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## Strategic Autonomy of The EU. Is it „Unreachable Star”<sup>2</sup>

Let me start with historical reflection. At the very beginning of the century in the year 2000 we were hosting here Annual Conference of the EFMD (European Foundation of Management Development). In search of a motto of the Conference we coined a phrase: “One Europe One World”. It represented our hope for order and rationality both on the European and global level. At that time one of the most quoted book was Fukuyama’s deadly wrong “The End of History”. In this part of Europe these were the times of “big hopes” for the European quality of life at the end of the Soviet imposed crude life styles.

As we are looking backwards today we find ourselves simpleminded and naïve. In the last almost quarter of the century the new chapter of history unfolded itself full of “black swans” unexpected, considered almost impossible, violent and often going against the state of the art reasoning and predictions of most “wise men and women”. To name the few: financial crisis of 2008, Worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, Russian forceful annexation of other country’s territory and further aggression on Ukraine, general worldwide crisis of democracy accompanied by the rise of authoritarian regimes. All these were not on the agenda in 2000, we did not expect them.

Now we are living in the times of “generalized or radical uncertainty” in almost all aspect of life. Times of “cozy Europe” are gone. In such times strategy is needed as a starting platform for agile quick responses. How can we apply such a basic principle of sound management to the largest trading bloc in this world: a Union of 27 sovereign countries with strong individual culture and long history full of bloody conflicts. In order to understand this real and present challenge we were trying this morning to cope with several issues:

1. What do we really mean by strategic autonomy as applied to such complex entity as the EU?

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2. Is it needed now in the times of radical uncertainty and why?
3. What inhibits strategic integration of Europe and why?
4. Is strategic integration of Europe achievable? To what extent and why?
5. Who is for and who is against and why?

As we understand it strategic autonomy is ability to generate and successfully implement jointly agreed upon among 27 states strategies and rules of the game bounding all members in the long run. In other words it means that the EU is capable of conceiving and implementing long term strategies for the whole block supported by member states. Management textbook definitions of strategy clearly do not fit very unique case of almost entire continent populated by over 500 million of relatively affluent and well educated people. Strategies include both long term objectives for the whole Europe, milestones, budgets, schedules and rules of the game (governance principles and collective behavioral patterns). Provided radical uncertainty environment: economic, financial, political, military, social, technological etc., strategies have to be constantly reviewed, adjusted and reformulated in the process of constant negotiation and constant search for consensus among nation states. Very high level of diplomatic and negotiation skills is needed as well as very efficient back office (multinational bureaucracy). Some issues are relatively more aggregable, some almost impossible. That's why European strategies are never 100% complete, never 100% coherent, and never 100% consistent.

Nevertheless common European strategies are badly needed, more nowadays than ever before. First of all because of security reason. EU was born almost from the ashes of WWII in order to prevent repetition of a scenario of Europe as a killing field again. Now reborn Russian imperialism poses the same kind of threat to the peaceful European order. The first act of this drama unfolds since last year on the battlefields of Ukraine. Joint strategy is needed to respond to it adequately and to avoid coming true Stalin's dream of invading and conquering Europe. It is real and present danger not fully understood by Western Europeans asleep by long years of prosperity and peace. The second reason why unification of European strategies is needed right now is excessive heterogeneity of the EU member states. Differences in the level of economic and technological development have shown themselves as relatively easier to overcome. Cultural, political and institutional (factors) are much more difficult to harmonize because of emotional undertone. Unchanged 19th century ideas of national sovereignty are still alive in Europe.

History knows several failed attempts to unify Europe. They failed because they were based on military domination and enslavement of entire nations, ethnic groups, tribes etc. Nowadays the EU is based on mutual benefits of all member states. Since several decades gradual progress was being made on this road. Is

strategic unification of Europe more urgent right now? To substantiate positive answer to this question one can provide several reasons:

- Unified or at least jointly coordinated Europe has enemies both inside and outside. From the inside divergent and often conflicting economic interests were considered the main obstacle inhibiting joint pan-European strategies. Conflicting economic interests can be relatively easily reconciled as long economies of scale, scope and coherent regulation are clearly understood by business, labor, and financial community. Experience of the last 20 years has shown that it is possible and progress is being made. Emotional factors are much more difficult to overcome. Notions of sovereignty, patriotism, “superiority” or at least “uniqueness” of national cultures are deeply entrenched in the hearts and minds of many Europeans. These emotions are being successfully exploited by mostly right wing politicians in their strive for power in different countries. Anti-EU and EU skeptical attitudes play an increasing role in democratic processes, sometimes gradually evolving towards authoritarianism. Brexit and conflict over rule of law between Brussels and some of the EU countries illustrate well this situation. Possible outcomes are highly divergent and difficult to predict at this point.
- Because of its free markets, wealth (material, cultural, intellectual), openness and democratic governance Europe became playground of authoritarian anti-democratic big powers: Russia and China. At the same time it was a key element of the US led world order generously protected by American military umbrella: large forces physically stationed on the European soil. Russian aggression on Ukraine and increasing tension between US and China put an end to this ambivalent situation. Provided that, as decades of experience tell us, EU is not able to create in reasonably short time significant European military force Europe will remain an American ally for the long time, point. TINA solution. In such a geopolitical situation Europe must develop a unified strategy consistent with American. This is creating some degree of dissonance covering Euro-Chinese and Euro-Russian relations as well as US-Europe strategic cooperation. Fortunately very few Europeans want to engage on the road to Russian serfdom, but different scenarios of Europe-US cooperation remain open. Nevertheless globalization processes clearly undergo dramatic reshaping. Global markets are falling apart into “blocs” and excessively long supply chains are getting shorter and simpler. Europe must rapidly adjust.
- Military situation in Ukraine is very far from clear. The jury is out and verdict will not be delivered soon. Stronger and more successful Russian pressure

inevitably triggers more powerful response from US and its allies predominantly European. This calls for closer strategic integration of European policies in such key fields as: defense, energy, research and trade. Is Europe capable of such multi-dimensional coalignment?. If not, radical changes in the architecture of decision making processes must be taken right now, without waiting for crises situation in the heart of Europe. If Ukraine is conquered Russian imperialism will inevitably move westward sooner or later. Last years' experience shows that most European countries are surprisingly mindful of such warning signals but necessarily ready to act right now. New institutions and procedures facilitating strategic autonomy emerge slowly due to democratic nature of decision making processes in Europe.

Factors inhibiting strategic integration of Europe are mostly political. Populism and “new nationalism” are generally considered as main stumble blocks. European integration is clearly an ideal focus of inspired hate diverting attention from real problems often unsolvable or requiring long time and costly commitment (as: health care or education reforms). This the way of “fast and easy” political power capture and populist social policies enable keeping it and using privileges and resources sometimes in parasitic ways. Populism is clearly on the rise worldwide and in Europe as well. Inevitable massive degradation of the quality of life countries practicing populism might eventually put an end to these practices. The question remains open how long it might take? And how much it will cost in terms of social and economic progress.

Recent acceleration of European strategic integration calls for piece of explanation. Escalating violence of Russia in Ukraine seems to play decisive role. Provided EU's military and political weakness (in spite of noticeable potential of some member states) Europe has to integrate further and “put its act together” in order to reliable partner of the US unquestionable leader of the “free world”. Such a need become more visible and more urgent as tensions grow between Russia and the West. Theory F comes to my mind F, F as fear of Europeans. Unfortunately it was not strong enough before WWII.

From purely economic point of view strategic integration is needed as well. EU as the largest trading bloc in the world and the world center of art, culture, education and science has sufficient potential to become leading player in the global game. None of the member states can match this potential even to some degree. Degradation of the UK after Brexit provides perfect example. To achieve this position Europe must really become one entity. From strictly economic point of view enormous economies of scope and scale come into play when European strategic integration is progressing. This applies fiscal and monetary policy, industrial and

R&D policies, education, health care and many other sectors, provided that national identities and cultures are respected. In the last 20 years big progress was made in this direction, but the road ahead of Europe is thorny and long: it will take decades. Further progress cannot be fast. Weakening of populism, lengthy negotiations and a lot of political maneuvering is needed. Otherwise Europe as a group of “sovereign” states implementing contradictory policies approaching the verge of an open conflict, is likely to become a victim of authoritarian global sharks. German overdependence upon Russian energy perfectly illustrates this point. Do we really have enough time for lengthy change before US engages itself more in confrontation with China.