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DAY TWO

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Global Trends to 2040: Europe's strategic choices in a more disputed world

Europe and the world in 2040: What kind of new international order?

Moderator:

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Panel discussion

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Summary of the session

The panellists generally seemed to agree that the main trends we are observing at present are rather stable, and they point towards a more divided world characterised by two different technological and normative spheres – one dominated by the liberal West, and the other by China.

In order to pursue strategic autonomy, the EU needs to address its own internal divisions and tackle internal challenges, such as ecological and technological transformations, consolidation of the single market, and commitment of all Member States to liberal democracy. Internal credibility is crucial for the EU's ability to project its values and interests globally. The US is a key partner in the EU's pursuit of strategic

autonomy, and Washington itself is interested in a more capable Europe. The EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy (and resilience) is paralleled by similar developments in China (which is becoming more inward-looking) and Japan (which is pursuing its own 'strategic indispensability'). Japan, in particular, will increasingly be a key global partner for the EU, especially in the context of its Indo-Pacific strategy.

US-China relations will be a crucial variable in the future global order. Going forward, both Washington and Beijing will need to reach a common understanding of each other's views of what may be stabilising or destabilising in their relationship – much like the US and the USSR did during the Cold War. At the moment there is a lot of potential for brinkmanship, especially in the South China Sea. The prospect of a war on Taiwan, however, seems still unlikely: China's economy is undergoing a phase of transition, and it is not in China's interest to deal with a military confrontation at the same time. Beijing's main focus is rather on internal stabilisation and tackling domestic discontent.

Transatlantic relations constitute a key axis of the international order, for the consolidation of a liberal democratic norms. Both the EU and US have a stake in each other's internal political developments, and it is important that they act together to tackle the challenges faced by liberal democracy (e.g. racism and socio-economic inequality) and identify its fragilities. The Summit of Democracies can send a clear political signal in this regard.

The weakening of multilateralism is a further area of concern, especially for the EU, as multilateralism is part of its 'DNA'. The EU's contribution to multilateralism should focus on areas where the EU is strongest and most integrated, such as trade. Other priorities include areas of urgent need, such as climate change and global health. Coordinating multilateral efforts with the US is key, and the pandemic has shown that global challenges cannot be tackled effectively without addressing also the needs of the developing world. It is also important to bring China on board. At the moment Beijing is seeking to project its own discursive power and to present itself as the leader of the global South.

The international order in 2040 is heading towards a direction of increased division between two different systems and normative spheres, but also of more fragmentation and fluidity, where countries will retain their agency and the ability to 'mix and match'. In a world of increasing competition, there will also be areas of convergence. In order to promote stability, it will be crucially important to preserve multilateral institutions and to foster mutual understanding through dialogue and conversation at all levels.