

DECEMBER 2022

Peace, security and defence, and the Renewed Social Contract

BRIEFING PAPER



Introduction

The European social contract promotes equality and opportunity through the engagement of citizens and policymakers in pursuit of the common objectives delineated in the EU treaties. Rapidly evolving technologies, globalised markets, as well as unprecedented health, geopolitical and environmental challenges are changing the landscape of Europe; consequently, the social contract is ripe for renewal.

Engaging citizens with European political processes, Friends of Europe believes social dialogue is the cornerstone on which to fulfil the promise of social progress embedded in the EU treaties and articulated via a Renewed Social Contract. Friends of Europe exposes the leading topics facing Europe through debates, interviews with experts and analyses. The thematic agenda is positioned within the framework of key strategic objectives for a Renewed Social Contract: challenging inequalities of opportunity, bolstering a green transformation, promoting new leadership, regenerating democracy, and reframing Europe's role in the world.

A Renewed Social Contract must address the real ongoing risks to Europe through an approach that fosters coordination, cooperation and innovation. The Russian invasion of Ukraine upset political, economic, social and environmental agendas around the world, revealing the vulnerability of countries thought to be sovereignly secure. Europe has taken a measured response to Russia's aggression to prevent escalation and leave the door open to a diplomatic "escape route" for Russia, while imposing targeted sanctions and increasing efforts to reduce reliance on foreign energy sources. The conflict has led Europe to take stock of its military and defence preparedness and its relationship with partners and allies. Other issues impacting European security include increased migration, driven by economic, conflict and now climate crises. Europe needs to find a balanced response that reflects the values embedded in the Treaties while protecting fragile national social systems and curtailing a rise in far-right nationalism. Other challenges include ongoing tensions in the Middle East, US-Iran relations, digital technology advances that pose growing risks to cyber-security in public and private institutions, the pandemic-driven inflation - particularly in regions reliant on Eastern European grain supplies, and drought and water-stressed countries impacted by climate change. The Friends of Europe Peace, Security and Defence programme analysed these ongoing transnational challenges throughout 2022. A coordinated effort to reduce fragmentation and duplication in defence strategies across Europe while emphasising innovation, green solutions and cooperation with like-minded partners, can inform a robust Renewed Social Contract that ensures citizens a safe and secure future and allows Europe to assume a strong leading role on the geopolitical stage.

A year dominated by the Ukraine invasion

Friends of Europe monitored the Russian invasion of Ukraine throughout 2022. The crisis fuels the potential to reframe Europe's role in the world, with leaders and

citizens seeking a united response to the unprecedented Russian aggression. As Europe reaffirms its values, strengthens alliances with like-minded partners and gives support to leaders and civil societies defending the sovereignty of Ukraine and other vulnerable countries in the region, momentum for regenerating democracy is growing. Opportunity exists for promoting new leadership, including a strong European role in supporting fragile democracies, assisting civil societies and facilitating Ukraine's accession process into the EU and possibly also to NATO as a strategic objective of the Euro-Atlantic community.

Energy and grain shortages provide a springboard for challenging inequalities of opportunity in the context of countries reliant on Russian supplies. The invasion is galvanising European ambition to bolster a green transformation with countries seeking to reduce dependence on Russian energy and fast-track renewable solutions.

In January, strategists and policymakers considered the Black Sea and European security and the need for a comprehensive EU strategy, which could reframe Europe's role in the region.

On 24 February, the day that Russia invaded Ukraine, Friends of Europe hosted an event on revising the vows of post-pandemic multilateralism. Intended to discuss multilateralism in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus shifted to the geopolitical crisis as a fresh test for multilateralism. Diverging values of democracy versus autocracy across international politics could undermine multilateralism and the effectiveness of institutions. Regional conversations must adopt a geostrategic perspective that takes the global reality into account.

