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OPENING
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Opening Thoughts*

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REALIGNMENT OF THE WORLD AND THE BALTIC STATES

Sven Sakkov

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The year 2020 has witnessed a confluence of different processes affecting the security of the Baltic States – including the rise of China, the souring of transatlantic relations, and the pandemic. One would assume that the rise of China should force the West to stick together, but it doesn't. The pandemic should induce the world to work together against this common enemy, but it doesn't. This paper looks at how these trends are impacting the security of the Baltic States.

The pandemic has accentuated ongoing shifts in international relations. A new big power competition between the US and China is emerging. The European security landscape is way more complicated now than a decade ago. The Middle-East and North Africa are in turmoil. Russia has occupied and annexed Crimea, is continuing its slow-burning war against Ukraine in Donbass, has used chemical agents on the territory of a NATO country and has interfered in American presidential elections and the Syrian civil war. On top of that, we have witnessed the rise of China as a security concern. For many European nations, this latter realisation came suddenly, when China tried to use the health crisis for the advancement of its geopolitical standing. It came with a relentless propaganda war waged by Beijing, even though the initial mishandling of an outbreak by Chinese authorities is the reason the world suffers now.

The West needs to manage two processes simultaneously – the rapid rise of China and the slow decline of Russia. Europe needs the US in order to contain Russia militarily. The US needs Europe in order to contain China politically and economically. If we had no alliance between Europe and North America, we would want to invent it.

During the Obama administration, American foreign policy was supposed to pivot to Asia. In reality it did pivot away from Europe and the Middle East, but not to Asia. One might label this as a quirk of Obama's aloof foreign policy, but in reality, it has proven to be a start of a wider shift in American foreign policy. There are several factors behind this shift.

First, American citizens are tired of 'forever wars'. This is understandable – many young American soldiers fighting in Afghanistan were born after 9/11. These 'forever wars' that have been taking place in the Middle East and Europe have served as a suitable military platform for the US. An end of these wars lowers Europe's strategic importance for the US.

Second, the US is now self-reliant on oil and gas, thus diminishing the importance of oil-rich Middle East in American strategic calculations even further.

Third, American policymakers have clearly realised that the Peoples Republic of China poses a long-term systematic challenge to American security. This realisation is shared by both major political parties and is not likely to be changed if Joe Biden wins the November elections.

Fourth, American policymakers consider affluent Europeans to be able but not willing to invest more in their own defence. In his valedictory speech to the NATO defence ministers in 2011, Defence Secretary Bob Gates warned that the time will come when the US is not ready to continue bankrolling European security (Gates, 2011). This time is now upon us.

In 2020, the nations of Europe and Northern America have witnessed a health crisis unprecedented in modern times. We are entering an economic crisis dwarfing anything seen during the past three generations.

We should learn lessons from the current crisis, but not overlearn them. Our future security will not be determined by the readiness and robustness of our health services alone, regardless of how important they are. After 9/11, every security threat was perceived to be asymmetric. After Russia's illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea, every threat miraculously turned into a hybrid one. But, of course, the so-called 'old' threats remained. The broad contours of Russian foreign policy have not changed for centuries. One virus will not change that. Nor will the virus change the fundamentals of human nature. This is why we can relate to ancient Greek tragedies. Hence, it is unfortunately self-evident that there will be wars, and the virus will not change that. *Si vi pacem para bellum* still stands.

The economic downturn in NATO nations will be severe. We need to make sure that security will not be one of the victims of the virus. If we compromise on that, we might end up losing not just our health but also our freedom and liberty. During the last 6 months the world has become more, not less, dangerous for democracies. The level of defence investment in NATO's European member states and Canada has been on the rise since 2015, bringing their aggregate from 254 billion USD to 309 billion (NATO, 2019). NATO governments should honour their pledge of moving their national defence investments towards the level of at least 2% of GDP, despite the state of economy. I use the term 'defence investment' on purpose – this is an investment into our security, into our future. If we now decrease defence investment, we will disinvest our future.

Europe clearly needs to be able to do more in the field of defence. The nebulous idea of European Strategic Autonomy needs to be interpreted as Europe contributing more resources and capabilities for the security of Europe and its surroundings. This is not to compete with, but to complement what Europe and the US are doing collectively in NATO. Talk about a 'European Army' is misleading and counterproductive. This is for a very simple reason – no-one knows what it is, and thus anyone can project their own understanding and meaning onto the concept. Empty of meaning, this concept leads to no action and no agency, thus doing nothing for the advancement of European security in reality. The alphabet soup of European defence initiatives are having a positive, though limited, impact on Europe's capability development. Without a significant increase in defence investment, talk about European Strategic Autonomy in the field of defence will remain just that – talk.

President Trump and some members of his administration have stated that the withdrawal of 12,000 American troops from Germany was meant as a punishment for that country for its failure to increase defence spending to the agreed level. Ironically, the countries whose security will be most impacted by this move are the Baltic States. Since the Baltic States make up the most vulnerable region of NATO, the negative impact of departing American military machinery is most pronounced there. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are staunch friends of the United States who meet the goal of 2% of GDP in defence spending.

Germany is surrounded by allies, while the Baltic States and Poland have a 967 km long border with Russia and 1,268 km border with Belarus, a country which may well end up as part of Russia, either officially or *de facto*. The Baltic States, not Germany, are the part of NATO where the Alliance is at its weakest and Russia is at its strongest.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE AND WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

NATO has been able to change many times in its history. We now need a new Atlantic Compact, reinforcing the determination of the Allies to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, a pact founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, as the preamble of the Washington Treaty stipulates. Washington needs to see NATO as somehow relevant to its struggle to manage the rise of China. The answer does not lie with the military, but rather in standard-setting, investment screening, export controls, etc.

Inevitably, the US will judge its European allies according to the level of support they offer in countering the rise of China. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania seem to be very cognisant of this tendency.

The US and Estonia signed a joint declaration on 5G security on 1 November 2019, and Latvia followed suite on 27 February 2020. There are strong indications that Lithuania will do the same in the coming months (Guzdar & Jermalavicius, 2020). The Baltic States are mindful of both the need to secure their future 5G networks against potential disruptions by the PRC security apparatus and of the continued necessity for US participation in Baltic security.

While the Baltic States (and Poland) are clearly aligning themselves with Washington, the same cannot be said about the EU as a whole. EU big-wigs are trying to chart a European 'Sonderweg' between the US and the PRC, as if the former is not Europe's main security partner and a fellow democracy while the latter is a communist dictatorship (*The Economist*, 2020).

The Baltic States do not enjoy the luxury of being able to choose which American administration to co-operate with. It is in the strategic interest of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to find common areas of co-operation with Washington, even if those areas would not be among their first choice. A case in point is having the Baltic States be among the founding members of International Religious Freedom Alliance (Ochab, 2020). Small, vulnerable countries in need of American attention use the straws they have.

The Baltic States should be very wary of Chinese investments in strategic industries and logistic connections. Here, Estonia is leading the way with its decision regarding the Tallinn-Helsinki tunnel. In July 2020 it became clear that the Estonian government will not support a private tunnel project, citing economic, environmental and security reasons (Posaner, 2020). The nature of these 'security concerns' is apparent in the annual security assessment of Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, which points its finger at the background of Chinese investment in the tunnel project (Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, 2020, p. 76).

In August 2020, Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs Urmas Reinsalu hinted that Estonia might distance itself from the Chinese-sponsored 17+1 format of PRC and Central-Eastern European countries (ERR, 2020). It remains to be seen whether this hint will be

followed up on and whether Latvia and Lithuania will follow suit. Looking at the overall dynamics of Baltic-American and Baltic-Chinese relations, it seems probable.

Listening to the political leaders of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania describe their security equation, one would assume that their defence spending as a percent of GDP is in the double digits. In fact, it is 2.14%, 2.01% and 2.03% of the respective GDPs (NATO, 2019). Bearing in mind the vulnerability of the Baltic States, American retrenchment and European military unpreparedness, such a low level of defence spending is not sustainable.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have been very hesitant when it comes to the European Strategic Autonomy (ESA) initiative in the field of defence. They have always emphasised that European military security is guaranteed by NATO and that any other efforts should be considered as a distraction at best. It would be more sensible to join the debate about the ESA and ensure that it is about Europe's defence capability and defence investment, not about words and declarations. Moving on from defence – the need for a higher degree of European autonomy has been highlighted by the pandemic, which demonstrated Europe's reliance on outside (mostly Chinese) producers of medical equipment.

