Review of Security and Defence in Europe - 2020

The European Student Think Tank

Working Group on Security and Defence in Europe

Foreword

It would be an understatement to say that 2020 was an eventful year not only for Europe, but for the entire world. The Covid-19 pandemic upended countless lives, strained relations within the E.U. and between itself and other actors, and amplified various different security threats. The pandemic is still running its course, and the longer-term effects of Covid-19 on European Security and Defence is a subject for another review. The contributions to this review focus instead on many of the other developments we saw through 2020, each of which will be consequential in its own way to come.

Bianca Canevari and Markus Pollak focus on two more internal issues which European policymakers will now have to concern themselves with increasingly due to the events of 2020 – Online Disinformation and Terrorism. While online disinformation has been on the radar of European policymakers for some time, its prevalence and relevance has exploded due to the pandemic. Similarly, combatting terrorist threats has clearly been on the agenda for a while, but has new salience after high-profile terror attacks in Austria last year   Both of these issues present both technical and political challenges for the E.U., - not only is there the question of how to most effectively respond to each of these threats, but there is the matter of doing so while respecting the fundamental rights of European citizens.

The rest of the articles examine the relationship between the E.U. and neighbours near and far. Ronja Ganster and Natalia Solarz consider two of the most important bilateral relationships the E.U. has today – with China and with the U.S. respectively. The nature of the relationship which the E.U. has with both countries has been challenged by the events of 2020, and both are likely to involve a combination of cooperation and competition. Getting the balance right will be key to the E.U. going forward if it wishes to make good on its self-stated 'geopolitical' ambitions.

Martin Vara Sanchez and Jack Smith's contributions look at relations between the E.U. and external actors which lie 'closer to home'. Sanchez focuses on a less well-known but vitally important issue – the ongoing dispute over the status of Western Sahara – and Smith writes about the course and implications of the recent deterioration in relations between the E.U. and Turkey. How the E.U. engages with each of these issues has considerable implications for its own security, and the security of the wider Middle East and North Africa Region, so an awareness of what the E.U. is (or isn't) doing with respect to these situations is of vital importance.

The contributions are intended as a brief overview of each issue to provoke more sustained exploration, and combine factual information, predictions about what might happen next, and suggestions for the direction the E.U. could, or should, take. I hope you enjoy reading these contributions as much as we enjoyed writing them, and that you find them stimulating and thought-provoking.

- *Jack Smith, Head of the EST's Working Group on Security and Defence in Europe*

Europe Under Attack: 2020 Disinformation Epidemic

Bianca Canevari

"With the digital revolution under way, citizens must be able to make choices where views can be expressed freely. Facts have to be distinguished from fiction and free media and civil society must be able to participate in an open debate, free from malign interference. […]"

- Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission[i]

Along with the coronavirus pandemic, Europe found itself confronted with another emergency, namely an information crisis or, more appropriately, a disinformation one. Before outlining the challenges and dangers associated with systematic disinformation campaigns, it is important to clarify the word's meaning. By disinformation we mean the creation, presentation and dissemination of verifiably false content for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, which may cause public harm[ii]. The term is not to be confused with that of misinformation, which is the distribution of verifiably false content *without* an intent to mislead, or to cause harm.

Although the appearance of fake news does not constitute a new phenomenon, the intensity and the speed with which conspiracy theories and false claims systematically attempt to penetrate our societies relates to something quite unprecedented, to the point that we can now speak, as EU Vice-President Vera Jourova referred to, of an "infodemic"[iii]. *"What's new is not the basic model; it's the speed with which such disinformation can spread and the low cost of spreading it,"* as stated by the renowned American politologist Joseph Nye[iv]. In this regard, the development of new technologies, especially when it comes to social media, appears to be strongly linked to the trend. By providing an increasingly amplified variety of proliferation mechanisms (including bots, trolls and algorithms), fake news authors are now able to reach a wider audience at a relatively low cost. Moreover, conspiracy thinking seems to thrive faster in times of crisis, providing the public with longed-for explanations, especially with regard to the attribution of blame[v].

Aiming to counteract this malign trend, Brussels has promoted different, although non-binding, countermeasures and initiatives, such as the 2018 Action Plan Against Disinformation and the Code of Practice related to online platforms. Nevertheless, the European strategy still seems to lack the coordination, coherence and efficiency necessary to tackle a problem of this magnitude. In this regard, understanding the seriousness of the challenge that disinformation campaigns pose to our societies appears to be the key prerequisite in order to effectively address it[vi].

As stated by the head of the European External Action Service, Josep Borrell[vii], earlier this year *"Disinformation* is playing with people's lives. Disinformation can kill*"*. The threat of such manipulative campaigns lies in the rapid socio-economic changes that have emerged in recent years. As our democracies appear to be increasingly characterized by stark societal divisions, malevolent actors seem to be presented with a more favorable environment for disinformation techniques to spread[viii]. In this regard, among the possible consequences of successful manipulation strategies, three main general trends can be defined. First, through

the spread of conspiracy theories, disinformation is likely to further increase societal polarization, thus creating a wider divide among citizens. Secondly, fake news is reported to have a negative impact on public trust, especially when it comes to mainstream media outlets as well as public institutions. Finally, by undermining their very core values, these initiatives are also thought to constitute a threat to democratic political processes.

This has become particularly evident with the advent of the COVID-19 health crisis, as there seems to be a correlation between the spread of corona conspiracy theories and EU citizens' compliance with public health guidance, alongside an increasing perception of social discontent, in particular when it comes to the operation of public institutions. Specifically, with regard to the spread of false covid-related claims in the European community, two major threats can be identified - an internal and an external one, as per Veritier, Bjola and Koops in their analysis "Tackling COVID-19 Disinformation: Internal and External Challenges for the European Union":

- The *Internal threat* is that, by promoting narratives such as the 5G hoax and the claim that COVID-19 is a man-made phenomenon, we assist a growing distrust, both at the local and the supranational level, in the health sector. This is an event which may result in a lower number of people willing to get vaccinated or comply with social distancing measures. It could additionally lead to amplified social instability.
- The *External threat* is that, through so-called "vaccine diplomacy", as it has been defined by the East StratComm project EUvsDISINFO, foreign states - mainly China and Russia – can deploy disinformation techniques in order to undermine Europe's efforts in dealing with the crisis, thus gaining geopolitical relevance. By promoting narratives showcasing the alleged European lack of solidarity with regard to its most-hit member states, foreign powers attempt to portray themselves as the emerging global leaders, strengthen their political and economic ties, while at the same time countering criticism. This is particularly true in relation to China.

Every cloud has a silver lining, though; instead of solely focusing on the negative consequences of systematic disinformation campaigns, what we can do is draw useful lessons for the future. As previously stated, fake news did not arise with the COVID-19 outbreak. Despite the fact that these strategies have long been in place, never before have their effects been more evident in the European community than this year. All of these factors led Brussels to outline new goals and more prompt initiatives to tackle the problem. Hampered by legal constraints, and lacking a real political understanding alongside a unified member states' perception of the threat that disinformation can pose - not seen by all as a primary concern - Europe's initial response prior to the COVID-19 outbreak has been described as too slow and incoherent.

As disinformation knows no digital or physical border, already existing European initiatives, such as the non-binding self-regulating 2018 online platforms Code of Practice, have proven too weak[ix].
Intervening on the matter, in a recent press conference the European Commission vice-president in charge of values and transparency, Vera Jourova, unveiled Europe's new Democracy Action Plan. The project constitutes the first piece of a digital agenda package whose goal is to counter disinformation, enforce open and free online public debates, and

safeguard elections' integrity[x]. Among the main measures announced are: the imposition of more obligations as well as accountability indicators on online platforms connected with the dissemination of fake news; the introduction of new legislation relating to the transparency of political ads; and reinforced protection of journalists against strategic lawsuits against public participation[xi]. Moving from "self-regulation to co-regulation", as per Jourova, hence bolstering an open inter-european dialogue over the joint disinformation concern, the plan aims at making the EU response more coordinated and coherent. According to Nicortra, researcher at the online rights campaign group Avaaz the plan "could be a Paris Agreement for disinformation where, even if it is not binding, you have all the actors coming together, agreeing on what the facts are and setting goals and deciding."

On the other hand, though, when actively engaging in order to find a solution to the rapid spread of fake news, Europeans should not lose focus on what has been listed by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights as one of the "core values" of the community, namely freedom of expression (ART 11)[xii]. This is particularly true when it comes to misinformation, that is, as already stated, when the author does not aim at causing any harm nor at deceiving others. In this regard, drawing the line between intentionally designed misleading content and citizens' personal expression of opinion appears fundamental, for by not properly distinguishing between the two, the Commission might risk to implement measures whose result will also be that of undermining Europeans' fundamental rights. "The COVID-19 pandemic is being used to limit freedom of the press," warned earlier in May EU High Representative, Joseph Borrell[xiii], as we saw EU and non-EU expanding their restrictive measures scheme on fake news, thus exercising greater control on the information space. What is needed, in this context, would seem to be a greater understanding of the problem - not a "ministry of truth", as outlined by EU Vice-President Vera Jourova - so as to move in the best possible direction by implementing coherent and effective countermeasures against disinformation, without threatening citizens' fundamental right to free opinion and expression.

At the same time, other parallel countermeasures might also prove to be useful. In this regard, according to the 2019 Mercator European Dialogue workshop report[xiv], "the best tool against fake news is prevention. Educating society to be critical with news, young people especially as they spend more time on social media." Among expert-proposed solutions we find that of bolstering media literacy among the European public, and primarily among young people. We define the term to mean the ability to critically analyze for accuracy, credibility, or evidence of bias the content created and consumed in various media, including radio and television, the internet, and social media. By acquiring more expertise in this area, citizens would then be able to develop independent critical thinking and more easily distinguish a reliable source from one that is not, thus being less exposed.

