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Speaker: Nathalie Tocci, Istituto Affari Internazionali, Italy; Special Adviser to EU HRVP
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Chair: Stephen Szabo, Senior Adjunct Professor of European Studies

European Foreign Policy in an Age of Populism

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The rise of populism represents an existential threat to the European Union according to Nathalie Tocci. As special adviser to Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission, Tocci played an integral role in drafting and implementing the European Global Strategy. Her unique knowledge of European foreign policy in the age of populism offered an insightful discussion in how the European Global Strategy was paradoxically advanced and is currently threatened by the rise of populism.

The European Global Strategy was a doctrine adopted in 2016 to improve the effectiveness of European security and defense strategies. With her intimate knowledge of the strategic planning process, Tocci offered great insight into the purpose of the strategy. Firstly, the strategy represented a unifying factor in response to various sources of European disunity, like the Iraq war back at the time of the European security strategy in 2003. Also in 2015-16, collective strategy making served as an identity building, unity fostering, and difference easing process in the EU. Similar to the European Security Strategy of 2003, implementation was not the main objective of the 2016 Global Strategy. However, significant action, particularly on security and defense, has occurred. Important steps on military planning and the national defense cooperation (CARD) have created mechanisms for members to share information and implement strategies together. Furthermore, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and European defense fund have each entered pilot phases. These actions, and the European Global Strategy itself, represent important steps to building a stronger Europe, according to Tocci.

Traditionally, security and defense are the most difficult areas of European cooperation, given that security heeds heavily to national jealousy. So why have these significant actions been possible? Though paradoxical, Tocci cites the rise of populism as an important factor. In 2014 when the committee began drafting the Global Strategy, global populism was mounting but it was still believed that populist candidates couldn't win elections. Thus, the election of Donald Trump in the United States represented a watershed moment, sending the strong message that it was time for the EU get serious about security. BREXIT also represented an important factor in changing the perception of European Defense. Lastly, the rise of non-liberal powers presents transnational threats to European security. In the globalized age, size matters. The EU collectively represents the fourth largest global power, but this ranking is contingent upon unity. In the age of populism, recognition of the importance of size and unity is growing among

Europeans. Tocci believes there is a growing consensus that even if European countries don't like each other, they need each other. Though BREXIT, Trump, and the rise of non-liberal powers helped advance the European Global Strategy, these factors remain a threat.

While the rise of populism helped advance the Global Strategy, it also represents an existential threat to the European Union. Tocci predicts the future will not be liberal in nature. This has serious consequences for Europe because while nation states can survive nationalism, the EU cannot. Given Trump's attack on the liberal order and the US's inability and reluctance to maintain the liberal system, the future of multilateralism is also in question. This is apparent in the current fight over the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) – the EU is not only fighting for nonproliferation and security within the Middle East, but for the broader goal of multilateralism. This is vital not only within the EU, but also within the global system. Though the rise of populism and emergent non-liberal order represent existential threats to the EU and broader goals of multilateralism, Tocci predicts through solidarity and necessity, the EU will prevail.