STATEMENT /
Europe Can Do Better! /

Global crises and challenges can only be overcome by means of cooperation. The erosion of the international order in recent years shows that Europe has to become a more effective actor in global power politics. For peace research and security policy in particular, this means one thing: Europe can – and must – do better.

In recent years, the EU has faced a difficult and complex global political situation: Under President Donald J. Trump, the United States hollowed out the transatlantic partnership that has defined "Western" policy since the end of the Second World War. At the same time, China has strengthened its position as a global player. The People's Republic is no longer a hesitant actor on the international stage but is now willing to use multilateral institutions for its own purposes and has begun to assert its own interests more firmly, even aggressively. Relations with Russia, which have long swayed between competition and partnership have, with the annexation of Crimea, the war in Syria, and the increase in domestic repression, once again frozen over.

With the inauguration of Joe Biden, the coordinates have shifted. In recent years, the EU was forced into the role – together with a handful of partners such as Canada and Japan – of defending the fundamental principles of multilateralism. Now it is faced with a US president who is pursuing a double strategy: While Biden affirms international institutions and agreements, he has simultaneously stressed the fundamental differences – including ideological differences – that exist with China and Russia.

In this situation, the EU needs to define its position. The ongoing pandemic, which has revealed an EU that is weakened internally by nationalistic tendencies and mismanagement, does not make this any easier. We nonetheless believe that Europe can be more than an onlooker in international affairs. But for this to be the case, the EU needs to make better use of – and to systematically strengthen – its ability to set the agenda. As part of this, it needs to sharpen its profile within the institutional structures of European peace and security policy. One test that must be dealt with immediately concerns the crises and wars around the so-called de facto states in Eastern Europe (including Donbas and Nagorno-Karabakh). The EU must respond to these conflicts in ways that strengthen the political will to compromise, but without abandoning fundamental principles.

Europe can be more than an onlooker in international politics

To strengthen its profile, the EU must, among other things, clarify its relationship with the major powers, and particularly with China: While Sino-American relations are permeated with deep and mutual mistrust, there is greater potential for cooperation between the EU and China, and Europe should make use of this to push for a greater focus on peace in the rivalry among great powers.

The EU also needs to shift focus in its relationship with the Global South. For all the difficulties it causes, the pandemic that is currently overshadowing everything also offers an opportunity to demonstrate global solidarity, as well as the willingness and the ability to shape policy. The EU can contribute to this by, for instance, ensuring equitable distribution of vaccines, ameliorating the socioeconomic costs of the pandemic, or reframing its policies for combating poverty and food insecurity in the Global South. It is also necessary to radically rethink military spending in the context of the United Nations, the G20, and NATO. A Covid-19 peace dividend would free up necessary funds for global efforts to combat the consequences of the pandemic. The democratic project also needs help, as the global tendency towards autocracy shows. The EU needs to play a role in reviving democracy globally and at every level of society.

↘ USING AND EXPANDING CIVIL CAPABILITIES

In European peace and security policy there is no effective division of labor among the OSCE, EU, and NATO. A systematic reorientation of these three institutions is necessary to clarify their distinct profiles and focus them in a coordinated manner on common challenges. The architecture of European security must therefore be placed on the political agenda, to empower European security institutions to tackle both global and regional challenges in the long term.

The debate over the development of European strategic autonomy is currently dominated by questions of defense policy. This debate must be expanded to include peace policy, which should become a central focus, as many global and planetary challenges – including the pandemic and climate change – require non-military solutions. The development of civil capacities and instruments would therefore strengthen the EU's ability to act. Rethinking the EU's strategic autonomy and systematically stressing its civil potential and ability to promote peace would give European security and defense policy a boost that it urgently needs. Furthermore, the ability of the EU to act must be understood as a question of European strategic autonomy. To this end, it is vital that the EU achieves clarity regarding not only the means it can deploy, but also the intended goals of its activities. To answer questions regarding the purpose of European strategic autonomy, the potential of a policy oriented towards peace and the necessity of close coordination in the development of the European security architecture need to be discussed not only in the political arena but also more broadly in society as a whole.