In conclusion, although the COVID-19 pandemic and its concomitant "infodemic" outbreak have hit the European community hard and still do, some useful insights have been drawn out of this experience. The disinformation burst has, in fact, enabled us to deepen our knowledge on the matter while, concurrently, better acknowledge the threat it poses to our societies. What's more, in the past months, a positive directional shift has been registered on the side of the European Community, which is now more willing to address the disinformation threat in a new, inclusive and coherent manner. Nonetheless, in this fight against disinformation, freedom of opinion and expression must continue to be valued as a

fundamental and inalienable right. Although Europe now appears better prepared to face this battle, there is still much that needs to be learnt about this invisible enemy.

Bianca Canevari is a Researcher at the Working Group for Security and Defence in Europe, and is a graduate student at ITRI, University of Strasbourg. She has previously worked in Russia, in communications, and has worked at the Russian International Affairs Council.

[i] European Commission Press Release (2020) "European Democracy Action Plan: making EU democracies stronger", URL: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2250

[ii] High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2018) "Action Plan against Disinformation," URL: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/les/eu-communication-disinformation-euco-05122018_en.pdf

[iii] DW (2020) "EU Takes Action Against Fake news", URL: https://www.dw.com/en/eu-takes-action-against-fake-news/a-55056541

[iv] Foreign Affairs, J.S. Nye Jr (2018) "How Sharp Power Threatens Soft Power
The Right and Wrong Ways to Respond to Authoritarian Influence", URL: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-01-24/how-sharp-power-threatens-soft-power?utm_medium=email_notifications&utm_source=reg_confirmation&utm_campaign=reg_guestpass

[v] The Hague Journal of Diplomacy, S. L. Veritier, C. Bjola, J. A. Koops (2020) "Tackling COVID-19 Disinformation: Internal and External Challenges for the European Union", pg 569-582, URL: https://brill.com/view/journals/hjd/15/4/article-p569_8.xml

[vi] Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, J. Pamment (2020), Future Threats and Future Solutions #1 "The EU's Role in Fighting Disinformation: Taking Back the Initiative", URL: https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/07/15/eu-s-role-in-fighting-disinformation-taking-back-initiative-pub-82286

[vii] J. Borrell (2020) https://twitter.com/JosepBorrellF/status/1242148469407649802

[viii] CSIS, A. Claesson, "Coming Together to Fight Fake News: Lessons from the European Approach to Disinformation", URL: https://www.csis.org/coming-together-fight-fake-news-lessons-european-approach-disinformation

[ix] EURACTIV (2020) "Time to act against fake news", URL: https://www.euractiv.com/section/digital/opinion/time-to-act-against-fake-news/

[x] EURACTIV (2020) "No 'ministry of truth', EU vows at democracy action plan launch", URL: https://www.euractiv.com/section/digital/news/no-ministry-of-truth-eu-vows-at-democracy-action-plan-launch/

[xi] European Commission Factsheet (2020) "European Democracy Action Plan"

[xii] EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, ART 11, URL: https://fra.europa.eu/en/eu-charter/article/11-freedom-expression-and-information

[xiii] DW (2020), "EU Condemns Attacks on Press Freedom during Covid-19 Crisis", URL: https://www.dw.com/en/eu-condemns-attacks-on-press-freedom-during-covid-19-crisis/a-53311679

[xiv] Mercator European Dialogue workshop report (2019) "Truth or Tale? Fact-checking, disinformation and fake news in European and national election campaigns", URL: https://www.mercatoreuropeandialogue.org/download-file/865/

Countering Terrorism in Europe

Markus Pollak

Another Wave of Terrorist Attacks in Europe?

On November 2, a 20-year-old gunman shocked Vienna with an attack in its old town, killing 4 and injuring 23 people in a matter of minutes. The attacker was an Austrian, socialized and radicalized in Mödling and St. Pölten, two medium-sized cities close to Vienna. Despite the exact circumstances still being under investigation, he is assumed to have been a "lone-wolf" terrorist, drawing his Jihadist ideology from the Islamic State (IS), but who had not been in direct contact with the group.[i] This was only the latest in a series of attacks that hit Europe in 2020. In early 2020, a right-wing extremist gunman killed 9 people in two shisha bars in Hanau.[ii] Like the attacker in Vienna, he was not directly linked to a terrorist organization. In France, jihadist terrorists beheaded a teacher in Paris and carried out an attack on a church in Nice. They also followed a similar pattern, being relatively independent attackers with a rather small number of victims.[iii]

Facing these recent attacks, has 2020 brought back a new wave of terrorism in Europe, similar to what happened in 2015/16? Comparative data from recent years shows that this is not the case. Both the number of attacks and the number of victims decreased since 2017 in a long-term trend, according to Europol data entailing completed, failed and foiled attacks (see figure 1).[iv] Moreover, the number of professionally organized attacks has decreased, while "lone-wolf" attacks have increased, preventing terrorist efforts to be as disastrous as they were, for instance, in the 2015 Paris attacks. Terrorism in 2020 was comparatively small-scale. In 2020, only one attack, the right-wing attack in Hanau (11 casualties), caused more than 10 deaths, while in 2015 and 2016 the biggest, well-prepared attacks caused 130 and 84 victims respectively.[v]
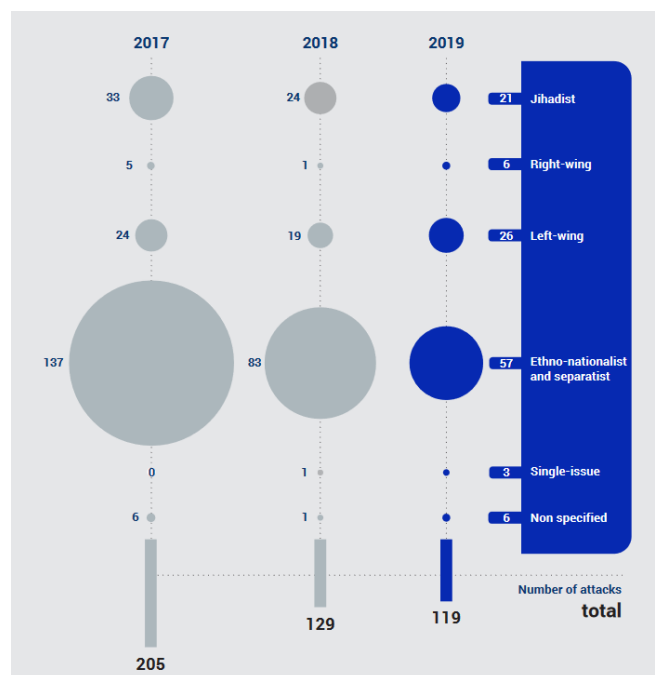
While Jihadist terrorism linked to Al-Qaida and the IS continues to be the most discussed and securitized[1] [vi] kind of terrorism, according to the Europol classification, terrorist attacks motivated by other kinds of ideas, such as left-wing, right-wing, or separatist ideologies were more common in recent years. Left-wing, anarchist terror is most common in Greece, Italy, and Spain, while right-wing terror attacks most recently happened in Germany. Instances of separatist terrorism are currently highly concentrated in Northern Ireland.[vii] However, the average number of victims in terrorist attacks was often particularly high in cases of jihadist

---

[1] According to the Copenhagen School, "securitization" is a discursive act of increasingly framing an issue as something that society considers to be highly threatening to itself or the state and bringing it to the security agenda (Waever, 1995).

and right-wing attacks, since human lives are often targeted directly, in contrast to critical infrastructure or public authorities often targeted by separatist terrorists.[2][viii]

Terrorism and Counterterrorism

Even though not comparable to the terrorist wave of 2015 and 2016, the continued presence of terrorism keeps the issue of counterterrorism on the agendas of policymakers in Europe. What can the European Union do to prevent terrorism? What policies are in place and what were the major response strategies?

Before facing the questions of counterterrorism, a general definition of terrorism is required. Even though terrorism is extensively covered in debate of scholars and policymakers, there has been   surprisingly little effort made to define terrorism in a conceptually meaningful way. Terrorism can be understood as a violence-based, politically motivated, indirect strategy that is most commonly, but not exclusively, atributed to non-state actors. As an indirect strategy, it can be applied by a wide range of actors of diverging ideological backgrounds, but the public focus has shifted to Islamist
terrorism, which has been securitized[3] profoundly since the 9/11 attacks.[ix] Trager and Zagorcheva bring forward that "the resort to terror tactics is itself a strategic choice of a weaker actor with no other means of furthering their cause". Terrorism can be, therefore, seen as a last-resort strategy of a weaker actor. Importantly, even "small attacks translate into disproportionate security losses"[x], which makes it an even more attractive strategy for weak actors.

Especially since the infamous 9/11 attacks in New York City, security scholars have dedicated a significant amount of work to the issue of counterterrorism and have drawn diverging conclusions. Many counterterrorist policies were discussed, such as deterrence, persuasion, economic aid, democratization, appeasement, reintegrative punishment and military force.[xi] The United States and Israel embraced "deterrence by punishment"[xii] as the central element of their counterterrorist strategy, chasing terrorists in a global "war on terror" and limiting warfare in the Middle East to prevent future attacks. Some European powers such as the UK and France have followed the United States in their endeavour. However, it is criticized that such strategy faces three major diﬃculties concerning the nature of terrorist groups: 1) the "problem of irrationality", which assumes that terrorists may not be rational, 2) the "problem of terrorist motivation", that constates that terrorists cannot be deterred since they are highly motivated and willing to sacrifice their life, and 3) the "return address problem", which points to the difficulty of identifying the right target for retaliation.[xiii] Moreover, it can be argued that while actors can be deterred under certain circumstances, strategies cannot be deterred, since the actors involved are too diverse.

The EU's Response: Deterrence by Denial and Prevention

The European Union cannot deter terrorism by punishment, even if it were possible, due to institutional constraints. The EU does not have a unified external policy on terrorism, despite efforts to integrate a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), so security policies remain mostly national. Nevertheless, the new commission led by Von der Leyen published two

---

[2] For instance, while separatist attacks by Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) in Spain caused 343 deaths in 3300 attacks between 1968 and 2002, the 30 jihadist attacks of 2015/16 caused 285 deaths).

