

European Prosperity and Security at the Crossroads – our way forward

Introduction

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I wish to thank Ciaran Cuffe, MEP, President of EUFORES, Brian Leddin T.D., and Jan Geiss for the invitation to join you here today.

In terms of the subject I was asked to address I propose to zoom up and use a wide lens.

This is a year of the most consequential elections of my lifetime in the EU and the USA. Today global population is 8 billion plus. The bet on democratising Russia and China by integrating them fully into world trade has not paid off. Immigration is an increasingly sensitive political issue. Vladimir Putin and Xi Jing Ping, at the height of their autocratic power, and others challenge the post war world order underwritten by American leadership and Pax Americana. Neo-imperial war for territory has returned to Europe through Putin's war of aggression in Ukraine. The Middle East is in the worst shape it has been in for decades. The rise of right wing influence in government and politics is no longer marginal but is increasingly becoming mainstream and normalised. Liberal democracy which was on the rise 35 years ago is now in recession. Freedom House has reported the 18th consecutive year of democratic decline globally.

We have entered a new age of uncertainty marked by shifting power dynamics, internally and externally. The world we live in shares both deep interdependence and deep vulnerability. The risk of nuclear proliferation is

spreading at a time of diminished and contested strategic weapons safeguards. Global warming is producing record temperatures and weather extremes of heat, cold, floods, droughts, fires and biodiversity loss. Covid 19 was an object lesson in our collective exposure and openness to pandemics and viruses. The digital revolution and the lightning speed of its known and unknown boundaries is yielding a harvest of both social and economic opportunity and disquiet. We are confronted by challenges that are truly global, threatening to outpace our collective and individual agency to respond.

Post war world order

The link between open markets, democracy, and international cooperation is a key normative aspect of the post war world order. Back in 2000 the West's expectation on China was captured by Bill Clinton's final State of the Union address to Congress where in essence he argued that China's admission to the WTO would enrich Americans and help convert China to freedom. China joined the WTO in December 2001, became the manufacturer to the world, lifted hundreds of millions of its citizens out of poverty, and through a steady flow of affordable goods lowered inflationary tendencies in the West. Meanwhile, Xi Jinping was tightening the grip of the Chinese Communist Party behind the Great Firewall of China. Less than two decades after Clinton's speech Donald Trump in his inaugural presidential address blamed trade with China for creating '*American carnage*.'

The ground has shifted from economic embrace to geopolitical great power tension and rivalry. The fate of multilateralism as we have known it is where the geopolitical stresses and strains currently are most evident. As the 2024 Munich Security Conference (MSC) Report notes: '*cooperation inside the*

existing order has been crowded out by competition about the order itself.' An era of multipolarity but with contested multilateralism has arrived. The multipolar world is transforming into a multi-order world which counts among its key influencers the leaders of the BRICS¹ and what more loosely is described as the Global South. They challenge the global West and its post war settlement, its values and institutions but these are not a homogenous bloc. They are non-West but not all are anti-West, thus adding to the increasingly complex tapestry of forging effective multilateral relations.

Interdependence

Public opinion, politics, and governments in the West today, with the exception of combatting climate change, are more focused on the vulnerabilities than the benefits associated with interdependence than in the early decades of the 21st century. The EU is no exception. Throughout this century EU-China trade has witnessed explosive growth with the net balance of trade decidedly in China's favour. The Covid 19 pandemic and the heightened global demand for personal protective equipment was a lesson for the EU of the risks of high dependency on single-origin supply chains. This has been amplified by the shift away from excessive energy dependency on Russia following Putin's invasion of Ukraine, and a growing appreciation of the need for diverse critical raw material supplies, whether for electric vehicle batteries or semiconductor chips.

A whole new lexicon has emerged from deglobalisation, to decoupling, to de-risking, from re-shoring, and on-shoring to friend-shoring, and the EU's choice

¹ BRICS is an intergovernmental organisation comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

of concept '*open strategic autonomy*.' The risk is growing of a mutually costly tit-for tat, zero sum logic protectionist era.

