



مركز أبحاث السياسات الدولية
Center for International Policy Research

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EU - Qatar Policy Dialogue

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The EU-Qatar Policy Dialogue was established to enable intellectual exchange and foster deeper discussion on pertinent issues such as the rivalry between the United States (US) and China and its implications for the European Union (EU) and the GCC, the crisis in Ukraine and Afghanistan. This policy brief was built upon the ideas and perspectives put forth in the first dialogue meeting that was organized by the Center for International Policy Research (CIPR) in a hybrid workshop in Doha on September 27th, 2022 to lay the groundwork for a strategic dialogue, provide a platform to promote collaboration, and develop innovative ideas with a view to comprehending the defining traits of the emerging global order.

Introduction

The world has been faced with multiple crises in recent years, including the conflicts in Ukraine and Afghanistan, uprisings in Iran, US-China rivalry, the energy crisis, irregular migration, and climate change. Considering the centrality of Europe in the global strategic conversation, the depth of Qatar's relations with leading European actors and the former's experience as mediator/facilitator in international crises, it is high time that a more proactive dialogue is initiated between Europe and Qatar. Against this backdrop, on September 27th, 2022, the Center for International Policy Research (CIPR) brought together distinguished scholars, experts, academics and practitioners from Qatar and Europe in a hybrid workshop to lay the groundwork for a strategic dialogue, provide a platform to promote collaboration, and develop innovative ideas with a view to comprehending the defining traits of the emerging order in global affairs.

The EU-Qatar Policy Dialogue aimed to enable intellectual exchange and foster deeper discussion on pertinent issues such as the rivalry between the United States (US) and China and its implications for the European Union (EU) and the GCC, the crisis in Ukraine, and the crisis in Afghanistan and its regional repercussions. This policy brief was built upon

the ideas and perspectives of this dialogue initiative, in order to generate recommendations for policy makers in European capitals and Doha for collaborative action. The following sections have been laid out, based on these workshop panels.

The United States-China Rivalry and Its Implications for the EU and the GCC

There has been an amplified tone in United States-China relations in recent years as a result of various developments including the COVID-19 pandemic, competition in the South China Sea, technological rivalry and trade relations. This rivalry pressures the EU into repositioning itself against the contours of this definitive relationship, which is still punctuated by the fluctuation of the occasional confrontation and cooperation. The emerging geopolitical situation has resulted in further erosion of trust between China and the U.S., while the EU faces ever increasing pressure to choose a side.

Against the background of the declining US commitment to internationalism due to domestic pressures, there are calls for the EU to uphold multilateralism. A renewed transatlantic route is still feasible and has been particularly heartened by Western unity over Ukraine. Yet it is also apparent that NATO's

credibility in conflict resolution has been tarnished in the last decade both in Syria and Crimea, while the hasty US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the uncoordinated announcement of the AUKUS security agreement, further demonstrated the geostrategic priority gap between the US and its European allies. While the United States has introduced coercive diplomacy, it has apparently coordinated with Australia, Canada, and the UK more than with the EU. If coordination with the US agenda on China fails, some claim the EU may pursue a semi-pivot to China, which would initially amount to opting for neutrality and prioritizing EU interests in the US-China rivalry and seeking further economic cooperation with China.

While the lack of a hegemonic leadership during the pandemic raised expectations of China playing a more central role as the provider of the conditions for global public health, China failed to meet these expectations, since it lacked the necessary capacity. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic ramifications, epitomized by global supply chain problems, already triggered a rethinking of EU policies towards China, not least the economic dependence on the latter. One thing is for sure, that the EU needs to approach the challenges more strategically than before. Moreover, promoting multilateralism and improving the structures of international institutions have come to the fore as key for coping with the emerging global challenges.

The Ukraine Crisis

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has posed a challenge to European security unprecedented in recent history. There have been concrete changes in the EU's policy response, which has been reflected in major decisions on security,

defense, finance, trade, energy, and EU enlargement following the Ukraine crisis. This situation is likely to shape the EU's external actions, bringing new issues to the agenda of EU governance and the policy priorities of the member states.