[3] See endnote 6

communications on terrorism in 2020, laying out an agenda of counterterrorism.[xiv] Its counterterrorist strategy rests on four pillars: 1) Anticipate 2) Prevent, 3) Protect, and 4) Respond.

The EU strategy essentially draws on two major paradigms. Firstly, it promotes long-term approaches to deradicalization, online echo chambers, societal resilience, non-formal education, and reintegration of former terrorists. Secondly, it promotes policies based on "deterrence by denial"[xv], a strategy mainly associated with hardening defenses, restrictive domestic security policies, and other tools so as to raise the costs of an attack. While the latter may be able to prevent large-scale terrorist plots on the most valuable targets, it does not address the root problems that lead organizations and individuals to choose terrorist strategies. The former paradigm recognizes the long-term socio-political processes leading to terrorist violence, but linked policies mostly remain in the hands of national legislators—who often eventually choose exclusionary denial-strategies over reintegrative policies.[xvi]

The EU strategy does not sufficiently reflect on the potentially subversive effects of certain counterterrorist efforts on democracy. Extensive denial-based strategies that focus on a highly restrictive security regime, combined with modern technologies, can lead to repressive, undemocratic measures once that security is perceived as more important than individual freedom and dignity.[xvii] Large-scale electronic surveillance and targeted killings through drone strikes that circumvent lawful trials are increasingly justified by the fight against terrorism. Besides its efforts to combat terrorism, the European Union should take a clear stance against such developments.

Nevertheless, since 2015, the European Union has made significant progress in information sharing and interoperability. This increased the number of foiled attacks all over Europe, since lack of information sharing was often the reason for the failure to anticipate, detect, and prevent terrorist attacks.[xviii] Its potentially disastrous effects were showcased by the failure of communication between the Austrian and Slovak authorities ahead of the Vienna attacks.[xix] Internationally, the European Union continues to have significant problems to find an integrated approach to counterterrorism, which leads to the very thin agenda on external responses in the latest communication of the Commission. However, on this matter, counterterrorism is no exception, since speaking with a unified voice internationally remains one of the biggest, mostly unresolved challenges of the European project.

Markus Pollak is the deputy head of the Working Group on Security and Defence. He is currently a student at Central European University in Vienna and a Research Project Assistant at the University of Vienna's Austrian Corona Panel Project.

[i] Mehra, L. & Coleman, J. (2020). Vienna Attack: the Path of a Prospective (Foreign) Terrorist Fighter. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT). . Retrieved from: https://icct.nl/publication/vienna-attack-the-path-of-a-prospective-foreign-terrorist-fighter/ (accessed on 06.01.2021)

[ii] Oltermann, P. & Connolly, K. (2020). Germany shooting: far-right gunman kills 10 in Hanau. The Guardian. Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/19/shooting-germany-hanau-dead-several-people-shisha-near-frankfurt (accessed on 06.01.2021)

[iii] Onishi, N., Méheut, C. & Foroudi, L. (2020). Attacks in France Point to a Threat Beyond Extremist Networks. New York Times. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/06/world/europe/france-attacks-beheading-terrorism.html, (accessed on 06.01.2021)

[iv] EUROPOL. (2020). European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2020. European Union Agency for Law Enforcement and Cooperation, 11. Retrieved from: https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020 (accessed on 06.01.2021)

[v] Nesser, P., Stenersen, A., & Oftedal, E. (2016). Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect. *Perspectives on Terrorism, 10*(6), 11-12. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/26297702 (accessed on 06.01.2021)

[vi] Wæver, O. (1995). Securitization and desecuritization. In Lipschutz, R. (ed) *On Security*, Columbia University Press.

[vii] EUROPOL. (2020). European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2020, European Union Agency for Law Enforcement and Cooperation, 54-56. Retrieved from: https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020 (accessed on 06.01.2021)

[viii] Andreeva, C. (2020). The EU's counter-terrorism policy after 2015—"Europe wasn't ready"—"but it has proven that it's adaptable". *ERA Forum* **20,** 343–370. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1007/s12027-019-00570-0

[ix] Dixit P., (2016). Securitization and Terroristization: Analyzing States' Usage of the Rhetoric of Terrorism. In Koch, B. (ed) State Terror, State Violence. Staat – Souveränität – Nation (Beiträge zur aktuellen Staatsdiskussion). Springer VS, Wiesbaden. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-11181-6_3 (accessed on 06.01.2021)

[x] Wilner, A. S. (2011). Deterring the Undeterrable: Coercion, Denial, and Delegitimization in Counterterrorism, Journal of Strategic Studies, 34:1, 3-37, 2011, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2011.541760, 25.

[xi] Trager, R. Zagorcheva, D. (2006). Deterring Terrorism: It Can be Done, International Security, vol.30, no.3, 89

[xii] Wilner, A. S. (2011). Deterring the Undeterrable: Coercion, Denial, and Delegitimization in Counterterrorism, Journal of Strategic Studies, 34:1, 3-37, 2011, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2011.541760, 14-21

[xiii] Trager, R. & Zagorcheva, D. (2006). Deterring Terrorism: It Can be Done, International Security, vol.30, no.3

[xiv] European Commission. (2020). On the EU Security Union Strategy (Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament, The European Council, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions), 24.7.2020. Retrieved from: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1596452256370&uri=CELEX:52020DC0605 (accessed on 06.01.2021)

[xv] Wilner, A. S. (2011). Deterring the Undeterrable: Coercion, Denial, and Delegitimization in Counterterrorism, Journal of Strategic Studies, 34:1, 3-37, 2011, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2011.541760, 21-26

[xvi] Fernando, R. (e d.). (2019). European Democracies Against Terrorism: Governmental Policies and Intergovernmental. Routledge.

[xvii] Falkenrath, R. A. (2017). Deterrence and Democracy: Reflections on American Post-9/11 Homeland Security, in: The Art of Creating Power: Freedman on Strategy, edited by Benedict Wilkinson, and James Gow. Oxford University Press, 7-8

[xviii] Andreeva, C. (2020). The EU's counter-terrorism policy after 2015—"Europe wasn't ready"—"but it has proven that it's adaptable". *ERA Forum* **20,** 351. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1007/s12027-019-00570-0 (accessed on 06.01.2021)

[xix] Mehra, L. & Coleman, J. (2020). Vienna Attack: the Path of a Prospective (Foreign) Terrorist Fighter, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT), 17.11.2020. Retrieved from: https://icct.nl/publication/vienna-attack-the-path-of-a-prospective-foreign-terrorist-fighter/ (accessed on 06.01.2021)

Post-Pandemic EU-China Relations: Navigating Rough Waters in Unprecedented Times

Ronja Ganster

The COVID-19 pandemic occurs against the backdrop of a changing EU-China relationship. After the EU announced a stricter course towards its far eastern partner in 2019, the pandemic served as a catalyst of underlying trends and re emphasized the need for Brussels to reshape its relationship with Beijing. In the coming years, the EU's China policy promises to resemble a walk on a tightrope. On the one hand, the EU economy is highly intertwined with China as it is a key partner in confronting global challenges like climate change and on the other hand, Beijing itself has become a more assertive player on the international stage and with pressure from the U.S on Europe to adopt a harder stance, China continues to grow. Thriving in a post-pandemic world, means successfully navigating the complex relationship with China, a component that is crucial to EU foreign and trade policy.

Europe Awakens to Its Eastern Rival

For many years, EU countries tried to walk a fine line in their relationship with China. Focusing on the economic side of the relationship, they tried to reap the benefits of trading with the largest country on the globe and while only cautiously addressing political differences and human rights issues. All the while, the EU lacked an official strategy. During the 2010's, China's economic and political ambitions started to expand well beyond Chinese territory and into the Middle East, Africa and Eastern and Southern Europe. In 2019, EU founding member Italy was the first EU and G7 country to officially join China's infrastructure mega-project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This drew criticism from major EU countries, as the EU was in the midst of charting a more competitive course in its relations with China.[i] The Commission's March 2019 "Strategic Outlook on China" began a new chapter in the EU-China relationship, calling the country "a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance."[ii]

In 2020, the new strategy was supposed to be translated into action with several high-level summits planned for the year, but the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic derailed the 2020 agenda of EU-China relations. The highly anticipated first EU27-China summit, with leaders from all EU members attending, was moved online and ended without tangible results.

