Report
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Facilitating Cooperation in a World of Uncertainty

Summary

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Future Leaders' DECLARATION on Security, Order and Interdependence in Wider Europe and Central Asia

Relations between the European Union, Russia and China are currently defined by a mixture of uncertainty and opportunity. Shifting balances of power between these three actors, and the presence of rival norms and visions of international order between some of them threaten to undermine the long-term stability of the Central Eurasian region, and the wider European and global spaces. **Yet there remain both ample scope and a significant need to foster a cooperative international environment.** If handled with care, the interaction between China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the EU's Asia Connectivity Strategy and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) has the potential to set positive-sum rules of the game across Central Eurasia. Russia and China are already deepening their strategic partnership rooted nominally in mutual respect for each other's integration projects, potentially driving the establishment of a new kind of great power relations. Similar strategic developments take shape between the EU and Central

Asia, the EU and China vis-à-vis the region. Furthermore, French President Emmanuel Macron's vision of an EU-Russia reset has the potential to clarify and delineate many of the contours of the renewed relationship between the EU and Russia, in the wider European space (including Syria and Iran) in a way that strengthens regional security and may even make an idealistic prospect of economic integration from Lisbon to Vladivostok a reality one day.

Key to the development of cooperative orders is the region itself inclusive of Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. While most countries of the region are practicing multi-vectored foreign policies of some sort, four in particular stand out: **Belarus, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. This declaration contends that these four states should take steps to enhance their international agency, clout and cooperation in a way that allows them not only to benefit from deepening ties with multiple leading actors, but also to turn them into term-setters and pillars of international order.** Rather than thinking of themselves as pivot states that are the object of great power competition, these should become important **hubs** that can stabilize the interaction between the major players in the region as Eurasian integration proceeds apace. Crucially, such a strategy respects the core principles of all major players: the EU's emphasising states' right to choose their orientation, Russia's highlighting the sacrosanct nature of state sovereignty and equal cooperation, and China's valuing non-interference in states' internal affairs.

We recognize that the international conditions for negotiating a new wider Euro-Asian security order are currently not present. We do not expect anyone across the Eurasian supercontinent to compromise on their legitimately held principles, norms and positions regarding how they believe international relations should be organized. Furthermore, we are not advocating neutrality for the individual states either: Belarus, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan will have their own international strategy and own particular equilibrium for relations with the EU, Russia and China. **The goal of this strategy is to allow these countries to assume more responsibility for ensuring the stability of their respective regions, strengthen the degree of cooperation between them as well as strengthening their own internal governance, and gradually ease the move of great power relations from conflict management toward cooperation.** With time, the aim is that they should serve as examples for other countries in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia to emulate and share their best-practice experience. The conflict in Ukraine is a stark reminder that everyone matters, and that states caught in-between have a responsibility to respond and contribute toward enhancing international stability.

What follows is a non-exhaustive list of potential initiativesthat Belarus, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan could jointly undertake to achieve the ends outlined above. The EU, Russia and China should encourage and support these projects wherever possible. Indeed, it is in the interest of all, for the political, security, and socio-economic costs associated with building a more cooperative international and regional orders to be distributed equality and in partnership, so long as the core interests and norms are respected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhancing international security and dialogue:

- Further establish the position of Minsk, Baku, Tashkent and Dushanbe as *places for international dialogue* along various tracks, each with a specific regional focus, along the lines of the Minsk Dialogue;
- *Establish a quadrilateral* dialogue on sharing best practices regarding the development of multi-vectored foreign policies;
- *Reaffirm the territorial integrity of states* as a key organizing principle for future interstate interaction;
- Play an active role in *stabilizing regional conflicts* in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central-Southcentral Asia and develop coordinated strategies for conflict resolution which would take into consideration the specificity of each of the conflicts;
- Establish a joint platform for the discussion of how to *prevent further militarization* in key theatres in the wider European and central Eurasian regionswithout undermining the importance of national military capabilities and collective security systems;
- Initiate a joint Eurasia-wide dialogue on *conflict prevention and share best practices* including, but not limited to strengthening institutions and reducing militarization;
- Work to combat *human and illegal arms trafficking* to preclude actors in areas of conflict to replenish their supply with weapons and ammunition and provide particular protection to refugees and migrants, who are the most at-risk for human trafficking;
- *Facilitate and pursue decarbonization strategies* and transitions to a green economy to reduce the risk of great power conflict, as well as furthering the implementation of climate-conscious policies and reducing the probability of any transboundary environmental hazards;

- Collaborate to *strengthen food security* and other key drivers of long-term domestic stability, governance and resilience;
- Strengthen joint efforts to *combat terrorism and radicalization* and enhance intelligence-sharing to ensure cooperation on every stage of combating radical movements - from their detection to taking the timely measures.

Economic collaboration and interdependence:

- Outline a joint vision to *strengthen economic links* among small and medium powers across Eurasiain a way that respects the integrity of all major economic and regulatory blocs, as a means of allowing them to assume greater responsibility and capacity for managing international order. This could also help to establish bridges and/or buffers where necessary between the EU, the EAEU and China;
- Jointly propose a *set of norms and standards* on key issues to govern convergence and connectivity in Eurasia, with reference where relevant to established processes (including but not limited to the Eastern Partnership). This could simultaneously allow for elements of divergence between ordering practices in different regions where necessary to ensure stability in great power relations;
- *Harmonize production standards* for key goods being exported to the European Single Market;
- Provide legislative support for *removing barriersto greenfield and other investments* that can drive innovation and economic diversification. *Increase collaboration with institutions such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank* to enhance economic development and growth;
- Advocate for the *harmonizing of digital markets* across Eurasia which will help the existing companies to grow faster and increase employment in the target states.

Institutional development

- *Cooperate to strengthen the rule of law* and reform public services to increase market attractiveness;
- Implement *judiciary and anti-corruption* reforms and introduce *e-governance mechanisms* to ensure more transparency in the decision-making processes;
- Strengthen *institutional cooperation with European counterparts*, including through the existing inter-parliamentary Euronest programme;
- *Increase media literacy* as a means of strengthening the foundations of international cooperation at the grassroots level;

- *Collaborate on education policy* to strengthen future generations of government and policy leaders. This can be done, inter alia, by integrating into European scientific collaboration networks and strengthening people-to people contacts through deepening university exchanges and research stays abroad;
- *Implement measures against brain drain*, including the simplification of red tape and the creation of a competitive environment in new industries like the start-up sector;
- Invest in the development of *national IT industries* and the creation of regional IT hubs,which can become the driver of economic progress.

With the return of great power rivalry over the course of the past several years, the asymmetric nature of international relations has been put on display. Carefully calibrated and coordinated strategies by leading regional states to enhance supercontinent-wide interdependence can help to bring about greater symmetry and stability in Eurasia – both among leading powers and between those powers and smaller states – not necessarily in terms of the overall balance of power but rather in terms of the distribution of responsibilities and the smoothness of integration.

Indeed, as they are not constrained to the same extent by normative rivalry and disputes over the rules of the game, now is an opportune time for the local stakeholders to gradually clear the way for Eurasian integration to move forward in a smooth fashion, growing the toolbox of policy options available to the EU, Russia and China in the process. Such an undertaking would strengthen their sovereignty and capabilities (as well as those of other small states), thus strengthening the core pillars and principles of the contemporary international order in a way that would be welcomed by Brussels, Moscow and Beijing alike.

The above-signed

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