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Den Haag

Conversations on the future of Europe in the world

Hard versus Soft Power: Is it time for an EU army?

The Hague and online, Thursday 3 February 2022

Summary of Proceedings

With the support of



Conference
on the **Future**
of **Europe**



The Hague & Europe

The Hague has a long-standing history and strong connection with Europe. Over 7000 inhabitants in our International City of Peace and Justice work at more than 30 European organisations established in the city. As the International City, we believe in the strength of co-operation, both in the city as well as on the European level, to shape the future of Europe. Therefore, The Hague creates inspiring meeting places in co-operation with our local, national and international partners to involve local citizens in the work of our International City of Peace & Justice.

Only together are we able to realise a shared European future!

Questions or remarks? Contact us via Europa@denhaag.nl

Summary of proceedings

LINKS Europe in collaboration with The City of The Hague, and with the support of The Hague Humanity Hub, hosted the fifth in a series of clusters of events titled '**Conversations on the future of Europe in the world**' on Thursday, 3 February 2022. The event was hosted online from the LINKS Europe office in the The Hague, and around 50 participants joined. The series '**Conversations on the future of Europe in the world**' contributes to the debate in the framework of the EU's '**Conference on the future of Europe**' process.

On behalf of LINKS Europe and the City of The Hague, the moderator of the event, **William Murray**, welcomed participants and introduced the topic: **Hard versus Soft Power: Is it time for an EU army?**

The conversation kicked off with a panel discussion with the participation of **Professor Rob de Wijk**, Founder, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS), The Hague; **Dick Zandee**, Head of the Security Unit and Senior Research Fellow, The Clingendael Institute, The Hague; and **Dr Daniel S. Hamilton**, Senior Non-Resident Fellow, The Brookings Institution, Washington DC, and former Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs at the US Department of State. Other participants commented or asked questions during the course of the conversation.

The 'Conversations on the future of Europe in the world' series is meant to attract diverse views and opinions and to stimulate discussions as part of the wider 'Conference on the Future of Europe' process. Opinions expressed in meetings or in reports from meetings do not necessarily reflect the views of LINKS Europe or The City of the Hague.

The following is an informal summary of the conversation:

The short answer to the question “Is it time for a European army?” is no!

1. The short answer to the question “Is it time for a European army?” is no. This was the unanimous view among speakers and participants in the roundtable discussion. Even though an EU army may be needed, none of the prerequisites exist.

2. Equally unanimous was the view that there needs to be stronger European defence co-operation, co-ordination and commitment in the face of ever-increasing threats and of changes in the US defence posture. There were different views on how this increased co-operation was going to be triggered, how it could be implemented, what needed to be prioritised and whether this would ever to be achievable.

3. Participants recognised the need for a sense of urgency in the conduct of this debate on European defence. In many ways there was no time to lose.

A sombre assessment of the current international situation

4. Speakers and participants took a sombre view of the current international situation and of Europe’s place in it. At a time of increased great power competition, the US focus on China and Russia will continue. The withdrawal from Afghanistan, inelegant as it was, was an expression of this reality. The current international situation was characterised as “the age of disruption”.

5. Participants had different views of the state of play in the EU as it faces these challenges. On the one hand Europe was described as a “fragile, fluid place”, which was trying to cling on to antiquated post-cold-war tools such as soft-power but where the enlargement model stopped being relevant, and instead where the process of disintegration was likely to continue. On the other hand, there appears to be a new sense of purpose within the EU institutions in relation to European defence and security issues, as seen for example in the recently published “Strategic Compass”.

6. The broad consensus in the discussion was that EU was far from being an autonomous player in

defence. European armies, even the ones that have the experience and the capacity to mount serious military operations in the EU's immediate neighbourhood and beyond, lack enablers, and continue to rely heavily on the US in areas such as command and control, intelligence, and advanced weaponry, and ultimately in the capacity to deploy troops.

The Strategic Compass

7. There was a broadly positive assessment of the "Strategic Compass" recently published by the European External Action Service. Unlike previous efforts in this direction, it combines ambition and realism; has clearly defined and time-tabled action points; and focuses on current and future challenges.

8. There was concern that the thinking on the Strategic Compass had been overly coloured by events in Afghanistan in 2021. It was felt the EU needs to think and plan for the next crisis, not the last one. There also appeared to be some ambiguity in the thinking between rapid response and longer sustainable efforts.