One month into the invasion, two expert speakers discussed geopolitics and energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean. Recommendations included capitalising on Eastern Mediterranean opportunities to diversify away from Russia, continuing the energy transition and strengthening EU production of renewables to bolster a green transformation.

A policy insight event in March addressed the breakaway regions of Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh. With global attention focussed on Ukraine, an event on frozen conflicts and thawing tensions in the EU's eastern neighbourhood gathered stakeholders to discuss the balancing act countries in the region play between maintaining relations with Russia while supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity. As the invasion threatens to destabilise the eastern partnership countries, there is an opportunity for Europe to reframe its role in the world through stronger political and economic support, regaining the trust of civil society and demonstrating commitment to peaceful resolution of disputes. The shrinking space for civil society in the region makes bottom-up engagement and international partnering difficult. There is an opportunity to challenge the inequalities of opportunity by strengthening civil societies in the region, helping them to promote new leadership, thereby regenerating democracy among populations.

In April, as part of Friends of Europe's 'In Conversation with' series, Wendy Sherman, United States Deputy Secretary of State, was invited to share insights on current topics. Sherman evoked the global impact of the Ukraine invasion as a force for regenerating democracy, citing the robust EU-US alliance. China's foreign relations and NATO's future challenges were also addressed. Sherman also called for challenging inequalities of opportunity and promoting new leadership by creating more space for women at global negotiating tables.

Discussions on 21st century warfare and a whole-of-society approach to resilience in June identified energy and food shortages, cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns as modern threats requiring a resilient response. Speakers called for updating the Geneva Convention to reflect the challenges stemming from the cyber-sphere. Communication tools used by Ukrainian citizens demonstrate their potential for regenerating democracy, although social media can equally be weaponised for disinformation and propaganda campaigns. Leveraging private industry in trust-based defence strategies has the potential for promoting new leadership.

Friends of Europe's annual Peace, Security and Defence Summit flagship event gathered senior decision-makers and experts in November to discuss Europe after February 24th to answer the key question: how secure is it? Participants discussed European rearmament in the context of ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine, the role of emerging and disruptive technologies in European defence, security cooperation between Europe and Africa, and Europe's post-war future.

Recommendations included encouraging private sector investment in innovative technologies, thereby promoting new leadership; exerting EU influence in humanising early metaverse coding programmes and identifying opportunities to develop and export EU digital services, thereby reframing Europe's role in the world as a digital leader; engaging civil society to determine priorities for international partnerships and cyber-defence and developing a granular, tailored approach to counter propaganda and misinformation, thereby regenerating democracy; and offering Ukraine a step-wise route to EU membership, thereby challenging inequalities of opportunity.

The event had also an important youth engagement component in the form of a pre-summit Oxford-Style debate on the potential membership of Ukraine in NATO held at the College of Europe with two teams of four speakers debating in front of an audience of 50. Friends of Europe also organised the Transatlantic Essay Contest, receiving more than 20 submissions from students and young security and foreign policy professionals from Europe and North America. The winner of the essay contest, as well as the members of both debate teams, participated in the summit as junior delegates, bringing an important youth perspective to the event through their active participation in the debates and engagement with the speakers and senior guests.

Seeking diplomatic strategies for Iran

The Friends of Europe Iran in Focus programme seeks to identify diplomatic approaches to resolving the challenges the country presents to the region, Europe and international community as a whole. In April, the roundtable on Iran's new policy for the Middle East and regional power games explored the state of Iran's global relationships. There is potential for reframing Europe's role in the world through bringing Iran and the US back to the negotiating table and mediating talks to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The Iran in Focus series report, published in September 2022, explored how Europe can support Iranian civil society, promoting new leadership despite internal repression

and economic sanctions. Europe seeks to challenge inequalities of opportunity through support for civil, political, as well as women's and minority rights, movements and aid in the context of imposed sanctions. By such actions, Europe can contribute to regenerating democracy through broadening and sustaining its engagement with civil society and activists in Iran.

