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2020 Transatlantic Security Jam

Securing the Post-COVID Future

REPORT



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Foreword



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In May 2020 Friends of Europe hosted one of the six platform debates that made up the Transatlantic Security Jam. This global online consultation extended over two days and brought political leaders and prominent experts together with the interested public for an open debate on the key security challenges of our time. We were proud to have the opportunity to contribute to this event. Our Friends of Europe platform on the theme of Autonomy and Cooperation was designed to inject a perspective from the capital of Europe in Brussels and provide a distinctly European voice in this wider transatlantic exchange.

Over the two days of the discussions our platform welcomed more than a thousand key policy makers and experts on a broad range of topics that covered security in all its dimensions. We debated the major threats and the military challenges facing NATO and the EU, as well as the economic and social dimensions of security. Moreover as security is first and foremost about keeping our citizens safe, prosperous and properly informed about the world around them, we examined not just the classical security challenges from geopolitical rivalries but also more hybrid challenges such as cyber attacks and disinformation campaigns. The Jam proved invaluable in this respect, offering a snapshot of how our political leaders and policymakers see the current security agenda, the priorities they are focusing on and the worries that could keep them awake at night.

When the Jam was over we realised that the two intensive days had produced a number of innovative insights and important recommendations. For instance on improving the resilience of the European Union to deal with major crises such as COVID-19. Or enhancing the EU's strategic autonomy by extending it into

the industrial and technology domains. Or in strengthening the transatlantic security partnership and NATO through greater political consultation in the alliance and more equitable burden sharing among allies.

As a result we decided to produce this report, both as a way of recording the many interesting discussions for those who took part as well as a means of presenting the conclusions of our particular Jam platform to a wider audience. We hope that you will find it a useful and relevant read given the urgency of many of the challenges that the EU and the transatlantic security community are facing. We hope even more that at least some of the recommendations will find a favourable echo and, even more importantly, be implemented.

Cooperation and autonomy: the global role of the EU post- COVID-19

Friends of Europe was the host one of six forums in the Transatlantic Security Jam. Ours was devoted to the European Union's response to the COVID-19 crisis in all its various manifestations and the implications for its future, both as a model of prosperous social market democracy at home, and a promoter of multilateralism in the wider world. We called our platform 'Cooperation and Autonomy'.

These concepts should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather interdependent. A more autonomous and capable EU is also better equipped to project its values abroad and attract the attention and cooperation of global partners. Our discussions revolved around the challenges and opportunities brought about by the health crisis to achieve these twin objectives. We made this theme a significant debating point of the Jam as reflected in the 48 prominent policymakers who led these discussions and the 878 comments by Jammers who joined us to provide incisive questions and innovative ideas.

Taking place across a multitude of different discussions and individual topics, several common preoccupations nonetheless emerged over the two days of the Jam.

“Europe is going through a public health, economic, and political crisis. Whether this triple threat turns into a security emergency or whether we emerge stronger out of it depends on our ability to cope with the crisis of trust.

Raimundas Karoblis, Minister of National Defence, Lithuania

The first observation of note is that there were no calls for ‘less Europe’. Certainly, there was much criticism of the EU’s initial faltering response to the COVID-19 crisis and its failure to prevent many of its member states from responding in a purely national, self-centred manner. However, participants stressed that it was precisely this lack of solidarity that China and Russia took advantage of through disinformation campaigns, efforts to showcase their own modest contributions and attempts to exert diplomatic and economic pressure on the EU and its member states.

As the crisis is set to continue for months to come, the EU still has time to prove its worth and bounce back. There will clearly be some repercussions for the Union’s economic, social and geopolitical spheres, if not its health dimension. Indeed, the EU’s capacity for coordination and solidarity during the recovery phase, along with its ability to mitigate long-term damage, will be of utmost importance for the future.

The second main conclusion that came out of these discussions was the EU’s need to preserve its unique economic and social model. This will allow it to retain the support of its citizens and to forge a sense of shared responsibility – and even destiny – among its member states post-crisis. This will not be easy, given the impact of the crisis on budget deficits and long-term debt levels as well as on unemployment and businesses. It will involve some tough policy choices that the EU has hitherto ducked, such as debt sharing and major financial transfers. Whether this takes the form of grants or low-interest loans, such measures are necessary to help the more

“The EU’s global role depends on getting its house in order: quickly overcome the health crisis; stand firm on principles which are tested. Maintain the European model. Consolidate the internal market: abolish border controls and travel restrictions.

