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EUROPE AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE MULTIPOLAR WORLD – WHAT PLACE IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER?

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FONDATION
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Pat Cox has been the President of the Jean Monnet Foundation for Europe since 1st January 2015. An Irish national, he is 70 years old. After teaching economics, he then became journalist and anchor-man of the news bulletin on the Irish national television. He was first elected to the European Parliament in 1989, serving for three terms until 2004. He was the President of the European Parliament from 2002 to 2004. He was the laureate of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aix-la-Chapelle in 2004. He subsequently presided over the European Movement International from 2005 to 2011. He was a member of the special European Parliament mission to Ukraine in 2012-2013, jointly with the former Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski. He is currently the Coordinator of the European Union project for the transport corridor from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean.

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Good morning, I am Pat Cox, and I am pleased, as its President, to welcome you to the Jean Monnet Foundation for Europe and our Colloquium on the theme of ‘Europe and the challenges of the multipolar world – What place in the new world order?’

Thank you for your presence and my thanks in particular to our distinguished speakers whom I look forward to hearing today. It is my pleasure and privilege to make some opening remarks.

To begin with let me recall the drift towards strong man autocratic leadership models.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has just been re-elected as President of Turkey for another five-year term. He served as Prime Minister from 2003 to 2014 and as president since then.

Vladimir Putin has been President of Russia since late 1999, broken only by one term as Prime Minister from 2008-2012. Under a reformed constitutional clause he may contest the presidential election next year and again in 2030. Conceivably Putin could be in office until 2036.

Xi Jinping, served as Vice President of the People’s Republic of China from 2008 to 2013, as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party since 2012, and was elected as Chairman of the Central Military Commission, and re-elected unanimously for a third term as President at the 14th National Peoples’ Congress in Beijing in March this year. He is the undisputed paramount leader of every significant organ of the communist party and the state in China, without any term limits.

While their systems differ, all three are strong man leaders of autocratic states or personalities with strong autocratic tendencies. Popular descriptions of Erdoğan as a new Sultan, of Putin as a new Czar, and of Xi as a new Emperor reveal a decisive shift to a more authoritarian world.

Address delivered by President Pat Cox in Lausanne on 8 June 2023 at the Jean Monnet Foundation for Europe, during the colloquium “Europe and the challenges of the multipolar world”.

India is the world's largest democracy. Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister, and his BJP party, have been in office since 2014 and will contest next year's elections anticipating a return to power. The deterioration in political and civil liberties in the country has led some commentators to describe India today as an 'electoral autocracy'.¹

In August South Africa will host a BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) summit. South Africa is a member state of the International Criminal Court, yet it may grant immunity to Vladimir Putin from the arrest warrant issued by the ICC. At the UN General Assembly these are among the most prominent and populous states to abstain from condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine.²

These are some of the key influencers in the contemporary multipolar global power play. They challenge the global west and its post war settlement, its values, and institutions. The EU is heavily invested in these norms and institutions. Its values and interests have been well served by multilateralism. The defence, reform, and promotion of effective multilateralism is central to the EU's strategic goals.

The weakening commitment of major countries to international agreements and institutions has been a source of concern for the EU, not least on the part of its indispensable strategic ally, the United States during the Trump presidency. This marked a high point in disruptive behaviour and a low point for multilateralism, provoking the Munich Security Conference in 2020 to focus on the theme of "Westlessness." Trump described NATO as obsolete. He withdrew from the delicately crafted Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), designed to limit Iran's nuclear programme to peaceful uses. Both the US and Russia suspended their obligations under the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty.

¹ A similar classification has been applied to Hungary.

² A recent meeting of foreign ministers of the Brics group of nations in South Africa has called for a rebalancing of the global order away from Western nations.

The US withdrew from the Open Skies Treaty permitting overflight inspections of military facilities. Trump withdrew from the Paris Agreement on climate change and announced the US intention to leave the World Health Organisation during the greatest health pandemic in a century. Under the Biden presidency many of these choices have been reversed but a lingering anxiety remains as to whether Trumpism is a spent force or is on the cusp of a revival.