A Catalyst for a Changing Relationship

Despite global havoc, the pandemic did not deflect from the EU-China relationship but instead emphasized key trends and the need for the EU to work on rebalancing its relations with China as a top priority. With global supply chains at a standstill, the EU's dependency on China for the supply of strategic goods like medical supplies, textiles and electrical equipment became apparent.[iii] Experts see the diversification of Europe's supply chains as a central objective for the post-pandemic world and as an important factor in reaching European "strategic autonomy."[iv]

2020 also witnessed a more assertive China on the international stage. Beijing used the pandemic to double down on efforts to expand its soft power and portray itself as a benevolent partner. It delivered personal protective equipment (PPE) to Western countries and promised the distribution of vaccines to a long list of developing countries from Southeast Asia to Africa and the Caribbean[v]. However, the EU High Representative, Josep Borrell warned that China may have ulterior motives, stating their attempts as: "aggressively pushing the message that, unlike the U.S., it is a responsible and reliable partner. In the battle of narratives, we have also seen attempts to discredit the EU as such."[vi] The EU Commission accused the Chinese government –alongside the Kremlin– of disinformation campaigns that tried to spread the claim that the EU had failed to adequately respond to the Coronavirus, exacerbate divisions between EU countries and aggressively push a distorted account of China's success in dealing with the pandemic.[vii]

China's growingly confrontative rhetoric towards other countries showcases its rising self-confidence on the international stage. Dubbed as "wolf warrior diplomacy,"[viii] Chinese officials began to stray from their former policy of diplomatic restraint, aggressively rebuking criticism of China and its handling of the pandemic. Australia was one of the first countries to experience the consequences first hand. After the country had demanded an international investigation into the origins of the virus, China unleashed a trade war on Australian goods.[ix] The rift further deepened when a well-known "wolf warrior" official from the Chinese Foreign Ministry tweeted a doctored image in which an Australian soldier held a bloody knife to an Afghan child's throat.[x] Incidents like this already prompted the EU ambassador to China to call on the US and the EU to jointly oppose the Chinese coercive rhetoric and "say 'no' to bullying and intimidation, coercive diplomacy, [and] 'wolf-warrior' diplomacy."[xi]

Beyond Economic Competition Lies a Rising Security Threat

The turning tides in European relations with China also extends into the realms of security. In 2019, NATO leaders first declared China a strategic priority of the alliance. Although Secretary General Stoltenberg clarified that "there's no way that NATO will move into the South China Sea"[xii], he advocated for a more global approach to defend the alliance's interests against a growing Chinese influence worldwide. While China isn't seen as a military threat to the European territory, the NATO 2030 report notes that "[s]ince the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, China has conducted a disinformation campaign in numerous Allied states […], committed widespread intellectual property theft with implications for Allied security and prosperity, as well as cyberattacks on NATO governments and societies."[xiii] China's partnership with Russia further deepens Western concerns. Beijing and Moscow have long shared a similar approach to global principles like non-interference, state sovereignty and human rights. Their cooperation in military matters ranging from joint exercises to arms sales and technical cooperation[xiv] presents a complicating factor for the EU and NATO.

Avoiding the U.S.-China Trap: The EU Caught Between its Biggest Partners

The EU is not the only global actor reassessing its relationship with Beijing. U.S. President Biden declared China a U.S. priority and announced to continue his predecessor's hard stance.[xv] Instead of rhetorical saber-rattling and imposing new punitive trade measures, Biden promised to place coalition-building at the center of his China policy, both with the EU but also other policy formats like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, an informal grouping

including Australia, India, Japan and the US. A foundation for increased cooperation was already laid in October with the launch of the U.S.-EU dialogue on China.

EU and U.S. interests in regard to China overlap on many issues, including what both see as unfair Chinese trade practices, the threat to liberal values and the global multilateral order. Nonetheless, EU leaders continue to stress the need that the bloc must stick to its own course and prevent getting caught between its two biggest trading partners. On the occasion of the September 2020 virtual EU-China summit, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas stated that "[w]e are strengthening the idea of a multipolar world in which no country has to decide between two poles of power."[xvi]

The political struggle over Chinese telecommunication firm Huawei's bid to provide the EU with 5G technology demonstrated the risk to the EU of becoming trapped between its partners' competing interests. While acknowledging the security risks associated with Huawei, EU members worried about threatening their trade relationships with Beijing.[xvii] Under considerable U.S. pressure, EU states eventually chose to side with the United States, even though a few countries like Germany stopped short of outright banning the Chinese company.

The Huawei case serves as an example for what European countries can expect in the years to come. As U.S. pressure for a harder stance on China rises, it becomes more and more difficult for European nations not to get caught in the zero-sum game between the United States and China. Any decision to strengthen relations with one partner is bound to be seen as a loss to the other partner. The conclusion of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment between the EU and China in December 2020, hailed by EU leaders for leveling the playing field for European companies in China, quickly raised concerns in Washington and was described as damaging to the transatlantic relationship.[xviii]

More Tensions Ahead: EU-China Relations in 2021 and Beyond

Brussel's struggle to reconcile its competing interests vis-à-vis Beijing – and Washington – will not become any easier in the future. Economic concerns will likely continue to loom large in all EU considerations. At 2.3%, China was the only major country whose economy grew in 2020,[xix] making the People's Republic a key factor in the EU and global economic recovery.

While the EU continues to shape its new approach towards China, Beijing won't just stand back. Instead, experts expect a hardening of China's policy objectives. Mikko Huotari, executive director of the Mercator Institute of China Studies, predicts that "[t]hinking in Beijing will, however, be even more shaped by friend-foe distinctions, striving for comprehensive national strength, geo-economic spheres of influence and control or dominance in strategic value chains."[xx] 2021 holds a significant date for the country as in July, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will celebrate its 100th anniversary. This year also marks the achievement of China's first "centenary goal", the fight against poverty, bolstering the CCP's self-confidence.[xxi]

In light of these predictions, it is highly important that the EU adopts a long-term approach towards Beijing to safeguard its own interests. The success of any EU strategy will be determined by two key factors. First, the EU needs to reinforce its ability to act as a unitary

actor and prevent member states from breaking the ranks when confronted with Chinese promises of new bilateral economic opportunities. This applies to both Eastern and Southern European countries that are keen on Chinese investments and participation in the BRI as well as economic powerhouses like Germany, which are looking to safeguard their export interests. Second, the EU needs to increase its clout and decrease its dependence on China by cooperating with new and old partners. It should strengthen political, economic and military ties with other Asian nations as well as take up Biden's offer of a common transatlantic strategy. This does not imply that the EU should subordinate all of its own economic interests to U.S. demands but instead should aim to find a common ground for cooperation and concessions in selected areas, as is normal in any partnership.

President Biden's public call on the EU at the Munich Security Conference to "prepare together for long-term strategic competition with China"[xxii] placed Beijing at the top of the transatlantic agenda and provided the EU with a good opportunity to show its resolve to cooperate – and willingness to compromise – in what promises to be an interesting time for EU-China relations.

Ronja Ganster is a Researcher at the Working Group of Security and Defence, and a recent graduate of Sciences Po Paris. She has worked at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, the German Ministry of Defence and a Moroccan Women's Rights NGO.

---

[i] Van der Eijk, Femke, and Angela Pandita Gunavardana. "The Road That Divided the EU: Italy Joins China's Belt and Road Initiative." *European Law Blog*, June 25, 2019. https://europeanlawblog.eu/2019/06/25/the-road-that-divided-the-eu-italy-joins-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/.

[ii] European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. "*EU-China–a Strategic Outlook, Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council, JOIN(2019) 5 final, 12 March.*" (2019), 5. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf.

[iii] Cernat, Lucian. *"Trade policy reflections beyond the COVID19 outbreak."* Chief Economist Note, Issue 2, June 2020, 16-17. https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2020/july/tradoc_158859.07.01%20Chief%20Economist%20Note%202%202020%20Final.pdf

[iv] Kenner, Joanna. "The Imperative to Diversify Value Chains Post-Covid-19." *Institut Montaigne*, June 23, 2020. https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/imperative-diversify-value-chains-post-covid-19.

[v] Wee, Sui-Lee. "From Asia to Africa, China Promotes Its Vaccines to Win Friends." *The New York Times*, September 11, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/11/business/china-vaccine-diplomacy.html.

[vi] Borrell, Josep. "The Coronavirus Pandemic and the New World It Is Creating." *European External Action Service [EEAS]*, March 24, 2020. https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/76401/eu-hrvp-josep-borrell-coronavirus-pandemic-and-new-world-it-creating_en.

[vii] "EU says China, Russia behind coronavirus 'disinformation campaigns'." *Deutsche Welle*, June 10, 2020. https://www.dw.com/en/eu-says-china-russia-behind-coronavirus-disinformation-campaigns/a-53762806.

[viii] Zhu, Zhiqun. "Interpreting China's 'Wolf-Warrior Diplomacy'." *The Diplomat*, May 15, 2020. https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/interpreting-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/.

[ix] Lucanus, Anton. "China Unleashes Brutal Wolf-Warrior Diplomacy on Australia." *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, November 26, 2020. https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/china-unleashes-brutal-wolf-warrior-diplomacy-on-australia/.

[x] Shih, Gerry. "Chinese official fuels outrage with doctored image depicting Australian soldier cutting Afghan child's throat." *The Washington Post*, November 30, 2020.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-australia-tweet-afghanistan/2020/11/30/546a2512-32b8-11eb-9699-00d311f13d2d_story.html

xi "Europe, U.S. should say 'no' to China's 'wolf-warrior' diplomacy - EU envoy." *Reuters,* December 10, 2020. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-eu-usa-idUSKBN28K0JS

xii Ellyatt, Holly. "China Is 'Coming Closer' but We Don't Want a New Adversary, NATO Chief Says." *CNBC*, December 2, 2019. https://www.cnbc.com/2019/12/02/jens-stoltenberg-rising-power-china-must-be-addressed-by-nato.html.

xiii NATO. *"NATO 2030: United for a New Era. Analysis and Recommendation of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General."* (2020), 17. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf.

xiv Kofmann, Michael. "The Emperor's League: Understanding Sino-Russian Defense Cooperation." *War on the Rocks*, August 6, 2020. https://warontherocks.com/2020/08/the-emperors-league-understanding-sino-russian-defense-cooperation.

xv Friedman, Thomas L. "Biden Made Sure 'Trump Is Not Going to Be President for Four More Years.'" *New York Times*, December 2, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/02/opinion/biden-interview-mcconnell-china-iran.html.

xvi von Hein, Matthias. „Coronavirus makes Germany's EU-China summit go virtual." *Deutsche Welle,* September 13, 2020. https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-makes-germanys-eu-china-summit-go-virtual/a-54907146.

xvii Bennhold, Katrin and Jack Ewing. "In Huawei Battle, China Threatens Germany 'Where It Hurts': Automakers." *The New York Times,* January 16, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/16/world/europe/huawei-germany-china-5g-automakers.html.

xviii Brunsden, Jim, Mehreen Khan, and Michael Peel. "EU and China Agree New Investment Treaty." *Financial Times*, December 30, 2020. https://www.ft.com/content/6a429460-4bfb-42d4-9191-73ba97dde130.

xix Cheng, Jonathan. "China Is the Only Major Economy to Report Economic Growth for 2020." *The Wall Street Journal*, January 18, 2021. https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-is-the-only-major-economy-to-report-economic-growth-for-2020-11610936187.

xx "China in 2021: Agenda Setting, Anniversaries, and Potential for Conflict." *Mercator Institute for China Studies [MERICS]*, December 20, 2020. https://merics.org/en/briefing/china-2021-agenda-setting-anniversaries-and-potential-conflict.

xxi Grünberg, Nils, and Claudia Wessling. "The powerful centenarian: China's Communist Party turns 100." *Mercator Institute for China Studies [MERICS]*, March 16, 2021. https://merics.org/en/short-analysis/powerful-centenarian-chinas-communist-party-turns-100.

xxii Manson, Katrina, and Guy Chazan. "Biden tells world 'America is back' but warns democracy under assault." *Financial Times*, February 19, 2021. https://www.ft.com/content/0c29d1f1-e25b-47c5-b942-063b9cba0100.

