

# REPORT

## BETWEEN INTERNAL CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Thursday **15<sup>th</sup> of November 2018**, 14:00 – 16:00  
**European House**, Jungmannova 24, Prague 1



Speakers:

- **Péter Balázs**, Professor, Central European University, former EU Commissioner
  - **Roland Freudenstein**, Policy Director, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies
  - **Barbara Lippert**, Director of Research & Executive Board, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
  - **Vessela Tcherneva**, Head of and Senior Director for Programmes, ECFR Sofia Office
- Moderator: **Petr Kratochvíl**, Senior Researcher, Institute of International Relations Prague

## PREFACE

The conference deals with the axis between the European Union's internal challenges and the recently increased unpredictability beyond European borders. Broader issues like the migration crisis, multidimensional security threats as well as a robust shift of power in the White House compels the EU to make a delicate balance between internal challenges and the bloc's message towards the external environment. Four experienced panelists in the field of European studies discuss this somewhat wide range of topics and attempt to identify the political directions of the EU in order to strengthen its position in the international world.

## DISCUSSION

Throughout the discussion, the panelists touched upon contemporary internal challenges that are currently facing the EU integration process. While they commonly agreed on the significance of complex matters, such as the next long-term EU budget, a cohesive migration policy including the protection of European borders, and the creation of a European army, the speakers put forth comparatively different views on the concrete directions the EU should take in order to enhance its strategic autonomy. Vessela Tcherneva started the session by addressing that EU's hostile external environment fundamentally undermines the values and interests of Brussels. In a world of erratic and unpredictable governments in the United States, Russia, Turkey, China and other important states, the questions of

Europe's strategic autonomy and European foreign policy "don't allow us to sleep well". This different external environment in which the EU finds itself isolates the bloc from other parts of the world, including gradually the United States too. Therefore, Tcherneva argued that the 28 member states should enhance their security policy, with or without the transatlantic coalition. On the internal aspect, Tcherneva viewed the struggles over deeper EU integration as highly complicated and more nuanced than a "Macron-Merkel versus Salvini-Orban axis".

***"There is a value-challenge within Europe that makes it more difficult to appear as a unified actor to the outside"***

In essence, **Roland Freudenstein** supported the idea that Europeans have to do more for their own security. However, he argued that the purpose of EU's efforts to improve defense must be to strengthen the transatlantic alliance, rather than replacing the United States. "Territorial defense will remain with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) within the foreseeable future". Internally, Freudenstein argued that the core issue contains EU's identity and whether Europe will remain an open society. "There is a value-challenge within Europe that makes it more difficult to appear as a unified actor to the outside". This challenge should be addressed by means of flexibility, taking into account the different cultural backgrounds of the member states. Secondly, Freudenstein considered the centralism that is contained in the idea of European integration an essential challenge for the EU as it



# PRAGUE european summit

contradicts the principle of subsidiarity. He openly questioned the “grassroots-orientation” which has always characterized Brussels in the international world but seems to become more obscured. Thirdly, Freudenstein drew the metaphor between EU as a vegetarian in a room full of carnivores, referring to the challenge of propagating European integration in an increased autocratic external environment. “Even if the EU manages to build a common armed force, even if the 28 member states become more unified on values, I’m afraid Europe would still face the problem of being constrained in the international world. But if the EU doesn’t change the status quo, it is not getting anywhere.”

***“Strategic autonomy is not an end in itself, but rather a way for the EU to promote its values and interests to the outside”***

Next, **Barbara Lippert** defined the notion of EU’s strategic autonomy more thoroughly and identified the recent shift in the debate on European security. In her understanding of strategic autonomy “the EU is able to set priorities, to take decisions on Foreign Security Policy on its own, plus it must have the institutional definitive of the material resources to follow through, preferably in cooperation”. With the transatlantic security framework being under severe pressures, Lippert stressed the importance of unity among European countries. “Strategic autonomy, as mentioned by the other panelists, is much more than military capacities. It is not an end in itself, but rather a way for the EU to promote its values and interests to the outside. And as European

allies, in particular the United States, are giving up its predominant role within this framework, I think the EU should rebalance and reinforce the transatlantic alliance.” In his speech, Péter Balázs argued that the EU should indeed be more united and active on its security by complementing NATO instead of duplicating it. “The EU, as it is well-prepared, should find solutions to issues that are not covered by NATO, such as terrorism, hybrid threats of all kinds as well as migration waves. Moreover, Brussels has to rethink its relations with very important partners such as Russia, Turkey and Iran in order to enhance its strategic autonomy.” Besides the security challenge, Balázs paid attention to the importance of new trade agreements as important big players are contesting multilateral trade. “Trade with the United States, China, but also the United Kingdom requires increased attention from the EU. It’s a misconception to believe that the World Trade Organization (WTO) is fully taking care of this.” On the internal elements, Balázs illustrated four points which are currently reinventing the EU and shaping its direction for the near future: the handling of Brexit, the Eurozone Summit in December, the new EU long-term budget scheduled for 2021, and the new political composition of the European Parliament. “These four issues are constructing the new railway on which the EU will commute for the next years to come.”