For affluent nations with large populations, foreign policy is about the advancement of its interest. For a small nation in precarious geopolitical surroundings, most of its foreign policy is influenced by its security policy. And its security policy is ultimately about an existential question – to be or not to be. The Estonian territory has been invaded five times over the course of 20th century. Big nations can make big mistakes and survive. Small nations might not.

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DOES NATO NEED A RUSSIA – AND CHINA – POLICY?

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Great powers competition is back in the 21st century. It is not the only game in town – does anyone remember 9/11? However, there is little doubt that history is back with a vengeance. And the West, hence the Atlantic Alliance, faces two major challengers from state actors: Russia and China.

The challenges they pose are different in nature and geography. Russia's challenge is well-known and is at the centre of NATO's defensive deterrence policy. China does not directly threaten the Euro-Atlantic space's security; on the other hand, it has emerged as a global superpower in competition with NATO's leading ally, the United States. NATO is a *political*-military alliance that encompasses the great majority of Western nations and has developed significant partnerships with like-minded countries, such as Japan and Australia, outside the North Atlantic region. It would delude itself by thinking that it can simply ring-fence its Euro-Atlantic perimeter from the US-China confrontation.

NATO does not have a China policy. It thinks it has a Russia policy. The latter is based on two pillars: deterrence and dialogue. Since there is hardly any dialogue left between Moscow and the Alliance, either political or military – mil-to-mil contacts have been reduced to bare bones – only one of the two is left standing: deterrence. This translates into a well-thought-out and effective defensive military posture, but it is not a policy.

But does the Alliance need such a policy? A case could be made that military deterrence is a sufficient response to Russia's challenge. Deterrence fulfils NATO's task of guaranteeing the security of the Euro-Atlantic space and protecting its members. Deterrence was highly successful in the Cold War to keep the mighty Soviet Union at bay. Why ask the Alliance for more?

There are two fundamental reasons for NATO policy on Russia, in addition and beyond military posture. The first and most obvious one is that the Washington Treaty envisages a continuing *political* process among the Allies in parallel with their commitment to collective defence. The two tasks are embodied, respectively, in Article 4 and Article 5. Following the London summit of 3-4 December 2019, NATO is actually revitalising its political dimension through a 'reflection group' that is expected to present its conclusions in November-December 2020.

Then there is an even more compelling rationale that applies equally to Russia and to China. *Either NATO does have a policy toward both countries, or individual Allies will, and in so doing they might differ among themselves and with NATO's mainstream.* The United States has and will continue to have a Russia and a China policy. The same applies to the European Union and to the post-Brexit United Kingdom. At the time of this writing,

French President Emmanuel Macron is initiating a bilateral diplomatic initiative with Russia aimed at developing a medium- to long-term dialogue. He does not underestimate the difficulties of a bilateral approach to Moscow, but he believes that one needs to talk to the people one disagrees with, not only to the ones with whom one already agrees, as former President of Israel Shimon Peres used to quip.

NATO policies towards Russia and China would not prevent national initiatives such as Macron's, but it would provide a framework for Allies' national engagement with Moscow and Beijing. Without it, NATO runs a twofold risk: internal fracturing, as Allies might part company in dealing with Moscow and/or Beijing, and marginalisation, as decisions will be made bilaterally, especially by the US, and/or in other contexts, as seen in the Normandy format on the Ukrainian crisis. The present paper aims at laying out the possible fundamentals and roadmaps of NATO policies toward Russia and toward China. As already noted, from NATO's viewpoint the two countries fall into different categories. Not only is Russia the devil we know and China the one we don't, but the NATO-Russia relationship has a long track record and an existing institutional structure, albeit one that has been practically unused since the Ukrainian crisis. The NATO-China relationship is a blank – that makes it more difficult and demanding, but potentially rewarding.

A NATO RUSSIA POLICY: OUTLINE AND ROADMAP

To NATO, Russia is an adversary and has to be recognised as such. This is not NATO's choice – it is the consequence of Russia's deliberate hostility toward the Alliance and of its behaviour, especially in the Ukrainian crisis. As long as it lasts, NATO has to deal with it not only militarily *but also politically*. The NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997, and the Rome Declaration in 2002, were based on the prospect of developing a cooperative relationship between NATO and Russia. That prospect is over. But the rationale for engagement is not.

Since 2014 NATO has followed the principle of 'no business as usual' in its relationship with Russia. That decision has *de facto* suspended contacts between the Alliance and the Russian Federation. That principle should now be turned on its head: the more 'unusual' the business, the more NATO needs to be able to *communicate with, engage and counter Russia at a political level*. 'Absentees are always in the wrong', said former Italian Prime Minister and stalwart Atlanticist Giulio Andreotti. In the political vacuum that is left between NATO and Russia, Moscow talks to individual Allies, to NATO partners and to special formats (like the Normandy group). It also exerts influence from within through disinformation and interference in domestic politics. The combination outlined above gives Russia a political advantage over the Alliance.

NATO needs to develop a political strategy on Russia in four directions: a) first and foremost, direct bilateral engagement with Moscow; b) more Article 4 consultations among Allies and with partners (both regional partners and 'global' partners such as Japan, South Korea, or Australia) on Russia and Russia-related issues; c) developing a counter-narrative to debunk Russian disinformation; d) outreach to other international players by interacting with major powers (China, India) and engaging multilateral fora – including organisations typically placed on Russian (or Russian sympathetic) turf, like the Collective Security Treaty

Organisation (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). *The Alliance needs to talk to Russia and about Russia.*

Re-engaging Moscow bilaterally would of course also depend on Russia's willingness to respond, which in present circumstances cannot be taken for granted. *It takes two to tango.* But should Moscow step off the dance floor, NATO could seek a dialogue aimed at: a) managing and de-escalating differences (*de-conflicting the relationship*); b) identifying areas of converging interests, terrorism or pandemic management come to mind (a *positive agenda*); c) confronting Russia on its aggressive policies of a military and non-military nature, such as disinformation and domestic interference (a *warning policy*).

The first order of business would be a re-activation of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). In addition, in order to overcome the NRC's institutional constraints and lack of political adjustability, NATO should consider new flexible diplomatic and political approaches, for instance empowering the secretary general to carry out appropriate initiatives and open pragmatic channels of communication. *None of the above initiatives should be seen as a reward to Russia. On the contrary, they would be part of a comprehensive policy designed to serve NATO's and Allies' interests.*

Finally, the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis needs to be factored in. This could go either way: it could be conducive to toning down the military challenge, or vice-versa, it could lead to increased confrontation. The rationale for NATO developing a political approach to Russia relations, in addition to its deterrent military posture, would remain the same in both scenarios, but the ways and means to carry it out will be certainly influenced by the medium-term fallout of the pandemic on the international scene and more specifically in Europe, Russia, and in the Euro-Atlantic region.

DOES NATO NEED TO WORRY ABOUT CHINA?

Unlike Russia, China is not threatening NATO militarily. It does not directly intrude on the security of the Euro-Atlantic space. Its exponentially growing influence in the area, including in the Mediterranean, and in adjacent regions such as Africa and the Arctic, is of a different nature: economic, political and societal. China aims at gaining hegemony, in Europe and elsewhere, through trade, essential industrial supply chains, the acquisition of critical infrastructure, technological dominance in 5G technology and artificial intelligence, and political connections with governments, political figures and political grassroots movements.

China's challenge to the West is technological and economic, whereas Russia is no match for West in those areas – and Moscow knows it. But China's vision of its future is global. It is an economic powerhouse, second only to the US – and catching up quickly. Xi Jinping makes no mystery of his goal of making China the world's leading superpower by 2050. The Chinese challenge will inevitably involve a security dimension in the Euro-Atlantic sphere as well. It already has to be confronted in the military domains that are not constrained by geography: cyber and space. This is the scenario that NATO needs to factor in.