The EU member states have provided military aid to Ukraine, to halt Russia's possible march westwards in line with the so called 'Putin Doctrine', and introduced ever growing international sanctions against Russia, even breaking barriers at the expense of inflicting self-harm on their national economies. The initiative to include Finland and Sweden in NATO is an extension of this fear, as these are states that have long borders with Russia and larger self-defense capacities than the Baltic states. Meanwhile the EU member states have also actively supported NATO's robust response to the crisis in Ukraine. This is indeed a show of a previously unseen ability to adapt to a new geopolitical situation, which will necessitate a thorough examination.

In the energy sector, the EU is caught between the energy security agenda and energy transition debates, as well as the need to reconcile green priorities and energy prices. While energy security had been on the agenda in the second half of the 2010s, it largely disappeared until recently. The war in Ukraine has heightened debates regarding the EU's interdependence, in terms of energy, defense (and intelligence), and economic model (based on growth and climate change), and thus sparked debates about European autonomy, which is not synonymous with protectionism. As such, the EU needs to foster relations with alternative partners such as Qatar. As also highlighted during the workshop, the EU's reliance on Russian gas has been significantly questioned, since the latter has been weaponizing it.

On the defense front, NATO has been

revitalized because of the Ukraine-Russia war, and European defense autonomy has been called into question. The US bears most of the burden of the EU's defense requirements. If Trump or a Trump-like candidate is re-elected in 2024, the United States may withdraw from this role, which places a burden on its taxpayers. Europe has been overly reliant on the United States for this. Unless a budget is allocated for defense costs, the EU will be content to have the US remain in Europe, and thus the unpredictability of US policy will continue to haunt them. The EU prefers the US to provide strategic capability and autonomy, without having to pay for it.

China comes on stage as part of the NATO security equation as well, as it has been militarizing the South China Sea. In this sense, European autonomy, as a military power would gain even more urgency. Issues such as the European Defense Fund, a permanently structured cooperation and a military version of the Schengen Convention need to be further discussed. The EU also needs to invest in maritime security. There is, however, the possibility that the EU may once again be trapped in the indecisiveness of the individual governments and fail to come up with collaborative action. As such, the lack of voting by majority within NATO may also need to be questioned.

Afghanistan, its Neighbors and Beyond

The EU has been an active player in Afghanistan since the foundational Bonn Agreement in 2001, and supported a new constitutional order based on a secular-centralized state and powerful presidency. The EU has provided more than €4 billion in development aid to Afghanistan in the last two decades, which makes Afghanistan the largest beneficiary of EU

development assistance globally. EU states have made significant contributions to state building efforts in Afghanistan such as the German-led police reform, the UK efforts to combat drug trafficking, and the Italian-supported judicial reform, on top of ISAF led security building efforts, in which various EU members were actively involved.

In the wake of US withdrawal, the EU has not recognized the Taliban government, but has opted for maintaining transactional engagement, on humanitarian grounds, among others. Given the current circumstances, there is a need for all countries in the region to put pressure on the Taliban. Qatar has been developing relations and coordinating with the Taliban. While the Taliban is suspicious of actors such as Pakistan and Tajikistan, it has better relations with Qatar. In a similar vein, Turkey has played an active role in Afghanistan both in terms of mediating the latter's relations with the West and delivering aid and investments. It is important to underline the fact that Qatar and Turkey could be valuable partners for Europe in its engagement with the Taliban.

A renewed tide of refugee flows and the revival of the ISIS threat (ISIS-K) are seen as major security concerns, which may be aggravated if the humanitarian conditions further deteriorate. Furthermore, issues such as migration, women's rights, human rights, and education come to the fore as major problems that have regional repercussions. As such, Afghanistan is not only a bilateral issue for the EU, but also entails regional and global engagement to achieve policy goals. Therefore, the EU needs to rethink cooperation with Afghanistan's neighbors, in particular Pakistan and Iran, to gain a necessary foothold on the ground. Given its international image and experience as a mediator, Qatar is in a favorable position to facilitate dialogue between the EU,