Expand the debate on Europe's strategic autonomy to encompass peace policy

↘ CREATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR CONFLICT HOT-SPOTS IN EUROPE – AND FURTHER AFIELD

The so-called de facto regimes in the post-Soviet space pose a true test for European peace and security policy. The fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh in autumn 2020 and the massing of Russian troops at the border of Donbas in spring 2021 illustrate clearly just how much potential for military escalation the de facto regimes represent.

The EU needs to develop creative strategies to deal with the de facto regimes in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. They should be offered convincing incentives in return for a demonstrable willingness to enter into political compromises and to find pragmatic solutions that can improve the situation of people living within the de facto states while facilitating cross-border exchanges. However, the EU should not grant these entities recognition under international law.

In addition, the German government should examine whether there are areas where the mandate of the OSCE could be enhanced. In cooperation with partners such as France, Germany could play a crucial role in mediation processes with respect to the de facto regimes. This will also require negotiations with Russia, which is ultimately the patron of most of the Eastern European de facto regimes – but which is increasingly suffering from the economic burden.

Looking further afield, Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus are not the only regions of the world mired in apparently intractable conflicts. While Covid-19 has not directly contributed to an increase in violent conflicts worldwide, the pandemic has intensified the humanitarian situation in many crisis regions. Half of all violent conflicts are being fought in sub-Saharan Africa. The civil war over the self-determination and territorial integrity of Tigray in northern Ethiopia is only the most recent example. Most of this violence, however, consists of acts of jihadist aggression that are destabilizing the Sahel region and the area around Lake Chad. Nevertheless, it is Afghanistan that remains the conflict with the highest number of casualties worldwide. The German armed forces have been deployed there since 2001 and are due to withdraw by 11 September 2021. Beyond this date, the German government should use all the instruments of diplomacy and development policy at its disposal to pursue a sustainable peace in that country.

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Conflicts in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus are an acid test for European peace policy

Jihadists are destabilizing the Sahel and Lake Chad regions

↘   **LEVERAGING POTENTIAL FOR COOPERATION**

One central question is how Europe will position itself towards China in the future. The escalating conflict between the USA and China is emerging as the defining source of geopolitical tension. For the EU, this could represent an opportunity to take on a significant and powerful role as an agenda-setting peacemaker, by helping the global rivals to settle their differences.

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Compared to the Sino-American relationship, which is characterized by deep mistrust on both sides, relations between the EU and China offer scope for cooperation. However, this relationship also suffers from contradictions and irritations, as recent events have shown: Mere months lie between the agreement in principle by both sides on an investment treaty in December 2020 and the imposition of mutual sanctions in March 2021 as a consequence of China's treatment of its Uyghur minority.

Relations between the USA and China are characterized by deep mistrust

A 2019 strategy paper already proposed that the EU pursue a model of relations with China in which elements of partnership, competition, and rivalry coexist in parallel. Applying this model to current issues in peace and security policy – for instance, the Belt and Road Initiative, China's territorial and maritime conflicts with its neighbors, and human-rights violations within the People's Republic itself – can help Europe to position itself between conflicting impulses with respect to China. This can create opportunities to stress elements of European peace policy. For instance, Europe could mediate in conflicts between China and its neighbors, introduce the topics of sustainability and conflict sensitivity in joint projects within the Belt and Road Initiative, or leverage common interests in Africa to draw China more deeply into multilateral arrangements. At the same time, it is vital that the EU is direct in addressing Beijing regarding its violations of human and civil rights in Hong Kong and with regard to the Uyghurs.

