. However, this will only be possible if it can be conveyed in socio-political terms, i.e. which political aims the EU intends to pursue and what it expects from its partners. If it wants to communicate these objectives more coherently and more credibly, there will need to be a higher degree of unity within the Union.

Effective joint action is still being hampered by internal procedures and institutional structures. Hence, the EU will need to carry out partial reforms and modernise. To remedy this, new ideas such as the European Security Council and the European Intervention Initiative may be useful.

EU citizens want to see their governments take on more responsibility when it comes to resolving international conflicts and crises. To most member states, taking on more responsibility means to implement policies through the EU. Following the Coronavirus pandemic, where countries have been acting within their national administrations, the EU will once again become the framework for the medium and smaller-sized EU member states to implement policies. In the long term Brussels must also be able to represent key interests independently. In the context of increasingly challenging transatlantic relations, it is essential for the European Union to become more assertive vis-à-vis the US in certain policy areas. This will be the only way for it to be able to assume a stronger long-term geopolitical role and stand up for itself in a globalised world.

In the long run, a European nuclear shield will need to be part of a joint security approach. Currently it does not seem to be pragmatic for the world to forego nuclear weapons. If Europe could rely on a European nuclear shield under French leadership, then it would be less dependent on the US. As the US has realigned its foreign policy, a European nuclear shield would mean that EU Member States would be guaranteed a sufficient level of security. Nevertheless, the Transatlantic Alliance would still be in

the interest of the EU.

The OSCE should be given much more attention within the EU. It is one of the rare organisations where all EU countries, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, Russia as well as the US and Canada are represented. More effective use should be made of these channels of communication. The OSCE has the capacity to provide Europe with a long-term vision of security policy, by integrating all stakeholders.

Policies of remembrance and history should contribute to the de-escalation of conflict in public discourse. However, this is currently not the case. On the one hand, national myths are being built up to sustain a construct of identity that is as coherent as possible; on the other hand, political players are using certain narratives to legitimise their current foreign policy actions. This leads to political tensions rooted in history having an impact on European threat analyses and hence on actions undertaken jointly in the EU's backyard. Security threat analysis should be conducted at a European level and threats should be jointly assessed. History should not prevent us from formulating sound policies.

1) EU disunity: "Divisive Topics"

With the European divisions on the Iraq War of 2003 fresh in his mind, the British historian Timothy Garton Ash wrote in his book *Free World* in 2004: "The whole of the new, enlarged Europe is engaged in a great argument between the forces of Euro-Gaulism and Euro-Atlanticism. This is the argument of the decade. On its outcome will depend the future of the West."

This was a fitting analysis of the two engines of European policy and also their potential split. More than a decade has passed since this assessment, but what remains is Donald Rumsfeld's well-known dichotomy between the "Old and New Europe". Much might have changed since then with respect to the EU's institutions (Joint Foreign and Security Policy, Eastern Partnership, Permanent Structural Cooperation: PESCO). In addition, three new members have joined and the United Kingdom has left the Union, but this dividing line is still clearly visible today.



Almost on a monthly basis there is a headline in political reporting that aims explicitly to show the lack of unity in the EU: Libya, Syria and the question regarding the position that should be adopted in the long run vis-à-vis globally operating autocratic systems such as China and Russia. One of the most prominent examples of this disunity, apart from the challenges of the Coronavirus pandemic, has been the position on European migration policy, which has been a constant topic of contention. Since 2015 the EU has failed to develop a sustainable concept; in this respect, just relying on Turkey will not be sufficient.

In this context, there has been concern regarding the advance of right-wing populists, national security and the desire to prevent renewed internal disputes. Some EU Member States insist that clear and inviolable values and fundamental rights must be adhered to, even at the EU's external borders. Most recent tensions at the Turkish-Greek border, however, suggest that some values and fundamental rights are potentially incompatible with the stringent border closures demanded by some EU Member States. Hence the lack of consensus on values and ethical considerations, generated by intense political challenges, may lead to persistent divisions between EU members.

Another area of partial disunity is how to deal with and how to include the transatlantic partner. Since the beginning of Donald Trump's Presidency, US relations have become increasingly unclear and complicated. The US administration's paradigm of "America First" has been putting into question principles that had been taken for granted in transatlantic relations for decades. Thereby Trump is even willing to resort to economic sanctions, i.e. measures that are not normally envisaged among partners.

