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SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE ISSUE

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**European
Security at the
Crossroads: Missed
opportunities in
a rapid changing
environment**

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Introduction

After the Cold War ended, the prospects of cooperative security seemed favourable for a few years. However, in spite of opportunities, a rather strange disparity or asymmetry has evolved. While the political – and even the normative and socio-economic – goals of transformation were ubiquitously accepted, the idea of a European peace order vanished from the agenda.¹ During the 1990s, a specific constellation of power materialised in the international system. What's more, Russia was pushed to the side lines. The two rounds of eastward enlargement of NATO created an illusion of Western dominance and of its capability to project stability eastwards. Once the alliance started to extend its influence in 'Europe-in-between', i.e., the sphere between the European Union and post-Soviet Russia, such plans met Russian resistance and came to a halt.

The current international order is in transition, driven by the interplay of its main actors: Washington; Moscow; Beijing; and less significantly, the European Union. Other emerging powers are also challenging the present arrangement and if successful, they will eventually create a multipolar global order. The transient international order is currently characterised by chronic instability, regional and global turmoil, and a dramatic decline in its ease of governance.

The central question is whether the emerging multipolar order can provide security and welfare for the international community. Or, will we see protracted policies based on narrow definitions of national interest, undermining opportunities for trust and confidence-building among the driving forces of the transformation process? Are we bound to reawaken memories of the bipolar, Cold War era, with its proxy wars that instrumentalised domestic and regional conflicts for external purposes?

The chances of reforming and democratising the United Nations are rather slim. Mutual trust and consensus over the essential challenges facing the world's chief international actors are missing.² The breakdown of trust and confidence, which, despite severe challenges,

- 1 Parts of this paper are based on an enhanced contribution titled 'A world in transition: Views from Russia, the US, and the EU on the challenges of Multipolarity' in Schulze (2018).
- 2 Studies by the National Intelligence Council (NIC) on how the world will change in the coming decades and how the US position will be affected were already presented in 2009 and 2012, to the Obama Administration. See *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds* (2012). In February 2017, a new *Global Trends* report was presented to the Trump Administration: *Global Trends: Paradox of Progress*.

had lasted from the demise of the USSR, has catapulted Europe into the midst of conflicts aggravated by inherently self-inflected contradictions.

The opening two decades of the new millennium has seen fundamental changes in the constellation of power among international actors. Those changes affected Europe and will further determine opportunities to establish a peace and security order for the whole continent. Let me outline a few interlinked factors that have contributed to the present situation:

1. The hegemony of the US has proved to be temporary; Predictions from both the CIA and the National Intelligence Council (NIC) see the US as a major military actor through to 2030, although with a weakened economic and financial foundation. In order to act as a global Hegemon in future, Washington needs to safeguard existing alliances and/or seek new and loyal partners that can offer assistance and are ready for burden-sharing.
2. Russia has returned from the cold and become an international player again. State authority has been restored after the chaotic decade of the 1990s. Moscow has formulated its foreign policy objectives based on a tripartite approach to seek balanced, pragmatic, and cooperative relations with Washington, Beijing, and Brussels.

In 2008, Moscow initiated a debate on a 'Pan-European Security Architecture' to overcome the division of Europe into different zones of security. The debate linked domestic issues with international cooperation. The then Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev, focused on Russian modernisation in terms of innovation, investment, infrastructure, and governance. Modernisation was the catchword, sounding, in a way, like Perestroika and Glasnost of the Gorbachev era.

But the Russian initiative did not generate any positive result among Western powers. A year later, using a bilateral platform with Berlin, Medvedev and Chancellor Merkel agreed on a new peace and security project, formulating the *Meseberg Memorandum* of June 2010.

The *Meseberg Memorandum* tried to replicate a pre-existing approach to dialogue between NATO and Russia in EU-Russia relations. Just as with the earlier initiative, NATO members refused to deal with the new process. Both projects were buried in commissions – like Corfu Process – and taken off the agenda.