This two-pronged strategy towards the PRC is only possible if two prerequisites are in place. First, it is necessary to recognize that policy areas such as economic cooperation and human rights develop each according to its own internal logic and that no single area should entirely determine EU relations with China. To better navigate and frame policy in areas where there might be more potential for cooperation or where conflict is more likely, it is therefore necessary to first perform analysis and policy development in each area separately. Second, the major challenge is to develop a general strategy that goes beyond the mere segmentation of policy areas – because the current regime could instrumentalize partial cooperation projects with Europe for its own purposes. It is therefore vital to ensure that Beijing upholds its obligations not merely in relation to specific policy areas, but also in terms of its overall orientation towards core norms and fundamental principles of the international order.

Highlighting issues of peace policy in EU-Chinese relations

↘ THE WORLD NEEDS A COVID PEACE DIVIDEND

Military spending rose worldwide in 2020 not only despite, but also because of the Covid-19 pandemic, as government financial assistance also benefited the arms industry. Yet high levels of military expenditure make it significantly harder to deal financially with the global consequences of the pandemic. A global package of measures to cut military expenditure and reduce violence worldwide is necessary to offset the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic more comprehensively and with a greater degree of global justice. Otherwise, new conflicts threaten to emerge. In addition, progress in the promotion of global peace has a powerful and direct beneficial economic effect. The negative effects of violence were calculated to have cost the global economy 14.4 trillion US-$ in 2019 alone (equivalent to 10.5 percent of world GDP, Institute for Economics and Peace 2021: 5). A coordinated strategy for reducing violence and lowering global military expenditures under the aegis of the UN or the G20 is therefore of central significance for addressing the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

High levels of military expenditure make it harder to combat the effects of the pandemic

The money saved is urgently needed to reduce global social inequality and for the restructuring of the global economy along socially and ecologically sustainable lines. In view of the high levels of debt that countries are currently incurring, the German government should advocate that NATO states suspend their target of spending two percent of gross domestic product on defense, at least while efforts to deal with the consequences of the pandemic are ongoing.

Lowering military expenditures and reducing violence releases funds for restructuring the global economy along social and ecological lines

That could also give a boost to arms control efforts, which the Biden administration has restored to the global policy agenda: The extension of the New START treaty must be used to revive nuclear arms control so that the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is not postponed yet again. Germany can introduce initiatives to help create a positive climate, for instance by participating as an observer in the conference of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) or by advocating a moratorium on the deployment of medium-range missiles. In view of the proposal that NATO develop a new Strategic Concept, the German government should use the Biden administration's announcement that it seeks to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in security policy to subject the policy of nuclear sharing to a critical review.

This would reduce the economic pressure to export weapons to third states and, above all, to conflict regions. At the same time, however, European armaments cooperation also threatens to undermine national arms export controls. It is therefore necessary – also as a means of reducing violence worldwide – to strengthen European arms export controls at EU level. This requires more precise definition and more stringent enforcement of the regulations contained in the EU's Common Position on arms exports, as well as joint risk assessment of all Member States, and tougher oversight by the European Parliament.

Linking European armaments cooperation to tougher arms export controls

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↘ EUROPE NEEDS TO THINK AND ACT GLOBALLY

The EU is faced with the challenge of addressing the negative consequences of the pandemic beyond its borders – not least out of self-interest, as Covid-19 mutations, such as those that have already emerged in South Africa and Brazil, pose a risk for Europe.

Levels of coronavirus infection have varied greatly among the world's regions. Notably, the number of infections and deaths remained lower than was feared in sub-Saharan Africa in the first year of the pandemic. Parts of Latin America and India, however, have been affected more dramatically than expected. Alongside the health consequences of Covid-19, the indirect effects of the pandemic represent a many-sided and long-lasting danger in countries with ineffective state institutions. Consequently, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the countries of the Global South is on a knife edge.