The recent Chinese handling of the coronavirus pandemic offers a telling case study. The COVID-19 pandemic posed a reputational threat to China. Beijing responded with a sophisticated strategy of disinformation, blame shifting, and targeted conditional assistance to selected countries. It built a reverse narrative about the origin of the pandemic

and its own accountability. These tactics included a deliberate attempt to *sway governments and public opinion away from the transatlantic relationship in favour of China*. They had some measure of initial success in manipulating discussions around COVID-19, for instance in influencing the debate in the EU.

Today's international scene is dominated by the China-US global rivalry. Beijing is no less as aware of this than Washington is. To play the two-superpower game, it will resort to the time-honoured 'decoupling' strategy by trying to break down the alliances and international systems that the US has initiated and supported. *The transatlantic relationship is therefore a Chinese priority target and a key battleground*. NATO may or may not know it, but Beijing does.

China's attitude toward NATO is different, and harsher, than its EU strategy. China seeks gains from eroding transatlantic solidarity, but it has no desire to break up the EU. The EU's single market is, for China, an attractive prospect, as long as Beijing maintains near unfettered access to it. Rather, China sees Europe as a battleground in its confrontation with the US. In order to 'tame' the EU, it has to weaken the two main transatlantic connections: the US-EU relationship and NATO-EU relationship.

While the impact of China's operations can occasionally surface in national politics, as has been the case in Germany and in Italy as a result of Beijing's pandemic disinformation campaign, of potentially longer-term concern is the country's economic-commercial penetration in Europe and in the Mediterranean, centred on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

China has been building strong commercial and industrial links, preferential bilateral relationships, and multilateral formats such as the 17+1 forum, which has enabled Beijing to reach out to governments across Central and Eastern Europe. It has established a strong presence in the Balkans; in Serbia – a Partnership for Peace member, albeit a difficult one – China's COVID-19 campaign, supported by carefully stage-managed aid deliveries, has resulted in a surge of pro-China sentiment. Finally, in its quest for influence over Europe and European nations, Beijing has been borrowing from Russia's playbook in terms of cyber and disinformation techniques, the dissemination of fake news, and interference in political processes. Taken together, all these initiatives have the potential to undermine NATO.

NATO needs to recognize China's challenge and look at its security implications. China does not pose an immediate or short-term conventional military threat, although it already intrudes in areas such as cyber and outer space that constitute military "domains". To confront the sheer size – geographical, demographic, and economic – and technological potential of China, the Atlantic Alliance needs to develop a comprehensive strategy.

At this point in time, a NATO China policy would only be at a preliminary stage, but the following guidelines can already be envisaged:

- engaging Beijing in political dialogue;
- debunking China's propaganda and disinformation as it seeks to insert a wedge between Europe and the United States, and between the EU and NATO;
- making China a central topic of NATO-EU cooperation;

- establishing a common baseline on difficult and sensitive issues, such as technology, critical infrastructure, and sensitive and dual-use trade. There is no other forum but NATO that can be used to draw *common red lines on China*²;
- developing mutually reinforcing China and Russia policies to put pressure on Moscow and Beijing to engage bilaterally with NATO rather than simply standing together on a unified anti-NATO front.

Tackling the China challenge will take NATO into uncharted waters. But either NATO chooses to sail those waters, or it will be side-lined *vis-à-vis* the world's second superpower, it will be vulnerable to the erosion of Atlantic solidarity, and it will be outplayed in the Great Game of the 21st century.

“You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you.” — Leon Trotsky

² In this respect the Alliance has two unique assets: membership – the US, the great majority of EU member states *and* non-EU important allies such as Canada, the UK, Norway, and Turkey (plus Iceland, Montenegro, and Albania, the latter two being also EU candidates) – and partnerships with approximately 50 other countries around the world.

THE FUTURE OF MULTILATERALISM IN THE ERA OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION

Angela Kane

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For someone who has worked for the United Nations for over 30 years, it is difficult to accept that there are politicians and people who reject multilateralism, yet 75 years after the founding of the UN, multilateralism is under increasing challenge. The UN Charter set the goal of achieving peaceful international cooperation and laid down principles that are non-negotiable. It offers tools, methods, and rules for the way forward. The Charter's provisions are interconnected and cannot be used 'a la carte', as former Secretary-General Kofi Annan once warned.

The experiences and ideals that dominated the minds of the drafters of the UN Charter belong to a different generation. What inspired the founders was an international order built on balancing sovereignty with power politics in order to maintain international peace and security. The world has fundamentally changed – and for the UN, the response to this change has primarily been to expand the number of organisational entities, creating a network of funds and programmes with specific mandates addressing specific issues.

We have the same structures as we did in 1945: the Security Council still has the five victorious powers of World War II as permanent members with the right of veto, and while the Council was enlarged from 11 to 15 in the 1960s in response to an increasing number of countries gaining independence, there is still no African or Latin American permanent seat on the Council. And less than 10% of the total UN membership (15 out of 193) take decisions about threats to international peace and security, decide on sanctions or on peace operations – decisions that are binding on the rest of the membership.

The UN system is now so large and diffuse that it is difficult to remember all the acronyms of the various entities that have been created. None have ever been dismantled, even those that no longer have a role or whose functions have been superseded, such as the Trusteeship Council. Organisational consolidation has been timid; modernisation has been demanded but this often resulted in a re-shuffling of functions and entities rather than an actual analysis and overhaul of the UN structures.

Governance is no longer the purview of sovereign states: we now have multinational companies that dwarf the GNP of most nations. Power shifts have occurred over decades; China has risen to equal the US in power and economic heft. There is a trend towards multi-polarity, as expressed by the increasing number of states that act as key players. Advances in technology and artificial intelligence empower us, yet at the same time

they instil fear, insecurity and fierce competition among states. Social media platforms have the ability to rapidly spread information, yet also to distort facts.

The predictability of Cold War adversaries vanished 30 years ago; the euphoria then over global détente and harmonious relations has given way to at times narrow-minded unilateralism. It has allowed the rise of despots and dictators, of corrupt politicians, of human rights abuses, of an increasing number of conflicts and wars that are waged for power, for access to natural resources, and for the political domination of one group at the expense of another. 'Politics have no relation to morals', Machiavelli said, and what the recent pandemic has additionally shown is the weaknesses of traditional security approaches and the return of authoritarian leaders who capitalise on the pandemic to further their grasp on power.

We could call this 'politics as usual', but what has changed is that there has been a growing tolerance of such abuse of power in recent years. Our threshold for accepting such abuses has been lowered, and the moral voices speaking out against them are fewer and more muted. So where does that leave multilateralism, our hard-won shining achievement of the post-war world? Where has the high-minded idealism of 'all for one, and one for all' gone? Where is the principle of equality, of 'one country, one vote'?

We have seen a weakening of the ratification of and faithful adherence to international treaties, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the countless treaties guaranteeing the rights of the child, freedom of association, social and economic rights, humanitarian law, arms control and disarmament, and even the most ratified treaties that are closest to universal world participation, which are those dealing with climate change, desertification, and the ozone layer.

We have also seen new types of actors that are changing the nature of the multilateral playing field. Regional organisations, already identified in the UN Charter (Chapter VIII) as important partners, have strengthened their role and power. The European Union became an observer in the General Assembly already in 1974, but its status was upgraded in 2011 by giving it speaking rights, which gives it some state-like qualities. Others, like the African Union, could follow. Does this not run counter to the principle of 'one state, one vote'?

Regional groupings, like the G-20 and the G-7, have not lived up to the promise of steering global affairs, as had been hoped when these powerful groups were established. The Alliance for Multilateralism, created by France and Germany in 2019, is an informal entity founded on respect for international law with the aim to protect and preserve international norms. It aims to build an informal network of like-minded states – some 50 ministers participated at an event last September – but with the Alliance still in its infancy, its reach and impact are still unclear. Let me mention the importance of civil society organisations. While their role is encouraged in assisting humanitarian crises, their voice in political matters is more tolerated than taken fully into account. The Security Council still holds 'Arria Formula', informal meetings to hear their input, rather than admitting NGO representatives as full participants in Council sessions.

