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# Strength in unity, the rebirth of a geopolitical fact

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From the very beginning European integration has always occurred through the interplay of an internal goal of reconciliation and convergence between neighbouring nations that share the same cultural values and the same historical experience, and a series of answers to changing exogenous geopolitical contexts[1]. The link between commitment from within and external constraints requires, if not permanent adaptation, at least an ability to fix long-term strategies when times change.

The revival of the European collective project: Europeans must act externally

Everyone admits that after a decade of decline, there are now new and credible prospects of a revival of the European project by its founding members[2]. The open period between the formation of a new German government (Easter 2018) and the elections for the European Parliament (23-26 May 2019) will be conducive to making real progress from within, notably the strengthening of the Euro Area based on Franco-German proposals[3] put forward in spring 2018 (monetary fund, finance minister, a separate budget or discrete budget line, or both[4]).

But this new stage will be fragile and incomplete if it is restricted to internal measures. Europeans must take external action. The exposure of European businesses to globalisation opens unlimited economic opportunities, but it is often a source of fear and a spur to neo-nationalism[5]. Closure versus opening is the new political fault line in Western democracies, and this division finds its starkest expression in the USA. Neo-nationalist priorities are harmful to the global political climate at a time of unprecedented ambiguity: couples of economic partners (USA and China, in a situation of co-dependency) are strategic rivals, while the White House openly describes old geopolitical

allies (Japan, South Korea, Europe) as being disloyal economic competitors, with Germany the principal target of these accusations.

The international context has grown tenser and more competitive, and states are cooperating less. The result is a multipolar situation, in which China and Russia, Turkey and Iran challenge the liberal world order, while multilateralism based on the rule of law, regulation and negotiation is in retreat.[6]

So what collective responses can Europe offer? There is not much point in talking about a powerful French-style Europe if, from the outset, its points of application are neither precise nor implemented. Nor is it useful to reduce world policy to simple commercial German-style considerations (Wirtschaftspolitik).

If, due to the Brexit-induced British diplomatic withdrawal, France is to carry the main burden of reaffirming European interests in the world as it stands, expressed by the French President[7] by the beautiful phrase "sovereign Europe", it must first gauge the geopolitical disarray of its German ally.[8]

## Germany and the USA

The traditional pillars of Berlin's foreign policy are in serious jeopardy. The transatlantic relationship – the basis for Germany's rebirth and security, and the guarantee of an open international system – has been undermined by the rhetoric of the US President. The US's stake in European security seems bound to diminish. Yet Germany is a product of the European and international order established in 1945. Worse still, Ostpolitik hit the buffers in 2014 in Ukraine, the frontline between two zones of influence with shifting boundaries. Binding Russia to Europe, by all possible means, guaranteed Germany's security.

1. This text was published originally in the "Schuman Report on Europe, State of the Union 2018" Editions Marie B Collection Lignes de repères, March 2018)

2. The Economist, "Macron's France, Country of the Year" (19/12/17).

3. Sigmar Gabriel, «Emmanuel Macron is an opportunity for the Germans" "France has the right to an answer other than the tired smile that receives his proposals (for Europe) at present in Berlin." (15 and 16/12/17).

4. Peter Altmaier, Le Figaro, 19/11/17.

5. Michel Foucher and Bertrand Badie, Vers un monde néo-national ? Dialogue hosted by Gaïdz Minassian, CNRS Editions, May 2017.

6. Thomas Gomart, interview with Marc Semo (Le Monde, 22/9/17).

7. Initiative pour l'Europe. Une Europe souveraine, unie, démocratique, Speech delivered at the Sorbonne, 26/9/2017.

8. This article does not aim to analyse the internal political developments of European Union Member States, though they do influence external political choices.

## Strength in unity, the rebirth of a geopolitical fact

Berlin must commit more fully to European security and to maintaining a liberal, regulated world order. Given these tasks and because any attempt by Berlin to exercise political leadership will always be rejected by other European nations, Germany will have to rely on an alliance with Paris, its most stable geopolitical ally, since French policy has been less affected by the changes described above. Still, there are many issues that will need to be clarified: NATO and European defence; interactions with Russia; free trade and regulation; Israel and Palestine; Turkey and the crises affecting its neighbours.

