

2021 ESPAS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

DAY TWO

Friday, 19 November 2021

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

Tomorrow's world - and its risks, opportunities and choices for Europe (Part 1)

In conversation:

Federica Mogherini, Rector, College of Europe; Former High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission

Commentary:

Pierre Vimont, Former French Ambassador to US and EU

Jim Cloos, Secretary-General, Trans European Policy Studies Association

Moderator:

Heather Grabbe, Director, Open Society European Policy Institute

Summary of the session

The discussion opened with a reference to the recent ESPAS mid-term report, which had underlined that that change is accelerating.

Federica Mogherini commented that the world had been a very different place forty (40) years ago, both in terms of technology and the problems we faced. Therefore, it was difficult to say what we will face in 40 years. She asserted that the potential for conflict in Europe should not be underestimated, but her belief was that there would be a strong EU in 40 years. In her view, it would be an EU of "different circles", comprised of more than 27 members, with greater responsibilities than today, and with more capabilities (for example, on defence). There had been many crises in recent decades, one after the other, most of them unexpected; they were growing in frequency and intensity. The EU should allocate more resources to crisis

preparedness, and not ignore the crises we see coming, whether it is climate change, challenges to democracy, or from demography and migration. The EU was well-prepared to deal with crises (the reaction to COVID had been “remarkable”), but it had struggled in some areas including some that were controversial like defence (which operated by unanimity in the Council). The concept of ‘strategic autonomy’ was a natural development for the EU, one which goes beyond security and defence to encompass economics. It was stressed that it could also be described as “cooperative autonomy”.

In subsequent conversation, the following points were made. Strategic autonomy was a ‘no-brainer’ - it was about the Union’s resilience and capacity to act. Recent crises that had beset the Union demonstrated the EU had to be stronger. It had to have better methods of functioning, and be more reliant on cost-benefit analyses.

The question of how the Union could move to a more systemic approach to instability was raised. The EU lacked a ‘road to action’; for example how could it incorporate inputs like those produced by ESPAS into policymaking? The term used at the outset by Ms Mogherini - “principled pragmatism” - was a good reference point. The EU should have policies that are more nimble, more agile, and more proactive. Some policies were bearing fruit in areas like climate, energy, competition, and the so-called ‘strategic compass’.

The panel addressed the question of whether a new ‘Strategic Alliance of Democracies’ was a feasible proposition. Ms Mogherini said that she believed in “principled pragmatism”, and that there was value in alliances. However, perhaps a more pragmatic way of proceeding would be to develop ‘flexible’ global alliances around themes; for example, “partnerships” on trade, human rights, vaccines, etc. Alliances could also include a range of stakeholders (companies, civil society, etc.). Europe was the place where democracy was born but there are challenges; nobody had a “licence” on democracy.

The EU required a ‘moral compass’, but should develop “variable alliances” to operationalise decisions. Some doubt was cast on whether “sanctions” was the best instrument to impose values on others.

In a complex world, the question of how the EU should deal with alliances was raised? In response, there was some concern that the US-led “Summit of Democracies” might look like a “Western” club which would alienate others

The panel was asked what would they change in a “Fantasy EU”. The following replies were given by the panellists. First, the EU institutions in the end worked quite well, the problem is with the political will. Second, Ms Mogherini stated that she would not seek to change the institutions (including the unanimity rule), but would change the sense of ‘ownership’ (in other words, the inconsistency between EU-agreed positions and national ones).

Third, it was suggested that the ‘mind-set’ had to change, with more flexibility for the EU institutions to be able to act when the Union faced constraints.