

## **An EU Foreign Policy for a World in Disarray**

**Article by Franziska Brantner**

July 23, 2020

With the transatlantic alliance on the rocks and China and Russia asserting their influence, we are living in times of historic upheaval. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the post-World War II multilateral order was revealing its limits. As a new geopolitical era emerges, Franziska Brantner argues that Greens have a responsibility to promote a networked foreign policy capable of securing Europe's long-term resilience. In an intensely interconnected world, no EU country – Germany included – will be able to go at it alone.

The international system built on the institutions and regulatory framework of the 20th century is showing signs of fragmentation. As political weights shift, power politics, cross-border military incursions, and proxy wars once again sit in the political toolbox. Democracies are at risk worldwide, while calls for national sovereignty and “my country first” grow louder. As a community of values, the West is increasingly shaky, and authoritarian revisionist states such as China and Russia are stepping in to fill the vacuum.

Germany's defence policy and principles are interwoven with the US. At the same time, Germany depends on trade with China – including in medical products – and relies on Russian energy. Germany is also one of the EU's major guarantors. These ties mean that, in troubled times, Germany cannot sit on the sidelines as an interested spectator. In the second half of the 20th century, Germany was accepted as part of a new world order based on a common set of values, notwithstanding having committed the greatest conceivable crimes against humanity merely a decade earlier. Germany owes the West, and the world, an ambitious, visionary and solidary contribution to the future world order.

### **Foreign policy as a Green responsibility**

The Greens have always been an internationalist party, working to make the world a better place. Ecology is globalist par excellence: the ultimate cross-border issue. Neither greenhouse gas emissions nor radioactive fallout are confined by national borders and the climate crisis can only be stopped through international cooperation. This is one of the reasons why the German Green Party is the counter project of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland. National populists deny human-caused climate change because to do otherwise would be to admit that solidarity and cooperation with other states are necessary and unavoidable.

Partners of the international human rights movement, the Greens espouse a peaceful but resolute defence of civil rights, solidarity, and global advocacy. A global network of Green democracy activists spans from former Soviet Union states and Africa to the Middle East and Latin America, fighting side by side with women's rights activists and civil society. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, the German Green Party, is the child of an alliance forged in 1993 between Bündnis 90, a coalition of three non-communist democratic political groups in East Germany, and the West German Green Party.

Peace is central to the German Green party's mission. Green politics in Germany came into its own at the height of the peace movement and is the political response to the challenges of the nuclear age that began with the atomic

bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Since then, any war is potentially the first step to humanity's self-destruction. Germans bear a special responsibility for coming to terms with the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the First and the Second World Wars. Scepticism towards the use of military force is one of the core lessons of the past and it forms part of German Greens' political DNA, though that does not completely rule out the use of military means. During the Red-Green government years in Germany from 1998 to 2005, decisions on such matters were not taken lightly. Faced with a world in disarray today, Greens are fundamentally guided by German history.

## **A new geopolitical era**

Two key developments are shaping the new geopolitical era. First, the post-Cold War world of the 1990s and 2000s marked by US unipolarity has come to an end. Authoritarian systems are on the rise and China and Russia are trying to reshape the world order. Russian forces have violated the territorial integrity of other states and, with its relentless bombing campaign in Syria, Russian President Vladimir Putin has reasserted his country's challenge to the Western order by filling the power vacuum former US President Barack Obama left in the Middle East.

With its Belt and Silk Road Initiative, Beijing is trying to establish alternative power structures to increase other states' dependency on China. US President Donald Trump has weakened the transatlantic alliance by treating Germany and Europe as a whole as rivals rather than allies. His "America First" policy undermines all international institutions of which the US is a member. Despite the defence alliance, Germany and Europe find themselves suddenly quite alone. With the international situation unpredictable and unstable, Europe must grow up as a geopolitical player.

Second, globalisation has over the last two decades fundamentally changed the nature of geopolitical competition. The world is closely interconnected: financially, economically, technologically, socially, culturally, and in terms of energy policy. The likelihood of an isolated, binary Cold War-style power bloc confrontation is slim. Today, interdependence makes all actors vulnerable, a fact that is open to misuse as an instrument of power. Russia uses its gas supplies as a weapon. China exerts political pressure via its investment and trade policy, while the United States wields the power of the dollar.

