



**THE FUTURE OF EU SOVEREIGNTY AND
THE ROLE OF DEMOCRACIES AFTER COVID-19**
The need for a European strategic autonomy in the new world order

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic is proving to be the main political agent of change of the contemporary era. It redefines the internal relations of the States, between citizens, Institutions and science/techne, but also the balance between States/Nations at a global level.

In particular, it affects the redefinition of the concept of sovereignty, forcing on the one hand a more firm and pervasive control from above, as a consequence of the health emergency, but on the other the need for a stronger coordination between public policies at a transnational level.

Perhaps for the first time, the pandemic opens up the need to reflect not only on a global health policy – given the nature of the threat represented by the spread of the Sars-CoV-2 virus and, presumably, of future threats – but also on a policy of common security in geopolitical areas that have already experienced the benefits of supranational integration, as is the case of the European Union.

Social Media summary

Covid-19 pandemic accelerates the need for a EU strategic autonomy. The virus is proving to be the most relevant political and geo-political actor of change. Europe needs to provide a systemic answer to the imminent re-definition of sovereignty at global level.

Keywords

#Covid-19 #Democracy #Sovereignty #EU #allianceofdemocracies #GlobalGateway

Short bio

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is proving to be the most relevant political and geopolitical agent of change of the contemporary era. It is profoundly – and presumably irreversibly – modifying the relationships between the actors of the national communities: Institutions (and politics), citizens, science (or *techne*).

From this perspective, the virus is accelerating and exasperating – in a sometimes uncontrollable way – dynamics already present, both within States and in international relations. Within States, especially in the West, the relationship between politics, citizens and science was already profoundly critical before the Sars-CoV-2 virus broke onto the scene. Movements characterized as anti-system or anti-establishment had already undermined confidence in the ability of the Institutions to give credible answers to the needs of citizens. Politics has repeatedly tried, even in the recent past, to replace *techne*, taking advantage of the benevolent help of citizens – voters who intended to promote protest rather than invoke or reward merit. From this perspective, the West discovered – even before the pandemic – to be fragile, vulnerable to that necessary relationship of trust between Institutions, voters and competences, which is the basis of a mature and civil coexistence.

Already in this fundamental fracture, the signs of a new division of the world into alternative political models could be glimpsed: the community of liberal democracies, dealing with an unprecedented political and legitimacy crisis, and that of the autocracies, that have instead resolved the issue of the relationship between rulers and ruled with the strengthening of the control from above and with the co-optation of the political classes and high bureaucracies.

The virus has definitively broken the thin thread that held together the relationship between politics, science and citizens in the West. In doing this, it also irreversibly undermined the classical codification of the concept of sovereignty.

After all, the spread of the virus is just the latest in an impressive sequence of changes in the national and international system driven by the proliferation of non-state threats to security and sovereignty. Traumatic events such as the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the financial crisis of 2008, which later turned into an economic – and therefore social – one, and the pandemic should be read together, and represent the extension of the end of the twentieth century and the manifestation of a world in search of a new geometry.

At the same time, the overwhelming rise of non-state actors, equipped with para-sovereign characteristics, such as the large operators of the digital world (so-called *over-the-top*), the growing integration of financial markets and the globalization of trade have opened an era of profound uncertainty, to which governments have struggled to respond. The inability to control these flows of an increasingly liquid planet pushed States to renounce part of their sovereignty, rather than to seek new forms and methods to define their contours, also lacking the opportunity of the recurrent desire to give consistency to global coordination fora, such as the G7 or the G20. In many cases, the only response considered effective by the political and industrial elites more exposed to the winds of change was that of the return of control and dirigisme in economics and social life. The Institutions, having abdicated the role of regulation and control of the possible market distortions,



advanced the claim of assuming the burden of the direct management of production and social protection, thus probably trusting in a sort of benevolence, a political dividend to be collected for this change of attitude.

The result of these twenty years of transition can be found in the profoundly different posture that democracies and autocracies have assumed precisely in the policies to combat the virus.

