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# **CES BRIEFS**

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**2014 SUMMIT ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE**

**BACKGROUND BRIEFING FOR  
ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION:**

## **What's Needed to Keep Europe Safe? Geostrategic Threats and Energy Security in the Wake of the Ukraine Crisis**

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Europe faces three key challenges: economic stagnation, institutional crisis, and new security threats posed by Putin's Russia and the rise of terrorism. Each of these three crises is novel in its own right. But it is their confluence that makes this historical moment truly unique.

Since the fall of communism, the broad contours of the continent's future have seemed predictable. While Europe's leaders had to take important decisions about membership in NATO and the European Union, as well as about the nature of the single currency zone, the areas in which policy seemed stable greatly outnumbered those in which politicians faced true alternatives. No longer. Taken together, the political, economic and military choices that Europe will have to make in the coming decade will radically alter the continent. Though many politicians and intellectuals remain reluctant to acknowledge the lasting significance of the choices that lie ahead—and might have preferred to live in less decisive times—Europe has unwittingly entered a new era of self-fashioning. And so the current conflagration of crises also provides a rare opportunity for Europe to decide anew what it would like to become.

It is Europe's economic crisis that has, understandably, taken up much of the limelight for the past five years. In the wake of the 2008 financial crash and the subsequent crisis of the common currency, the very bases of the European financial system started to look precarious. Meanwhile, mass unemployment—on a scale unseen since before the economic miracles of the postwar era turned reluctant Europeans into enthusiastic democrats—has rapidly escalated poverty and tested the patience of Europeans, especially in the South, to an unprecedented degree.

Because of worries about the stability of the euro, most of the economic discussions of the recent past have been focused on the short or mid-term. How can we save the euro? Is fiscal expansion or fiscal discipline more likely to facilitate economic recovery and long-term growth? Although these tactical questions are undoubtedly of great importance, they also elide the need for answers to some equally challenging strategic questions: What can Europe do to remain one of the world's richest regions? And how can Europe's generous welfare states be preserved in an era in which an ever-greater swath of the continent's population is elderly, and an ever-smaller swath of the world's GDP hails from the Old World?

Europe's economic crisis, in turn, fed into a fundamental political crisis. Despite some longstanding misgivings about the EU's democratic deficit and overregulation by Brussels' "Eurocrats," most citizens remain attached to the most important hallmarks of the European Union. They cherish the free movement of goods and peoples, like to pay in their own currency while on holiday, and take ample advantage of opportunities for cross-border mobility like the Erasmus program. In short, though most Europeans are opposed to giving more power to the EU, they would be happy to retain the status quo. The euro crisis is so significant, in part, because it has made that status quo untenable. Europe could make the euro sustainable over the long-run—but only by increasing the powers of the EU in the face of energetic opposition by citizens and national politicians. Or Europe could resist giving more power to Brussels—but only at the risk of dismantling some of the Union's historic achievements, which a clear majority of citizens continues to value. The longstanding democratic deficit has been complemented by a new democratic dilemma.

At the same time, the EU is not the only locus of institutional crisis in contemporary Europe. An equally strong challenge is building within nation states. The rise of right-wing populists is transforming traditional party structures; in few European countries do parties and coalitions that were long accustomed to alternate in power still retain their ability to rule on their own. Populists have been so successful of late because they have seized upon a flagrant contradiction at the very heart of most European polities: European nations opened their doors to mass immigration, yet pretended that

immigrants would not challenge their largely monoethnic and monocultural definition of what full membership in the nation entails. Whether this contradiction can belatedly be overcome by convincing average Europeans to rethink their exclusionary definition of the nations to which they continue to pay their allegiance is open to question. There is, then, no reason to assume that the populist rise will be halted anytime soon. But if political elites prove unable to survive the onslaught of populist insurgents on both the left and the right, it is not only the EU that may look very different a decade or two hence; so, too, might the domestic politics of its member states.

Finally, Europe now faces the first serious military threat since the end of the Cold War. After 1990, most European countries grew accustomed to being surrounded by friends. The civil war in the Balkans was a terrifying civilizational catastrophe. But it seemed like a belated return of the crises, which the movement for self-determination had brought about in the early part of the 20th century, unlikely to repeat itself now that the remaining European nations had finally formed their own states. It thus only reinforced the idea that, except for limited fears about the possibility a serious terrorist attack, the continent was safely pacified. Questions about security, which had dominated discussion of foreign policy for many decades, receded into the background. But then the Ukraine crisis—coupled with the crises in the Middle East and the associated danger of domestic terrorism—put a definitive end to the illusion that Europe no longer faced any existential threats. What steps are needed to keep Europe safe? That will be the focus of today's discussion.

The crisis in the Ukraine forces European politicians to settle three questions which, until recently, had seemed to have foregone conclusions. First, it raises anew the question of whether nations like Germany and France are unequivocally part of the Western alliance. This is in part a concern, felt with increasing urgency in Central Europe, about the degree to which they are willing to take on serious security risks in order to defend Tallinn, Vilnius or even Warsaw. But it goes beyond that. In the early phase of the crisis, opinion polls showed that many European think of Russia and “the West” as equally responsible for the crisis; even now, as the crisis heats up, a large minority retains a surprising degree of sympathy for Russia's actions. For the first time since the 1960s, this raises the possibility that some Western European nations might be tempted by their potential as a Central power, slowly inching toward neutrality between Russia and the United States.

Second, the threat posed by a resurgent Russia calls in question whether Europe can persist in its aversion to military spending. During the Cold War, the United States guaranteed the bulk of Europe's defense needs. After the end of the Cold War, it was easy to imagine that Europe's defense might be accomplished on the cheap. But this holiday from history has now come to an end. The willingness of the United States to commit major resources to Europe's defense seems increasingly uncertain. Meanwhile, any attempt to deter Putin's adventurism with limited means looks to be a case of Russian roulette. Does Europe need to rediscover its martial side to stay safe?

Finally, the Ukraine crisis is also challenging some broader social and environmental attitudes. So long as much of Europe remains deeply dependent on Russian gas, many Europeans will remain reluctant to confront Putin. But to gain energy independence, Europe would have to give the go-ahead to projects—from an increased use of atomic energy to fracking—to which most Europeans are viscerally opposed. Does Europe need to sacrifice its environmental priorities to retain its independence?