

# THE SENSIBLE PUSH FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY

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In the last few years, Europe's security assessment has changed dramatically, but our immediate responses to today's crises should not divert attention from the necessity of constructing a long-term vision, which puts great emphasis on joint European efforts, and the deployment of soft and smart power. A new approach to international development is also key in order to keep Europe and its neighbourhood safe.

In the 'good old days', prior to the breakout of the global financial crisis, the Arab Spring, and the Ukrainian crisis, the security assessment for Europe, in terms of most urgent threats and answers, would have been easy to describe. One of the priorities would have been to foster further integration within the EU and, additionally, to pursue a policy towards Europe's immediate Eastern and Southern neighbourhood that would rather gently insist on democratic reforms (while appreciating a certain stability guaranteed by authoritarian regimes). Secondly, there would have been a need to counter the growing gap between rich and poor within developed and emerging countries to avoid social and economic upheavals. And, thirdly, we would have had to address the challenges posed by global warming and climate change through a variety of multilateral measures.

Obviously, none of these challenges resulted from an immediate crisis or disruption (one caused by political decisions or by quickly unfolding dynamics and/or events), but are rather long-term problems that require long-term measures and broad cooperation.

In the last few years, however, we have seen that the security assessment for Europe has changed dramatically. The financial crisis and later the Greek crisis unveiled the unfinished architecture of the European common currency and undermined trust in a global economic system that has rewarded those responsible for the crisis. The Arab spring, which promised to bring the authoritarian states of the Middle East into the fold of a slowly but surely evolving democratic world, soon enough turned into yet another winter. Moreover, with the annexation of Crimea and with its support for the so-called separatists in Ukraine, Russia's President Vladimir Putin showed all too clearly that he was not interested in participating in a global liberal order – one that would still be dominated by Western liberal democracies – but would instead prefer to follow his own rules.

Europe today is thus confronted with the strong leader of a weak state (Russia) who is trying to compensate for his country's economic and soft power weakness by undermining the strength of his Western, liberal competitors, as well as by his willingness to use military force in order to achieve his goals. Moreover, there is a deep crisis of leadership and legitimacy in the Middle East that has resulted either in political turmoil, civil war, and humanitarian catastrophe, as in Syria, or in the return to a (seemingly) powerful authoritarian state, as in Egypt and Turkey, and a

range of (semi-) fragile states in between those poles. Finally, Europe is also confronted with a political and ideological crisis within Europe and the Western alliance that became visible with the rise of populist governments within the European Union, namely in Hungary and Poland. The need to find a solution that helps tackle this trend became particularly urgent with the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom and the election of a new U.S. administration that is, for the first time in 70 years, calling into question the Western alliances and its most important security structure, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

### **DON'T OVERLOOK THE SHORT-TERM NEEDS**

All of these crises require immediate measures due to their quickly unfolding dynamics – be it a flaring up of violence in the Donbass, or even more pressing, the huge waves of migration from the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa into Europe.

None of these crises can be resolved merely by military means, but the solutions to each of those crises have to involve hard power tools as well, be it in the form of deterrence against Russian intervention or strengthening security forces in potentially fragile states. Here, the Readiness Action Plan, which was approved at the NATO Wales summit in 2014, and with it the establishment of a 5000-strong, so-called



Very High Readiness Joint Task Force within NATO, is a necessary first step for deterrence, and the concept of *Ertüchtigung*, loosely meaning a policy of ‘help for self-help’ that would enable fragile states to take care of their own security.

Moreover, none of these crises can be solved by one power alone. Multilateral approaches are inevitable, even if deepening ideological differences – even within the Western alliance – make it ever more difficult to act jointly. Thus, we need to tackle these crises with a carefully calibrated set of hard, soft, and smart power tools – and we shouldn’t shy away from deploying vast political, economic, and also military resources.

## A LONG-TERM VISION IS NEEDED

Whilst Europe’s security environment has changed dramatically and the EU put under unprecedented pressure from external and internal forces, the top priority of European security has not only remained the same but has become ever more urgent, with only a slight change of emphasis: not “further integration”, but “making European integration work”; or, to put it more bluntly, keeping Europe together has to be Europe’s top priority. In order to be successful, building up ‘European capacities’ is the most promising approach, even if this has to be done via a few detours.