For autocracies, even those more oriented towards forms of economic liberalism, sovereignty can be defined by subtraction. This means that the central power will increasingly tend to evaluate geographical, political, economic and social integrity as a superior good, sacrificing every possible aspect of public policies – and even the interaction between social subjects – for this purpose. A questionable reinterpretation of sovereignty, which is therefore heavily based on aspects of technological pursuit, military advancement, social coercion and the pervasive use of internal control tools.

The same cannot be said, at the moment, for the choice of the West. A choice, that of redefining sovereignty, dictated at the moment by the need to completely redesign the trajectory of relations within and between States. And it is precisely on this point that the virus is acting as a formidable political agent of change.

In a context where the relationship of trust between politics and citizens has broken, it is clear that the recent health policy decisions taken by governments, especially in the West, are seen as a violation and a limitation of fundamental freedoms. If there is no full participation of citizens in the crucial choices of a community, especially in conditions of extreme emergency, the basic pact of coexistence that has held up the very definition of sovereignty from the seventeenth century to the present is no longer valid.

Similarly, the historically controversial relationship between politics and techne today finds a critical point of decline. It would even seem obvious to say that, in a balanced and virtuous system, politics makes use of the skills it does not possess to make informed and effective decisions. However, the pandemic highlighted an absolute desire of politics to exclude from the perimeter of the choices any actor not strictly controllable, perhaps far from the partisan vision of contemporary politics. Scientists have always had the difficult task of advising, at the risk of not being listened to. And if the outcome of those Countries where politics has replaced science is disastrous, for example by letting the virus circulate freely, with devastating consequences for public health and the stability of health systems, those systems in which politics has not assumed its responsibility and the right-duty to decide in conscience, perhaps based on the suggestions of science, have proved to be equally dangerous.

The West faces an epochal challenge today: to rebuild that necessary relationship of trust between citizens, politics and science. The sovereignty of the next decades will be based on this point. Modernly sovereign States will be defined only as those capable of activating full participation in the imminent challenges that await the international community as a whole, and the relations between States specifically. We are moving towards an era of further, growing instability, and it is necessary to prepare our political and Institutional systems to face new, devastating crises. But



we also need to prepare citizens to be an integral part of the response, adaptation and opposition to/against these threats.

How the pandemic is re-shaping sovereignty

To understand how to do that and, therefore, ultimately, to imagine how State sovereignty will change in the coming decades, it is necessary to start from the analysis of the most immediate effects of this pandemic, and then move on to the definition of future threats. In conclusion, it will be observed how different political systems can presumably react to these threats, obviously with particular regard to the prospects of a global health policy and to those cases in which the pandemic has already changed the very concept of sovereignty in the areas that have experimented and tested forms of coordination of the strategic policies, as in the case of the European Union.

The war metaphor, often used to connote the systemic effects of the ongoing health crisis, is particularly appropriate when looking at the possible consequences of the pandemic.

Health will be to the decades to come as security was at the beginning of the 21st century, and particularly after 9/11 and the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington.

New spheres of influence will be defined around health and health safety. Growing nationalism, already present before the global spread of the infection, risks increasingly affecting health policies as well. There is a danger of a “new Yalta”, with vaccines, therapies and data representing the threads of a new Iron Curtain.

Although with different gradations and postures, unfortunately most of the major global players are already sliding towards forms of health and vaccination protectionism. There are already cases in which governments have long been engaged in an active foreign vaccination policy, with anti-COVID serums used as a strategic weapon and a means of geopolitical influence.

In other cases, the immunization policies implemented by some governments do not take into account the observation that the pandemic knows no borders, and that the vaccination of the entire globe is a necessary condition for the general strengthening of protection against the spread of the infection, even due to the inevitable, physiological mutations of the virus.

Vaccine protectionism is perhaps the clearest and most worrying manifestation of the contemporary distortion of the concept of sovereignty. Bent to the interests of politics and the geopolitical aims of the States, sovereignty has gradually emptied itself of its connotation linked to civic solidity and has become the instrument for a drift of the consensus of the ruling classes.