European Strategic Autonomy in a Changing World

Natalia Solarz

The transatlantic relationship, which emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War, has been a cornerstone for both European and American security policies throughout the past seven decades.[i] It has allowed states on both sides of the Atlantic to emphasize their common interests on the global stage and to highlight their commitment to mutual defence through Article 5 of the NATO founding charter. While the European Union was developing as a community of increasingly integrated states, NATO continued to serve as the main vehicle for mutual defence and the only organization providing a solid military structure.

That is not to say that the European Union lacks its own security and defence arrangements. However, European defence structures within the framework of the European Common Security and Defence Policy remain heavily reliant on NATO. In the 2009 Treaty on European Union, the provisions for mutual defence and increased military operation capacity among member states specify that these commitments shall be complementary to the obligations that member states have to NATO.[ii] Likewise, it has been emphasised that the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) integration that the treaty calls for is complementary to NATO's capacity to provide integrated military forces.[iii] It follows that a dependence on NATO, and thus on the transatlantic relationship, remains essential to European security and defence in the 21st century.

At the same time, during his years in office from 2017 to 2021, U.S. President Donald Trump pursued an "America First" foreign policy.[iv] Broadly, this involved a rejection of many of the global norms that the United States had helped to establish, and a move away from the position it had previously occupied as a guarantor of global stability. In line with this agenda, Trump withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia, the Paris Climate Agreement, the UN Human Rights Council, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, among others.[v] From early on in his presidency, he also heavily questioned U.S. participation in NATO, criticizing a broad under-commitment among member states to the 2% GDP defence spending obligation and hinting that the United States would reconsider its own commitment to the alliance.[vi]

Within the European Union, this led to fears that its largest transatlantic ally could no longer be depended upon for continued defence cooperation.[vii] Even without a full U.S.withdrawal from NATO, there was skepticism that the United States would honor the mutual defence clause of the NATO founding charter if enacting such a measure ever became necessary. Nonetheless, given the European dependency on NATO, European member states alone currently still lack the full capability to ensure their mutual security and defence without the participation of the United States.[viii]

As a result, discussion about the concept of European strategic autonomy has emerged in recent years. Generally, it is a broad term, encompassing multiple spheres of cooperation, but in practice it has also been applied heavily to security and defence cooperation. In this regard, the term first gained traction with its mention in the European Union Global Strategy 2016, which puts forth that "[a]n appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is

important for Europe's ability to foster peace and safeguard security within and beyond its borders."[ix] In short, although vaguely defined, this means that there is an understanding that to ensure European security, the European Union must develop the capability to function as an independent actor without the help of allies.

Yet, even after several years of discussion, multiple problems with the concept of European strategic autonomy are evident. The first is that the term is still lacking a commonly agreed upon definition.[x] Any academic article considering the topic first acknowledges this limitation and creates its own working conceptualisation, which makes it difficult to understand what strategic autonomy really means or how it might function going forward. The second is the varying levels of support among member states, with France remaining the strongest proponent and other member states less in favor.[xi] The above flaws point to the fact that, as much as strategic autonomy has become a buzzword in recent years, the concept is still in its early stages and is unlikely to be functional enough to provide a framework for the guarantee of European security and defence in the near future.

The good news, in this respect, is the election of Joe Biden to the U.S. presidency in November 2020, which should lead to a normalization of transatlantic ties. Reportedly, one of the first actions the then president-elect took in the days following his win was making calls to European leaders, in which he discussed "his interest in reinvigorating bilateral and trans-Atlantic ties, including through NATO."[xii] On the campaign trail previous to his election, he also expressed similar sentiments, making a point to state his eagerness to renew commitments to the alliances of which the U.S. is a part.[xiii] Among European leaders his election has also been welcomed with hope of a return to the previous status quo.[xiv]

However, optimism must also be somewhat restrained. Despite what appears to be a renewed U.S. commitment to the transatlantic relationship, there is a likelihood that a reduced capacity to act abroad will remain. While Donald Trump no longer has a direct impact on American politics, the movement that he began still does. As a result, it remains likely that the U.S. will have to place a continued focus on domestic stability in the months and years ahead potentially decreasing the ability or willingness to become involved in affairs outside U.S. borders.

Furthermore, during the presidency of Donald Trump, the world saw a continuation of shifts in global strategic environment - most notably the rise of China. Already previous to Trump's presidency there was ample evidence of shifting American priorities, best exemplified in Barack Obama's Asian pivot.[xv] Even under the presidency of Joe Biden, this American focus on transpacific ties is unlikely to change, meaning a decreased importance will be placed on the maintenance of the transatlantic relationship.

On the other hand, within the EU there has already been a shift in mindset towards the need for greater autonomy that is unlikely to change.[xvi] Previous to the election of Trump, comprehensive European security and defence without the cooperation of the U.S. was unthinkable. Now that this scenario has out of necessity been considered as a possibility, it will seem as less unthinkable going forward. This shift in mindset is encapsulated in the congratulatory message Angela Merkel released following Biden's victory, wherein she also emphasized the need for the European Union to take more responsibility for its own

security.[xvii] Given the change that occurred in European thinking and the ongoing broader shift in U.S. priorities, it seems probable that considerations of the necessity of European strategic autonomy are here to stay.

The past four years have marked an unusually tense time in the history of transatlantic relationship between the European Union and the United States. Under the administration of president Joe Biden, it is likely that there will be a recommitment to the transatlantic relationship and a normalization of ties. However, given the overall shift in U.S. priorities in a changing global security environment, the concept of European strategic autonomy will likely remain a prominent point of discussion going forward. At the same time there is still much work to do towards defining what strategic autonomy actually entails and transforming this vision into a workable concept capable of providing for autonomous European security and defence. Creating such a concept will require multilateral negotiation and cooperation in the coming years, which could prove difficult in an increasingly divided Union, with multiple visions for the future competing for supremacy.

Natalia Solarz is a Researcher at the Working Group on Security and Defence in Europe. She is a graduate of Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland, and is currently working as a Security Analyst in the private sector.

[i] Cowles, M. G., & Egan, M. (2012). The Evolution of the Transatlantic Partnership. *Transworld*, 29. http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/TW_WP_03.pdf

[ii] Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union. (2012). *Official Journal of the European Union*, C *326/15*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

[iii] NATO Secretary General welcomes PESCO, stresses need for complementarity. (2017). *North Atlantic Treaty Organization.*https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/news_148838.htm?selectedLocale=en

[iv]Trump, D. (2019). *Speech Before the United Nations General Assembly 2019*. https://www.politico.com/story/2019/09/24/trump-speech-at-un-1507923

[v] Wolf, Z. B. (February 1, 2019). Here are all the treaties and agreements Trump has abandoned. *CNN*. https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/01/politics/nuclear-treaty-trump/index.html

[vi] Beckwith, R. T. (April 27, 2016). Read Donald Trump's 'America First' Foreign Policy Speech. *Time*. https://time.com/4309786/read-donald-trumps-america-first-foreign-policy-speech/

[vii] Franke, U. E., & Vara, T. (July 18, 2019). Independence Play: Europe's pursuit of strategic autonomy. *European Council on Foreign Relations.* https://ecfr.eu/special/independence_play_europes_pursuit_of_strategic_autonomy/

[viii] Brzozowski, A. (November 24 2020). EU lacks defence capabilities to meet 'strategic autonomy' goals. *Euractiv*. https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/eu-lacks-defence-capabilities-to-meet-strategic-autonomy-goals/

[ix] Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. (June 2016). European Union. Retrieved from https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf

[x] Patrick, S. M. (November 15, 2019). Europe Wants Strategic Autonomy, But That is Much Easier Said Than Done. *Council on Foreign Relations*. https://www.cfr.org/blog/europe-wants-strategic-autonomy-much-easier-said-done

[xi] Franke, U.E & Vara, T. 2019.

[xii] Crowley, M. (November 10, 2020). Biden Speaks to European Allies as Strongmen Stay Silent on U.S. Vote. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/10/us/politics/biden-european-allies-foreign-policy.html

[xiii] Biden, J. R. (March/April 2020). Why America Must Lead Again: Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump. *Foreign Affairs*. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again

[xiv] Crowley, M. 2020.

[xv] Lieberthal, K. G. (December 21, 2011). The American Pivot to Asia. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-american-pivot-to-asia/

[xvi] Franke, U.E & Vara, T. 2019.