North Stream II is probably the most topical example of where the US saw itself forced to act to protect the EU, especially Germany, from the supposed dependency on Russian energy supplies. So far not all EU Member States have clearly condemned or disapproved of US behaviour, which can probably be attributed to their own economic interests, with the positions on the project among EU Member States diverging as well.

Fundamentally, in many cases the EU is not even sure whether or not its own interests coincide with Washington's. Even in the past it has not always been easy to reach an alignment of interests. There have been examples in areas such as external energy policy, including the American dislike of Soviet pipelines in the 1970s and 1980s, or recently in the context of the establishment of PESCO and the European Defence Fund (EDF). However, even if there is consensus within the EU, there is also the need to assess how far Member States are prepared to safeguard their own national interests at the international level. In various areas there seems to be a lack of willingness, when push comes to shove. A case in point: INSTEX, the instrument for supporting trade activities with Iran, has only been used half-heartedly to save the Iranian Nuclear Agreement, the JCPOA.

With Ursula von der Leyen taking over as President of the European Commission, the EU has increased its own ambitions in terms of security policy. Von der Leyen has been calling for a "more geopolitical EU". This also corresponds to the proclaimed objectives of the German Government to take on greater responsibility at the international level which is meant to be consensus-based EU policy and to be implemented as such. The underlying principle that only a more "united" EU will be able to become "a geopolitical player" has been stressed and also reinforced by former President Jean-Claude Juncker.

However, it is a problem that the current institutional set-up makes joint action much more difficult within the EU. Firstly, matters of foreign policy must be subject to national procedures which are then dealt with at an intergovernmental level within the European Council, where every decision has to be taken unanimously. As the international system is becoming more turbulent and the ability of the EU to react to major crises is increasingly in demand, the lack of structural unity in security policy is becoming a serious problem.

If the EU wants to be relevant at an international level and wants to become a global player, then it will need to partially reform and modernise. Planned structures, such as the European Security Council and the European Intervention Initiative, might pro-



vide a remedy. However, it needs to be clear that in the medium and long term, a united EU cannot be compensated for by new bodies and EU institutions. When it comes down to unity and being a global player, relations with Russia will evidently be decisive, as this is one of the topics which is the source of many disputes with the EU.

Relations with Russia have been made so complicated by the fact that divisions as well as differing perceptions and positions of EU Member States are based on so many different causes and facts. Apart from conducting an analysis of the authoritarian country, some EU Member States have also been searching for national identities, historical differences, party-political changes at the national and European level as well as for alliances within the Union (Visegrád members). These members are particularly keen on prioritising their region or their own political agenda as well as their own economic interests.

2) Strategic Autonomy: “European Union as Subject”

“Euro-Gaullist activism” could also be observed among some predecessors of French President Emmanuel Macron. Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy also implemented such policies, although with varying degrees of success. Chirac was one of the leading architects of the “Paris-Berlin-Moscow Axis,” which, in conjunction with some other Western European countries, formed the opposition to the US-led Iraq War of 2003. However, President Sarkozy’s initiative to intervene in Libya with a European coalition of the willing led to a disastrous outcome for security policy within the context of the Arab Spring.

What has changed with respect to the French initiative for a European Security Policy? The objective is now a joint approach to further the strategic development of the EU and the role of the EU within Europe. President Macron’s new way of thinking provides an opportunity for a detailed debate on the methods and objectives of European Security and Defence Policy with an ambitious aim: increased independence as a player in security policy in a volatile international system. Whatever Emmanuel Macron

presented last year and more recently at the Munich Security Conference in February 2020 is not part of a myriad of initiatives made necessary by a difficult domestic situation, as some experts suspect, but a calculated policy on the basis of national analyses, accompanied by the strong international political standing of the French President.

On several occasions Macron has pointed out that a political debate with Russia is necessary, despite potentially being a source of major conflict at European level: “If we do not talk to Russia, this would be a serious mistake. Russia is situated in Europe and we cannot and should not ignore it.” He is being supported by Jean de Glinasty, the former French ambassador to Russia: “Macron’s objective to transform the European Union into an ‘acting subject’ of history [...] can in his opinion only be achieved by normalising relations with Moscow.”