This drift has proved so pervasive as to contaminate even the most autonomous spheres, such as that of science. The same science that has made it possible to reach an effective vaccine against Sars-CoV-2 with a swiftness never experienced before (less than a year, compared to the five-eight years usually required). But, while the global scientific community was engaged in this titanic effort, the words of Chinese President Xi Jinping opened a rift in the relationship between science and politics, and above all in the redefinition of the concept of sovereignty. “Science knows no borders, but scientists have a homeland”, reminded the Chinese leader. A patriotic science is simply a contradiction in terms: research success cannot live on political inputs or global power



designs. And yet the world will have to prepare for a scenario in which the political figure of sovereignty will create fertile ground for a new conflict between interests and ideologies on a global level. We are probably already on the eve of a new Cold War.

Towards a new world order after Covid-19

In this context, it must be reiterated that the pandemic is not a “black swan”. That is, it is not an unpredictable event that is impossible to contain. This is for two fundamental reasons.

The first is that at least since 2001 the world has been immersed in a markedly asymmetrical security scenario. The nature of the systemic threats, that is, since that dramatic day of the attacks on the Twin Towers, is predominantly non-state and unconventional. Whether it is terrorism fueled by fundamentalist religious organizations, or the systemic effects of financial crises, or the spillover of a virus from the animal reservoir to man, we should have got used to it for some time, and therefore prepare ourselves adequately to face this type of complex challenges. This is all the more true for the future. Will the new species leap of a pathogen be capable of causing a pandemic? The proliferation of an antibiotic resistant bacterium? The systemic effects of climate change on national and international security? The pervasiveness of the military use of the cybernetic network?

Whatever the identity of the next systemic crisis is, we already know that its nature will be asymmetrical. That’s why not preparing our systems to deal with it properly would sound like serious comparative negligence, next time around.

The second reason the ongoing pandemic is not a black swan is that this awareness has already existed for the past few years. But the alarm seemed to be closer to a prediction than to a policy priority. The reports of the international organizations, the meetings of the main business forums, the analyses of the global intelligence apparatuses, all reported a ranking of the possible, main security threats strongly oriented to the proliferation of asymmetrical threats. Again, climate change, pandemics or cyberspace security were high on the agenda of political leaders and corporate top managers. But the long wave of globalization has not transferred that sense of urgency and pragmatism that would have allowed the world to face this crisis in a different, and certainly more adequate way.

Now that the lesson has been heard loud and clear in every corner of the planet, the global community has no more excuses, and will have to prepare populations and systems to resist and react to the next, impending crises.

The danger and the suspicion is that different political systems will react very differently to the proliferation of such crises. In fact, this is already happening.

That is why a completely different world design will emerge from the response to this pandemic. The effects of managing the ongoing health crisis will therefore go far beyond the defeat of the virus.

It is clear that the autocracies took advantage of the pandemic, not only to strengthen internal control – one of the most important manifestations of the exercise of sovereignty – but also to



accelerate the climb to occupy and influence policies on a global scale, projecting outside their own concept of sovereignty, but above all their own vision of the world and their own political model, based on a marked conditionality. A glance at the schedules of the main global satellite television networks during the first wave of the pandemic made it possible to identify a narrative with the features of a studied propaganda. The main message of networks such as Russia Today (RT) or CGTN (China Global Television Network) was that “this is not our war, this is not our crisis”. Images of full hospitals, wards and intensive care units, especially in Europe, conveyed the sense of the fragility of those Countries in containing the contagion, as well as of a devastating effect for the stability of the systems – and not only the health ones – in the West.

All this was made possible by the exasperation of a concept of sovereignty in those areas of the world that is based on a precise postulate: the degree of control exercised by public bodies and by the organization of authority within territorial boundaries.