Rolf Nikel, Ambassador of Germany to Poland

indebted member states and to support EU objectives such as the digital economy and the Green Deal. Are EU member states ready for these trade-offs and compromises to kickstart economic recovery?

The third major agreement emerging from of the debates was that the quest for European Strategic Autonomy is as relevant as ever, particularly in a world where the EU risks being squeezed between two rival powers, the US and China. The EU lives in a turbulent neighbourhood which has become even less stable during the COVID-19 crisis. Conflicts have unfortunately continued in Syria, Libya, the Sahel and Ukraine. The EU will need diplomacy and military capabilities to deal with these hot spots.

Participants therefore called for military cooperation efforts to continue. Yet, in the wake of the health crisis, many Jammers also argued for refocusing EU Strategic Autonomy towards technological and industrial autonomy. A weakened EU might give way to foreign takeovers of critical infrastructure and innovative tech companies. The EU has traditionally been a strong believer in globalisation and an open trading system. Yet, given the ‘carnivorous’ nature of the current economic situation, buyouts have increasingly become the tool of geopolitical rivalries in the quest for domination. Accordingly, the EU cannot be naïve. It must define and protect its core defence industrial and technology base as a precondition for its longer-term strategic autonomy. This will allow it to act as a normative power without the fear of intimidation or reprisals.

“One of our biggest challenges is to diminish Europe’s global dependencies in strategic sectors. Therefore, we may engage in an intensified debate on European strategic autonomy [...] A new European industrialisation based on sustainable development must be considered.

Teresa Ribeiro, Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Portugal

This takes us to a fourth outcome of the debates: namely the common perception that the virus has exposed Europe's lack of preparedness to cope with pandemics. There is still far too much dependence on foreign and unreliable supply chains. European countries have allowed their stockpiles of essential medicines, equipment and protective clothing to dwindle. This is not because pandemics have not been identified as a priority threat in national security strategies. Indeed, many EU states have held exercises to test their resilience against COVID-19 type scenarios. Yet the lessons drawn have not been implemented in terms of public-private sector partnerships nor health service surge capacities. The potential role of the EU in dealing with public health issues was completely neglected.

Unfortunately, health preparedness was overshadowed by more immediate concerns such as terrorism or extreme weather events caused by climate change. Undoubtedly the pandemic will force governments to rethink their supply chains and possibly relocate them closer to home. Resilience will have to be redefined to encompass shocks affecting the entire population and at several levels (health, social, economic and security) over different timespans. This is very different from a flood or terrorist attack, which only affects a limited area for a set period of time. The hallmark of a big shock is that there is no 'return to normal'. It is thus crucial for the EU to develop a European concept of resilience, taking stock of global best practices regarding pandemic response.

“The EU's role in the post-COVID future will be about upholding the values of solidarity and multilateralism it stands for to find common solutions to these common challenges.

Despina Spanou, Head of Cabinet of the European Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas

Finally, and notwithstanding the current strains in transatlantic relations, there was a sense that ‘the West’ should pull together to rein in the abuses of authoritarian regimes and enemies of liberalism who believe that their model has been vindicated by their dirigiste handling of the crisis.

This mood was reflected in the many calls for closer cooperation between NATO and the EU, for instance in combating fake news and disinformation. There were also calls to push back against propaganda and false narratives seeking to delegitimise and discredit Western democracy. NATO and the EU could better pool their resources in attributing and combating hybrid warfare campaigns and building resilience, whether against cyberattacks, terrorism, or even future pandemics.

So, to harken back to the famous dictum of Viennese diplomacy: “the situation is desperate but not serious”. Our discussions on the Cooperation and Autonomy platform provided much clear-headed and sober analysis of the EU’s challenges. Yet in the many useful ideas and concrete recommendations featured in this report, there are also grounds for optimism. The EU could still emerge stronger from this crisis, and as with so many crises in the past, this shock could provide the required incentive to move towards a new stage of European integration.