A common EU position in terms of relations with Russia is very important, as well as a constructive development of this relationship. This includes dealing with the conflict in the Ukraine, climate change (Russia’s territory comprises about one eighth of the earth’s surface and consequently is one of the decisive players), the conflict with Syria (where Russia plays a decisive part and whose solution is also partially linked to the resolution of the migration crisis), the long-term energy security of the EU as mentioned, as well as military de-escalation (to promote the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and to prevent another arms race).

It is hardly surprising that many EU partners have shown reluctance and a negative reaction with respect to France’s “New Thinking” and this is partially based on historical analogy. Similarly, German chancellor Willy Brandt had to cope with disunity and initial rejection among the Western powers to promote his “Ostpolitik”. However, the desire for the reunification of Germany was so great that no effort was to be spared. At the same time the West German government was determined to make its Western allies accept that relations with Socialist neighbouring countries and the USSR needed to be improved, but sought to do this as transparently as possible to facilitate this. Egon Bahr had previously received Washington’s approval.



Over a decade after Brandt and Bahr, Soviet Leader Michael Gorbachev also had to take note that his “New Thinking” was met by major scepticism not only among the political class in the Soviet Union, but also by the West. At the time it was argued that this might lead to a split of the allegedly fragile West in its entirety.

Another example in the more recent past shows how Europe has been dealing with new ideas and concepts: the Three Seas Initiative. Started by Poland and Croatia in 2015, this informal forum of twelve Central and Eastern European States has provoked a lot of scepticism in Western Europe. Disagreements about EU Migration Policy and historical comparisons with the Polish Intermarium Project of the interwar era have generated major fears of division. For the last two years German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier have attended the summit meeting of the Three Seas Initiative, with Germany having somewhat adapted its policy to project the image of a more “united” Europe. The reasons for this change in policy have been: the prospect of mutual good will, Poland becoming more open to EU initiatives as well as Germany being given better insight into the development of this political process (as an observing member).

An EU leadership core will need to cooperate and communicate intensely in order not to encourage any bilateral strategies coming from Russia and the US, who both want to exploit the structural disunity within the EU. However, with the EU having 27 member states, a lot of national players need to be dealt with. Even Berlin and Paris cannot whole-heartedly agree on what the EU as an independent player in security policy entails. Ideally, Poland, as an important Central Eastern European country would take part in such an initiative because it is in its own interest to co-determine such policy and not just to reject it.

Over the past few years the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has been widely criticised for its lack of strategy, because there has been no political project, with it having served only as the classic EU instrument for enlargement and integration. The reasons for this are to be found in the implicit sha-

ring of roles between the purely intergovernmental and US-led NATO on the one hand and the EU, which was not responsible for security and defence, on the other hand. This division of labour has never been questioned by more recent EU members.

Only over the last three years were these additional institutions, i.e. the launch of the PESCO Initiative and the European Defence Fund, noticed by the outside world and then promptly criticised by the US Defence Secretary of the time, James Mattis. The main criticism was that they would be competing with NATO. However, there has also been criticism within the EU. This was not only about the heightened importance of being able to act in foreign policy matters, but also about the strategic autonomy of the EU. This is currently an ambitious policy initiative and might become a guiding principle of the EU, if it were sufficiently supported by the union.

However, on this important topic, the charged dynamics of transatlantic and Euro-centric forces can be seen at play, as pin-pointed by Garton Ash. If there were to be agreement in favour of a process of strategic autonomy, the EU would be provided with an impetus for its policy of integration on the one hand, and would be given space to develop its security policy on the other. The effects of this would be felt beyond Europe.

The open disagreement between Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel about the status of NATO in November 2019 has shown again that Germany believes that harmony and stability within transatlantic relations should take precedence over ambitious reform theories. The debate over the “nuclear sharing” of recent months illustrates again that Germany is not willing to change existing rules. However, Paris would be the logical partner with whom Berlin and other EU Member States might reflect upon and shape the process of strategic autonomy. It will be an important task over the following years to find a balance between countries who want to actively participate or just be passive bystanders.

3) Constructive Approaches:

There have been only a few exceptions since EU enlargement in 2004 where EU Member States have



acted jointly (for example the sanctions against Russia due to the conflict in and about the Ukraine). It is important to take constructive decisions and to show that a union with half a billion inhabitants is able to act, particularly in times of international crises and conflicts. The main focus should be on the following six elements:

a) Pragmatic strengthening of the capacity to address urgent crises: The EU must prove its competence as a global player

The results and the analysis of the study "Security Radar 2019"¹ show that a large majority of Europeans feel part of a European culture and want to see their governments assuming more responsibility to resolve conflicts. In addition, the analysis of expert debate and the responses of representative surveys in seven countries (France, Germany, Poland, Serbia, Latvia, Ukraine and Russia) have shown that the leading tandem consisting of France and Germany should be bringing about a positive change of the status quo. In this context it is important to point out that both France and Germany see their current national governments' objectives in security policy being closely linked to a united Europe.