The emergence of truly global problems further contributed to the erosion of the centrality of governments. An article in 2006 already aptly stated that the 'policy authority for tackling global problems still belong to the states, while the sources of the problems and potential solutions are situated at transnational, regional or global level'. Issues such as the

non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, climate change and now pandemics are truly global and cannot be tackled on a national scale alone.

The decline of multilateralism goes back over a decade, but it has clearly accelerated with the election of Donald Trump as US president in 2016. He has questioned international institutions and the value of alliances, pulled out of the UN Human Rights Council, UNESCO, and the World Health Organisation; he has left international treaties such as the JCPOA and the Paris Climate Agreement, as well as arms control treaties that ensured security for decades.

The strains on the international community have been deep, compounded by the ongoing war in Syria, the refugee crisis, and now the pandemic. Yet we have to recognise that the multilateral system has held together relatively well, with some states (European Union members in particular) having stepped up to prevent further damage (after all, no other states followed the US in leaving international institutions or agreements), though this often meant assuming higher financial burdens to shore up a crumbling multilateral system.

Keeping multilateralism alive will mean facing several challenges in the future, even if a new US president is elected come November. The erosion of the US position as the 'leader of the free world' has already happened and it will not be easy to reverse the damage. What needs to be done now is to work for compromise: how can this best be achieved in future diplomatic processes, given the rise of China and the redistribution of global power in general?

Will veto-wielding Security Council members continue to table opposing draft resolutions and curtail UN involvement in key political hotspots? And what does it mean for the legitimacy of the institution if a resolution for a ceasefire during COVID-19 gets held up for three months due to the petty intransigence of one veto-wielding member?

Another difficulty will be upholding the value of international agreements and treaties. Their value lies in faithfully implementing their provisions: once that faith is eroded, compliance falters and ratifications stall. It seems that this is a time when war crimes go unpunished and the laws of war become optional. Compromise and language that at times denotes the lowest common denominator have been a feature of recent agreements; the international community needs to re-learn how to frame accords that inspire implementation rather than project the image of being a restrictive arrangement impinging on sovereignty.

The road ahead is difficult. This difficulty will be further compounded by the unpredictability of world events. The conflict and increasing competition between the US and China could further exacerbate, drawing other countries deeper into taking sides. We have already seen confrontations in the UN Security Council over Syria, the resolution on the pandemic, and on the JCPOA. This raises uncomfortable political questions: how can the Secretary-General navigate the crises, how can the 75-year UN commemoration be 'celebrated' at a time when distrust reigns in the Council, how can the UN continue its work when its coffers are empty due to the lateness of contributions to the UN budget? As Secretary-General Guterres said recently: 'It is not enough to proclaim the virtues of multilateralism; we must continue to show its added value. International cooperation must adapt to changing times'.

Finally, it comes down to what value member states put on the multilateral system. Despite the strain, this system must be maintained: no country can manage global

challenges on its own. Solidarity, trust – and yes, idealism – were present at the UN's creation, but we have lost sight of those qualities. Power is not defined by having power over others; we should think of it not as a zero-sum game but as an issue of strengthening others in order to reach joint goals – goals that we are not able to reach on our own.

Reinforcing multilateralism means creating a balance of power among UN members, as well as creating a balance of responsibilities and representation for the people of our planet. The Charter opens with the words 'We the peoples of the United Nations', a stark reminder that states cannot be the only building blocks for effective multilateralism. The future of international cooperation lies with people – and I look towards the involvement of youth. The current generation has grown up with a wider lens on the world, with social media, with an outlook that is international, not restricted by borders. Their activism for the environment and their protests against political repression make me hopeful that support for international cooperation and multilateralism will grow stronger. The opposite would be too dire to contemplate.

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AN INITIATIVE TO END THE STANDSTILL. DESIRABLE SECURITY POLICY OBJECTIVES OF A UNITED EUROPEAN UNION

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Since Ursula von der Leyen assumed the role of President of the European Commission, the European Union has shown stronger aspirations in security policy. Van der Leyen has been calling for a 'more geopolitical EU'. The EU wants to take on a larger share of global responsibility. However, this will only be possible if that desire 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. The underlying principle that only a more 'united' EU will be able to become 'a geopolitical player' has been stressed and reinforced by former President Jean-Claude Juncker.

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. New ideas such as the European Security Council and the European Intervention Initiative may be useful in this regard.

EU citizens want to see their governments take on more responsibility when it comes to resolving international crises or conflicts. To most member states, taking on more responsibility means implementing 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 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 assume a stronger long-term geopolitical role and to stand up for itself in a globalised world. The EU should not become a weak 'in-between region' – between the US and China.

In the long run, a European nuclear shield could be part of a joint security approach. Currently, it does not seem to be either morally right or pragmatic for Europe to forego nuclear weapons. However, 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. At the same time, the transatlantic alliance is still an important security foundation in the interest of the EU.

The OSCE should also be given much more attention within the EU. It is one of the rare organisations where all EU countries – including 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. The German EU presidency is looking into that.

EU DISUNITY: 'DIVISIVE TOPICS'

With European divisions over the Iraq War of 2003 fresh in his mind, 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-Gaullism 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 their potential split. More than a decade has passed since this assessment, but what remains true 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 (such as the Joint Foreign and Security Policy, Eastern Partnership, and Permanent Structural Cooperation: PESCO), and three new members have joined the Union and the United Kingdom has left, but that dividing line is still clearly visible today.

Almost on a monthly basis there is a headline in political reporting that aims explicitly to show a lack of unity in the EU: on Libya, on Syria, and on 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 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.

Another area of partial disunity is the question of how to deal with and how to include the transatlantic partner. Since the beginning of Donald Trump's presidency, US relations with the EU 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. Trump is even willing to resort to economic sanctions, i.e. measures that are not normally envisaged among partners.

Nord Stream 2 is probably the most topical example of where the US saw itself forced to act to protect the EU, especially Germany, from a supposed dependency on Russian energy supplies. So far not all EU member states have clearly condemned or disapproved of the US's behaviour, which can be attributed to their own security but also 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 of this in areas such as external energy policy, including America's dislike of Soviet pipelines in the 1970s and 1980s, or more recently in the context of the establishment of PESCO and the European Defence Fund

(EDF). However, even if there is consensus on issues within the EU, there is also the need to assess the extent to which 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 to do so, 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 (JCPOA).

It is a problem that the current institutional set-up of the EU 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 become 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 provide a remedy. However, it needs to be clear that in the medium and long term, a united EU cannot be compensated for with new bodies and EU institutions. When it comes to unity and being a global player, relations with Russia will evidently be decisive, as this is one of the topics that 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 the differing perceptions and positions of EU member states, are based on many different causes and factors. Some EU member states have been searching for national identities, historical differences, and party-political changes at the national and European level, as well as for alliances within the Union (such as the Visegrád members). These members are particularly keen on prioritising their region or their own political agenda, as well as their own economic interests.

NEW THINKING: 'THE EUROPEAN UNION AS SUBJECT'

'Euro-Gaullist activism' could also be observed among some predecessors of French President Emmanuel Macron. Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy 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 to form 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 the European Security and Defence Policy with an ambitious aim: increased independence as a player in security policy in a volatile international system.

On several occasions Macron has pointed out that a political debate with Russia is necessary, despite this potentially being a source of major conflict at the 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'. A common EU position in terms of relations with Russia is very important, as is the constructive development of this relationship. This includes dealing with the conflict in Ukraine, climate change (Russia's territory comprises about one-eighth of the earth's surface), the conflict with Syria, the long-term energy security of the EU, as well as military de-escalation (to promote the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and to prevent another arms race).

Many EU partners have shown reluctance and a negative reaction with respect to France's initiative. 'New Thinking' has always been highly controversial. German chancellor Willy Brandt had to cope with disunity and initial rejection by the Western powers when promoting 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 because of Germany's horrific and barbaric actions against humanity during WWII. Bonn sought to facilitate this by being as transparent as possible. 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 within the political class in the Soviet Union, but especially by the West. At the time, it was argued that this might lead to a split of the allegedly fragile West in its entirety.