In the name of global solidarity, the EU must push for significant financial transfers and debt relief for the Global South. These measures should specifically target the population groups that find themselves at greatest risk: Access to basic state services (e. g. healthcare, clean water, energy) needs to be improved, and social security systems and policy instruments targeting the job market must be strengthened. Trust between the state and the people has to grow stronger if the pandemic is to be combated effectively. To aid in the equitable distribution of Covid-19 vaccines worldwide, the EU should support the COVAX initiative (Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access). For the global fight against the pandemic it would be helpful to suspend certain aspects of the patent protection agreed upon by WTO-members. By means of the so-called TRIPS-waiver, manufacturers in the Global South should be able to produce Covid-19 vaccines.

The pandemic has also demonstrated just how vulnerable globalized supply chains are to crises. Partially decoupling local food markets from the world market, shortening supply chains, and increasing local production could help to prevent future crises. Overall, global supply chains need to be reformed and regulated more tightly. Germany's new Supply Chain Law is a step in the right direction. Yet it needs to be enhanced, for instance with respect to the possibility of bringing actions under civil law. Following a comprehensive legislative proposal by the European Parliament in March 2021, the European Commission has announced that a far-reaching draft law will be published in June 2021, which will also cover small and midsized enterprises and enable civil suits.

↘ ENSHRINE THE PROTECTION OF DEMOCRACY
AS A TASK FOR THE WHOLE OF SOCIETY

In the dispute over the 2020 US presidential election, which culminated in January's storming of the US Capitol, the global crisis of democracy reached a new low. After decades of global expansion, democracy has now been declining worldwide for around a decade – Europe is no exception. A growing number of democracies around the world have experienced the erosion of democratic norms and institutions: Brazil and the USA along with EU member states Poland and Slovenia are examples of a gradual qualitative decline. Countries such as India, Mali, Turkey, Hungary, and Venezuela have already crossed the line into autocracy. The seizure of power by the military risks hurling Myanmar into civil war.

Global erosion of democracy

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There are many challenges that need to be faced: in many countries, polarization has divided politics and society into antagonistic camps. Terrorist violence also threatens democratic systems when governments use the threat of terrorism as a pretext to permanently restrict civil liberties and democratic procedures. Governments worldwide have also substantially restricted democratic rights and freedoms in reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic. The right to assembly and parliamentary oversight of the executive have been particularly affected. In many locations, this has led to concerns that these rights and freedoms may not be restored following the pandemic.

Restrictions of democratic rights and freedoms during the pandemic

Among its many roles, the EU is also a normative project. Against this background, it should give the protection of democracy a central role in its activity – both at home and abroad. It is necessary both to preserve democracy within the EU and the framework of multilateral cooperation among democratic states and to strengthen democratic institutions in fragile states in the Global South that have been placed under additional strain by the Covid-19 pandemic. The curtailments of civil and political rights imposed within the EU in the name of managing the pandemic have been severe. They can only be justified for restricted time periods and are subject to high thresholds under constitutional law. Therefore, these curtailments must be reversed as rapidly and as thoroughly as possible once the requirements do not apply anymore. To renew democracy and strengthen it for the future, parliaments and the public sphere in general must again become places of lively debate.

The EU should support collective efforts for the protection of democracy

CONCLUSIONS

It is not only in its efforts to deal with the current pandemic that the EU is struggling with mismanagement and nationalism. It has also reacted hesitantly to crises, conflicts, and challenges that pose a threat to peace – and far too frequently has made a poor impression: internally divided, with an unclear division of responsibilities in distinction to NATO and the OSCE, timid in formulating an independent position focused clearly on the pursuit of peace. And yet we are convinced: Europe can do better! A Europe dedicated to the normative foundations of the European project can combat the erosion of democracy – initially within Europe, but also worldwide. The economic potential for Europe to play a more proactive role on the global political stage certainly exists. In times of pandemic, this capital can be deployed as a sign of living solidarity with the Global South, something that ultimately also benefits Europe. Peace and security policy is a matter of Europe using its civil strengths, enlarging the scope of its potential for cooperation, including with respect to China, contributing to rapprochement between China and the USA, and developing creative approaches to dealing with conflict zones in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. Europe can do better. But it has to want to.

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