Enabling the EU to become a "global player" will only be possible if the EU is united in wanting to acquire this ability. There are good reasons for this. For the next decade the greater geopolitical ambitions of the new EU Commission will need to be compatible with the structural change in transatlantic relations, as well as with the swift political changes in third countries that might affect the interests of EU Member States. If such interests cannot be made compatible with transatlantic relations, the EU (supranationally or after consultations with governments, depending on the internally agreed level of ambition) must be in a position to represent its vital interests independently. Depending on the nature of the challenge, it will need to be able to establish the necessary majorities and agreements, taking into account existing diplomatic and military capabilities. However, on a case-by-case basis, this might lead to unconventional constellations of stakeholders (within the EU as well as with third countries), as can be seen at present in Mali and Libya.

Germany and France should take action. As the EU state with the largest population and the strongest economy, Germany in particular should no longer adopt a wait-and-see-attitude, but take the helm and fulfil its responsibilities.

b) Tackling the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic in a cooperative manner

At national level there has been a remarkable eagerness to take decisions in order to overcome the economic effects of the pandemic. Huge financial rescue packages were agreed by national governments to alleviate the consequences of the pandemic for the labour market and for essential sectors and stakeholders. However, this does not show good international cooperation, as rich countries are able to do so while others cannot. This is also insufficient. However, admittedly, this national momentum could lead to necessary cooperation.

The EU has taken first steps by considering raising the billions of euros necessary for a reconstruction fund by issuing Euro bonds. The compromise that has been emerging on the Franco-German proposal of such an instrument means that cooperative and not only national action is necessary to address the severity of the Coronavirus crisis. Apart from this financial aspect, it is also appropriate to invest into the strengthening of international organisations such as the WHO as well as setting up coordinating institutions such as a Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. After these organisations have been set up, it is important that they should not only be active within the EU, but also cooperate in conjunction with other international organisations and government crisis response centres.

c) Debate on a European Nuclear Shield

A survey by the Körber Foundation and the Pew Research Center from September 2019² has shown that respondents in Germany specifically declared

¹ <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/wien/15176-20190412.pdf>

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/03/09/amerikaner-und-deutsche-unterscheiden-sich-in-ihren-ansichten-uber-einander-und-uber-die-welt/>



themselves to be in favour of a European Nuclear Shield instead of remaining under the US shield. A remarkable feature was the fact that Germans were even prepared to accept larger defence expenditure in order to achieve this. At the beginning of the year, French President Emmanuel Macron fleshed out his plans regarding a European Nuclear Shield³. He called for increased cooperation and established a European dimension for the French nuclear deterrent force. Germany as well as the other EU Member States should be very open to this offer and should discuss its long-term implementation.

Naturally, this does not mean that the EU should demand that the US-Nuclear Umbrella over Europe be closed. However, it may be advantageous, especially in times of incalculable security risks, to develop an EU strategy of nuclear deterrence in parallel to the existing NATO-concept.

d) Allowing for coordinated challenges

In the Eastern European neighbourhood of the EU, it is a matter of challenging the policies of the Russian Federation by allowing its leadership to react to pragmatic policy initiatives in very precise and sectoral areas of policy. The EU might submit a roadmap with tangible and politically synchronised actions for de-escalation to Russia. Russia could, at best, respond to this in stages. If Russia broke existing agreements in this context, then the EU could always intervene and reassess its policy. If this approach is agreed as far as possible, then the EU can rely on its inner strengths and in case of a foreign policy slip by Moscow it can return to the status quo ante at any time.

Vis-à-vis Russia, the EU is superior or at least equal in almost all relevant attributes of power and capabilities. The substantial dialogue with intermediate stages between the EU and Russia or the Eurasian Economic Union should be conducted in accordance with agreed criteria and a common understanding about its purpose. It should be clear to the EU and in particular to France and Germany that a

process of political dialogue is of strategic interest, especially to settle armed conflicts in Europe and in its immediate neighbourhood. One of the initial results should be an improvement of the situation within and around Ukraine.

