

DÉBAT

Thierry de Montbrial, fondateur et président de l'Ifri et de la WPC

Il nous reste environ 11 minutes et je propose maintenant d'élargir la discussion. You can speak English or French if you wish, or perhaps even Arabic. I can see Karl Kaiser.

Karl Kaiser, associé principal du projet sur l'Europe et la relation transatlantique du Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard

You recently pointed out that majority voting is one way for the European Union to be able to act. How do you get there and how do you see it now, particularly after the events of the recent two months, which make the notion of the European capacity to act much more urgent?

Josep Borell Fontelles, Haut Représentant de l'Union européenne pour les affaires étrangères et la politique de sécurité, vice-président de la Commission européenne

It would be much easier for me if the decision-making was based on a majority, qualified but a majority. However, to be realistic I do not think that we will change that rule in the short-term because to abandon unanimity would require unanimity and I do not see that happening frankly speaking. Everybody will be attached to their veto right, so we have to build with the tools we have. It is certainly a big disadvantage; this is my point of view though it is not one that is shared by everybody. For example, President Michel believes that unanimity is a good way of taking decisions because it puts everybody together. Yes, certainly it puts everybody together but around what? We are together about nothing or about very little things. For me, it would be much better to have a capacity to decide by qualified majority because it would be a big incentive for people to engage in discussions. If you know that nobody can do anything without you, you just stay in your corner; you do not need to participate in the debate because you can just block it. This is certainly not the way to face the geopolitical problems of the world. I have to be realistic and I do not think we are going to change this rule so we have to look for ways to get around it and I think the Treaty provides some ways to act according to unanimity but with a bit more of flexibility on implementation of the decisions. Forget about having majority rules in the next month.

Bogdan Klich, sénateur au Parlement polonais, président de la commission des affaires étrangères et européennes au Sénat polonais

Fortunately, we overcame the longest crisis of the CSDP after 2008 and such instruments that were expected and designed in that Treaty, such as PESCO, and those created recently, that is the European Defense Fund, show our ability to overcome such crises. We are now in a very difficult financial situation, with the allocation of so many funds to fight coronavirus and recovery funds. What about the CSDP in the future, because in fact, it is an expression of our

strategic autonomy in Europe? What do you think about the future of the CSDP? I am strongly in favor of reinforcing that policy.

Thierry de Montbrial

Maybe you could explain what the CSDP is for those who do not know the acronym.

Josep Borell Fontelles

I suppose everybody knows the Common Security and Defense Policy, the will to build a common way of ensuring our security and providing defense capacities. It is true that in the current financial perspective, member states were not favoring this policy when allocating resources because the pandemic was there and internal issues were much more important at that critical moment. The CSDP has not been very well treated with the allocation of resources for these years. Nevertheless, we have started with a defense fund to provide support to our industrial military capacity and we need an industrial military capacity. It is topical to believe that you are a security provider actor if you do not have an industrial capacity in the field of defense. This has to be done and we need to increase our capabilities and this starts with industry. It is not sufficient but it is absolutely necessary. We have this fund and we have this peace facility, a new instrument that will allow us to provide lethal equipment to our partners. When we go to train our partners in the Sahel, for example, we train them but we are unable to provide them with military warfare. When we train the Malian soldiers in our training camp they have to come with their own ammunition because we do not even provide that for their training. This has to be overcome and this peace facility will allow us to do that. It is not the solution for everything but is a big step forward.

