Defending The Front Line

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Interviews

The chair of parliament's SEDE committee Anna Elżbieta Fotyga discusses the threats Europe faces, cooperation with Nato, fake news, AI weapons and UK defence relations post Brexit.

In your time as Sede committee chair, how has the security and defence challenges facing Europe changed?

In the last five years, history came back to Europe. With the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, we have witnessed changes of borders by force. Moreover, after the war in Georgia in 2008 we have seen what the future for Crimea could look like. We cannot adopt a 'business as usual' policy without addressing this as we continue to see how the challenges are becoming more complex and intertwined. Advancing technologies, failing states and aggressive actors are change our landscape dramatically. I had the honour to lead missions to places such as Mali, DRC, Japan, Georgia and Ukraine and have seen how contagious conflict and instability can become. From the Donbass to Damascus, we have seen an explosion of tensions play out in real time, forcing SEDE to diversify its focus from issues such as tensions in the South China Sea, terrorism within member states, to an

upsurge of refugees fleeing Africa and the MENA region. Most of all, we have seen the adversaries against democracy become emboldened, increasing e orts to undermine both our institutions and the transatlantic alliance.

Do you believe the EU is finally recognising the importance of security and defence as a major policy issue, or do actions and investment need to match the rhetoric?

The institutions and the people we represent are more aware than ever, motivating all EU and Nato members to increase their capabilities to defend. This is why we have seen the deployment of four Nato-led battalions to Poland and the Baltic States, an increase in joint trainings and exercises both within and between the EU and Nato, increased e orts to ensure military mobility across Europe, the emergence of PESCO and an enhanced scope for CSDP missions and operations to bolster Allies and deescalate conflicts abroad. Together with our transatlantic partners, we have seen an increase of over €77 billion in defence spending, added 1,200 personnel to the Nato Command Structure, added capacity for training and supported local security forces. There has also been an unprecedented increase in cyber defence. It's an iterative process, with more to do, but actions and investments are going in the right direction.

> "We have seen the adversaries against democracy become emboldened, increasing e-fforts to undermine both our institutions and the transatlantic alliance"

Poland is on the front line against an increasingly aggressive Russia; are other member states recognising the danger, and what kind of support should Poland and central Europe receive?

Poland, and the entire Central and Eastern Europe region, fully understand the depth and breadth of Russian aggression. This has let support those that are most at risk as well as advising on how best to address their societal vulnerabilities. Equally important is to ensure that our neighbours that aspire to EU and Nato membership are free to decide their futures without becoming victims of Russian aggression. The most important tools in our toolbox here are solidarity and resilience. If Russia believes it can divide us, it will only increase its aggression. However, the best way to prevent threats is to ensure you are not vulnerable to them in the first place. Our awareness, trainings and capabilities will be key. Member states throughout the EU and Nato recognise this and understand that supporting to frontline states is essential. Initiatives such as Nato's Enhanced Forward Presence in Poland and the Baltic States, the US's European Deterrence Initiative and the development of Nato's maritime and air presence in the Black Sea Region via Romania and Bulgaria have been instrumental in sending a clear message that the territorial kleptocracy of the Kremlin will not be tolerated. crisis. We should remember that, even in Nato, its strength comes from its members.

Poland is one of the few Nato members that spends the agreed two percent of GDP on defence; does president Donald Trump have a point that Europe relies too much on the us?

The US concerns in this area date back to the 1990s and we must accept that some European nations have relied too heavily on US support. The major change has been the expansion of the threat environment. This is why, following the 2016 Nato Summit, we saw a major increase defence spending. Europe and Canada have seen an increase of 3.8 percent in total defence spending since 2014. At the Warsaw Summit, Poland was one of only five nations meeting the two-percent rule. Currently, eight allies now meet this, with more passing the threshold each year. We are on track to meet the goal of having all 29 Allies meet the two percent threshold by 2024. However, what is more

important than jhow much we spend is what we spend it on. This is why many nations still working towards two percent line still provide major contributions to Europe's security in terms of capabilities, troops, technologies and expertise. In the era of the new technological revolution we cannot rely on hangover equipment from the Cold War; security requires investment.