The more recent past holds an example that 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 12 Central and Eastern European States has provoked a lot of scepticism. For the last two years, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier have attended summit meetings of the Three Seas Initiative, with Germany having somewhat adapted its policy to project the image of a more 'united' EU. The reasons for this change in policy have been threefold: the prospect of mutual good will, Poland becoming more open to EU initiatives, and 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 to avoid encouraging any bilateral strategies coming from the US, Russia or China, who all 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 wholeheartedly agree on what the EU as an independent player in security policy entails. Ideally, Poland, as an influential 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 to reject it. And the importance of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in that matter is not questionable.

Over the past few years, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has been widely criticised for a 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 sharing 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 not 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 of these 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.

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. Paris and ideally Warsaw would be the partners 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 that want to actively move the EU forward and those that want to be passive bystanders.

CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACHES

There have been only a few cases 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 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.

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* show that a large majority of Europeans feel part of a European culture and want to see their governments assume 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 as 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 structural change in transatlantic relations, as well as with 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 form 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.

Tackling the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in a cooperative manner

At a national level, there has been a remarkable eagerness to take decisions to overcome the economic effects of COVID-19. Huge financial rescue packages were agreed upon by national governments to alleviate the consequences of the pandemic for the labour market and for essential sectors and stakeholders.

The EU has taken the first steps in this regard by considering raising the billions of euros necessary for a reconstruction fund through issuing Euro bonds. The compromise that has been emerging on the Franco-German proposal of such an instrument means that cooperative – 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 in the strengthening of international organisations such as the WHO, as well as to set 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.

The debate on a European nuclear shield

A survey by the Körber Foundation and the Pew Research Center from September 2019 has shown that respondents in Germany specifically declared themselves to be in favour of a European Nuclear Shield instead of remaining under the US shield. A remarkable feature of this was the fact that Germans were even prepared to accept larger defence expenditure to support it. At the beginning of the year, French President Emmanuel Macron fleshed out his plans regarding a European Nuclear Shield. He called for increased cooperation and established a European dimension for the French nuclear deterrent force. Germany and 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 a good idea, especially in times of incalculable security risks and unclear alliances, to develop an EU strategy of nuclear deterrence in parallel to the existing NATO concept – with the clear understanding that the EU is foremost interested in a comprehensive regime of limiting nuclear weapons or, at best, eliminating them altogether.

Allowing for coordinated challenges

In the Eastern European neighbourhood of the EU, it is important to challenge the policies of the Russian Federation by allowing Russian 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. At best, Russia would 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 many 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-upon criteria and a common understanding about its purpose. It should be clear to EU member states that a process of political dialogue is of strategic interest, especially in settling armed conflicts in Europe and in its immediate neighbourhood. One of the initial results should be a substantial improvement of the situation within and around Ukraine.

There is a successful record of such a 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.

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, and the Russian Federation are all 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 this is the organisation that should restore cooperative security in Europe. Even though it might already be a link between EU and non-EU members, the EU should strengthen the organisation's role and should pay much more attention to it. A stronger OSCE might reinforce the feeling of unity, put all stakeholders on 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 the 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?

LOOKING AHEAD

It is partially in the hands of politicians, but primarily in the hands of the citizens of EU member states, to make sure that an agreement can be reached between the different key drivers of European security policy. There is certainly not going to be any complete unity, but a common understanding might be possible. In turbulent times, when it is becoming increasingly difficult to rely on political partnerships in the international system, and in times of socio-economic challenges, not only due to the pandemic, the EU cannot afford another decade of constant disunity.

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W(H)ITHER NATO-RUSSIA?

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NATO-Russia relations have not yet withered to the point of non-revival. However, the time has come to seek the ways and means to ensure that resuscitation could take place.

There should be neither illusions nor delusions that a Russia led by President Putin will change its ways in the foreseeable future. On the contrary, we are likely to witness more of the same, with nuances that fit the tactics and strategy of Putin.

This assumption needs to be the starting point when analysing how NATO as a defence alliance – and how its individual members – should carry on dealing with Russia. There should be a focus on finding common ground between those who argue for a ‘re-think’/ ‘re-set’ and those who point to the failures of such an approach.

What evidence is there of a consistent hard line and uncompromising approach by Russia? NATO-Russia Council (NRC) meetings have gone nowhere over recent years. Russia’s reluctance to appoint a new ambassador accredited to NATO makes high-level dialogue difficult to achieve and reduces the availability of contacts. NATO has had a standing offer to hold an NRC meeting for the last half year, but it has not been taken up. Efforts by Russia to try to brush over the root causes of the deterioration in relations that arose in 2014 (i.e. the illegal annexation of Crimea and ongoing war in Eastern Ukraine), and to ‘move ahead’ by ignoring fundamental problems, have continued unabated. Ukraine needs to stay on the agenda.

Russia’s active measures involving interference in the affairs of democratic processes in third states have proliferated over the past few years. Evidence of influencing the last US and French presidential elections, as well as the Brexit referendum, has been collated by authorities in all three countries. Chemical weapons were used by Russian intelligence officers in a bungled assassination attempt in Salisbury, UK a few years ago. Not to mention killings and attempts to kill opposition figures on Russian territory, with the Navalny incident in August 2020 being the latest example.

Blatant and cynical revisionist disinformation operations regarding the outbreak of World War Two have targeted Poland and the Baltics; these are being used as a countermeasure against facts about Stalin and Hitler dividing up Europe as a precursor to invading Poland and annexing the Baltic countries. These were prevalent in August 2019 during the marking of the 80th anniversary of the signing of the Soviet-Nazi secret protocols. Poland was blamed for the outbreak of the war, whilst Latvia was described as ‘voluntarily’ joining the Soviet Union and ‘gaining’ (rather than ‘regaining’) independence in the 1990s. These examples may seem trivial. However, when compared with the disinformation surrounding the annexation of Crimea, the military engagement in Eastern Ukraine and the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 in 2014, they provide a consistent and determined pattern of undermining facts and creating uncertainty that can have

consequences. In addition, the underlying purpose of such campaigns destroys and precludes any element of trust between Russia and its partners.

The ongoing global pandemic crisis relating to COVID-19 has also been used by Russia as a tool for promoting disinformation and an opportunity to exploit a lack of solidarity amongst the Allies. In the latter case, Russian military medical assistance was provided during the early stages of the flare up of the pandemic in Northern Italy. This was after European partners failed initially to respond to Italy's appeal for urgent help in dealing with their health emergency. Seemingly, no permanent rift within NATO came about as a result, but no doubt security risks could have ensued given the Russian military presence on NATO territory.

By March 2020, the EU's European Action Service (EEAS) had already identified some 80 Russian COVID-19 injections of disinformation over the course of two months. Amongst the actions taken were claims that the virus was a biological weapon released by China, the US or the UK. Evidently this helped to increase and exploit popular concerns about whether European health systems were sufficiently well-equipped to deal with the emerging crisis.

The result of Russia's approach in deftly helping Italy and exploiting popular concerns about the virus was to unbalance the Allies and test their coherence.

These examples are not meant as a tool for 'Russia bashing'. Rather, they are offered as a pertinent reminder of what to bear in mind when dealing with our important neighbour.

TO RE-SET OR NOT TO RE-SET – THAT IS NOT THE QUESTION

Individual NATO member states cannot and should not be restrained from attempts to re-engage with Russia. President Obama's approach failed, leaving US-Russian relations in a worse state at the end of his administration than at the beginning. French President Macron's launch of efforts to re-engage Russia, with a warning to his assembled ambassadors in August 2019 not to use the 'deep state' to hinder his policy, has, one year later, yet to provide tangible results. Although in all fairness, this policy was from the outset touted as a long-term goal.

Attempts to force other allies to adopt such an approach or to turn it into a joint NATO policy are likely to be doomed to fail. On the one hand, all credit to President Macron for engaging the country's top non-Russian specialist diplomat, Pierre Vimont, to head up talks with his counterpart in President Putin's office and to actively and openly explain to NATO partners what developments are (or are not) taking place as a result of increased French-Russian contacts. In contrast, any French attempts by Hubert Vedrine to push through a Gaullist agenda in the NATO reflection group are unlikely to make headway.

In any event, there should be an awareness that individual 're-sets' risk causing rifts in Allied unity, thereby playing into the hands of Russia.

In the run up to November's US presidential elections, well-argued opposing positions about the US's approach to Russia have appeared in the public domain.