On the other hand, the West has undoubtedly found itself unprepared to handle a crisis of this magnitude. A fundamental role was played by the political elites and the ruling classes in a first phase, oscillating between denial and improvisation. An attempt was made to remedy the failures of a twenty-year period in which, beyond public proclamations and good intentions, the principle of competence was systematically demolished, the design of a revolt against the Institutions was cherished, and the possibility that everyone’s opinion can question the scientific method. This fragility has cost time, money, and above all human lives.

It is clear that the scarce goods of the future will not be rare earths or oil. It will be trust. Because democracy is mainly nourished by trust (autocracies need it less). And because the reaction to this unprecedented health crisis will have to lead like-minded communities to rebuild this relationship of trust between Institutions and citizens, and to know that it is the prerequisite for a solid and mature civil coexistence.

This ambitious program, in which values are once again central also in politics, has been especially pursued by the new US administration, in this finding a good support in most of the Governments of the European Union, as well as in the top management of the Community Institutions. It is a good first step, above all to reach those dimensions of scale that will be necessary if we want to compete in the world of the next decades and in the post-COVID scenario.

However, the proclamations are not enough, and will not be enough. On the more concrete front of the fight against the pandemic, we are still very far from defining common objectives, from the deployment of genuine solidarity, from the ability to intervene on a global scale, also to protect our own security.

In other words, we are still far from the redefinition of a model of shared sovereignty, which seems to be the only useful tool to deal quickly and effectively with the crises of the near future, as well as, obviously, the current one.

From this point of view, it is necessary to clarify what can be the main road for a new declination of sovereignty, in a context of fragility and uncertainty.



Even before the pandemic, it must be recognized that much of the concern stemmed from the hypothesis of pooling of sovereignty, rather than its delegation. An emblematic case is that of the European Union which, among many uncertainties and as many crises, remains to this day the most important, positive and significant example of integration on a world level. When we talk about the EU, however, we must still refer to a grouping of sovereignty, rather than to an actual transfer of the same. Even in cases where integration has gone very far, such as for the emblem of the common currency, paradoxes and contradictions continue to emerge, aimed at making the European plan still “unfinished”.

Again, the pandemic works as a watershed and a powerful accelerator. If on the one hand we have tested, once again, the ability of the European Institutions and the Member States to be protagonists in the face of very heavy crises, on the other it will be necessary to work on the limits highlighted by the virus, in order to accelerate decisively on a path of greater transfer of sovereignty, perhaps starting precisely from the health and crisis management policies.

The first side of the coin shows unprecedented facts, such as the single and centralized negotiation of the availability of vaccines and other therapies against COVID-19, an operation that allowed Member States to benefit from exponentially greater negotiating power than it would have been in the faculty of individual governments; as well as the massive and historic plan for the recovery and resilience of the European economies and societies, weakened by this devastating crisis. An operation, that of the so-called Next Generation EU, which could have important implications for the future also in terms of communitarisation of the debt, through the use of common public debt instruments.

A “now or never” moment for the European Union

In summary, faced with the scale of this crisis, European governments have raised the level of ambition, but above all they have extended the delegation conferred on Brussels.

But on the other side of the coin, many shadows emerge that highlighted how much the project of a European sovereignty still needs a more precise codification on the one hand, and a further political push on the other.

The temptations of a vaccine nationalism have often been in the air even among the European leadership, often torn in a lacerating way between a more compassionate and collaborative position and more populist drifts. What is certain is that the management of the pandemic and the subsequent vaccination campaign came at perhaps the most delicate moment of redefining European governance after the United Kingdom’s decision to leave the common space. As is well known, this led to a huge supply problem for at least one of the available vaccines, the one produced by the Anglo-Swedish company AstraZeneca, as well as important discrepancies in health policy recommendations and the implementation of vaccination strategies.

The political implications that the management of the fight against the virus has had and is still having in the very heart of Europe are not irrelevant either. From the decision of some governments, such as the Hungarian one, to adopt serums never evaluated and approved by the



European Medicines Agency (EMA), such as the Russian Sputnik-V or the Chinese Sinopharm, to the use of the extraordinary powers that many European governments, as a consequence of the emergency, adopted in a first phase, except to expand them dramatically also in areas of social and civil life that have nothing to do with the fight against the virus.