The rise in nationalism and protectionism also has made consensus building in established organisations, such as the World Trade Organisation much harder to achieve. The lesson is that institutions though essential need to be animated by political will and trust to be effective. These latter qualities are becoming scarcer over time.

This is the world into which Russia's aggressive war of choice against Ukraine exploded on the 24th of February 2022. We have entered a new age of uncertainty. Today Russia represents a combustible mix of grievance, ambition and insecurity suggesting that it will continue to play a role as spoiler with consequential risks for wider regional stability and security. Putin has become Ukraine's most potent unifying force. Backed by its allies Ukraine is fighting for its freedom and territorial integrity but also, as a by-product, for the freedom and stability of the EU's eastern flank. As the EU nurtures Ukraine's aspiration to full membership the centre of gravity of its politics and geography will shift to the east. The EU, the US, the UK, and NATO share an interest in ensuring that Ukraine does not lose the war. Russia is determined that Ukraine should not win the war. Politically, neither side has an appetite for a premature peace. The stage is set for an intensification of fighting in the coming months in a war whose escalation, duration, and outcome remain conjectural at this point. China with its 'no limits friendship' with Russia and a shared determination to challenge perceived western hegemony is positioning itself as a potential end game peace broker. One winner already is evident. A weakened Russia, isolated from the west, is a geopolitical gain for China whatever the outcome of the war.

Putin's invasion has been a wakeup call for the EU, the USA, the transatlantic alliance, and NATO. For the EU and its member states policy aspirations that proved elusive over decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall crystallised into policy decisions and reforms within days of Russia's breach of the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

In the EU, Nord Stream 2 was suspended. Years of German policy continuity, *Wandel durch Handel*, of change through trade with Russia under Angela Merkel, Gerhard Schroeder and their predecessors evaporated in the heat of the moment. Chancellor Scholz committed Germany to spending 2% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defence. The EU broke with long standing taboos in creating the European Peace Facility from its own resources with an initial € 500 million to provide weapons for Ukraine's defence.

Accelerating the already robust Covid-driven debate on EU strategic autonomy, fifteen days into the war, the Versailles Declaration addressed three key dimensions for the EU, bolstering defence capabilities, reducing energy dependencies, and building a more robust economic base. Agreement was reached to phase out dependency on Russian gas, oil, and coal. Putin's war drove Finland and Sweden to apply for NATO membership and Denmark to hold a referendum which reversed its European security policy optout.

Strategic autonomy in any policy domain poses the question of autonomy for what, from what, and by what means. In the field of security and defence Ukraine is proving the value of strategic security backed by the weighty engagement of the United States. Far from being "brain dead" or "obsolete", the transatlantic partnership through NATO has deepened as a result of Russia's aggression and President Biden's commitment. NATO itself has expanded its membership and territorial extent. NATO and the EU have twenty-two member states in common, have common values and face similar threats and challenges in the current security environment. A stronger European pillar would complement and not substitute NATO. In January this year a third Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation was signed to further

and strengthen the partnership. The United States in supporting Ukraine is supporting European security. It is doing so at considerable cost and with congressional bipartisanship, which has shown some signs of fraying around the edges as a more isolationist rhetoric has returned in the early stages of the next US presidential campaign.

However, there is one major issue which unites US politics. That is the great power competition with China. This poses a sensitive challenge for EU positioning between a major trading partner, China, and its closest ally historically, politically, and economically, the USA. An early victim of the pressure to take sides was a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment between the EU and China negotiated under the German Presidency of the EU in 2020. This was frozen months later, overtaken by a Biden-led allied action sanctioning four Chinese officials leading Beijing's policies in Xinjiang.

China has changed. Back in 2000 the bet on China was captured by a Bill Clinton address to Congress in which he argued that China's admission to the WTO would "enrich Americans" and "help convert China to freedom." Less than two decades later Trump blamed trade with China for creating "American carnage," while Xi Jinping was tightening the grip of the Chinese Communist Party behind the Great Firewall of China. The bet did not pay off and the ground has shifted from economic embrace to geopolitical great power tension and rivalry.