Putting aside the question of whether or not to re-set (or re-think) relations with Russia, there are some constructive and useful ideas to be gleaned from both sides. Let's

call this brief review of the arguments ‘Kramer v. Gottemoeller’, as the lead proponents of the respective arguments were David J. Kramer and Rose Gottemoeller.

Gottemoeller’s camp refers to blocking Russia’s interference in elections. Publics in all NATO member states can surely go along with that.

There follows a reference to exposing Russian disinformation, which has an echo within the Kramer group with their suggestion to provide more analysis about Russia’s actions. NATO’s Centre of Excellence on Strategic Communication in Riga, which focuses on these issues in general (not only *vis-a-vis* Russia), is up to the task as far as disinformation is concerned.

Is there a big difference between ‘containing and confronting the threat’ (Kramer) and ‘balancing a commitment to deterrence and detente’ (Gottemoeller)? The NATO dual-track approach of maintaining dialogue with Russia whilst retaining a robust defence and deterrence policy seems to embrace the proposals from both sides. Détente, of course, can extend beyond dialogue, but cannot take place without it.

Kramer and colleagues call for the Putin regime to be recognised for what it is – corrupt and aggressive towards its neighbours. On that basis, NATO can proceed, to quote Gottemoeller’s group, to ‘deal with Russia as it is, not as we wish to see it’. This train of thought can be developed further by referring back to Kramer’s appeal to distinguish the regime from the people. Engaging with Russian partners outside the circle of Putin’s people is an important policy approach for NATO as a whole, as well as for its individual member states.

Are NATO’s relations with Russia broken and therefore in need of a fix? If we assume this to be the case, what would the fix entail and how should it be approached? Here are some suggestions.

1. There is not going to be any ‘quick fix’, but there is a need to think in the long term. Strategic patience and Allied unity founded on the dual-track approach of deterrence and defence with dialogue must be maintained.

2. The NRC is indeed in a sorry state, but it remains a unique forum for Allies to hold dialogue with Russia. Eminent minds need to address the question of how it can best serve the purposes of all parties in terms of managing future NATO-Russia relations. The Reflection Group will hopefully address this issue and offer specific proposals. Input from the non-governmental sector should be encouraged.

3. The arms control and non-proliferation agenda affects everybody in the Euro-Atlantic area. The nuclear threat is increasingly existential. Engaging with the Russian government to work towards risk reduction, whilst simultaneously continuing to point to Russian violations, needs to be the way ahead.

4. Engagement and negotiation ‘out of the public glare’ (Gottemoeller) has indeed been the essence of discussions at the Riga Dialogue meetings these past few years. In parallel, important discussions in other fora (e.g. the European Leadership Network) are working on specific proposals to improve the NATO-Russian dialogue. High-level military-to-military NATO-Russia contacts, which are discreet but ongoing, should of course be maintained.

5. Discussions about specific regional de-escalation measures should be avoided unless all countries in the regions concerned give their prior approval to such discussions. The security of NATO’s European members should continue to be

viewed through a 360-degree lens. Spanish and Italian troops in NATO's enhanced forward presence (eFP) on Latvian territory is as important as Latvian soldiers participating in operations in the Sahel region. Russia's disruptive role in Ukraine (and hopefully not Belarus) is mirrored by its opportunistic engagements in Syria and Libya.

As a result of fraudulent presidential elections, mass protests and heavy-handed attempts to maintain the status quo, developments in August 2020 have thrown Latvia's neighbour Belarus onto the international agenda. Both Russia and NATO have exercised initial restraint in their reactions. At the time of writing (at the end of August), President Putin has been contacted by European leaders (including Merkel, Macron, and Michel) to discuss the fast-developing events and has in turn invited Lukashenko to Moscow for talks. In parallel, Lukashenko has appealed for Russia's help, pointed to a so-called 'build up' of NATO troops in neighbouring Poland and Lithuania, and talked about Belarusian troops being moved to the border region. If and when the NRC resumes contact, Belarus will no doubt need to be an additional item on the agenda.

Less than one year ago, French President Macron in an interview in *The Economist* warned that the Alliance was 'brain-dead'. In spite of ongoing internal challenges, NATO remains 'alive and kicking'. The same needs to apply to NATO-Russian relations.

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POST-INF MISSILE RESTRAINT FOR EUROPE: BUILDING ON THE RUSSIAN 'MORATORIUM'

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Unrestrained deployments of INF-class missiles in Europe and the action-reaction pressure this would create will further escalate tensions in NATO-Russia relations. Russia should expand its 2019 missile moratorium proposal to include the withdrawal from service of the SSC-8 system. That would give NATO countries significant incentives to reciprocate by confirming and expanding NATO's own restraint pledges. While fragile, such moves could create space for stabilising the relationship.

The value of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty for European security stemmed from a number of factors. Signed in 1987 by the United States and the Soviet Union, the INF turned out to be a vital element in the process of overcoming the Cold War and guaranteeing a largely peaceful transition to a new era of international relations post-1989. The treaty itself, which prohibited the possession of all (conventional and nuclear) ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 km, removed from the table an issue that in the late-1970s and 1980s greatly increased strategic instability in Europe: the introduction of a new generation of intermediate-range missiles and their deployment on the continent. These missiles could be used to initiate a large-scale, precise and surprise nuclear attack against a range of enemy targets, without involving the strategic nuclear forces of the Soviet Union or the US. Thanks to the INF, that threat disappeared. By 1991, 1,846 Russian and 846 US missiles had been verifiably destroyed in accordance with the Treaty. It seemed that at least one pillar supporting strategic stability in Europe was firmly put in place, and that it would survive well into the 21st century.

The treaty's demise in 2019 therefore came as a shock to many Europeans. The developments leading to the US decision to withdraw from the INF Treaty in August 2019 have been well-described and debated in hundreds of analyses and op-eds. At the same time, all sides stick to their own narratives. Russia categorically denies that it violated the treaty with the development and deployment of the SSC-8/9M729 cruise missile. All NATO members have sided with the US in accusing Russia of treaty transgression, and ultimately supported the US's withdrawal decision. The secretary general of NATO announced, meanwhile, that the Alliance has 'no intention to deploy new land-based nuclear missiles in Europe'.

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

This is, however, not the end of the story. Since the demise of the Treaty, both Russia and the United States have moved forward with developing new types of INF-class missiles, with Russia continuing to deploy the SSC-8 and having several other systems under development. The US's plans for an INF-class force are not entirely clear, with several projects in different stages of work. But once some of these US systems reach the production phase, the United States may initiate the process of deploying these conventional – and potentially in future nuclear-armed – land-based missile systems to Europe. Some NATO members, especially those situated along the Eastern flank, may be ready to host such missiles.

From Russia's viewpoint, that would have serious strategic consequences in terms of the increased threat of a swift 'decapitation strike' against its decision-makers, crucial command and control centres, and other critical infrastructure. That is the same concern that led the Soviet Union to negotiate the INF Treaty in the first place. From NATO's perspective, the deployment of numerous and more diverse Russian INF-class weapons in Europe would mean broadening the spectrum of capabilities that Russia could use for signalling, coercion and escalation during a crisis, and for defeating NATO forces during a potential war. Both sides therefore have nothing to gain from an arms race involving ground-based missile weapons, and plenty to lose.

THE WAY FORWARD

In September 2019, President Putin proposed to NATO a 'moratorium' on INF-class missiles, pledging that Russia would not deploy such missiles in Europe as long as the US refrains from doing so. The main flaw in this, and the reason why NATO dismissed the Russian proposal, was that it did not cover the existence and continued deployment of SSC-8/9M729 cruise missiles, which NATO classifies as INF-range. Only French President Emmanuel Macron expressed some interest in further exploring the moratorium in his talks with Russia, but he quickly clarified that this does not amount to accepting Russia's proposal for a reciprocal NATO moratorium.