A further geopolitical weakness of Europe in this phase was the inability to deal with the security of its borders, and therefore of the areas of closest proximity and interest. As we write, entire regions of the Balkans or North Africa lack sufficient doses to vaccinate the population (Tunisia, Libya, Algeria) or have found it very convenient to accept the offer of powers such as Russia and China, receiving immediate medical help and large doses of their respective vaccines, only to discover that such assistance would soon turn into political and economic conditionality.

This last point is particularly relevant for an analysis of future prospects, also in the redefinition of the concept of sovereignty, especially in Europe.

It refers to two fundamental aspects: on the one hand, the danger of a global vaccine nationalism, for which – in the name of an emergency that is not destined to end in the short term – areas of influence and a new strategic consensus are being redefined; on the other, the danger of a new authoritarian drift and the return to sovereignty understood as control and expansion from above, especially within one's own national borders. In both cases, it will be the virus itself that will dictate the political conditions for this change, which is up to the international community – and in particular to those actors who have already successfully experimented with supranational integration formulas – to fight firmly.

On the first aspect, science and politics can easily converge. It is clear to everyone, in fact, that there will be no possibility of mitigating the effects of a virus, the fate of which is probably that of remaining endemic, without guaranteeing adequate and effective coverage for the entire world population. This finding is obviously based above all on scientific evidence, related for example to the fact that the Sars-CoV-2 virus, like all other known coronaviruses, tends to mutate very quickly and frequently, to ensure its own survival. The longer the delay in providing a global protective umbrella, the more the infecting efforts of the virus will be multiple and sudden.

This risk is very clear to politics, at least in its public statements, but it must be equally clear to those who are called to promote strategic analyses and geopolitical projections for the post-COVID world. The more space we leave for the penetration of a “politicized science” around the planet, the more pressing will be the attempts to incursion of alternative political models, of geopolitical designs aimed at redefining the spheres of global influence. It is the most modern and most dangerous expression of the use of alternative tools to military force, of what has long been codified as a new “soft power”: the power to attract towards one's values and models without the use of coercion but, in this case, through conditioned assistance based on vaccines, therapies, health technologies, data.

In this scenario, the West – and in particular Europe – need to get out of the trap of populism and sovereignty, which has also heavily penalized the quality not only of the relations in the last decade, but also of the response to the first phase of the health emergency.



The good news is not lacking: the most significant number of vaccines, especially the most effective and most technologically advanced, have been conceived and produced in the West. It is from here that we need to start again, from the ability to compete and to still be the undisputed leaders when it comes to innovation, technologies, medicine, research.

But in an era of exasperated politicization (and polarization), this may not be enough. It is necessary to accompany these elements of indisputable success with a clear political and geopolitical ambition. And it is in this sense that the discussion around the future of sovereignty becomes crucial.

Before the virus arrived on the world stage, the most consistent attempt to open a debate on this front came from French President Emmanuel Macron. He called for the need for Europe's increased strategic autonomy and for a profound rethinking of multilateralism. It should be specified that the French President's initiative dates back to 2020, and is part of a particularly fragile historical context, characterized by the violence of the pandemic, by the highly uncertain prospect of a re-election of Donald Trump to the White House, by the beginning of the descendant parable of Angela Merkel's stay in power in Germany and, last but not least, by the acceleration of the long negotiations between the UK and Brussels on Brexit. A window of opportunity in a context of high volatility that allowed France, despite being very weakened internally, to try to relaunch a strategic perspective compatible with its own design and vision. It is no coincidence that, in an albeit appreciable context of codification of the need for Europe to become a net producer of stability and security, ceasing to rely only on the unconditional support of the USA and without seeking unlikely alliances of convenience with emerging powers, Macron identifies for example in Africa the geopolitical area of greatest interest in perspective. This is certainly a priority issue for all of Europe but, as certainly also known at the Elysée, still particularly divisive; while the redefinition of a modern concept of shared sovereignty should hopefully start from the definition of a common denominator, and be characterized by effective assumptions of common responsibilities even outside the areas of direct strategic interest.