Relations with China have been characterised by the EU as a cooperation partner, a negotiation partner, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival. Throughout this century EU-China trade has witnessed explosive growth with the net balance of trade decidedly in China's favour. A silver lining in the cloud of Covid 19 for the EU was the dawning realisation that it cannot continue to rely on excessive dependency for critical raw materials or supplies on states such as China. Wishing simultaneously to promote free trade and to achieve more self-sufficiency has led to some linguistic dexterity on the part of the European Commission which now

promotes “open strategic autonomy” and “de-risking,” the latter phrase now adopted by the US and the G7 also. Given the extent of trade and investment interdependence with China built over several decades, and the value of the domestic Chinese consumer market for European and US companies, the appetite for and the scale and pace of what this will mean in practice remains to be seen.

For his part Xi has accused the United States of a policy of containment and suppression. Joe Biden’s rhetoric has been softer than Trump, but his policy stance has been tougher, banning all Chinese access to high end semiconductors that could be used to upgrade Chinese military, AI, and Quantum computing ambitions. Japan recently has followed this lead. Fears of Chinese illicit state access to data has seen the banning of Huawei 5G telecom products in multiple states and even has extended to sensitivities about the Tik Tok app in many cases.

Xi Jinping speaks of China’s international influence, appeal, and power to shape the world as having significantly increased, in sharp contrast to Deng Xiaoping’s 1992 admonition that China should “hide its strength and bide its time.” Xi is the paramount leader of an increasingly wealthy, self-confident Communist Party-dominated state, willing to be more assertive in domestic and global affairs. He challenges the global west and believes that Chinese modernisation offers humanity a new choice, a different model of development. China already has surpassed the US economy in size based on purchasing power parity and will do so absolutely in the next decade. It is the major trading partner of more than 120 states, more than the USA. It has the largest diplomatic corps in the world, boasts hundreds of Confucius Institutes on every continent, and promotes the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative. It recently has courted Central Asian neighbours, the Stans, all in Russia’s backyard to deepen security and trade links. It is talking to the Taliban in Afghanistan. It brokered a Saudi Arabian Iranian diplomatic rapprochement showing ambitions in the Gulf. It has offered to assist a settlement of the Russian war in Ukraine. This challenges not only the US but also the EU to up its

game in diplomacy, development assistance, and the promotion of the rules based multilateral order in which we believe. Emerging economies in Africa and the global south now are open to all sides in their own self-interest and China is playing to win.

A crackdown on internal dissent and an aggressive posture in the South China Sea which carries one third of global seaborne trade, have been sources of friction between the global west and China, but the ticking geopolitical time bomb is Taiwan. For Xi, this has all the hallmarks of being a legacy issue. It is “a historic mission and unshakeable commitment” in which China “will never promise to renounce the use of force”³ he told a party congress. In the past fifteen months China has twice blockaded and menaced Taiwan for conducting high level political contacts with successive Speakers of the US Congress. The US sent two Navy carrier strike groups on drills to the South China Sea last year and has upped its level of Indo-Pacific deterrence through the Quad and AUKUS.⁴ Each side’s deterrence is the other side’s provocation. We have all the ingredients and downside risks of a new Cold War. Taiwan in our time risks to become this generation’s Cuban missile crisis. As we meet here in Lausanne there are no guardrails, there is no détente, in this tense geopolitical standoff. The EU needs to get its act together and speak with a coherent voice on China and use its best endeavours with the two key powers to encourage the decommissioning of the ticking Taiwan timebomb.

A final thought on the EU closer to home. How the EU relates to its own neighbourhood after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and post Brexit has resulted in the formation of the European Political Community. This intergovernmental forum comprises countries that share core values and who are willing to cooperate on politics, security, energy, infrastructure, investment, and migration. Its territorial extent mirrors the Council of Europe, except for the

³ Xi Jinping address to 22nd Communist Party Congress, October 2022.