PESCO is still in the first years of development and we cannot ask it to deliver results because everything in the defense field takes quite a long time. It will provide better results and we will try to orient PESCO more towards field and implementation projects, less logistics and more action, more deployment capacity. However, it takes time and we cannot ask PESCO to change the European defense landscape in four or five years. We have launched two new missions, so we are advancing little by little but I think we had to have a kind of breakthrough, a jump, something different something more, a qualitative step. That is what we are proposing with the Strategic Compass. We had the battle groups, we have never used them. That is not because we have never needed to, it is because we do not have the will or maybe the instrument is not well-designed. That is why we have proposed this new instrument, the Strategic Compass, to reinforce the CSDP because frankly speaking I do not see how we can be a real security provider at the geopolitical level if we do not pool our resources more. Altogether, the member states spend five times more on defense than Russia. Altogether, we have as many soldiers as the US but evidently we do not have the same strength. The only solution for us if we want to exist in the world is to pool our capacities more. We do not want to abolish national armies and build a European army, which is topical. However, we want to complement our individual capacities with a collective one, which could become a European pillar on NATO, complementary to NATO as Presidents Biden and Macron have said. If we cannot advance in this field, our strategic shrinking will continue and we cannot afford that, we should not afford that.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much. We will take two last questions.

Dania Khatib, cofondatrice et présidente du Research Center for Cooperation and Peace Building (RCCP)

You have said that because there is unanimity in decision-making, it is very difficult to make decisions. However, Europe is surrounded by a very unstable neighborhood if you look at North Africa, Lebanon and Syria. Do you think at some point Europe will have an overarching strategy to deal with its neighborhood?

Josep Borell Fontelles

An overarching strategy for the whole Mediterranean neighborhood is something that would be really difficult to build and maybe we do not need one. In Europe we use and abuse the word “strategy”. We have a strategy for everything and we produce them on a weekly basis. It is good to have an idea of how to act but sometimes we call something a strategy to think that they are not a strategy. A strategy is something that links means and purposes, the resources you have and the objective you want to reach. This is a real strategy. Sometimes we call something a strategy that in reality is an analysis. I do not think we need a whole strategy that goes from Gibraltar to Syria, but we need to have a clear idea of how to deal with our neighbors and I think we have. Another definite thing is that in the case of Lebanon, all our requests for the Lebanese political class to take its responsibilities have failed. Since the explosion of the harbor in Lebanon, President Macron, myself, President Michel have been pushing the Lebanese political class to act and face up to the challenges of the country. It has been a big collective failure of the Lebanese political class, despite our pressure. It now seems that things are moving but this is not a question of having a strategy, it is a fact that in some countries there is a complete failure of the political system and the Europeans cannot replace another country’s political system. We can help, push, provide financial support and put political pressure on, but we cannot be a substitute. In the case of Lebanon, it is very clear to me that if the political resources do not exist inside the country itself, you cannot ask Brussels to provide a solution.

For example, today we have the case of Tunisia where there is political development and we had to place ourselves with respect to this. In general terms, our ambitions for the Mediterranean have not been fulfilled and the Mediterranean is not improving from the economic point of view. The gap between the north and the south is increasing, our trade relations are not improving and the integration of Mediterranean states and North Africa – I am thinking of Morocco and Algeria – continues to be very weak. However, believe me that it is impossible for Europe to provide the solutions. In some cases, I think we have been very active and that has provided good results. Finally, I will mention Libya, where together with other actors we have been able to stabilize the situation. However, in the case of Lebanon, only the country’s political class can provide a solution to the Lebanese problem.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much. A last question from Professor Sigal.

Robert Sigal, directeur général de l'Hôpital américain de Paris

Merci, Thierry. Un des problèmes de l'Europe qui a souvent été décrit, c'est le manque de confiance du citoyen ordinaire dans les institutions européennes. Ma question est la suivante : ne pensez-vous pas que le fait de pousser, actuellement, une politique de santé unifiée au niveau de l'Europe, qui n'existe pas, aurait un intérêt évident pour le citoyen, mais aurait un intérêt au-dessus de cela pour la constitution de l'Europe elle-même, pour défendre d'autres buts européens, et que ce serait quelque chose de très concret qui permettrait d'augmenter la confiance dans l'Europe ?

Thierry de Montbrial

Une politique européenne de santé. C'est ce que vous dites...

Robert Sigal

The question was, don't you think that a common European policy in the field of healthcare would enhance the confidence of ordinary citizens in Europe, something which is really needed as we know, because there has been a deficit over the last years?

Thierry de Montbrial

Est-ce que c'est du domaine du Haut Représentant pour les affaires étrangères et la politique de sécurité ?