A compelling example is the current security situation in Afghanistan, a Country where the whole Western community has invested resources, commitment and human lives in two decades of presence, with the aim of promoting the affirmation of the rule of law, training local military and police forces, containing the hegemonic aims of regional and global powers as well as the destructive thrust of the Taliban and what remains of al-Qaeda.

The new American President Joe Biden followed up on what his predecessors, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, wanted to do: an unconditional withdrawal from Afghanistan, now that the American political dimension has returned to being predominantly domestic. The result was as quick as it was obvious: not only the Taliban have repossessed a large part of the Country, but they have already opened the doors to totally new international alliances, obviously starting with Beijing.

The European reaction to this umpteenth dramatic crisis was once again defensive. It was limited to prejudicially exclude any generalized welcome to the many refugees who presumably will be forced to leave Kabul and other areas of the Country due to the return of violence, and to exclude



any future agreement with the “students of the faith”, should they regain power. Too little for the strategic autonomy mentioned by the French President to be transformed into a significant improvement for the European Union.

The vision recently proposed by the Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi with reference to the prospects of a new European sovereignty¹, and even before formally assuming the task of leading the executive in Rome, is different. The “functionalist” vision that the Italian prime minister derived from the nine crucial years spent at the helm of the European Central Bank focuses on the prospect of a Europe that rediscovers the awareness of having to be united in order to compete above all on the fundamentals of the global race. Demographics, for example, in a world in which Nigeria alone is expected to have the same number of inhabitants in 2050 as the entire EU. Or the need to be the protagonist of new global regulatory policies, in tax matters (and with reference to the role of digital corporations), through a common security and defence framework² or in the fight against climate change. Only through the single voice of an integrated space on matters of common interest can we imagine a stronger and more authoritative Europe on the world stage.

Conclusion

A new sovereignty therefore defined on the basis of long-term interests, following a more federalist approach, in which governments can continue to maintain their own national connotation and dimension, while maturing the conditions for a more effective coordination of strategic policies.

The sovereignty of the future will be modeled around some fundamental principles: an increasingly important role of non-military powers, especially as a consequence of the role of health in public policies; an increasingly pervasive control of central powers, also as an effect of the prolonged state of mobilization and emergency dictated by the fight against the virus; a profound reinterpretation of the spheres of influence globally, with vaccines and science defining the spaces of power; the proliferation of asymmetrical and systemic threats to the security and sovereign integrity of the States.

This implies the need to redefine sovereignty on the basis of a new, more pragmatic and effective multilateralism, also as a response to the need for protection that has strongly emerged in the last decade as a consequence of an unregulated globalization and the proliferation of sources of threat to existence and prosperity, from fundamentalist terrorism to the global financial crisis and, of course, the pandemic that is still ongoing.

From this point of view, a return of the value dimension alongside the political one appears likely, summarized by the recent statements by the President of the United States of America Biden and the Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg.

¹ Speech of the Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi in front of the Italian Senate on the occasion of the Italian Government inauguration ceremony – Rome, February, 17th 2021

² “EU defence capabilities a key asset for European Sovereignty” – Mario Draghi during the official State visit to Greece, Sept, 21st 2021, Source: Corriere della Sera, https://www.corriere.it/politica/21_settembre_17/draghi-ad-atene-su-difesa-europea-non-c-molto-tempo-aspettare-bbdb23de-17d9-11ec-b2b6-639c253d3354.shtml



Both spoke of the need to promote an “Alliance of democracies” as a response to the increasingly loud sirens of autocratic models that are now becoming protagonists of a new geopolitical and diplomatic activism, also taking advantage of the weaknesses of the systems and the strategic opportunity provided by the new "unconventional weapons".