As for the USA, we might note that Europe is second in the list of priority regions of American interest presented in the new national strategy document[9], below the Indo-Pacific region yet ahead of the Middle East, Latin America, Canada and finally Africa, which is mainly seen through the prism of counter-terrorism. China and Russia are classified as revisionist powers "defying the influence and interests of the USA whilst operating under the threshold of openly armed conflicts and on the limits of international law." China is defined as a "strategic competitor", which raises the prospect of a tightening of American policy over the trade imbalance and transfers of technology, while at the same time attempting to ensure its cooperation on the North Korean question. Despite significant differences of opinion (on the climate, unilateralism, taxation and trade) and disruptive action by the White House, transatlantic links on what the European Union deems major issues will centre on in-depth dialogue with Congress (Iran, Russia, anti-terrorist actions, ending crises), research centres (options and scenarios), cities (environment), increased diplomatic engagement in crisis zones (Middle East) and redoubled efforts on defence. "Congress and the Pentagon are more aware of the strategic interests of these links than the president himself. The continuation of the transatlantic relationship is indeed clearly challenged by the repeated criticism made by the Trump administration, which primarily targets Germany. As noted by Pierre Vimont[10]: "Were he be asked about the future of Europe, Donald Trump would say she has none. Better to be aware of it".

### Russia and China

Russia's renewed interest in its close neighbours (Eastern Europe, Syria) should not lead us to overestimate the capabilities of a country which remains on the side-lines of globalisation and has yet to enact domestic reforms.

The French and Germans have agreed on a mixture of dialogue and resolve, even though relations with Moscow are a naturally more pressing issue for Berlin (which feels that it is a target) than for Paris (where the threat is more remote). This is an area in which the two capitals can easily reach an agreement to reject the many and varied forms of Russian interference (financing of populist parties, hacking, military incidents on borders). The increasing role of the Russian media in the propagation of narratives about Europe's decline is undermining one of the foundations of the modern state's sovereignty – control of its international image. This has been damaged by this information war, an extension of the old Soviet penchant for propaganda that can have a significant impact.

Incidentally, it would be preferable for the European Union not to hurry unconditionally into a plan to rebuild Syria after the Bashar regime and its Russian and Iranian allies helped to destroy the country. Syria is not Palestine.

The balance of power is key, and European geopolitical culture would gain greatly by reflecting on this.

More urgent is the need to challenge Russia's leaders about their repeated criticism of the international order, which they helped to found and of which they are co-sponsors, first and foremost at the UN Security Council[11]. This problem is tangible on the European continent. Although the European order and how its security is structured do crop up intermittently as a topic in Paris, Berlin, Warsaw, London and Moscow, Russian proposals are hardly ever explicit, apart from bids to gain the right to monitor the decisions taken by NATO and the European Union. Russia's repeated insistence on an equal, institutional relationship between the European Union and the Eurasian Economic

9. *National Security Strategy*, December 2017, 56 pages. It describes the four security pillars (protection of Americans, promotion of prosperity, protection of peace via force, influence) and details the regional strategy.

10. *Le Monde*, 1/6/2018

11. Speech by Serguey Lavrov at the Wehrkunde of Munich, 18/2/17: building a "fair democratic world, a post-Western world if you like."

Union is in the same vein. How long will it take the Russian elites to understand that their long-term interests lie in a working relationship with Europe rather than with a rising Eastern Asian power, China, which is about to snatch away Russia's hegemony in Central Asia?[12]

The economic promises (markets, investments) China has made to the Europeans may blur the reality of Beijing's ambitions. Europe is undoubtedly a vital partner if China is to establish the multipolar world that Washington rejects, and it is an essential target, given Europe's status as the world's largest mature market and its technological advantage. Direct Chinese investments in Europe have risen from €1.6 billion in 2010 to 35 billion in 2016[13], with priority being given to high technology sectors (16% of total investment in 2010 and 2016), as well as the automotive industry (14%), transport and infrastructures (15%), real estate (15%), and machine tools and industrial equipment (11%). The main target countries are the UK (23%), Germany (19%), Italy (13%), France (11%) and Finland (7%). Europeans are divided about these investments in strategic sectors. Paris, followed by Berlin and Rome, has advocated a right to public oversight of these acquisitions, while the Netherlands, the Nordic states and Greece reject any form of "protectionism" by Brussels. Is it not time to create a committee on foreign investments, along the same lines as the CFIUS[14], in order to protect the European tech industry? China's leaders are fervent supporters of generalised "connectivity"[15], but this is an acceptable stance only if accompanied by the reciprocal opening of the still relatively inaccessible Chinese market. As long as China's rapid growth and foreign investment is driven by the state, its companies and its banks, it cannot be described as a market economy.

