



Open Strategic Autonomy Seminar

Tuesday, 4 April 2023

Concept Note

Introduction

In late 2022, the Egmont Institute's European Affairs Programme established the Egmont Foresight Network, a growing interdisciplinary community which aims to offer a platform to allow individuals, institutions, and organisations interested in and engaged with issues surrounding strategic foresight to communicate and to exchange views concerning policy related matters of shared interest. Against the backdrop of the nascent Egmont Foresight Network, the Egmont Institute is keeping up to date with the way in which foresight capabilities are currently being institutionalised and integrated into the operational practices of (public-sector) actors in Belgium, as well as in the wider European Union and its institutions.

Purpose of the Seminar

Within the above-outlined context, the Egmont Institute will host seminars which will provide participants with an opportunity to discuss the applicability of strategic foresight in relation to specific (economic) policy domains in greater detail. The first such upcoming seminar will address the issue of open strategic autonomy.

International openness constitutes one pillar of the European Union's approach to the world and is deemed to be central to the continued success and prosperity of the EU. An open international economy has contributed to an overall increase of the world's GDP, reducing poverty and inequality. Yet, the EU's dedication to maintaining such openness has created numerous dependencies, and, by extension, multiplied vulnerabilities, which all have the potential to negatively impact European citizens' wellbeing, especially in the face of geopolitical confrontation and increased competition for technologies and raw materials. To address the impact of these dependencies and vulnerabilities on Europeans' lives, the European Commission has devised the concept of "Open Strategic Autonomy" (OSA).

To date, the Commission's understanding of what open strategic autonomy should entail appears to have remained relatively abstract, as has its practical applicability in relation to various key domains of the European Union's economy.

Understanding the Impact of the EU's Dependencies: An Overview

The dependencies and vulnerabilities of the European Union may have a particularly noticeable impact on four sectors of the European economy—namely, in the areas of energy, food, healthcare, and technology. For each domain, a number of reflective questions can be formulated.

In the **energy** sphere, the EU, as an actor committed to both achieving carbon neutrality and to creating a mostly independent energy system by circa 2050, is encouraging the use of renewable energy resources, as well as the development of alternative fuels. The EU simultaneously promotes increased energy efficiency while safeguarding the continued access to the critical raw materials required for achieving the Union's envisioned green transition.

- How can the EU and its Member States ensure that the increased extraction of raw materials causes no environmental harm and contributes to social development?
- Which policy instruments does the EU have at its disposal to improve the security of raw materials supply? And how do the capabilities of the EU manage the security of raw materials supply compared to other major international players such as China and the US?
- To what degree are the European Union and its Member States currently able to achieve strategic autonomy against the backdrop of the ongoing energy transition?

In the **area of food and food security**, Europe's agri-food system is confronted with several challenges, aiming in particular at reconciling the supply of affordable and sustainable food with the demands of the green transition and the climate agenda. Moreover, the EU must address its dependencies on basic foodstuffs and materials in the face of major crises and geopolitical changes. In addition, the EU should also consider the way in which food shortages, compounded by the effects of severe climatological changes, can be a catalyst for military conflicts and humanitarian crises. Meeting these challenges requires synergy between agricultural, environmental and trade policies.

- How should the EU and Member States improve the food systems, as well as the sustainable food and nutrition security in the EU and globally?
- How can we prepare better for potential scarcities? How does the Union's capacity to address shocks to its food supply compare to those of other international players?
- What emerging technologies can help make the European food and nutrition security more competitive and resilient?

In the field of **health**, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted significant dependencies--30 percent of medical devices and consumables, together with 80 percent of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) used in Europe, originate from beyond the EU. Recognising these vulnerabilities, the European Commission, amongst other initiatives, has created HERA (European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority) as an entity tasked with monitoring medical supply chains and associated risks, while the Council of the EU is currently encouraging the development of new medicines and medical treatments in Europe.

- How can we strengthen global health security, to better prevent future pandemics and other threats, and to increase resilience? How can the new EU Global Health Strategy help mitigate the risk of a new pandemic?
- The 2020 Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe called for 'boosting the sector's global competitiveness', developing EU open strategic autonomy and ensuring robust supply chains for European needs. Considering that people in Europe and beyond depend on pharmaceuticals produced in the EU, what concrete steps should the EU take to engage with reliable trade partners in order to strengthen supply chains and support EU autonomy, including increased production capacity?

In the domain of digital technology, the EU heavily depends on actors, including private-sector actors and government regulators, for most of the vital technologies used across the Union daily--this includes those technologies upon which Europe's financial professionals and political actors rely.

- How can the EU and Member States achieve digital strategic autonomy?
- How far have we come in achieving the targets of the Digital Compass for 2030? Which extra steps could the Commission and/or Member States take?
- What are the challenges to the EU's response to technology and digital sovereignty?