It is clear that, unless Russia upgrades it, NATO countries would not treat the 'moratorium' as a credible point of departure for engagement. Russia should therefore consider coming back to the table with a new proposal that would build on its own idea. Such an offer would need to include, at minimum, the withdrawal from service of the 9M729 missiles. If Russia prefers, this could be explained as a 'goodwill gesture', without changing its official position about the range of the system. The withdrawal *and* destruction of all the launchers and missiles, in a manner which could be externally verified, would be the preferable option from the Western point of view, but this may be a step too far for Russia. But other solutions can be suggested, e.g. placing the withdrawn and "mothballed" systems into designated permanent storages sites, which could be monitored remotely to detect any attempts to return them to service. Another solution, suggested by German expert Ulrich Kühn, would be to attach electronic markers to the SSC-8 launchers, which would allow for their movement to be detected by NATO if they enter the European part

of Russia. The launch vehicles could then be withdrawn beyond the Ural mountains on Russian territory and put in storage areas.

With such an 'improved' moratorium as the first step, NATO states could then in response pledge not to deploy, or allow the deployment of, land-based missiles with a 500-5,500 km range in Europe. From NATO's perspective, that would be a meaningful upgrade of the previous pledge of its secretary general, which covered only ground-based nuclear missiles. At the same time, such restraint can realistically be expected from Russia and the US only with regards to European territories. It seems clear that the US has already made the decision to develop some intermediate-range missiles for its China-related contingencies. Russia would also most likely want to deploy some intermediate-range systems too address non-European regional threats. Any mutual pledges would therefore not be global in scale. The United States would be free to deploy intermediate-range missiles on their own territory and in other regions of the world, while Russia would be able to develop INF-class missiles other than the 9M729 (or its variants or clones with similar characteristics) and deploy them beyond its European territory.

LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Granted, such a political arrangement to keep Europe free of land-based intermediate range missiles could be easily violated during a crisis or conflict, due to the characteristics of the launchers, which are mobile and transportable by land, sea and (in some cases) air. It would not address other developments in the missile domain, such as the increasing role of air- and sea-based missiles, some of which are nuclear or nuclear-capable, or the increasing importance of new-generation missiles of mixed trajectories (e.g. the air-launched *Kindzal*). Finally, it would not affect the deployments of Russian missiles with ranges shorter than 500 km, even those which are nuclear-capable and which in some regional contingencies (such as the Baltic and Black Sea areas) would have strategic significance.

However, a strong signal from Russia about its willingness to address the key issue in the INF Treaty dispute, namely the use of the SSC-8/9M729 missile, could positively affect broader NATO-Russia dynamics. It would address the concerns of not only the US, but of other members of NATO as well. It could also help to enable some movement on other contentious issues. For example, if Russia credibly resolves the SSC-8 controversy, this could provide incentives for NATO and the US to offer increased transparency about the Aegis Ashore sites in Europe (the site Romania and the site under construction in Poland) to address Russian concerns about the characteristics of the missiles deployed there and the nature of the system itself.³

The resulting political ban on NATO and Russian INF-class missiles in Europe, even if fragile, would increase both arms race stability and conflict stability. It would demonstrate that both Russia and NATO are capable of military restraint. It could also help to launch

³ Russia claims Aegis Ashore is capable of launching US Tomahawk missiles; the US and NATO position is that the system has been modified from its sea-based version and it is capable of using only missile defence interceptors.

talks on an arms control agreement prohibiting or establishing limits on INF-class missiles in Eurasia or globally – a genuine successor to the INF Treaty.

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SECURITY CHALLENGES FROM RUSSIA AND CHINA IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

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We are still facing the COVID-19 crisis. One of the consequences of this is the acceleration of many of the substantial developments we have seen in international politics and international relations over the last few years. We have seen a hardening of positions between the US and China in their relationship. We have seen an increase in national responses in Europe and beyond. And we have seen a continuation of global power shifts. These developments are likely to have effects on broader security issues in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). In this discussion paper, the focus will be on recent security⁴ developments in the BSR with reference to the current and developing challenges posed to it by China and Russia.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

The Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014 was followed by (still ongoing) military activity in Eastern Ukraine. Both events had severe negative effects on security in the BSR, increasing feelings of insecurity in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, as well as in Poland. As a consequence, these countries sought substantial reassurance and support from their allies and partners in NATO and the EU. A package of military measures was agreed upon by NATO, including an 'enhanced Forward Presence' (eFP) by NATO⁵ in each of the four countries. Naval exercises were also conducted, in addition to ongoing NATO-led air-policing in the BSR. Russia views these military developments with deep mistrust. Another substantial recent development in the region has been the deepening of cooperation and dialogue between NATO and non-members Finland and Sweden, which is also perceived with great mistrust by Russia.

For its part, in recent years Russia has reformed and increased its military forces in the region, especially in Kaliningrad and Western Russia. On several occasions, Russian military forces have displayed much more aggressive behaviour – for example, in responding to NATO exercises in the region. The political and military rhetoric from Russian diplomats and other officials has been far more robust and intimidating than before the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis.

We still lack a comprehensive and non-classified analysis of Russia's military build-up and military activities in the region, as well as of the changes in Russia's political and

⁴ The term 'security' is being used here in both a narrow and a broader sense. Its sense is narrow when speaking about a state's territorial integrity, often in reference to military threats to it. In this piece, I will use security more broadly to refer, for example, to non-traditional threats such as cyber, hybrid and substantial economic challenges, as well as challenges derived from climate change.

⁵ The temporary deployment of a multinational battle group in each of the four countries.

military rhetoric towards other states in the BSR, whether in public or in closed bilateral settings. Add to this the different kinds of cyber and information activities that come out of Russia, and they are clearly seen as very disturbing by neighbouring states in the region. Finally, Russia's North Stream 2 gas pipeline project has raised a number of other concerns in the region.

In other words, in recent years the Baltic Sea Region has moved from being a relatively stable region in Europe to one where quite negative developments have taken root. Political, military and civilian contacts between Russia and the EU and NATO countries in the region are far more limited than before the Ukraine crisis. However, most if not all countries in the region stress the need for an approach towards Russia that has not only a deterrent effect but also a dialogue component.

Political dialogue with Russia since 2014 – whether taking place at the bilateral, minilateral or multilateral levels – has often been quite 'robust'. Interactions between elements of civil-society groups in Russia and other countries in the region have been made much more cumbersome by new Russian legislation directed against so-called 'foreign agents'.

In some areas, such as research and trade, we see regular contacts, some dialogue and sometimes substantial cooperation. However, the broader picture of regional cooperation with Russia is bleak and likely to remain so unless new and significant developments and opportunities emerge. The COVID-19 crisis does not seem to be changing the state of affairs for the better at all.

The dramatic developments following the recent general election in Belarus, which Russia clearly perceives as part of its sphere of influence, only add to the overall impression that there is very little dialogue and cooperation between Russia and other countries in the BSR. The outcome of the current crisis may have very significant effects not only for the people of Belarus, but also for security in the broader Baltic Sea Region and possibly beyond.

In recent years we have also seen increased Chinese political, economic and cultural interest in the region and its member states, including in the area of high tech. This interest is very different in its nature and objectives from Russia's aims in the region, as Russia regards many states as being within its sphere of influence. China's interests are far more focused on economic and technological matters, as well as on critical infrastructure. The tools China uses to promote its interests are therefore also different, and less visible, than Russia's actions in the BSR. However, China's interest also has broader security aspects to it.

China's growing interest and actions in the BSR are being felt at a time when far more sceptical perceptions of China's domestic and foreign policy actions can be seen in many European states. One of the reasons for this is obviously the broader American warnings to its European partners, warnings that are not only coming from the Trump administration. China's far more self-assured behaviour in a number of European states in recent years is another important factor. Added to this is the fear in many European countries that China's increasing economic power is being used to invest in the European continent, for example, in crisis-hit critical physical and technological infrastructure.

We have therefore seen discussions and initiatives in the EU, as well as individually in many member states, on the possibility of increasing control over foreign investments.

Furthermore, considerations are ongoing within the EU to find ways to ensure there is a much more level playing field when it comes to Chinese companies investing in Europe and European companies investing in China.

The polar dimension of the huge Chinese 'Belt and Road Initiative' is one very substantial example of China's growing interest in critical infrastructure such as ports and railway connections in the BSR. The so-called 'Talsinski project' to establish a tunnel between Tallinn and Helsinki is a good illustration of a project that could have huge importance in building a state-of-the-art gateway from and to the polar part of the Belt and Road Initiative, with connections to Northern Europe and Western Russia.