⁴ The QUAD includes the US, Japan, India and Australia. AUKUS is a trilateral security pact between the US, the UK and Australia.

addition of Kosovo as a member. Russia and Belarus are excluded. All member states of the EU are represented, as well as the presidents of its three institutions.

That it met last week in Moldova just twenty kilometres from the Ukrainian border was perhaps its most significant political sign of Europe's collective solidarity with the victim of Russia's aggression.

The European Political Community is an additional political forum but for several states is not an alternative option to EU accession. Eight countries currently have EU candidate state status. These include Turkey, whose accession negotiations have been frozen for many years, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Moldova, Ukraine, and Bosnia Herzegovina. Kosovo and Georgia also formally submitted applications for membership in 2022. This will challenge both the EU's and these candidate state's absorption capacities and is set bring enlargement back to the centre of EU politics and policy a decade after the accession of Croatia.

The EU has proven itself to be politically resilient through numerous crises and challenges over the past fifteen years. It will need all that resilience to cope with what lies ahead.

Thank you for your attention.

The Fondation Jean Monnet pour l'Europe was created in 1978 by Jean Monnet, who conceived and was the first president of the first European Community (Coal and Steel), as well as the first honorary citizen, of Europe. He donated all his archives to the Foundation. As an independent institution serving the public interest, the Foundation is non-partisan and does not engage in lobbying. It receives support from the Canton of Vaud, the Swiss Confederation, and the City of Lausanne. It operates out of the Dorigny Farm, which is located on the campus of the University of Lausanne, its main partner.

The Foundation also keeps and provides access to numerous other private archives, including those of Robert Marjolin and the European papers of Robert Schuman and Jacques Delors, as well as images and audio-visual documents. In addition, it houses a specialised library and a European documentation centre, and it collects first-hand accounts from participants and observers through a filmed interview programme. It thus provides users, and especially researchers, with a coherent corpus of documentary resources on the origins and development of European integration and on Swiss-European relations.

Thanks to the internationally recognised importance of these collections and to the collaboration between Jean Monnet and Professor Henri Rieben, who chaired the Foundation until 2005, the Foundation is a focal point for European studies and an essential venue for meetings, debates and analyses about major issues facing Europe. It regularly organises conferences, European dialogues, and international symposia, forming partnerships with renowned institutions. It periodically awards its Gold Medal to prominent political figures who have worked for the common interest of Europeans; past laureates include José Manuel Barroso, Emilio Colombo, Mario Draghi, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Jean-Claude Juncker, Helmut Kohl, Romano Prodi, Helmut Schmidt, Martin Schulz, Javier Solana, and Herman Van Rompuy. The Foundation receives many visitors, regularly provides assistance to researchers and is involved in training university students. Each year, the Foundation awards the Henri Rieben Scholarship to several advanced PhD students. With support from the Canton of Vaud, in 2016 the Foundation created a think tank whose experts are currently working on the challenges of Society 4.0.

Finally, the Foundation also produces a number of publications. The Red Books Collection, which was created by Henri Rieben in 1957, now comprises 219 titles, while the Debates and Documents Collection, a series of shorter publications in open access, was launched in 2014. Taken together, these publications highlight the Foundation's documentary collections and public events, as well as its members' and partners' expertise.

Both the Foundation Board, with more than 600 members from all over the world, and the Scientific Committee meet annually. Pat Cox, former president of the European Parliament and the European Movement International, has been president of the Foundation and its Executive Board since 1 January 2015. This role was held in the past by José María Gil-Robles (2009–2014), former president of the European Parliament and the European Movement International; Bronisław Geremek (2006–2008), member of the European Parliament and former minister of foreign affairs of Poland; and Henri Rieben (1978–2005), professor at the University of Lausanne. Since 2012, the Foundation has been led by Gilles Grin, who holds a PhD in international relations and is a lecturer at the University of Lausanne.

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