In order to successfully manage the threats Europe is facing in the long-term, policy-makers need to take into consideration the following four priorities:

### I. TAKE THE 2% GOAL SERIOUSLY: ON A EUROPEAN SCALE WHEREVER POSSIBLE

Europe had heard about the necessity of increasing its defence spending towards a 2% GDP target even before Donald J. Trump came to power, and while the messenger may be problematic, the message is nevertheless true. Europe cannot rely on U.S. support forever; it has to build its own capacities, preferably within NATO (even if it's only to keep the Brits on board). Needless to say, the goal of 'spending more on defence' has to be done through 'building capacities'.

Europe still acts on a 'Mac versus Windows' blueprint from the old days of the computer age. Capacities are wasted because systems are incompatible. 'Pooling and sharing' has been a buzzword for years – it is high time the concept was taken seriously. After all, hard power measures have to include diverse concepts, such as 'deterrence' (including nuclear) and 'anti-terror-measures', which require vastly different means and capabilities. Deterrence only works if the means that can be employed are not only impressive, but can also credibly demonstrate that they can be deployed within a

considerably short time. Despite the agreement to establish a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force inside NATO, much is to be desired in this field.

It would be impossible, or worse – a wrong-headed waste of resources, for European countries to build these capacities on their own, instead of pooling their resources. Considering that security is still thought of mainly in terms of national sovereignty, an ‘island to island’ or ‘bilateral cooperation growing into something bigger’ approach might be helpful for the time being. At the 2017 Munich Security Conference, German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen pointed out how well established French-German and Dutch-German cooperation worked. This approach should be broadened so that European countries can act together when it comes to defending their borders.

## II. BUILD AND STRENGTHEN EUROPEAN POLITICAL CAPACITIES AND INSTITUTIONS

Entities can only survive if there is a certain sense of cohesion. If the number one goal is to keep the EU together, then the EU has to demonstrate that it can provide its citizens with a sense of security. Nothing gives populist parties a bigger boost than a very simplified message, in which they claim that it is the nation states alone that can protect people from terror attacks and successfully mitigate the effects of migration waves. And it is the ‘bureaucratic,

cold-hearted’ EU that contributed to their feeling of a ‘loss of control and identity’.

In fact, exactly the opposite is true. Europeans have gained a sense of security over the years because the EU was, and is, the number one provider of wealth through open borders and markets. The task, therefore, is to keep Europe’s internal borders open while visibly (!) securing Europe’s external borders.

A whole range of measures is therefore necessary: strengthening European border controls, especially in the Mediterranean; supporting countries logistically, politically, and economically who have to carry the main burden of receiving and registering migrants and refugees; and strengthening the cooperation of European intelligence services in their fight against terror and (see point one) move it slowly into the direction of a truly European intelligence.

## III. TAKE ‘NATION-BUILDING’ SERIOUSLY AND DEFINE IT BROADLY

Fragile and failing states in the European neighbourhood are Europe’s main security challenge. They are breeding grounds for jihadi and terrorist groups, cause huge migration waves, and contribute to growing poverty. No doubt, the concept of nation building has suffered a serious blow after the invasion of Iraq and an ongoing engagement in Afghanistan

that required vast resources, but did not provide satisfying results – because no stability is possible without a political order that provides legitimacy *and* security for its citizens.

While ‘nation building from outside’ is a very difficult endeavour, there are different measures that would enhance this long-term goal. An example would be strengthening institutions where they already exist, as they do in Tunisia, through a range of ‘soft power’ measures: economic cooperation, exchange programmes and trainings for parliamentarians, the executive (police and military), and ‘young leaders’, as well as ongoing dialogue and cooperation with the civil society.

Such a multi-layered, long-term approach requires an apparatus that can sufficiently coordinate different efforts and provide logistics and strategic planning. While European nation states could become stake-holders in this process, it should be a vastly strengthened and reinforced (and financially beefed-up) European External Action Service that would provide the logistical guidance.