Another significant development in the BSR concerns Chinese trade with the countries in the region. This includes high-tech companies such as Huawei, which are actively seeking new market access in areas such as critical infrastructure, sometimes by intimidating local decision-makers. It is clear that China is seeking to benefit from the widespread perception in the BSR and in Europe that having close economic relations with China is essential for individual countries' economic development. However, recent research shows that the widespread perception that European trade with China is very comprehensive is not entirely correct. In fact, China makes up less than 6% on average of total trade for European Union member states.

Nevertheless, China is using a broad set of foreign-policy instruments in the BSR. It is actively using its increasing economic strength and economic tools, including possible investments, as leverage to acquire insights and cooperation with local decision-makers, sometimes also exerting pressure on them.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Although Russia and now also China are clearly showing an interest in the region, their goals and foreign-policy instruments vary greatly. Russia, lacking China's comprehensive and increasing economic strength, is focusing on the hard-security policy instruments in its foreign- and security-policy toolbox. China, on the other hand, has the strategic patience and the economic strength to work much more 'under the radar' than Russia.

The spill-over from the conflict in Ukraine, perhaps now to be followed by an escalation of the situation in Belarus, sets limits to how far cooperation with Russia can be developed. The point of departure is clearly that the EU and NATO cannot give in on the clearly agreed demands they have made to Russia with regard to the still-ongoing conflict in Ukraine, including Crimea. It would not only cause shock waves for the populations of many NATO and EU countries if NATO and/or the EU gave in, it would also set a dangerous precedent for similar potential invasions and actions by other authoritarian regimes both within and outside Europe.

To consider how to address the very different challenges that Russia and China present in the region, we need to think and act both at the national and regional levels.

THE NATIONAL LEVEL

A number of activities needs to be considered at the national level.

- A. The research community in the BSR can and must contribute more to informing about, and thereby raising awareness of, the comprehensive developments in the BSR – in other words, ‘the larger picture’. Thus, up-to-date research can certainly contribute more to the knowledge base of national decision-makers, parliamentarians, officials, the media and civil society concerning recent developments in the BSR. It is important to emphasise that such research must be seen as independent and thus credible.
- B. There is a tendency in some countries to focus on developments of more imminent importance for that country and thus place less emphasis on the larger and more comprehensive picture in the region as a whole. This so-called ‘straw syndrome’ (looking at developments and challenges through a straw) can also be seen, for example, in participation in larger international peace-support missions, where the respective countries have their forces locally deployed in a country or region. Therefore, there is a tendency to look at the local level rather than the comprehensive level of development in the country or region.
- C. We also need to be more aware of history and better able to counter misinformation. Especially in the EU’s and NATO’s older members, many decision- and opinion-makers are often not aware of key facts and causal relationships – they tend to forget, tend to overlook or do not emphasise key political decisions in the decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is often easy for Russian officials to give their interpretations of key decisions in the past and have those versions go uncorrected. One striking example is NATO’s opening to new members that began in the 1990s. This is often portrayed as NATO (or a US-led NATO) pressing forward in violation of international treaties or political agreements. In fact, NATO’s and the EU’s enlargement processes were to a very large degree a response to a deliberate and strong political push from the new democracies to become members of both organisations. The new democracies not only felt they belonged in them, but also felt safer in the face of a very large and somewhat intimidating neighbour. Russia in fact agreed to key international declarations at the level of heads of state and government that European nations had a right to enter security alliances of their own choosing, as well as to leave them if they so choose.⁶

⁶ For example, the Istanbul OSCE Summit Charter for European Security, 1999, para 8:

“Each participating State has an equal right to security. We reaffirm the inherent right of each and every participating State to be free to choose or change its security arrangements, including treaties of alliance, as they evolve. Each State also has the right to neutrality. Each participating State will respect the rights of all others in these regards. They will not strengthen their security at the expense of the security of other States. Within the OSCE no State, group of States or organization can have any pre-eminent responsibility for maintaining peace and stability in the OSCE area or can consider any part of the OSCE area as its sphere of influence.”

THE REGIONAL LEVEL

At this level, too, a number of activities need to be considered.

- A. It is clear that enhanced cooperation between Sweden, Finland and NATO provides new opportunities for establishing a common picture of military, political, diplomatic and economic developments in the BSR. It also provides an opportunity to disseminate this broader picture to a number of target groups in nations around the Baltic Sea, including Russia.
- B. Furthermore, cohesion and solidarity are key issues when it comes to sending effective political signals to Russia. NATO and EU states in the region need to ensure prompt and close consultations, as well as effective cooperation, to avoid being divided. The need for a significant US commitment, including a military presence in the region, is agreed by all nations except Russia and Belarus. However, it must be asked: does the recent political decision to move 12,000 US troops out of Germany send signals of solidarity and coherence to the Alliance, as well as towards the East? According to media reports, approximately 1,000 of these 12,000 US troops are to be transferred to Poland. The US decision, seen together with the Trump administration's blunt rhetoric regarding the German government, is probably a move that governments outside NATO will interpret as an indication of less cohesion in NATO.

Another important and related question: how many and which US and NATO military capabilities are enough to make Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians feel safe from their big neighbour? These are surely questions on which there will be continued and difficult debates in NATO and its member states.

- C. Geography plays an important role in security – any student of political science knows that. Russia, being where it is and having the size it has, will continue to be a security challenge in the region as far as one can foresee. We do not have the luxury to choose our neighbours. In the near future, we therefore need to give more thought to how we can engage in some kind of constructive political *dialogue with Russia*, that is, with Russian decision-makers, researchers, civil society and, if possible, the broader public. However, we should do this without abandoning our red lines over, for example, Ukraine and Crimea.

The research world offers some avenues for substantial dialogue with Russian researchers, and also with Russian decision-makers. Clearly it is useful for the academic world to listen to the perceptions of its Russian interlocutors, and vice versa. Should we consider adopting a more proactive national and multilateral approach when it comes to information activities directed towards the broader Russian public, perhaps by using social media? Does it make sense to disseminate facts about Russia's comprehensive actions and military build-up in the BSR in the Russian language? These facts may also include Russian officials' blunt rhetoric, including threats of the use of nuclear weapons against their neighbours in the region.

- D. Consideration should also be given to whether the academic community in the BSR can be useful in establishing Track II-like dialogues and building up professional

networks. We need not start with the most difficult issues, such as security. Other issues, such as climate change, the environment in the BSR, preventing epidemics, etc. may have better chances of getting some positive traction. Some nations, such as Finland and Norway, have already established concrete contacts and cooperation between some of their civilian ministries and their Russian counterparts. We may be able to learn something from their experience.

- E. Another important question here is whether we can use already established institutions to achieve substantial political dialogue within the BSR. The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) had a very promising start in 1992, but cooperation in the Council has been severely limited due to the overall deterioration of security in the region. Nordic cooperation in many different forums (NORDEFECO, the Nordic Council, etc.) also has the potential to be taken further.
- F. The challenges posed by China's increased involvement in the region suggest different policy considerations. We clearly lack a transatlantic forum for comprehensive dialogue about how to deal with China in the years to come. Since China poses a challenge with many different aspects – economic, trade, technology, AI, military, health, etc. – it is difficult to see either the EU or NATO being a forum for such dialogue. Therefore, combined meetings – for example, at the ambassadors' level – could be one way to initially establish such a dialogue, one in which those members of the EU or NATO who are not members of the other organisation can participate. The recent reaching out to the US by EU High Representative Borell was a step in this direction. However, even though this was met with a fairly positive initial response from the US administration, no such dialogue is likely to gain much momentum before the US elections.
- G. We also need a political dialogue within the BSR about the emerging Chinese presence and China's actions in the region. Again, it is clearly advantageous for decision-makers to have a broader knowledge base about developments in the BSR, rather than focusing primarily on bilateral relations. Another issue is whether there are close contacts between civilian ministries in the BSR – for example, ministries of transport – when it comes to their approach to growing Chinese interests.
- H. A final consideration is whether it would be useful to raise the issue of China's increased presence in the region in contacts with Russian interlocutors. For example, it would be interesting to learn about Russia's perceptions and goals in relation to Chinese military activities and economic investments in the BSR.

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