Top recommendations

Preserve the EU model and enhance European strategic autonomy

It is essential to maintain the EU social model and devise a European Recovery Plan that preserves and enhances the EU's political, economic and social cohesion. To this end:

1. Enhance and use the EU's collective purchasing and bargaining power

Make health a shared competence between the EU and its member states. The EU should use its purchasing and bargaining power to collectively acquire and stockpile critical resources rather than having each state do so separately. The EU should also define minimum levels of strategic stocks and secure diversity of supply chains.

The EU can develop procedures for rapid cross-border crisis response, including airlift and transport requirements. It should also conduct lessons learned analyses to determine the role of the military in supporting national emergency response planning and actions.

2. Expand the definition of EU strategic autonomy

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted new, perhaps less obvious dimensions behind the term 'security' and has shown that strategic autonomy should be addressed more broadly through hard security, science, and economic system sustainability.

“The concept of European Strategic Autonomy will become less military and more supply chain oriented and industrial and economic after this crisis

Maciej Popowski, Deputy Director General, Southern Neighbourhood, Turkey, Migration, Refugees and Security Issues, DG NEAR

It is still important to maintain the military dimension of Strategic Autonomy; the flashpoints around Europe make European military intervention and stabilisation capacity more important than ever. But it is time to stop thinking about strategic autonomy only as a military concept and work on re-defining it by including economic, scientific and digital resilience, and supply chain autonomy.

3. Recalibrate the EU's digital capacity

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted our dependency on digitalisation. One of the focuses of the recovery should be major investments in digital infrastructure across Europe. The EU needs to leverage existing European 5G technology to avoid overreliance on single suppliers that may compromise European security. This will help Europe enhance its autonomy in monitoring future pandemics by accessing new technology and big data. It will also result in better early warning systems through improved reporting and tracking systems.

Moreover, the EU needs to set standards for tracking and tracing apps based on the performance of different systems used during the crisis. This should be done within an EU regulatory framework to ensure data protection and EU norms of privacy.

4. Allow regional and city authorities access to the EU recovery fund

Urban areas have suffered disproportionately from the COVID-19 crisis. The allocation of the EU's

“Global power competition is indeed intimately connected to the mastering of key technologies of the future [...] What seems to be disruptive technology today will be at the core of future capabilities of relevance in the context of security and defence

Michael Simm, Head of Strategy and Policy at the European Defence Agency (EDA)

recovery fund should reflect the specific needs of regional authorities.

Allocate part of the recovery fund directly to regional and city authorities, alongside grants and loans to national governments. This will allow for the design of secure and sustainable urban spaces based on the specific needs of a city or region instead of those defined by national priorities. This can also help local authorities and cities improve resilience and responsiveness against shocks and crises.

5. Reshape the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) into an EU-wide cyber protection agency

Give ENISA the power to regulate cyberspace to enhance protection against cybercrime and cyberattacks. ENISA should function as an EU-wide cyber protection agency with an enhanced mandate to gather and disseminate threat intelligence on cyber vulnerabilities and to coordinate cross-border assistance. It could make use, for instance, of rapid response teams, forensics, and recovery. It should set EU-wide standards for cybersecurity of critical infrastructure including telecommunications and space-based assets.

“COVID-19 is a global challenge that requires not only effective health system responses but also comprehensive strategies to limit the pandemic’s adverse socioeconomic effects and its potential impact on security, particularly in cities

Viktor Kisob, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UN-Habitat

The global role of the EU: reviving cooperation

Reviving and enhancing multilateral cooperation will be of the utmost importance in tackling the widespread effects of the ongoing global pandemic, and filling the vacuum created by the lack of US leadership. To this end:

6. Foster resilience in the EU neighbourhood

Resilience should be a key policy objective of the EU's approach in its neighbourhood. It should adopt a 'funding plus model' which balances conditionality with improving regional and local capabilities. In this regard, it will be important to take full account of the infrastructure, socio-economic and political context in different neighbourhoods. The overriding aim should be to foster local and regional resilience so that regions are better prepared, stable and have the means to respond to future crises with greater confidence and self-reliance.