There is a successful record of such a kind of political process. The silent and effective diplomacy between France and the Soviet Union, used to pave the way for the CSCE process, became an important link in the era of Détente. At that time, the European Community and the Western world as a whole were anything but united. In both cases the objective was not a strategic partnership.

e) A holistic Understanding of Security: Strengthening the Role of the OSCE

The unique feature of the OSCE is the fact that EU members, the US as well as the Russian Federation are represented under one umbrella. For this reason it should be obvious, as enshrined 30 years ago in the Paris Charter of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and confirmed by the Astana Declaration of 2010, that it is the organisation which should restore cooperative security in Europe. Even though it might already be a link between EU and non-EU members, the EU should strengthen its role and should pay much more attention to it. A stronger OSCE might reinforce the feeling of unity, put all stakeholders on a more equal footing and provide Europe with a security policy objective. This might contribute to making the process more transparent. On the other hand, this referential space of cooperative security could include Russia in this process, provided that the country is still interested in such an initiative. However, some fundamental questions would need to be answered: Will new rules and agreements be required to deal with the current threats and challenges to security? What is the objective of European security over the next five to ten years?

f) De-politicising European History

National historical myths play an important part in the development and permanent adoption of identities. However, the level of the current historical and commemorative debate is turning this social con-

³ <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/07/discours-du-president-emmanuel-macron-sur-la-strategie-de-defense-et-de-dissuasion-devant-les-stagiaires-de-la-27eme-promotion-de-lecole-de-guerre>



text into one that is increasingly security-oriented where mutually exclusive narratives are inexorably opposed. At the intergovernmental level, they influence threat analyses of security policy.

This recourse to history, if well measured and consensus-based (Franco-German reconciliation after the Second World War being used as a basis and accompanying the process of European integration), can be a decisive stimulus. If France and Germany had continued to blame each other for the past, then there would never have been any European integration.

Even within the EU there are strong discrepancies in matters of historical perception. This can be clearly seen in the strained relationship with Russia, among other things. This relationship is full of tensions as many individual EU member states feel very threatened by Russia. Within this perception of threat, respective national histories play an important part because they contribute greatly to Russia's definition as a player and its aims.

However, other member states do not perceive this danger as such. All three aspects are based on a threat analysis where Russian foreign policy does not represent any danger to France or the EU: ranging from the "brain-dead diagnosis" to the French advocacy for strategic autonomy and culminating in the conditional rapprochement with Russia. These differing perceptions of threat are problematic in the sense that they turn a Common Foreign and Security Policy into a very difficult undertaking.

European policy-makers and hence all responsible stakeholders on the continent must ask themselves for how long and to what extent our future will continue to be dictated by the history of national suffering. History plays an important part in politics and society, but it should not serve as a veto in solution-oriented policies.

4. Looking ahead:

It is in the hands of politicians, but also in the hands of the citizens of EU Member States to make sure that an agreement can be reached between the dif-

ferent key drivers of European security policy. There is certainly not going to be any complete unity, but a common understanding might be reached. In an era where it is getting increasingly difficult to rely on political partnerships in the international system and in times of socio-economic challenges due to the pandemic, the EU cannot afford another decade of constant disunity.

FES ROCPE in Vienna

The goal of the FES Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe (FES ROCPE) of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Vienna is to come to terms with the challenges to peace and security in Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union a quarter of a century ago. These issues should be discussed primarily with the countries of Eastern Europe – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – and with Russia, as well as with the countries of the EU and with the US. The security order of Europe, based until recently on the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the Paris Charter (1990), is under threat. This is, among others, a result of different perceptions of the development of international relations and threats over the last 25 years, resulting in divergent interests among the various states.

For these reasons, FES ROCPE supports the revival of a peace and security dialogue and the development of new concepts in the spirit of a solution-oriented policy. The aim is to bring scholars and politicians from Eastern Europe, Russia, the EU and the US together to develop a common approach to tackle these challenges, to reduce tensions and to aim towards conflict resolution. It is our belief that organisations such as the FES have the responsibility to come up with new ideas and to integrate them into the political process in Europe.

We support the following activities:

- Regional and international meetings for developing new concepts on cooperation and peace in Europe;
- A regional network of young professionals in the field of cooperation and peace in Europe;
- Cooperation with the OSCE in the three dimensions: the politico-military, the economic and the human.

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