#### IV. THINKING AHEAD AND SUPPORTING INTELLIGENT GROWTH

Climate change and global warming are no longer on top of the European foreign policy agenda due to the perception of other crises as currently more pressing. However, these are and will be the biggest potential disruptors. There has been a whole set of political issues – the lack of civil and political freedoms in Syria, the spark of the Arab Spring, and President Bashar al-Assad’s brutal oppression of any call for reform – that have led to the biggest humanitarian catastrophe in the 21st century. However, according to a study published by *Atmospheres, the Journal of Geophysical Research*, a massive drought – in fact, the worst drought of the last 900 years in the Middle East (and the inability of an authoritarian regime to acknowledge the problem, let alone tackle it) – might very well have contributed to the break-out of political unrest and the ensuing civil war.

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Long-term challenges will not go away just because most of our attention is spent on solving immediate crises. Poverty, a lack of perspectives (combined with a spread of real or supposed ‘information’ about life in the Western world through global media), violent conflicts, and environmental disasters are still the biggest drivers of unrest or migration into Europe. Very often, causes are intertwined and have to be tackled in a multi-layered, multilateral approach through ‘intelligent growth’, investments in renewable technologies and energy sources, and smart development aid that enforces and rewards ‘bottom-up’ approaches wherever possible. Diplomacy and supranational organisations should also play an important role. The United Nations or the World Bank are indispensable partners in the field, with enormous expertise, logistical infrastructure, and vast experience.

“Wrapping your head around current crises and thinking ahead of developing crises” should be the slogan of the day. In that context, it should come as no surprise that Chancellor Angela Merkel declared last fall that we need to do much more to “help

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Sub-Saharan Africa develop”. Most policy makers in Germany understand that the biggest migration waves are expected to originate from Sub-Saharan Africa, and most decision makers understand that almost no other issue could have such an unsettling impact on the political landscape in Germany and the European Union as an uncontrolled or uncontrollable wave of migration. Germany could be in an extraordinary position to contribute to the ambitious goal of ‘helping to develop’ Sub-Saharan Africa’s vast potential; as a strong believer in multilateralism, it could be a leader in multilateral, diplomatic efforts to fulfil the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals.

As a leading nation in the field of environmental technology, it should be a key provider of smart, green technology.

And finally, as a strong European power, it could work for a much smarter EU policy towards our southern neighbours. Slashing tariffs, cutting down on subsidies for European agricultural products, and boosting exports from Africa into the EU would definitely be a smart part of an overall European security policy.

## RIDING THE TRICYCLE

For decades, the answer to crises within or outside Europe was the never-ending mantra “More integration, please”, sung the loudest by us Germans. Facing a multitude of different challenges that rapidly develop, this answer still holds true – in a certain sense. But Germany has to sing a slightly different tune. It will have to be a leading voice yet still ensure that all other voices in the chorus are equally heard. It will have to push for more integration in necessary fields, such as intelligence sharing, common European defence, a common policy towards the southern and eastern neighbourhood, as well as show its willingness to contribute considerably politically, economically, and militarily.

Being the one nation in Europe that most urgently wanted to leave nationalism behind and find comfort in a European identity, Germany needs a much deeper understanding of an almost banal truth: Europe, or the EU for that matter, is not – and will not in any foreseeable future be – a Political Union, nor a European super-state in the making. It will be a federal entity that consists of nations with different interests, national histories, specific perceptions, deep historical traumas, and fears of losing control of their own destiny. Germany’s push towards more integration has, therefore, to be determined yet sensible. Berlin would have to signal that strengthening the ‘Paris-Berlin Tandem’ is of utmost priority.

This strengthening of the tandem could even lead to a switch to a more stable vehicle. For years, I would have preferred a ‘European four-wheel drive’, consisting of France, Poland, Germany, and Great Britain; with the UK having voted for a Brexit, this has turned into a pipe dream – however, a tricycle still seems to be a possible solution, and one that is more stable than a tandem...

After all, a common European foreign policy will not evolve *par ordre du mufti*, but through the shared experience of successful cooperation.



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