[xvii] Merkel, after Biden victory, says EU and U.S. must work side by side. (November 9, 2020). *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-merkel/merkel-after-biden-victory-says-eu-and-u-s-must-work-side-by-side-idUSKBN27P10I

Western Sahara – EU Policy After US Recognition

Martin Vara Sanchez

Background and Recent Developments

Western Sahara is a territory located between Morocco and Mauritania. This is one of the 17 non-autonomous territories included under the supervision of the UN Decolonization Committee, it has been under dispute since 1976, when Spain (the former colonizing power) interrupted the decolonization process and handed the territory over to its neighbours. Although Mauritania left the area shortly thereafter, Morocco maintained its claims on Western Sahara, establishing an effective occupation of the territory that remains to this day. In its legal dimension, the conflict leaves no room for discussion. The tripartite agreements of Madrid (1975), which handed over the Sahara to the two African countries, are considered void as they breached fundamental principles of international law related to the right of self-determination of peoples.[i] Morocco is considered an occupying power, and the UN understands the issue of Western Sahara as a decolonization problem that must be solved with the conduct of a referendum.[ii] To that end, a UN mission, MINURSO, was established in 1991. This much needed referendum – whose census was drawn up in the 90s and which was ready to be held on a couple of occasions – has always been postponed indefinitely due to Moroccan tactics and the permissibility of its allies in the Security Council – particularly France and the United States.[iii] Although the main purpose of MINURSO (organizing the referendum) has not been achieved, its mandate has been renewed every year, gradually shifting its focus to maintaining the ceasefire and fostering negotiations between the parties.[iv] These negotiations have been deadlocked for the past two decades.

On November 13th 2020, the Moroccan army and the Polisario Front exchanged fire in the demilitarized zone of Guerguerat, thus putting an end to a 28-year-old ceasefire. Hostilities began when Moroccan forces entered the area to dislodge a group of pro-Sahrawi activists who had been blocking a major highway for weeks in an act of protest. The next day, November 14th, Brahim Ghali, secretary-general of the Polisario Front and president of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), declared war on Morocco[v]. During the following weeks, the Front has been announcing daily attacks on Moroccan positions, claiming to have caused fatalities and considerable material losses. Morocco, for its part, kept a low profile, giving little importance to the movements of the Polisario Front and denying its claims of having sustained fatalities among its ranks.[vi] However, another key development has recently taken place that could further escalate the situation. On December 10th 2020, Donald Trump, President of the United States of America, announced his intention to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara in exchange for Morocco establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. This is an unprecedented move, which breaches the most fundamental principles of international law, and threatens to put one more nail in the coffin of the Sahrawi cause.[vii] Until this moment, not even the staunchest allies of the Moroccan monarchy had dared to take this step, being aware of the dangerous precedent it would have entailed.[viii] Although American recognition comes in the form of a political declaration, rather than a legal opinion,

linking it to the new agreement between Morocco and Israel increases the costs of a possible change of policy with the incumbent Biden administration.[ix]

EU Policy

Despite being an extremely close conflict to Europe (European borders are less than 250 km away from the region) and one in which certain Member States (MS) like Spain have important moral and legal responsibilities, the European Union has kept a rather low profile on Western Sahara. The EU, as an external power, should be well-positioned to contribute to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. However, its policies have been ambiguous at best: while in its declarations the EU supports the UN mission in search of a solution based on international law, in practice the EU has been contributing to maintaining the status quo or the situation of illegal occupation. The Union has avoided confronting Morocco on this issue directly, ruling out the imposition of sanctions on the country, with some MS even advocating its positions in the UN Security Council.[x] Over the years, Morocco has strengthened its position as a preferred European partner in North Africa. Thus, Morocco is a key ally in a multitude of political areas, from migration to the fight against terrorism, as well as being an essential trading partner.[xi] The European Union has even concluded important trade agreements that have been applied in the territory of Western Sahara.[xii] These agreements violated international law and were later overturned by the Court of Justice of the European Union in two landmark rulings.[xiii]

European inaction in Western Sahara is a product of the existing tensions between international legality and power politics, which echoes in another tension between the legal and political dimensions of EU foreign action. As López Belloso and González Hidalgo point out, a strict application of international law and the EU's policies in other contexts (i.e. Palestine) to the case of Western Sahara would mean a stronger engagement in this conflict.[xiv] However, the competing interests of different Member States and the lack of a shared vision on an appropriate solution block any possibilities for a European common action in Western Sahara. Due to the intergovernmental nature of the EU's foreign policy, these tensions are bound to persist until the Union evolves into a more unitary political actor.[xv] Nevertheless, this should not constitute an excuse for not working towards a common approach to the conflict that is more in line with our values. The EU should be interested in finding a better solution, as dealing with present and future sources of tension and instability is a fundamental task of its foreign action, and resolving the Sahara problem is essential to achieving this goal.[xvi] Overall, European policy on this matter has been inconsistent with its alleged role as 'global security provider' by contradicting important points of the Union's Global Strategy and its treaties in addition to resulting in a worse security situation for all the actors involved.[xvii]

Costs

The status quo for the past two decades has been characterized by a stalemate which favours the Moroccan position. During this time, Morocco has consolidated its control over large areas of Western Sahara, moving hundreds of thousands of settlers to the territory in the process.[xviii] Additionally, thanks to its intense diplomatic activity, it has managed to get over 20 out of the 82 countries that had previously recognized the SADR to withdraw their support – although, according to international law, state recognition is unconditional and

irrevocable.[xix] The recent turnaround in American policy constitutes one of Morocco's greatest diplomatic victories in recent times. However, US recognition, coupled with the declaration of war by the Polisario Front, may lead to an escalation of the conflict during 2021.

Some Member States seem to have assumed the – now endangered – status quo as an acceptable scenario. The main motive has been to avoid a diplomatic crisis with Morocco, as explained, an essential partner for Europe in North Africa.[xx] In addition, the economic benefits obtained through illegal activities in the Sahara – in which European states such as Spain or France have taken part – make the occupation profitable and constitute another obstacle to the resolution of the conflict.[xxi] Another justification, often put forward by France, is the concern that an independent Sahara would become a failed microstate, contributing to further instability in the region.[xxii] These arguments disregard the serious costs that the conflict entails.

First, the conflict in the Western Sahara is already a source of instability, with both internal and external ramifications. To begin with, the conflict is a source of enormous polarization between the indigenous population and the Moroccan settlers. This polarization is defined by mutual demonization of the parties, in which the former are branded as separatists and terrorists, and the later as occupants.[xxiii] This polarization has led to acts of violence on both sides, and constitutes a major obstacle to the negotiations. Building a climate of trust between the parties seems key to reach a peaceful solution.[xxiv] Until then, the Western Sahara conflict will remain a major obstacle to the economic, social and democratic development of Morocco.[xxv]

More dramatic are the costs related to human rights violations and the humanitarian situation in the region. Regarding the first, several NGOs have drawn attention over the years to ongoing human rights violations, including torture; arbitrary detention, often resorted to aggression and rape; prolonged imprisonment and disappearances; and systematic harassment of the local populations by security forces.[xxvi] There are also significant limitations on freedom of association and expression specially enforced on pro-Sahrawi movements.[xxvii] We must also take into account past violations that have remained without reparation, the most relevant being the alleged massacre of civilians that occurred when the forces of Mauritania and Morocco invaded the territory in 1976.[xxviii] The situation of the Sahrawi refugees in Algeria is equally worrying, although for a different reason. More than 170,000 people have been forcibly displaced and are currently living in one of the five refugee camps located in the province of Tindouf.[xxix] After decades of conflict, their humanitarian situation remains unacceptable. Entire generations have been trapped in these camps for more than 40 years, being fully dependent on an ever-decreasing humanitarian aid – now even more threatened by COVID19 pandemic.

Several analysts warn that, over time, the Sahara conflict has developed a new security dimension that requires close attention.[xxx] In the absence of a solution agreed by the parties, there are concerns that the Sahara could be dragged into the broader insecurity and tension of the Sahel. The latest developments on the ground make these concerns even more relevant. Furthermore, there are serious fears that the Saharawi youth population –

frustrated, locked with no future in the refugee camps of Tindouf – could become the perfect breeding ground for the jihadist groups that are gaining a presence in Northwest Africa.[xxxi]

In its external dimension, the consequences of the conflict include lasting tensions in Morocco – Algeria relations, periodic frictions in Spain's relations with Morocco and Algeria and recurring tensions in Franco-Algerian relations.[xxxii] Disagreements over the appropriate solution for Western Sahara between Algeria and Morocco were also the main cause of failure of the Arab Maghreb Union. These obstacles to further integration in the area have significant socio-economic costs and prevent much-needed cooperation in the security sector, in addition to having a profound impact on the economic and political relations between the Maghreb countries and their European neighbours.[xxxiii] It is also the cause of recurring conflicts within the African Union and, according to some scholars, could escalate conflicts across North Africa and the Sahel and eventually entail a risk of regional warfare.[xxxiv]

In short, the costs of this conflict are high for all the actors involved, including Morocco. For the European Union, and especially for the United Nations, there is a significant additional cost in terms of credibility. For the former, inaction in the region highlights the incoherence of its foreign policy, failing to pursue the principles listed in the treaties and damaging its image as a global security provider. For the latter, its incapability to contribute to any progress in the peace process constitutes a dramatic failure and undermines its credibility as a conflict solver. Furthermore, the non-resolution of a decolonization process like that of Western Sahara damages the very foundations of the international legal system.

Conclusion

The EU's lack of involvement has significant costs and drawbacks, which are often overlooked. In light of the new developments, the rise in violence and the increase in the urgency of the crisis, it is necessary to rethink European policy in this regard – making efforts to find a common position among the Member States that respects both international legality and its own treaty goals, and which actively contributes to a peaceful solution of the conflict.