The President of the European Commission finally lifted the taboo regarding the use of the word "reciprocity" in his State of the Union speech[16]: "Europe is open to trade, yes. But we have to have reciprocity. We have to get as much as we give. (...) Once and for all I would like to say, we are not naïve supporters of free trade (...) Europe must always defend its strategic interests.

This is why we are offering a new framework of the European Union today based on investment screening. If a foreign public business wants to acquire a strategic European port, part of our energy infrastructure or one of our companies in the area of defence, this can only be done transparently, via in-depth assessment and debate. It is our political responsibility to know what is happening at home to be in a position, if necessary, to protect our collective security." We know the sectors that China is targeting in order to become a scientific power by 2025: artificial intelligence, robotics, renewable energies, biotechnologies, and quantum computing.

Europeans have other problems too, both diplomatic and logistic. The active diplomacy of the forums is increasingly successful, as demonstrated by the meeting between 16 European Union Member States and the candidate countries of the Western Balkans with Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang in Budapest in late November 2017. Meetings of this kind have been held since 2012. They are opportunities to collate data and platforms for investment promises (high-speed rail link between Belgrade and Budapest; motorway from Bar and Podgorica to Boljare, with an extension to Belgrade – European Union Corridor XI), after COSCO Shipping's investment in the port of Piraeus[17]. These forums spread the idea of an alternative development model – the so-called "Chinese solution". Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban echoed this, indicating that the "centre of gravity" of the world had shifted from the West (Europe) to the East (China). The theme of European decline is common in the Chinese media, as are pronouncements of the end of the international liberal order.

Relations between Europe and China will play a structuring role in international relations and in how the Eurasian continent develops. China's vision is legitimate, yet the Chinese authorities tend to deny European reality, deeming the idea of a united Europe insufficient. Responding to the German Vice-Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel's declaration that "If we do not succeed in building a single European strategy, China will divide us" (September 2017), Cui Hiongjian, an expert at the Chinese Institute for International

12. Michel Foucher, "L'Euro-Asie selon Pékin", *Foreign Policy*, March 2017.

13. *Chinese Investment in Europe A Country-Level Approach*, edited by John Seaman, Mikko Huotari, Miguel Otero-Iglesias, ETNC, December 2017.

14. *Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States*.

15. Michel Foucher, *La connectivité vue de Chine*, Mucem, Marseille, 29/11/17.

16. 13/9/17.  
17. To a total of 67%, in 2016. It is true that this port was for sale due to the privatisations demanded by the European plan to settle the Greek debt.

Relations, which is part of the Waijiaobu[18], said, "Europe is feasible from a geographical point of view, but not in political or economic terms." We should note that China's approach to access to Southern Europe's major ports involves negating the idea of the "Mediterranean", which is at the heart of the European strategy. Also, France is never invited to major regional meetings on maritime issues (format 6+1: China + Southern Europe). Replicating its tactics in South-East Asia, China is circumnavigating the major states and extending a hand of friendship to smaller ones (Greece and Hungary), who complain about Brussels' demands; or else China impedes the expression of a common position on issues of international law such as the South China Sea. Lucidity, realism and reciprocity should therefore guide the Euro-Chinese policy in the future. "He who controls Europe controls the world," declared, Mackinder style, a leading executive of the International Department of the Communist Party to a small audience and in the presence of a European witness![19]

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18. Chinese Ministry for Foreign Affairs

19. "Who controls Eurasia controls the world", a famous geopolitical proverb that inspired the strategy of "containment."

20. Les Échos, 24-25/11/17.

It is therefore vital that the impending effort to revive the collective European project should emphasise both external and internal aspects, both overseas and

domestic. Certain industrialists have a clear idea of what needs to be done. We should therefore allow a German industrialist working in France, Joe Kaeser, CEO of Siemens, to continue our plea for a "strong Union": "It means building another world power, alongside the USA, China and soon India. Germany alone is too small to do this, and so is France. So far, Europe has been taken up with itself - without taking enough notice of the outside world." [20]

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