Josep Borrell Fontelles

Non, mais je ne vois pas d'inconvénient à dire que la pandémie a montré que les capacités de l'Union européenne en matière de santé étaient très faibles, pratiquement inexistantes. Le traité n'a pas prévu de donner aux institutions européennes des capacités d'agir dans le domaine de la santé.

Parfois, on demande à l'Europe des choses que l'Europe ne peut pas faire parce que personne ne lui a demandé de le faire. Que doit faire l'Europe ? Ce que le traité dit qu'elle doit faire. Dans le domaine de la santé, le traité ne dit pratiquement rien. Les compétences de la Commission et des institutions communautaires sont donc très faibles.

On les a développées à marche forcée parce qu'il fallait bien qu'il y ait une instance de coordination des politiques nationales. Peut-être alors, dans la réflexion sur le futur de l'Europe, faudra-t-il mettre ce sujet sur la table. Ne faudrait-il pas, dans le futur, que l'Union ait des compétences communes pour faire face d'une façon plus coordonnée à une menace commune ? Oui, sans doute. La pandémie nous l'a appris.

La pandémie nous a appris que la réponse a été parfois trop nationale et, parfois, a montré que c'était chacun pour soi. On a vu des images, au début de la pandémie, qui n'ont pas donné de l'Europe une image très positive. Les gens se demandaient : « Mais que fait l'Europe ? » L'Europe ne fait pas grand-chose parce que l'Europe n'a pas les compétences pour le faire.

En revanche, c'est effectivement au niveau européen que l'on a poussé le développement des vaccins. C'est au niveau européen que l'on a encouragé un achat commun, qui a été aussi critiqué au début, mais imaginez-vous si tous les pays européens étaient allés, chacun pour soi, au marché des vaccins, à essayer d'acheter des vaccins en se faisant de la concurrence les uns contre les autres, comme une sorte d'enchère. Cela aurait été catastrophique.

Nous avons au moins évité cela. Nous l'avons évité parce que les États membres ont dit à la Commission : « Allez-y au nom de nous tous, pour chercher ce bien collectif. Nous le partagerons ensuite. » On pourrait penser que maintenant, avec la montée du prix du gaz, ce serait une sage idée de faire une sorte de centrale d'achat du gaz. Ce serait sans doute dans l'intérêt de tous. Il faut donc en effet avoir plus de compétences.

Et permettez-moi de répondre à votre question du point de vue géopolitique. Il faut accélérer les dons de vaccins de la part des États membres aux pays en développement. Il faut absolument accélérer cela parce que nous l'avons promis. Nous sommes déjà à quelque 300 millions de doses de promesses, mais jusqu'à maintenant, les dons réels, effectifs, ne suivent vraiment pas le rythme de nos promesses.

Et nous faisons face à une situation mondiale – le Secrétaire général de l'ONU l'a dit à New York, l'autre jour –, qui n'est pas très acceptable. 3 % de la population est vaccinée dans les pays en développement. C'est 3 % en Afrique et 70 % en Europe. Le déséquilibre vaccinal est énorme. L'Europe a exporté 700 millions de doses, mais c'est une chose d'exporter et c'en est une autre de donner. Il faut accélérer les dons. Nous sommes encore loin de nos engagements.

Thierry de Montbrial

Merci infiniment. Je crois que nous devons nous arrêter là. À propos de la dernière question, il faut toujours rappeler que, comme dans les armées, on ne peut bien faire en cas de crise que ce qui a été correctement préparé à l'avance.

Dans des opérations aussi complexes que la crise sanitaire, on peut dire que, finalement, compte tenu du fait – comme vous le rappeliez – que la santé n'est pas une compétence de l'Union européenne, on ne s'est pas si mal débrouillé que cela. Les choses auraient pu être bien pires, mais, effectivement, tout le monde reconnaît que ce doit être un sujet majeur pour l'avenir.

Nous allons nous arrêter là. Je vous remercie infiniment de votre présence et de cette conversation.