"As some Member States push the EU to increase its military role, it must be complementary and avoid duplication"

You recently hosted an event on propaganda, disinformation and election hacking. How big a danger is this to the stability of the EU, and what should be done to counter this threat?

Simply put, disinformation kills. This is increasingly clear as we see the extent to which disinformation can disrupt and devastate our institutions and societies. Wars can be won not only in militarily but also in perception, through successful communication strategies. However, disinformation is only one of the tools; part of a wider hybrid warfare strategy. This is why I don't like the term "fake news"; it blurs the bigger picture. The best steps all revolve around better education, monitoring and response capabilities. A key area where the EU can make a major difference is by increasing understanding and development of our technological capabilities to expose disinformation. When we look to how new technologies are being used by states like Russia and China, we see how increasingly-capable social media bots, AI-created fake images and video have misled major parts of our populations. In my region, automated social media bots produced roughly 70 percent of all Russian disinformation messaging. The EU institutions have woken to this and have some reasonable proposals; regrettably they continue to hesitate to implement proven solutions such as strengthening Stratcom East Task Force. We should also remember that the most work needs to be at member state level. Here, we have some excellent examples of best practice, once more, mainly in my region. One needs to remember, that even when aware of harmful projects such as Nord Stream-2, there are powers in the EU that do not share our perception of threats and put their own interests to the fore. Undermining solidarity in one area creates a lack of cohesion and unity in others.

What is the impact of AI and autonomous platforms on defence capabilities? Should this technology be banned from military use, or should Europe increase research and investment?

This is an era of decentralised innovation and software-driven warfare, where data access provides a strategic advantage; therefore it is hard to overstate the impact of AI and autonomous platforms on defence capabilities. This technology is already in the military sector in different countries; banning it in Europe won't help. Instead, we should think about general regulations and strengthening cooperation with the US in this domain. Unlike defence industrial bases, which are needed for fighters or tanks, critical AI innovations could come from Europe's smaller nations. By enhancing its research and investment in this area, the EU could play a major role in developing AI capabilities that match Member States' operating concepts. This would bridge technical gaps and modernise defence ministries. Moreover, taking full advantage of AI can prevent escalation of a crisis by combining e orts to determine how, and where, a scenario may develop. New technologies are good for societies and aid decision-makers, so I value the debate and research SEDE has had on AI. Increasing European research and investment, particularly in virtual and augmented-reality visualisation, would play a significant role in providing advanced training and pre-deployment preparation for EU or Nato-led forces during peacetime. With the right policies in place at the EU and member state level, AI can assist us with issues currently plaguing CSDP or Nato operations and provide consistency of execution for our forces.

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Do you worry that Brexit could have a negative impact on EU security and defence? How would you like to see EU-UK defence cooperation develop post Brexit?

I am not worried, as the UK has always been, and will continue to be, a major security provider to the international community. The UK will remain part of Europe, and its troops will be present in my region. Regardless of Brexit, it is in everyone's interest to ensure that defence cooperation not only continues but also expands to ensure seamless cooperation, particularly in cybersecurity, counterterrorism and capacity-building for third countries. When looking to the future, it's important to note that the UK is a UN Security Council Veto Power, a leader in Nato, head of the Commonwealth, a G7 economy, a nuclear power, the sixth-biggest defence spender with one of the most sophisticated and capable armed forces with world-class special forces and intelligence agencies. The future of European, and indeed international, security depends on greater, not less, cooperation with the UK.

Will you be standing again in the European elections, and what will be your key political/policy priorities? Will European security and defence be important?

Politicians should look to the future, however it's too early to make such plans after the elections. I am focused on current tasks and challenges. Security of both eastern and southern EU neighbourhood remains my biggest concern.

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