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Globalised interdependencies lie at the heart of the geopolitical balancing act. Connectivity is power. The different political spheres intermingle. It is no longer primarily about economics, but about geo-economics, and it is precisely here that the US and China lock horns in their hegemonic competition. Ground troops and military exercises belong to the geopolitical world of the 20th century. Today, currency wars, commercial spheres of interest, technological dependence, and hostile takeovers are just as relevant. It is not necessary to invade Europe to dominate it; undercutting the euro will suffice. There is no need to bomb Iran to bring the regime to its knees – cutting off financial market access will have the same effect. Why bother with a cyberattack if you already control the 5G network? Armed conflicts have not disappeared but, when fought, they take the form of brutal proxy wars, like in Syria and Yemen. In his [keynote defence speech](#), French President Emmanuel Macron characterised the new geopolitical norm: "the line between competition and confrontation... is now completely blurred." It will be important not to declare these grey areas war zones, but to recognise vulnerability as such and to prevent and react

accordingly.

The coronavirus has shown our vulnerability in an interconnected world [see here for more on [geopolitics in pandemic times](#)]. A relatively harmless trade dispute can, under the pressure of climate change and other crises, quickly escalate into new forms of war in cyberspace, outer space, or in territorial disputes such as in the Arctic. Greens alone cannot prevent such an escalation, but they must articulate ways in which Germany and Europe can properly respond to the new reality.

The other political parties, by neglecting to update their policies to this new reality, are making Germany and Europe more vulnerable. Germany's Social Democrats support Putin's Nord Stream 2 project, which strengthens Russia's leverage over Germany and undermines European energy solidarity. For years, the Christian Democratic Union has stood by and watched as foreign state corporations, especially Chinese actors, purchase security-relevant companies. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has opted not to exclude Huawei from the German 5G network, making it possible for the Chinese Communist Party to oversee the control centre of Germany's digital nervous system [see here for more on [EU-China relations](#)]. While these may not appear to be questions of war and peace, they affect Germany and Europe's long-term security and sovereignty. Thus, eventually, this will become an existential question.

## **A networked and European foreign policy**

An effective foreign policy response to these challenges rests on two pillars: networked geopolitics and European cooperation. Networked foreign policy must be thought of broadly. It should be feminist and encompass areas such as digital technology, culture, economic and financial policy, climate and environment, and, last but not least, health policy. The Greens bring decades of experience when it comes to this interconnected, interdisciplinary approach.

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“There is no such thing as Green foreign policy; there is only German foreign policy,” stated the Green Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer 20 years ago. Today, there is no such thing as a German foreign policy; only a European one is relevant. That must be the premise of all German foreign and security policy in the 21st century. No single European country, not even France or Germany, can stand alone against nations with new “great power” ambitions. If Europe fails to stand together, its members will simply become pawns in a game played between the great powers. German foreign and security policy must acknowledge the new order of international relations and adjust. This context demands a new European patriotism that defends Europe's freedom and sovereignty wherever it is challenged and defines peace, multilateralism, and liberal democracy as European guidelines in its relations with third countries.

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The geopolitical reality requires European strategic sovereignty. This is not to be misunderstood as a populist call for a walled-in “Fortress Europe”. Nor is it a demand for self-sufficiency or autarky. Rather, European strategic sovereignty means the ability to act: the ability to make global policy in times of interdependence. It stands for geopolitical resilience and resistance. It is about the ability to preserve the values of the European Union in an interdependent and complex world and pursue European interests accordingly. As early as 2017, the European Commission described resilience as being about “moving from crisis containment to a more structural and long-term approach to global challenges. Particular emphasis is placed on anticipation, prevention and preparedness”.

Europe must continue to pursue its objectives, even if it is dependent on certain networks like the US financial market. In this world, the actors with the most connections and networks will be key players. Europe must build up its networks and set the pace in standardisation and standard setting across domains – technological, economic, financial, and environmental – so that it can help shape the world according to the principles of the rule of law and human rights. The European Union must be an anchor for alliances, and an alternative for all those who do not want to choose between the US and China [see here for more on geopolitics and the European Green Deal]. The possibility of using alternative, European networks creates room for manoeuvre, reduces dependencies and vulnerabilities, and thus strengthens geopolitical resilience. This is Europe’s task.