In the Western Balkans, the EU needs to strengthen cooperation by further emphasising conditionality and its value-based approach linked to financial assistance. Further access to the European free market and inclusion into relevant supply chains are strongly linked to values such as a healthy democracy and a rule-based environment. This should foster intra-regional cooperation in trade, critical infrastructure, cross-border investment in health and education, and labour mobility. The EU needs to increase communication towards and within the region to boost its impact and make its support more visible.

“Just as individual member states cannot chart their separate paths out of the health and the consequent economic crisis, Europe will not emerge from the crisis strong and healthy if the world in general and our neighbours in particular are unable to see the light at the end of the tunnel

Nathalie Tocci, Director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali and former Special Adviser to EU HRVP Mogherini

In the MENA region, the EU needs to tackle immediate needs and shortages by creating and upholding crucial supply chains. An EU-led initiative to develop health systems and resilience should focus on cooperation on vaccines, donations of respirators, personal protective equipment (PPE), medicines and testing kits. It should also assist with tracking and tracing, and stats and data management. In the long run, it will be important to open up the market by establishing creative free-trade agreements with the region.

“Stating the obvious, multinational institutions are the best tool and framework we still have to address the current crisis, despite their weaknesses

Brice de Schieter, Chargé d'affaires,
Delegation of the European Union to Canada

7. Preserve and develop multilateralism

In the absence of international leadership during the crisis, the EU needs to increase and sharpen its leadership profile. Promoting and upholding global standards in key areas such as trade and international health is crucial. This can be realised within the multilateral framework of the UN and the WHO by engaging other like-minded actors in a 'coalition of reforming multilateralist' (e.g. Australia, Canada, Japan, Latin America and South Korea) and other international players (e.g. the US, Russia and China).

Regarding China, it is important to prioritise engagement with safeguards rather than exclusion and containment. The EU should therefore critically engage in a more reciprocal and transparent relationship in the areas of trade, investment, intellectual property protection, infrastructure development, business ownership rules and cyber restraint.

The EU can furthermore build bridges and foster cooperation by leading the way on science and research, especially in the field of global health.

8. Adjust the strategic concept of transatlantic security cooperation

Both the EU and NATO are crucial and indispensable pillars of the transatlantic partnership and the common multilateral security system. To build a much closer political-military partnership between both organisations, it will be necessary to improve coordination in areas where the policies and activities of the two organisations largely overlap. In particular, coordinate Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defence Fund (EDF) and Military Mobility projects with NATO's collective defence planning.

Increase communication and transparency, information-sharing and the exchange of best practices between both organisations.

Furthermore, enhance resilience by jointly responding to hybrid warfare, detecting and countering disinformation and non-transparent foreign influence campaigns, and increasing crisis response capacities, also involving the military.

Avoid the creation of new trade barriers and remove existing impediments in the transatlantic defence industry sector, to keep up mutual competitiveness.

“There will be black and white areas but also a lot of grey ones. It's in the grey zone that NATO and the EU, and cooperation between them, can add the most value in helping all of us manage the risks associated with dependence on external sources and resources

Mike Ryan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for European and NATO Policy, US Department of Defence

9. Save arms control

Save arms control by strengthening and engaging with multilateral institutions, treaties and organisations. The EU can be a global leader in non-proliferation by promoting the use of existing treaties and organisations, such as upholding the existing multilateral arms control framework based on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and bringing into effect related treaties like the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Fissile Materials Cut Off Treaty as well as agreements to restrict transfers of missile technologies.

The EU can demonstrate leadership at the upcoming Tenth NPT Review Conference. It can put pressure on the United States and Russia to extend and develop the New START treaty when it expires next year, and encourage its two nuclear powers – France and the UK – to work with other nuclear powers for a wider global arms control and transparency framework, engaging China and other nuclear states. The EU should also work with like-minded countries, such as Australia, Japan and South Korea, to form a coalition committed to upholding arms control regimes like the NPT.

Izumi Nakamitsu, Under Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, United Nations: In the nuclear realm, as supporters of disarmament, as the home to a nuclear-weapon state, and as many nuclear allies, the EU can be an advocate for the necessary restraint and dialogue.

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