The question is whether it is too late to re-launch a common platform of values and interests in the Western world. The Trump Presidency in the United States of America and the effects of the pandemic on re-shaping the political agenda both at domestic and global level, are having profound effects on the perspective of common interests and shared values.

The recent decision by the US President Biden to withdraw from Afghanistan has been probably the most relevant political case in the last two decades. Not only for the geopolitical – and humanitarian – consequences that this decision is already having but for the fact that it perpetuates an era of “America first” posture, weakening any potential design of transatlantic common strategic interest. The same applies to the recent decision to consolidate a trans-pacific military and strategic alliance (AUKUS) with Australia and the UK as a way to contain and deter Chinese military ambitions, especially in the South China Sea.

We are in a sort of “now or never” moment for the European Union. The strategic autonomy is an imperative which goes much beyond the contingency. It is not about capsizing the traditional and quintessential Atlantic dimension of our security (and identity). It is rather about giving course to the long-standing need of a more capable, autonomous, flexible strategic toolbox. This includes not only a doctrine, rather the capacity to enhance a EU security and defence capacity, able to grant an engagement and an out-of-area commitment, when and if the mechanism of Atlantic solidarity should temporarily fail.

Since the middle of the ‘90s there has been a debate on the so called “burden-sharing” within NATO for instance. Since then, all US Administrations have called for a stronger and enhanced role of EU countries within the framework of the Atlantic Alliance: more investments, more equipment, more troops and a common strategic vision. The pandemic has re-shuffled and reinforced this priority, while Europe has failed to codify the basis of a modern, pragmatic and efficient strategic autonomy, based on the value of solidarity and on the ultimate aim of promoting multilateralism.

The world is knowing an unprecedented era of uncertainty, whereas traditional threats (i.e. the failure of Afghan sovereignty) cross unconventional and asymmetric trends. Whether it is the use of media propaganda, the ability to manipulate digital platforms, to penetrate cyber spaces even for military purposes; or whether it is a matter of using the supply of vaccines as a weapon of strategic blackmail; or even derogating from the commitments undertaken to protect the climate and avoid a crisis on a planetary scale dictated by overheating; or, finally, imposing new forms of economic conditionality based on the exploitation of natural resources: in all cases, these are new ways to limit or erode the sovereignty of States in a context where history and geography have once again become crucial elements of global competition, claiming a centrality that some theses and that some ruling classes obsessively denied for so long.



For the European Union and its Member States, this is in particular an unprecedented challenge which, however, also has the flavor of a last call. Either we Europeans can actually manage to refound our common space by basing our vision on a new codification of sovereignty, or the proliferation of the threats and fronts of instability will cause a ruinous dissolution, not only of the dreams of the fathers and the many children of Europe, but of our own ability to resist the next, imminent, certain and devastating crisis.



Policy recommendations

- The European Union shall accelerate in setting a common strategic posture, leveraging on its soft power capabilities but also building up a rapid, flexible military and civil protection response force. The EU is the only global superpower able to connect pragmatic objectives with substantial values. The case for climate change and the commitment to fight global warming is a very concrete one.
- Health security must be at the core of this new strategic posture, whereas vaccine diplomacy is considered to be today the first and most relevant case for a common EU pursuit of interest. Enhancing the industrial base, investing in research and development, promote a science and evidence – based approach could all shape the new « Global Gateway » strategy advanced recently by the President of the European Commission, Ursula Von Der Leyen (« *State of the Union Address* », 15 September 2021)
- Strategic autonomy is not an option any more, rather a necessity for the European Union. It must be based on a common set of forces, tools and objectives. The ultimate aim shall be to complement the traditional security architectures (starting of course from NATO) in a context where global and regional powers are re-defining their priorities and their strategic objectives.
- European Union needs to set up a common Security Council, a core of intelligence and analysis structure, a rapid response force, a common civil protection force, a common research and industrial base on key enabling technologies (Artificial Intelligence, big data, cybersecurity, life sciences, genomics).



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