Water access across the Middle East

Water access is a geopolitical challenge in the Middle East. An event on the future diplomacy in the Middle East, which focused on the challenges of water, energy and climate, gathered stakeholders in September, after a summer of record temperatures. Water must be included as a priority in broader discussions on security, even in countries with active conflict and other serious challenges. The urgency of climate crisis, as a transnational phenomenon, could increase the potential for deepening regional cooperation. Water diplomacy – agreements between countries with shared rivers and lakes – has been successfully negotiated in certain areas. Countries can address inequalities of opportunity by sharing their technological advances. Engaging civil societies to build capacities and raise public awareness presents an opportunity both for regenerating democracy and promoting new leadership, particularly among young people, who will face increasing challenges. Facilitating regional cooperation could reframe Europe's role in the world. The UK is prioritising Libya's green transition, bolstering a green transformation, but support is unequal across the region. Certain technological solutions, such as desalination, have serious environmental consequences. As the causes of climate change are multifaceted and global, the solutions must be global as well. It is in tackling, adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change that Europe can play a crucial and positive role, especially by providing diplomatic and technical support to the affected countries in the region.

Immigration, racism and disinformation

An event confronting the EU's 'Great Migration Muddle' explored strategies for reframing the potential of migrants in contributing to EU economies by providing much-needed labour. Participants called for a reframing of Europe's role in the world through renewed migration strategies that would challenge inequalities of opportunity by offering safe and stable living conditions to migrants. There is potential for promoting new leadership via policymakers and organisations reframing migration as a win-win phenomenon.

Far-right rhetoric is a stumbling block for migration. The policy insight event, entitled 'Dealing with far-right radicalisation and disinformation', explored racism fuelled by social media targeting disenfranchised populations. Participants emphasised the

need for promoting new leadership through citizens, governments and social media companies taking action to eliminate disinformation and regulate hate speech. There is a potential for regenerating democracy through regulating social media platforms in a way that would minimise their role as channels for foreign and domestic actors to infringe upon the integrity of democratic processes. Such policies would also help to reframe Europe's role in the world. Ensuring all groups have a safe space on social media and within society eliminates inequalities of opportunity.

Looking ahead

Over 40 senior experts from NATO, the EU, as well as the private and civil society sectors, gathered in May for a tabletop exercise on Europe in 2030 and boosting public-private cooperation in hybrid crises. As rapid technological developments create un- or under-governed spaces, Europe must pro-actively create legal and policy frameworks, promoting new leadership through strengthening public-private engagement. Forward-thinking strategies and policies aimed at enhancing cybersecurity within the Euro-Atlantic area can reframe Europe's role in the world. The opportunity for regenerating democracy exists through more robust civil society engagement focused on the quality of the output. As immersive technologies expand, EU must prepare to eliminate inequalities of opportunity by ensuring workers are not stranded in the digital divide. Europe must incorporate technologies and strategies that bolster a green transformation for a healthier, cleaner future.

Conclusion

A Renewed Social Contract must provide a safe and secure environment to allow citizens to flourish. Geopolitical challenges, hostile foreign and domestic autocratic actors, health threats and climate emergencies are among the major challenges facing Europe and the world. Rapid advances in technology are part of the modern landscape. Appropriate policies and legal instruments are needed to ensure that technology works for society rather than becoming weaponised. A strong and reliant European defence is needed to protect democratic interests. Friends of Europe provided a robust venue for reflection on elaborating the role of peace, security and defence within the framework of overarching key objectives for a Renewed Social Contract.

Friends of Europe

Connect. Debate. Change.

Dharmendra Kanani: dharmendra.kanani@friendsofeurope.org

Juraj Majcin: juraj.majcin@friendsofeurope.org

friendsofeurope.org

Friends of Europe is a leading think-tank that connects people, stimulates debate and triggers change to create a more inclusive, sustainable and forward-looking Europe.