Martin Vara Sanchez is a Researcher at the Working Group on Security and Defence and is a recent graduate of Radboud University in the Netherlands. He has also worked at the European Security and Defence College and has been involved in the NGO sector.

i   Briones Vives, F. (2003). El derecho a la autodeterminación del pueblo saharaui. *El Vuelo de Icaro: Revista de Derechos Humanos, crítica política y análisis de la economía*, (4), 27-32 ; Saul, B. (2015) The status of Western Sahara as occupied territory under international humanitarian law and the exploitation of natural resources, *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 27(3), p. 301-322 ; Ruiz Miguel, C., (2006). Los Acuerdos de Madrid, inmorales, ilegales y políticamente suicidas. *La Ilustración Liberal*, (26), p. 61-62

ii   United Nations, Security Council *(1991, April 19th)* Resolution 690. *The situation concerning Western Sahara*.

iii   Zoubir, Y. H. (2007). Stalemate in Western Sahara: Ending International Legality. *Middle East Policy*, 14(4), p. 162-163 ; Gimeno Martín, J. (2016). ¿Elegir entre paz y justicia? Apuntes para la resolución del conflicto del Sáhara Occidental. *Revista Andaluza De Antropología*, 10, p. 76

iv   In its latest extensión on October 30, 2020, the word referendum was not even mentioned.

v   Borrell urges return to talks following renewed Western Sahara tensions. (2020, November 16). *Euractiv*. Retrieved from https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/borrell-urges-return-to-talks-

following-renewed-western-sahara-tensions/ ; Peregil, F. (2020, November 14th). El Frente Polisario considera roto el alto el fuego con Marruecos y declara el estado de guerra. *El País*. Retrieved from: https://elpais.com/internacional/2020-11-14/el-frente-polisario-considera-roto-el-alto-el-fuego-y-declara-el-estado-de-guerra-con-marruecos.html

vi   Peregil, F. (2020, November 23). Marruecos avanza en su dominio del Sáhara Occidental. *El País*. Retrieved from: https://elpais.com/internacional/2020-11-21/marruecos-avanza-en-su-dominio-del-sahara-occidental.html

vii   For an in-depth legal analysis of the conflict see Saul, B. (2015)

viii In short, accepting the annexationist theses of Morocco amounts to legitimizing the acquisition of territory by force. Of course, the recognition of the United States of Moroccan sovereignty does not change the legal status of non-autonomous territory of Western Sahara.

ix   Fernández Molina, I. (2020, December 22). EEUU - Sáhara Occidental - Marruecos - Israel: El diablo está en los cabos sueltos. *Política Exterior*. Retrieved from https://www.politicaexterior.com/eeuu-sahara-occidental-marruecos-israel-el-diablo-esta-en-los-cabos-sueltos/

x   López Belloso, M., & González Hidalgo, E. (2016). The role of European Institutions in the Defense of Human Rights in the Western Sahara. *Estudios de Deusto, 64(1)*, p. 336 ; Gimeno Martín, J. (2016), p. 76 ; Zoubir, Y. H. (2007) p. 165-168

xi   Benabdallah, K. (2009). The Position of the European Union on the Western Sahara Conflict. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 17(4), p. 431-432 ; Michalska, K. (2020). Migration Trends in Morocco: Implication for the European Union. *The Polish Institute of International Affairs Bulletin*, 32(1462). P. 2 ; López Belloso, M & González Hidalgo, E. (2016) p. 333, 353

xii   i.e. Euro-Mediterranean Agreement (200); EU-Morocco Fisheries Partnership Agreement (2006)

xiii General Court (2015) Front Polisario v. Council. T-512/12 ; Court of Justice (2016) Council v. Front Polisario. C-104/16 P ; Ferrer Lloret, J. (2017). The Conflict of Western Sahara before the Courts of the European Union. *Revista General De Derecho Europeo*, 42, 15-64.

xiv López Belloso, M., & González Hidalgo, E. (2016) p. 337

xv   De Waele, H. (2017). *Legal Dynamics of EU External Relations Dissecting a Layered Global Player* (2nd ed.). Berlin: Springer Berlin, p. 185

xvi López García, B. (2014) España ante el problema del Sáhara: por una solución magrebí. *Estrategia Exterior Española 13/2014*.

xvii EU's alleged role as a 'global security provider', i.e. European External Action Service (2018, November 19). A stronger EU on security and defence [Press release]. Retrieved from https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/35285/eu-strengthens-cooperation-security-and-defence_en

xviii Gimeno Martín, J. (2016) p. 169

xix See Article 6, Montevideo Convention (1933)

xx   Benabdallah, K. (2009) p. 431-432 ; López Belloso, M. & González Hidalgo, E. (2016) p. 333, 353

xxi Ruiz Miguel, C., & Blanco Souto, Y. (2020). Una visión de la MINURSO: Antecedentes, evolución y perspectivas. *Anuario Mexicano De Derecho Internacional*, 20, p. 391

xxii Benabdallah, K. (2009) p. 430-431 ; Zoubir, Y. H. (2007) p. 168

xxiii López García, B. (2014) p. 3

xxiv López García, B. (2014) p. 8

xxv Gimeno Martín, J. (2016) p. 180

xxvi   López Belloso, M. & González Hidalgo, E. (2016) p. 337-343

xxvii Human Rights Watch (2019) World Report: Morocco/Western Sahara. Retrieved from
       https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/morocco/western-sahara ; Amnesty
       International (2019) Morocco and Western sahara. Retrieved from:
       https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/morocco-and-western-
       sahara/morocco-and-western-sahara/

xxviii López Belloso, M. & González Hidalgo, E. (2016); López García, B. (2014) p. 8

xxix   Algeria: Sahrawi Refugees. (2020, June 23). Retrieved from
       https://www.acaps.org/country/algeria/crisis/sahrawi-refugees

xxx   Lebovich, A. (2020). Why the Western Sahara dispute could escalate conflicts across North Africa and the
       Sahel. *European Council of Foreign Relations*. https://ecfr.eu/article/why-the-western-sahara-dispute-
       could-escalate-conflicts-across-north-africa-and-the-sahel/ ; Salvador Milo, J. (2020, December 21). The
       Sahara conflict and the terrorist threat. Retrieved from https://atalayar.com/en/content/sahara-conflict-
       and-terrorist-threat

xxxi   López García, B. (2014) p. 7

xxxii Zoubir, Y. H. (2007) p. 159

xxxiii Darbouche, H., & Zoubir, Y. H. (2008). Conflicting International Policies and the Western Sahara Stalemate.
       The International Spectator, 43(1), p. 103; Gimeno Martín, J. (2016) p. 180; Lebovich, A. (2020)

xxxiv Lebovich, A. (2020) ; Zoubir, Y. H. (2007) p. 158-159

2020 - The EU and Turkey's *Annus Horribilis*
Jack Smith

Between an averted breakdown in March of the EU and Turkey's refugee deal, confrontation in the Eastern Mediterranean over the summer, and wars of words between Turkish and EU leaders, 2020 was not a year to remember for EU-Turkish relations. From a European perspective, this fissure is particularly important because it indicates a lack of consensus between member states on foreign and security policy, and how these issues should be resolved. Any efforts from the EU to 'reset' relations in 2021 will be an important test case for the EU's wider efforts to build a common approach and move towards a 'Geopolitical Europe'.

A historic year - for the wrong reasons

Against the backdrop of a global pandemic and a contentious geopolitical landscape, the relationship between the EU and Turkey has taken a considerable turn for the worse over the course of 2020. Firstly, following an attack on Turkish forces in the Syrian city of Idlib, the Turkish government threatened in March to renege on a deal it had signed with the bloc aimed at stemming the flow of refugees from Syria to Eastern EU member states. This culminated in some refugees crossing the border into Greece near the Turkish city of Edirne and led to a flurry of last-minute 'crisis diplomacy' to rescue the deal.[i]

Even more significantly, the summer of 2020 saw a standoff between Turkey and EU member states over drilling and natural gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean. Although Turkish exploratory drilling in waters claimed by the EU has taken place for several years, 2020 saw the first sanctions passed by the EU against individuals associated with Turkey's actions.[ii] The summer subsequently saw an intensification of drilling from the Turkish government, and consequently a heightened response from the Greek and Cypriot governments. The situation then became much 'hotter' when the French government deployed warships off the coast of Cyprus, in aid of Greece and Cyprus's response to Turkey.[iii]

Tensions between France and Turkey also took the form of very public animosity between the leaders of both countries. Following the murder of a French teacher, Samuel Paty, by extremists in September, French President Emmanuel Macron made a number of comments defending French 'values' with respect to its policy of secularism. These comments were interpreted by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as being insulting towards the global Muslim community, leading him to say that Macron "needs treatment on a mental level".[iv] The two also clashed over Turkish intervention in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which Macron condemned.[v]

A backdrop of difficulty

These events reflect a number of longer-standing issues which have clouded, and continue to cloud, the relationship between the EU and Turkey. First and foremost among these is a dispute over the status of Cyprus, which has been *de facto* divided into two separate entities since the Turkish military invaded the north of the island in 1974.[vi] Since then, Cyprus and most of the international community have decried the partition of Cyprus as illegal, while Turkey has insisted on the legitimacy of the Northern Cypriot government and its ongoing

military occupation of Northern Cyprus.[vii] The entry of Cyprus into the EU in 2004 and the failure of the 'Annan Plan' to reunite the island in the same year, as well as the recent election in Northern Cyprus of an advocate of permanent partition, have further complicated matters.[viii] This dispute was ultimately what caused the 'freezing' of Turkey's ongoing application for EU membership in 2009, when the Cypriot government chose to block several articles of accession.[ix]

Another factor weighing on the relationship between Turkey and the EU is an ongoing maritime boundary dispute between Turkey and Greece. Turkey has advanced a heterodox interpretation of maritime law, refusing to sign or ratify the UN Convention of the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS), and advances maritime territorial claims which Greece, the rest of the EU, and most of the international community do not accept.[x] The situation is further complicated by the fact that Turkey recognises the waters surrounding the north of Cyprus as under the jurisdiction of the Northern Cypriot administration, a claim which no other country recognises. This directly led to the clash between Turkey and Greece last year, as Turkey began exploratory drilling activities in disputed waters.[xi]

The EU's relationship with Turkey is also affected by longer-standing animosity between several of its member states and Turkey. When accession talks were ongoing between the EU and Turkey in the mid-2000s, France and Austria more specifically strongly opposed Turkish membership. Grigoriadis noted in 2006 that "support for Turkey's accession in Austrian public opinion is the lowest among EU member states", while the strength of French opposition to Turkish EU accession led the country to develop "an unforeseen interest in the Cyprus question".[xii] French-Turkish relations also soured decades ago over France's recognition of the 1915-17 Armenian Genocide, which put it at odds with Turkey's policy of Armenian Genocide denial.[xiii]