The Greens can lead by defining what networked foreign policy and European strategic sovereignty mean for different policy areas. Public health policy is a timely area to start with [see here for more on public health and the EU]. A more strategically sovereign approach demands of Europe to again produce key medical products and active ingredients. Essentially, the EU must be able to ramp up medical supply production rapidly in times of crisis. While European production may lead to price increases in the short term, it is incommensurate with the long-term dependency costs.

It is not only in the health sector that the safeguarding of European public goods and services is the core issue. After the coronavirus crisis, Europe needs a new reality: one that remembers that it was those working at supermarket checkouts, driving buses and lorries, collecting rubbish, and caring for people in the health sector, as well as the countless volunteers, who kept us alive through the pandemic – not the millionaires safely tucked away in their second homes. To recognise that critical contribution, European public goods – climate protection, transport and energy infrastructure, food, culture, education and training, social security, and peace – must lie at the heart of strategic sovereignty, and public health and digital infrastructure should be added to the list. The European budget, European industrial policy, and European legislation must be reorganised accordingly.

Europe must be ready to use its regulatory power to resist the pressure of powerful rivals. Control over access to the EU’s internal market – the largest common economic area in the world – makes Europe strong. To use regulation for this purpose, the EU must be able to assert itself in technological as well as economic terms, whether in the fields of artificial intelligence, quantum technology, or system-critical components such as semiconductors. This means it will be important to continue to invest in Europe’s technological and economic capabilities and strengthen and expand the number of existing European players.

Taking the 5G debate as an example, Chinese state-subsidised providers cannot be allowed to force European companies – such as Nokia and Ericsson – out of the market, nor should American companies be able to buy up these European players. The EU should specifically enable and financially support a European 5G consortium composed of Nokia and Ericsson and all the smaller software-based and more innovative 4 and 5G companies. As European companies often struggle to scale up their provision for international demand, more funding opportunities are needed but above all a stricter and differentiated pro-European anti-trust policy. Big tech firms such as Facebook should be broken up, and data giants such as Google cannot be allowed to gain a monopoly over our health data, particularly in the current pandemic. Strong EU regulation of these sectors is essential – both in terms of data security and ethical limits on future developments.

## **Difficult questions**

European strategic sovereignty needs to address the future of the transatlantic alliance and NATO, and demand answers to uncomfortable questions. Germany and Europe share values and interests as well as defence policies with the US. But the Trump administration treats Europe as a vassal at best, even a rival. Europe must rethink the division of labour within the transatlantic alliance. If Europe wants the United States to treat it as an equal partner, it must act appropriately. This means putting the continent in geopolitical order, integrating European military capabilities through synergies, and becoming a player that can act independently when needed but closely linked to the United States.

The EU must ask what division of labour is needed for networked European foreign policy. Germany, France, and their EU partners must jointly develop strategic thinking and action. This exercise must extend across the board – to governments and parliaments, armies and ministries, political parties and citizens. The Greens should ensure that their concerns and reservations, especially about military intervention, are heard loud and clear and factored into the decisions. A common European security culture means accepting differences. France's nuclear weapons will not disappear overnight, neither will they simply be made available to France's European partners. They will remain under French command. Macron has already announced his intention to discuss France's nuclear arsenal with Germany. What does this debate demand from the Greens?

That EU member states have fundamentally different views must not prevent them from acting together. Germany cannot achieve anything on its own. But what price will we have to pay to make this integration possible, to pursue a coordinated, powerful, networked European foreign policy, knowing full well that certain Green ideas and premises will not find any resonance and or understanding with some European partners and allies, no matter who is in power?

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The Greens will also be confronted with dilemmas on the use of military force. What military scenarios should we prepare for? For which scenarios do we, as Europeans, want to be able to act independently? How can we prevent repeated violations of international law, or Russia using its veto in the United Nations Security Council to commit war crimes on the ground, as in Syria? How do we escape from this downward spiral into total abandonment of all international law? How do we help to enforce the responsibility to protect?

These questions are extremely difficult, especially for Greens. But to be able to face the challenges of global politics and take responsibility, Greens must tackle them. We live in geopolitically wild times. European security and sovereignty are under completely new conditions, in a global, networked, high-tech world. These times beg the question of how Europe wants to face the world as an independent actor and contribute to its order. It is up to Greens to offer Germany and Europe a concept for this.



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Published July 23, 2020

Article in English

Published in the *Green European Journal*

Downloaded from <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/an-eu-foreign-policy-for-a-world-in-disarray/>

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