3. The failure to establish a conflict-prevention and management centre in EU-Russian relations already indicated a shift of paradigm in the Russian and Eastern policy of the EU, which occurred somewhere between 2008 and 2010. The change was from a cooperation to confrontation.
 The twofold objectives were the essence of the paradigm shift: Firstly, to isolate Russia in Europe, and secondly, to undermine the dominant position of Berlin in formulating the EU's Russia policy.
4. An anti-Russian coalition of member states was formed, and to be successful they needed to undermine Berlin's leadership in the EU's Russia policy. From 1991 until 2009, the EU borrowed a formula for its Eastern policy which was very much linked to German *Ostpolitik*. For nearly 20 years, Berlin's economic and political predominance in nearly all aspects of EU-Russian relations compensated for Brussels' lack of strategic orientation as to what to do with Russia. Pragmatic partnership and cooperation at all levels of economic, social, political, and cultural life was the core idea. This concept even worked miraculously to defuse the negative consequences of the Russia-Georgia war in 2008.
5. Reluctantly, and without a solid consensus or a coherent strategy among member states, the European Union was pushed into a geopolitical role by conflicts and consequences of state failures in its 'near-abroad', i.e., in 'Europe-in-between' and in the Mediterranean area.
 Given the conflicting and unstable conditions in the area between Europe's two geopolitical power blocs, one may only speculate as to whether the presence of security institutions, as proposed at Meseberg, would have contained the dangers of confrontation and prevented the war in Ukraine.
6. As a result, by 2012 a notable shift in the Russian foreign policy paradigm had already slowly commenced. The Kremlin simply lost hope of once again being accepted as a partner by Western powers and sought after alternatives in Asia and other emerging countries.
7. Shifts in the global economy and emerging growth centres like China, the G20, and generally the BRICS strengthened such expectations in Moscow. The policy shift toward a multipolar world order was even echoed by some EU member states.

8. An icy relationship developed in EU-Russia and NATO-Russia relations from 2012. The danger of a new Cold War is written on the wall. There is no comfort in the fact that the new Cold War differs fundamentally from the old one. Reciprocal political accusations have pushed aside the central issues of what Europe's role and position in the globalised world will be and whether there is any chance of a pan-European security arrangement. The division of Europe is at issue again; this may even be desirable for some governments.
9. The Ukraine conflict which haunts Europe today is multi-layered. It is not only a military conflict of intervention, separatism, and annexation but it also portrays signs of a societal crisis. More than two decades into transformation, the results of building a modern Ukrainian state, based on enduring economic growth, political stability, checks and balances, legitimacy, the rule of law, identity, and welfare for the people, are not very convincing. Ukraine's lingering systemic crisis has been brought to light by the catastrophic consequences of war, secessionist movements, political polarisation, and refugees, as well as by financial and economic decline. The war has simply deepened and sharpened underlying trends.

Dim chances for a breakthrough in European security

Indeed, since 2016, several jarring game-changers have troubled the international system, with consequences for European and global stability. In addition, Brexit has weakened the EU's main instrument of persuasion and soft power influence. The victory of Emmanuel Macron in the French presidential elections and the landslide success of his *En Marche!* movement in the parliamentary elections was met with triumphant enthusiasm from political establishments in Brussels, Paris, and Berlin. But two years later, such an unquestionably positive development has been offset by domestic developments in France and European fatigue. A dynamic rebirth of leadership between Berlin and Paris has not materialised.

Hopes of a game-changer effect to kick-start the EU restructuring process, enhance its geopolitical influence, and promote a comprehensive order for peace, security, and welfare on the continent are not in sight. The unpredictability caused by political fragmentation and the rise of nationalist forces in many EU member states offers little optimism for advances in EU restructuring. Nor are there grounds to expect Brussels to formulate resolute policy towards Europe's eastern neighbours

independently of US objectives. Furthermore, it remains doubtful that Brussels will influence the shape of the emerging global order, given the present state of the European Union – fragmented by uncontrollable external challenges and home-grown problems which have been eroding EU solidarity since 2009.

There have, however, been positive indications. Amidst challenging external and internal trends, in June 2016 the European Union attempted to define its place and its responsibilities within the shifting context of the international system (Council of the European Union, 2016). The *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe* strategy report is less a forecast or projection of what the future holds, and more a document of assertiveness and re-affirmation to stem the tide of draining internal cohesion and to unify the EU against external challenges. Missing from the report are instruments and conceptual frameworks capable of repairing internal fragmentation, regaining trust, building solid consensus for political action, and meeting external threats to the south (migration) and the east (Ukraine).

It is doubtful the global strategy will propel the EU along the path of sovereignty and autonomy in security.³ US opposition to a stronger EU component within NATO reveals the futility of attempting to reconcile the historically subtle rivalry between NATO and EU objectives. Accordingly, the formation of European foreign, security, and defence activity, apart from and distinct to NATO, has been difficult to realise.

Declining US hegemony

As *Global Trends* repeatedly stressed, the US will operate as a recognised regional Hegemon within its sphere of influence. Brzezinski's characterisation of a power bloc consisting of the US and the EU remains a reality, resting on a dense network of militarily, political, and economic institutions, such as NATO, notably, as well as a plethora of agencies and NGOs operating from within and below constituent states. Obligated by its weakening global status, the US is doomed to follow a status-quo policy that aims to prevent its position from deteriorating further.