The bigger picture for Europe

This difficult spell for EU-Turkish relations is especially significant, however, because it exposes some of the issues which the EU will face in realising Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's recent ambitions for a 'Geopolitical Commission'.[xiv] Disagreement between member states has complicated the EU's response to the Eastern Mediterranean crisis in particular, as some states (such as Germany) have backed a more conciliatory approach with Turkey while others (such as France) have advocated a harder line.[xv] Even when states have managed to agree on action, it has been perceived as not enough by some member states. In the run-up to negotiations over a new set of sanctions against Turkey in December, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said pointedly that "It is very clear what is at stake here: the credibility of the European Union".[xvi] Moreover, the deadlock has spread to other foreign policy areas – Cyprus blocked sanctions against Belarus after that country's crackdown on peaceful protests earlier this year, ostensibly because of the EU's failure to agree on new sanctions against Turkey over the drilling.[xvii]

A potential standoff between Turkey and the EU also raises important questions about the relationship between the EU's defence and security policy and NATO. In November 2019, Macron forcefully argued in an interview with *The Economist* for a European move away from reliance on NATO for the bloc's defence and security needs, going as far as to describe the Alliance as 'braindead'.[xviii] One way to look at France's support of Greece and Cyprus against

Turkey earlier this year in the Eastern Mediterranean is as an attempt to put this principle into practice, by deploying military forces to 'defend' the interests of EU member states against another NATO member state. These disputes between the EU and Turkey correspondingly occur against the backdrop of wider concern about Turkey's reliability as a NATO partner, due to Erdogan's recent adventurism in the Middle East and the Caucasus and Turkey's now-suspended purchase of a Russian Air Defence system.[xix]

A brighter picture for 2021?

In spite of the difficulties of 2020, there are some promising signs that 2021 will be a better year for the EU and Turkey's relationship. In November, Erdogan described Turkey as "as an inseparable part of Europe", even while he decried what he referred to as "veiled injustices and double standards".[xx] More recently, Greece and Turkey agreed to resume talks over their maritime boundaries, ending a five-year break in discussions over that particular dispute.[xxi] There is also the prospect of a potential shift in American policy towards Turkey that could benefit the EU. The Biden administration will likely take a harder line towards Ankara than Trump did, raising the possibility that America can play 'bad cop' and allow the EU to avoid politically difficult decisions.[xxii]

It should also be said that, in spite of their differences and difficulties, the EU and Turkey remain very close to each other. There are a variety of different formal ties between the two, not least a Customs Union that facilitates more than 138 billion euros worth of trade in goods both ways.[xxiii] There are also millions of Turkish citizens living in the EU, with the Turkish Foreign Ministry stating that 5.5 million people live in Western Europe alone.[xxiv] And regardless of the fissure between Turkey and other NATO members, Turkey is still a vital part of the Alliance. It boasts the second-largest armed forces of any NATO ally[xxv] and hosts the Alliance's Land Command.[xxvi] Turkey is, furthermore, a crucial component of Europe's 'nuclear umbrella' – the U.S. has a stockpile of 50 B61 Gravity bombs stored at Incirlik Air Force Base in the south of the country, accounting for 1/3 of all American nuclear warheads in Europe.[xxvii]

Nevertheless, the recent difficulties that the EU has had in responding to Turkey pose searching questions for the bloc's frequently-stated ambitions to forge a more assertive and autonomous path where foreign and security policy are concerned. Even if a complete breakdown in EU-Turkish relations is highly unlikely, the fallout from 2020 will leave the viability of member state consensus on key foreign policy issues, and the EU's relationship with NATO, as open questions for European institutions and member states to take into the next decade. While a recent proposal from Von der Leyen to make it easier for the EU to put sanctions in place by removing the current requirement for member state unanimity shows that the EU is cognisant of these issues, it will be a matter of translating thought into action if similar crises are to be averted.[xxviii]

Jack Smith is Head of the Working Group on Security and Defence in Europe. He is currently a graduate student at Sciences Po Paris and the London School of Economics.

[i] D. Jones, 'European Leaders Videoconference over Refugee Crisis, Coronavirus', *VOA News*, 17 March 2020. Access date: 27 January 2021. https://www.voanews.com/europe/european-leaders-videoconference-over-refugee-crisis-coronavirus

[ii] M.D. Lenzu, 'Turkey's illegal drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean: EU puts two persons on sanctions list', *The European Council*, 27 February 2020. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/02/27/turkey-s-illegal-drilling-activities-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-eu-puts-two-persons-on-sanctions-list/

[iii] 'Turkey-Greece tensions escalate over Turkish Med drilling plans' *The BBC*, 25 August 2020. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-53497741

[iv] 'France recalls Turkey envoy after Erdogan says Macron needs 'mental check'', *The BBC*, 25 October 2020. Access Date: 27 January 2020. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-54678826

[v] N. Hovhannisyan & N. Bagirova, 'France and Turkey at odds as Karakakh fighting divides NATO allies', *Swiss Info (Reuters)*, 30 September 2020. Access date: 27 January 2021. https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/reuters/france-and-turkey-at-odds-as-karabakh-fighting-divides-nato-allies/46066928

[vi] See 'What caused the Division of the Island of Cyprus?', *The Imperial War Museum*, 2021. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-caused-the-division-of-the-island-of-cyprus

[vii] 'Cyprus country profile', *The BBC*, 19 October 2020. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17217956

[viii] G. Kyris, 'Europeanisation and Conflict Resolution: The Case of Cyprus', IBEI Working Papers, vol. 39, 2013, p. 6

[ix] T. Barber & D. Strauss, 'Cyprus adds obstacles to Turkey EU accession', *The Financial Times*, 8 December 2009. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.ft.com/content/e62670a6-e421-11de-bed0-00144feab49a

[x] D. Sheppard, L. Pitel & M. Peel, 'What is at stake in the Eastern Mediterranean crisis?' *The Financial Times*, 8 September 2020. Access date: 27 January 2021. https://www.ft.com/content/e872ed5d-1f64-48ae-8b8d-d6b49476e749

[xi] 'Turkey-Greece tensions escalate over Turkish Med drilling plans' *The BBC*, 25 August 2020. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-53497741

[xii] I.N. Grigoriadis, 'Turkey's Accession to the European Union: Debating the Most Difficult Enlargement Ever', SAIS Review, vol. 26, no. 1, 2006, p. 154

[xiii] D. Coffey, 'Marking 20 years since France "upheld the truth" and recognised the Armenian Genocide', *RFI*, 18 January 2021. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.rfi.fr/en/international/20210118-marking-20-years-since-france-upheld-the-truth-and-recognised-the-armenian-genocide-turkey-history-azerbaijan-nato

[xiv] See L. Bayer, 'Meet von der Leyen's 'geopolitical Commission'', *Politico*, 4 December 2019. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.politico.eu/article/meet-ursula-von-der-leyen-geopolitical-commission/

[xv] I. Anthony & M. Sahlin, 'Maritime Disputes in the eastern Mediterranean: Why and why now?', *SIPRI*, 23 October 2020. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.sipri.org/commentary/essay/2020/maritime-disputes-eastern-mediterranean-why-and-why-now

[xvi] R. Emmott, 'After heated debate, EU to prepare new sanctions over Turkish gas drilling', *Reuters*, 10 December 2020. https://www.reuters.com/article/eu-summit-turkey-idUSKBN28K12N

[xvii] J. Rankin, 'EU fails to agree on Belarus sanctions after Cyprus blocks plan', *The Guardian*, 21 September 2020. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/21/eu-fails-agree-belarus-sanctions-cyprus-blocks-plan

[xviii] 'Emmanuel Macron warns Europe: NATO is becoming brain-dead', *The Economist*, 7 November 2019. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-warns-europe-nato-is-becoming-brain-dead

[xix] See B. Pullen, 'NATO's Turkey Problem', *American Security Project*, 16 November 2020. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.americansecurityproject.org/natos-turkey-problem/

[xx] 'Erdogan Says Turkey Sees Itself as Part of Europe', *Voice of America (Reuters)*, 22 November 2020. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.voanews.com/europe/erdogan-says-turkey-sees-itself-part-europe

[xxi] 'Greece, Turkey resume talks on maritime disputes after years of strife', *France24*, 25 January 2021. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20210125-greece-turkey-resume-talks-on-maritime-disputes-after-years-of-strife

[xxii] M. Champion & N. Wadhams', 'Erdogan Gets Ready for a Rocky Four Years of Biden', *Bloomberg*, 24 November 2020. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-11-24/erdogan-gets-ready-for-a-rocky-four-years-of-biden

[xxiii] See 'Countries and regions: Turkey', *The European Commission*, 20 May 2020. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/turkey/index_en.htm#:~:text=EU%20goods%20exports%20to%20Turkey,%E2%82%AC138%20billion%20in%202018.

[xxiv] 'Turkish Citizens Living Abroad', *Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2011, Access Date: 27 January 2021. http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-expatriate-turkish-citizens.en.mfa#:~:text=The%20total%20population%20of%20Turkish,live%20in%20Western%20European%20countries.

[xxv] 'Number of military personnel in NATO countries 2020', *Statista*, 26 November 2020. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://www.statista.com/statistics/584286/number-of-military-personnel-in-nato-countries/

[xxvi] See 'Allied Land Command: Izmir, Turkey', *NATO*, 2021. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://lc.nato.int/

[xxvii] H.M. Kristensen & M. Korda, 'United States nuclear forces, 2019', Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, vol. 75, no. 3, 2019, p. 122

[xxviii] See in 'State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary', *The European Commission*, 16 September 2020. Access Date: 27 January 2021. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1655