Westlessness

The United States has been the indispensable anchor of the normative West. What the USA does matters. This year's US Presidential election is likely be generationally significant, not just for the USA but for the idea of the West itself, its values, norms, aspirations, and choices. Donald Trump is running against the system, if he wins he likely will face the fewest constraints ever on a US President. He has disparaged NATO and dislikes the EU. Tariffs are like to be one of his key policies of choice.

The West also is stressed by political, social and economic cleavages following multiple consecutive crises. Anti-elite, illiberal, anti-system political candidates and philosophies abound. This poses a question as to whether the West in terms of inherited normative standards such as liberal democracy, open markets, and international cooperation is becoming less western, threatened both from without and within, a phenomenon labelled by the Munich Security Conference 2020 as 'Westlessness'.

Security and defence

In the light of geopolitical circumstances and US insistence, European states are under increasing pressure to spend more on their security and defence. Of the 32 NATO member states, including Finland and Sweden, 18 are expected to meet the target of 2% of GDP expenditure on defence this year. European states plan to up their defence expenditure in their own national and collective security interests and in order to support Ukraine. This inevitably will receive more EU focus in the immediate future. A continuing transatlantic security

guarantee, if it remains, will not be cost free in terms of the EU's policy margin of manoeuvre in the new great power rivalry between the USA and China.

Enlargement

Enlargement is now back on the EU's strategic agenda after a long period of internal enlargement fatigue. This month marks the 20th anniversary of the big bang enlargement of 2004. My contention is that enlargement is perhaps the EU's most powerful, transformative and successful external policy instrument over the past five decades. The candidate states will have to undergo significant transformation, each at their own pace. The EU too has homework to do in terms of its decision making process and budgetary capacity to absorb new member states. At this time of profound and unrelenting stress I believe that Ukraine needs the reassurance of our solidarity and of our openness, in due course, to embrace its entry into the Union. The EU needs stability and not chaos on its eastern flank and embracing Ukraine ultimately is in the EU's collective as well as Ukraine's interest.

Stronger together

The EU and the West in general can seek to influence others. We cannot choose what they do. Upcoming elections offer us our moment of choice. The stakes are high. In my time as MEP the Single Market project was launched when the Soviet Union still existed. China and India together constituted less than 5% of the global economy. Conversely, today, collectively we represent a diminishing share of the global economy. We face a shrinking and ageing population. We are lagging behind the USA, China and others in terms of economic growth rates. Internationally, power politics is back in business. Together we are stronger. Divided we are diminished.

The way forward?

Listen to and seek to address people's reasonable fears and anxieties but confront and reject the slick simplicities, fear mongering, and toxic polarisation of populism and the far right.

Reinvigorate and not backslide on our commitment to pluralist democracy, the rule of law, and the protection of human and minority rights.

Promote and work for a 21st century architecture for international cooperation fit for our times and equal to our challenges.

Assure that planetary public goods from global warming, biodiversity protection, pandemic preparedness, and digital public goods are framed in terms that transcend the current drift towards polarisation.

Explain that physics and not short term anti Green Deal politics determines that more greenhouse gases pumped into the atmosphere means more extreme weather events.

This is not a time to standstill or go backwards but to accelerate the transition to EU and global clean energy whose investment and jobs opportunities reached an all-time high in 2023 of \$1.8 trillion, twice that of 2020.

Decarbonisation offers multiple wins – environmental, climate, nature, jobs, health, balance of payments, energy security, and competitiveness.

In Ireland, appreciate that pooling some of our sovereignty with the EU has added to our influence, and that with fellow Europeans we can be stronger together in promoting our national and European interests and the wider global good.

Two final personal comments, I regret that decades ago when I served as an MEP I was not then as animated by the emerging climate crisis as I am now, and I am convinced you have an excellent and diligent MEP in your Eufores President, Ciaran Cuffe. I earnestly hope he will be re-elected to serve another term.

Thank you for your invitation.

Thank you for your attention.

Pat Cox

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