Paradoxically, despite its unpredictability and confused foreign policy actions, the Trump administration seems to have understood the

3 See also Zbigniew Brzezinski (2004, p. 95). Brzezinski sees no signs of a political rivalry between the US and the EU. He views the EU as too bureaucratic and too dis-united, and therefore incapable of matching the military-political strength of the US. For him, the EU resembles a giant economic conglomerate and he sarcastically adds, "Conglomerates do not have historic visions; they have tangible interests".

writing on the wall. Declaring that the time of the free ride for European security is over, the Trump administration has reversed the asymmetry between economic development and security which helped Western Europe to its favourable economic status from the early 1960s. The formula was simple and worked well for both sides: Europe delegated its security needs to the US, accepting its leadership; and the US accepted unrestricted economic development for Europe. The equation was questioned when the US slid into economic and financial troubles. Ever since, the call for burden-sharing has been on the agenda.

The sharing of military costs – 2% of GDP for defence – and trade restrictions, even a looming trade war, are the prices the EU must pay. This US-dominated power formula will work as long as the conflicts in Ukraine and Eastern Europe are not resolved. However, those conflicts are interlinked with international issues. In this respect, they will remain unresolved as long as there is no consensus among major players about the diffusion of power and positions in the emerging new world order. For Europe, Russia and the US are the primary actors in this conflict. And due to the new hybrid form of this conflictual relationship, US-Russia relations cannot be expected to improve in the near future. If one follows Karaganov's line of argument, relations between Russia and the US "are worse than ever since the 1950s and the Cuban missile crisis" (Karaganov, 2018).

Europe, and the EU, is sandwiched between the conflicting major powers, Russia and the US. Even if a major restructuring of the EU gained momentum towards the creation of a homogeneous Core Europe, able to define and project foreign and security priorities as well as to build defence capabilities, the EU would be a respected and recognised mediator of peaceful settlements rather than a major geopolitical actor, capable of globally significant power-projection.

The present situation does not allow such optimism. As the weakest link in the chain of competing great powers, the EU is not even in a position to choose options for security and alliances. Referring to theories of neoclassical realism, the weaker player in a given power constellation generally has three options:

- Firstly, to bandwagon with the most powerful state. This would be, in our case, the US.
- Secondly, to remain neutral. This is the best option and guarantees a higher degree of sovereignty.
- Thirdly, to establish a counter-balance against the Hegemon with other states. Momentarily, this option is being pursued in an unconvincing manner, because resistance from pro-Atlanticist member states in the EU is high.

Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), or the renewed debate on Core Europe and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), points in a hopeful direction, but the realisation of both projects is extremely difficult and a slow process. Nevertheless, Berlin should put more effort into approaching member states to put the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Russia on the table again.

Paradoxically, the present policy of the Trump Administration could speed up both projects. Unintentionally, the peculiar and unpredictable behaviour of the US administration has opened a window of opportunity for Brussels to define 'European interests' as distinctive from Washington's. The Trump Administration shies away from direct military interventions, a process which had already started under Obama. Instead it uses economic sanctions, combined with legal actions, as potent soft power instruments to keep alliances under control. Allied partners which cross lines are economically and politically punished.

This kind of policy makes sense for a former Hegemon that can no longer maintain its global position by pure military means. However, it undermines the power equation between the US and all stages of European integration, which has lasted since the beginning of the Cold War. The US has historically been accepted as, politically and militarily, the undisputed guarantor of European security and the leader of the Western bloc, institutionalised in NATO. Given the nuclear security guarantees to the European member states, the EEC and then the EU were able to develop their economic soft power capabilities without major economic and political dissent from the US.

The Trump Administration has dramatically changed the 'security for economic recovery and growth' equation that kept the Atlantic community so closely interlaced for decades. The consequences of the sanctions regimes against Russia and Iran, in combination with the cancellation of treaties, is affecting the core of the Atlantic relationship.

Brzezinski's characterisation of a power bloc consisting of the US and the EU is still in operation but the links are getting weaker. There are chances for a political emancipation of Europe from Washington, but this would be a long and difficult process. Furthermore, such a process needs collective leadership and a robust consensus among the EU's main member states. Both factors are missing. Neither Berlin nor Paris are in any condition to provide leadership or a vision of a common European security agenda. As long as the Ukraine crisis is unresolved in a satisfactory and face-saving way for both sides, any attempt to balance against the unpredictability of US moves in political, economic,

and military ways would be sternly resisted by the pro-Atlanticist camp within the EU.