but also entails regional and global engagement to achieve policy goals. Therefore, the EU needs to rethink cooperation with Afghanistan's neighbors, in particular Pakistan and Iran, to gain a necessary foothold on the ground. Given its international image and experience as a mediator, Qatar is in a favorable position to facilitate dialogue between the EU, Afghanistan and regional actors, which could also be integrated into the subsequent agendas of the EU-Qatar Policy Dialogue. As also indicated during the workshop, states should take agency regarding the problems emerging in their regions, rather than being dependent on the great powers for resolving conflicts. In this view, many conflicts around the world are indeed driven by the great powers themselves. There is room for collaboration between the EU and Qatar to navigate the crises and create mechanisms for their resolution. So far, the U.S. has mismanaged withdrawal from Afghanistan, which resulted in serious rifts in transatlantic diplomacy. Brussels also has a new geopolitical agenda, paying regenerated Russian, Chinese and ongoing Indian attention to Afghanistan.

Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations were made during the workshop.

Recommendations for the EU

I. Strengthening relations with the Gulf and the Middle East:

- The EU needs to understand that Ukraine is not at the center of debate in the Middle East. Different crises in the global south did not elicit the same reaction. It should recognize that this is not everyone else's war.

- Interaction with the Middle East can take various forms, such as energy transition.

II. Becoming a valuable ally with stronger and autonomous security/ defense structure:

- The EU should strengthen its commitment to crisis management response.
- The EU should have a separate EU command for special missions and should take responsibility for its own backyard. There needs to be a division of labor between NATO and the EU.
- The EU should commit and contribute more to NATO, and not expect so much from the US, which is also busy with its own quagmire with China. As such, there may also be a need for the US to push the EU into having more autonomy.

III. Obtaining Political Cohesion (Political Project)

- There needs to be more political cohesion within the EU and NATO, to put critical decisions into action. A variety of structural changes in how decisions are made within NATO and the EU are possible. For example, key defense decisions should be taken by majority vote.

IV. Advocating a Rules-Based World Order

- While China desires an alternative world order, Russia wants chaos and anarchy. Agreements (such as the grain agreement) can be easily violated by Russia. The breaking of rules and agreements by states should be prevented.

V. Increasing the number of alternative suppliers to bypass dependency on Russia.

Recommendations for Qatar

I. Qatar should play a more active mediation/facilitation role in cases such as hostage crises, prisoner swaps, and others. It could also be utilized as a safe and neutral venue for peace talks.

II. Qatar should take an active role in countering information warfare, since the amount of propaganda and misinformation targeting Qatar is huge.

III. Qatar could play an active role in the process of post-war reconstruction in Ukraine, which could also offer the potential for long-term cooperation.

Recommendations on the EU-Qatar Policy Dialogue: More engagement

I. Specific dialogue between the EU, Ukraine and Qatar on specific issues could be established with Ukrainian networks, think-tanks, and policy circles. These meetings can be based in Poland as a safe space for such engagements and conversations.

II. Track II diplomacy on EU-Gulf Studies on Ukraine/Russia, Iran, China, and Afghanistan should be established and promoted.

III. Topics of common interest such as resilience, energy and sustainability/climate change could be further elaborated in the dialogue meetings.

IV. In addition to the current topics, a Task Force of experts could be established for potential future crises.

V. China, and specifically the competition between China and the USA and its

consequences could be further discussed.

VI. Youth could be a common theme for future activities.



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About Center for International Policy Research

Center for International Policy Research (CIPR) is a research center with focus on economic, political, energy and security issues in the GCC region. Based in Doha, CIPR specializes in political risk analysis, government and corporate advisory, conflict advisory, track II diplomacy, humanitarian/development advisory, and event management in the GCC region and beyond. The CIPR aims at becoming a primary research and debate platform in the region with relevant publications, events, projects and media productions to nurture a comprehensive understanding of the intertwined affairs of this geography. With an inclusive, scholarly and innovative approach, the CIPR presents a platform where diverse voices from academia, business and policy world from both the region and the nation's capital interact to produce distinct ideas and insights to the outstanding issues of the region.

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