Reliance on the US for Europe's defence

9. The discussion gave particular attention to the question of Europe's reliance on the US for its defence. The broad consensus was that dependence on the US was real and across the board and unlikely to end in the short term. On the other hand, excessive dependence was no longer sustainable. There was also broad consensus on the need for Europe to develop capabilities to compliment, and if possible, replace those of the US in the European theatre.

10. It was emphasised that increased European capacity did not necessarily mean less transatlantic dialogue and co-operation; in fact, it may even result in more. Better European consolidation will amplify

Europe's voice. It was also, however, mentioned that in the US, the term "strategic autonomy" remains somehow toxic.

The EU's crisis driven decision-making

11. Concerns were aired that the EU's decision-making process was too much driven by crisis. The Trump factor had created a crisis which helped focus minds. This approach was, however, far from ideal. Better institutional frameworks and decision-making processes were necessary. The idea of a "European Union Security Council" merited discussion.

12. Consensus decision making made progress on defence issues at best cumbersome. This needed to be recognised, regardless of whether one agrees with the consensus approach. This required enough flexibility for smaller groups of states to work together within the EU, and if possible, with EU support and possibly also funding. This could also include areas such as Research and Development, and Procurement.

Nuclear Capability

13. Even though not immediately under consideration, the issue of nuclear capability will need to be discussed if ever the issue of strategic autonomy develops enough.

Niche capacities

14. In its quest to become a security provider, the EU needs to consider what niche areas it can excel in, and focus on them. Cyber defence can be one.

Hard power versus Soft power

15. **Dennis Sammut**, the general rapporteur of the series "Conversations on the future of Europe in the World" updated the meeting on ideas that had emerged in the ongoing dialogue process in The Hague

in the last six months on the issue of *Hard versus Soft power*. In many ways framing the question like that was disingenuous, for there was clearly a need to have both. There was, however, a feeling that the EU had not maximised its soft power capabilities and that it needed to be more ambitious in this field, to the point where it could become a soft power superpower.

16. There were mixed views amongst the panellists on the usefulness of soft power – some seeing it as an antiquated concept, others as an essential part of the EU toolbox.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Whilst there were many different opinions aired during the meeting, and differences on some of the approaches going forward, it was still possible to draw some conclusions and recommendations:

(a) In the face of fast changing international developments and serious challenges to the safety and security of Europe's citizens, the debate on the future of European defence needs to be widened and accelerated. Even though immediate action is necessary, there is a need to ensure that citizens are aware of the threats and that a broad consensus emerges about the response.

(b) In future thinking on European defence, EU-NATO relations are pivotal. NATO has to be "Europeanised", to the extent that its European member states would provide half of the necessary troops and enablers. In the long term and after that happens, "European NATO" could merge in the EU.

(c) Europe needs to have the capacity to operate in the neighbourhood without the US, even if only as first responders.

(d) The EU's recently published Strategic Compass

is a positive development, but the real test starts when it moves from the design stage in Brussels to the implementation stage in the various European capitals in March 2022. The military elites of the member states need to be prepared for the big demands that are going to be made on them and to take ownership of the process.

(e) “What is Europe?” – The answer continues to be defined and redefined. The cumbersome decision-making process within the EU made defence co-operation more challenging. Different countries have different threat perceptions. There are huge risks in endless navel gazing. The option for “coalitions of the willing” therefore needs to remain.

(f) The EU has allocated substantial amounts of money for the development of European defence capabilities. These are, however, mainly targeted at long-term initiatives. There is, however, an urgent need to develop capabilities to respond to immediate needs, including in the area of hybrid warfare. It is necessary for the EU to get the basics right before it runs out of time. This may require a re-organisation of PESCO, the EU’s Permanent Structured Cooperation on security and defence, through which 25 Member States committed to co-operate more closely with one another on defence.

(g) In the current situation on the European continent, NATO’s expansion to the East is unlikely, even as NATO and the West continue to insist on the right of Georgia and Ukraine to join if they want to. This requires that the partnership with these and other countries be extended to the maximum short of full membership.