Some recommendations for the reconstitution of a common security dialogue

There is no illusion in Moscow that Germany will veer off the course of NATO and will hunt for a new and dominant role in formulating and shaping the EU's Eastern and Russia policy. In this matter, the former role of German *Ostpolitik* would be an essentially potent instrument of understanding and bridging gaps, but the political leadership is missing and there is no indication among the new coalition government that Berlin is willing to embark on such a risky path.

Europe sees widespread use of formulas of the past – that there is ‘no security in Europe possible without or against Russia’ and that of a possible Europe ‘from Lisbon to Vladivostok’ – which, although desirable, lack any practical meaning. As Andrey Kortunov (2018) piercingly points out, “To cut it short, there are absolutely no reasons to hope for any breakthrough in German-Russian relations just because a new coalition government has finally arrived at Berlin”.⁴ What Kortunov has also addressed is the contradiction Berlin faces when the goal of renewed Russian relations has to hide behind the slogan that ‘there should be no special relationship between Russia and Germany’. In addition, there is the ubiquitous German mantra that ‘Germany’s foreign policy, especially that directed towards Russia, must be embedded in a European framework’.

However, Berlin can neither deny nor escape its centuries-long historic relationship and position with regard to Russia. Even during the Cold War era, it was Bonn which started the process of normalisation and the undoing of the division of Europe that finally ended in German reunification. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) was the crucial instrument in bringing down the Wall and, for some time at least, preventing the reawakening of Cold War ghosts. Given that legacy, there is no other country more interested in stability, security, and peace in Europe, including Russia. Moscow may have lost Germany for the moment, but the cultural, historical, and political ties may prove more potent in the future in overcoming the present stalemate.

4 One could even project this gloomy statement into the future: indicators predict a Black/CDU/CSU and Green Coalition government after the next parliamentary elections in 2021. Given the negative attitude of the Green party toward Russia, the chances for improvement German-Russian relations are not very promising.

Recommendations

The central issue for a renewal of Europe-Russia relations is the resolution of the Ukraine crisis. Let me propose a few ideas:

- Firstly, Germany should take a more active position on Ukraine, along the lines already marked out by former foreign ministers Steinmeier and Gabriel. It is very unlikely, given the desolate relationship between the US and Russia, that any positive initiative will come from either Moscow or Washington. As long as the Ukraine conflict is simmering, the US will have enough leverage to contain and even stop any EU member state from leaving the sanctions regime. However, the US would not be able to act against Berlin if Berlin succeeded in forming a coalition of member states to gradually eliminate the sanction regime. It is of the utmost necessity that Berlin acts carefully to form such a coalition in the name of protecting 'European' interests and sovereignty.
- Secondly, linked with such a move, Berlin should bring its energy to bear on reconstructing the defunct PCA (Partnership and Cooperation Agreement) between the EU and Russia. A starting point could be the four dimensions of the 2003 Saint Petersburg agreement and a decision to liberalise the visa regime.
- Thirdly, Berlin should look beyond the malfunctioning NATO-Russia Council. Germany should either work towards meetings and operative cooperation on a permanent and sustainable basis and/or enhance the Council's relevance by creating an attaché or incorporated crisis management group to deal with future possible threats and challenges. Possibly a closer sharing of information and on-the-spot cooperation between NATO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) would be an objective worth striving for.
- Fourthly, Berlin should throw its political weight and economic interests into the ring to establish a common basis for economic cooperation between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Here again, a modified PESCO related to the economic cooperation of interested member states could break the ice.
- Fifthly, Berlin should support the enforcement of the Minsk II agreement. One-sided accusations against Moscow are counterproductive; a big step forward towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict would be to pick up and begin serious nego-

tiations about UN peacekeeping forces in the Donbass area to protect civilians and to deescalate war-like action on both sides. Berlin must use a carrot and stick policy towards Kiev if necessary. In this context, the role of the OSCE must be strengthened.

- Sixthly, what has almost been lost in the debate are the treaties and arrangements from the Cold War era on arms reduction. What is especially important is the prevention of any attempts towards a new arms race in Europe: With the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty/INF practically gone, a potential conventional and even nuclear arms race followed by instability and civil discontent are threatening the peace in Europe.
- Paradoxically, there is little doubt that any of these ideas are on the table or being pursued in the design of Germany's present foreign policy. These actions could contribute to a thawing of currently antagonistic narratives that are blocking steps forward. In addition to political leadership and consensus-building activities, the vision and the endurance needed to shape Europe's security future will be crucial.

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