(h) In the face of hybrid threats, the EU needs to be able to deploy a mix of hard and soft power. Here too it needs to up its ambition to become a “Soft power superpower” but this will require a better understanding on how soft power can be used strategically. The possibility of designating one of the EU Commissioners to be responsible for mobilising and co-ordinating European soft powers tools and capabilities should be considered.

(i) The fragmentation in European defence is costly and risky. All processes that lead to better co-ordination and integration, interoperability, and joint processes in procurement and research should be encouraged. Co-ordinating, supporting and financing these processes can be an important role that the EU as an institution can play in the field of European defence.

(j) Regardless of its operational limitations, the European Union has a central role to play to co-ordinate and develop European defence and security policy, including through co-ordinated approaches within the UN and the OSCE and in negotiations on the future of Europe's security and security architecture.

About the Conference on the Future of Europe

The Conference on the Future of Europe is a citizen-led series of debates and discussions that will enable people from across Europe to share their ideas and help shape our common future.

The Conference is the first of its kind: as a major pan-European democratic exercise, it offers a new public forum for an open, inclusive, and transparent debate with citizens around a number of key priorities and challenges.

It is part of President von der Leyen's pledge to give Europeans a greater say on what the EU does and how it works for them. All Europeans - whoever they are and wherever they are - can take part.

The Conference aims to reflect our diversity, and to bring Europe beyond its capital cities, reaching every corner of the EU, strengthening the link between Europeans and the institutions that serve them. It does so through a multitude of Conference-events and debates organised across the EU, as well as through an interactive multilingual digital platform. Young people in particular are encouraged to take part and share their ideas. European, national, regional and local authorities, as well as civil society and other organisations can also organise events to involve as many people as possible. #TheFutureIsYours

For more information: www.futureu.europa.eu

About LINKS Europe

LINKS Europe is a foundation based in The Hague promoting the peaceful resolution of conflicts and a secure and prosperous Europe, in friendship and solidarity with its neighbourhood. Our work is organised around five thematic areas:

1. **Peace through dialogue and confidence-building**

LINKS Europe is a peace-building organisation. We support the quest for peace through track 2 and track 1.5 initiatives, including through dialogue and confidence-building. Our work is currently focused primarily on areas in the EU's neighbourhood, with particular emphasis on the South Caucasus.

2. **A European Union in friendship and in solidarity with its neighbourhood**

LINKS Europe firmly believes that peace and prosperity in Europe are strongly dependant on peace and prosperity in Europe's neighbourhood. It supports an extensive EU commitment to the future of neighbouring regions, including through political and economic co-operation, support for peace initiatives, and extensive people-to-people contacts. We group the EU's neighbourhood in six clusters: North Africa and the Sahel; Turkey, the Balkans and the Levant; Russia and Eastern Europe; The South Caucasus; The Gulf and Red Sea Regions; and Central Asia. Whilst each cluster has its own specificity, there are also a number of common features resulting from geographic proximity and common historical experiences and connections.

3. **A Global Europe that provides safety, security and prosperity for its people and is a force for good**

Europe's increasing ambition to become a global geopolitical player is a result of necessity. We believe this will happen despite the reluctance of some and the shortcomings of others. It is therefore important to engage with this debate and help forge the new global Europe that can provide safety, security and prosperity for its citizens and be a force for good in the world. The process of 'The Conference on the Future of Europe' provides us with an excellent focus and platform to do this in a structured way.

4. **Connectivity as a tool for peace and prosperity**

In an increasingly interdependent world, isolation is not the solution. Developing proper connectivity that works well for all concerned is one of the biggest challenges of the time. Connectivity, in areas such as transport and communications, is also a potential tool for peace, improving trade and business, facilitating people-to-people contacts, and enabling countries and communities to develop shared interests. LINKS Europe is contributing towards the debate on how connectivity can contribute to peace and prosperity.

5. **Understanding radicalisation, and developing responses to it**

Globalisation and connectivity have their negative side too. Radicalisation has shown a capacity to spread quickly, often leading to violence. Vulnerable groups – be they whole communities and tribes in the Sahel, or disenfranchised sons of migrants in the slums of Paris – are prone to fall victim of radicalisation. No religious or ethnic group is immune. White communities impacted by economic downturns are equally likely to succumb to extreme ideas, leading some to see violence as a solution. LINKS Europe works to understand the phenomena, including the connection between radicalisation and violent conflicts, and on ways of fighting back against this dangerous trend.



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