

Straw poll of 70 attendees at Wilton Park conference on European Security in 2020

Alex Evans, February 2008

Questions asked

1. If you could assemble a group of world leaders of your choice, and get them to make a deal on one issue, what would that issue be?
2. Which countries / blocs (min. 2, max. 20) would be needed in order to forge that deal?
3. Which international institution or forum could best host such a negotiation? If none, which is currently closest to what we would need?
4. Which country or region will be Europe's single most important bilateral relationship in 2020?
5. What will be the three most important subjects of discussion in that relationship?
6. What does that country / region want from us?
7. What will be Europe's three biggest vulnerabilities in 2020?
8. What are the 3 key steps Europe could take now to reduce those vulnerabilities?
9. If the biggest unexpected shocks of the last 20 years were (for example) the fall of the Iron Curtain or 9/11, what do you imagine might be the biggest in the *next* 20?

Key findings

- Participants overwhelmingly saw climate change as the most important issue for a global deal (34% of responses, compared to 13% for the next highest priority). Surprisingly, though, the *impacts* of climate change did not figure heavily in perceptions of key European vulnerabilities: only 3% of votes cast were for climate impacts, placing the issue outside of the top ten vulnerabilities.
- In terms of the countries needed to make the key global deal, the US and China shared joint first place, with 20 votes each out of a total of 131 (participants were allowed to name up to 20 countries or blocs). The EU itself was next, with 19 votes, followed by a fairly tight cluster of India, Russia and Brazil all of which scored more than 10 votes.

After these countries, there was a significant drop-off; Japan, the next country to figure on the list, scored only 4 votes.

- There was also an overwhelming consensus on the UN as the key forum for negotiating the global deal perceived to be most important: it scored 57% of the votes, though many of those included the caveat “with significant reform”. The G8 was next, with 21%; other forums cited tended to be issue specific, e.g. the NPT or UNFCCC.
- Over 50% of participants saw the US remaining firmly in the top spot as Europe’s key bilateral partner in 2020. Interestingly, Russia – rather than China – came second, by a decisive margin: 22% voted for Russia as opposed to only 10% for China, although a further 8% of participants also voted for “Asia” as the key bilateral relationship.
- Which issues would matter in the key bilateral relationship? Trade and economic relations came out decisively in front, with 22% of votes – followed by energy (16%), security / defence (13%), resource security (11%), climate change (8%) and crisis management / peacekeeping (7%).
- By and large, perceptions of what Europe’s key partner would want from the EU were as could be expected: trade and market access and “a trusted partner” were the two most popular answers. Participants who cited Russia as Europe’s key partner tended to cite a desire for respect and geopolitical status as a particular consideration for Russia; this issue did not arise for any other countries cited as Europe’s key relationship. Where the US was cited, a willingness to use force or shoulder international responsibilities also scored significantly.
- One of the surprises in the poll was the great diversity of responses on Europe’s key vulnerabilities in 2020. Energy dependency was the clear front runner – 17% of votes cast compared to 11% for immigration, the second highest – but the main story here was the ‘long tail’ of vulnerabilities identified by just one or two people, leading to 27 separate vulnerabilities being cited in total. One high scorer largely unaddressed by the conference so far is demographic issues in Europe, especially its ageing population: this was the third highest scoring issue, with 9% of votes.
- Participants felt that the most important thing Europe could do to reduce its vulnerabilities was to invest in energy efficiency or alternative energy (14%). Immigration accounted for both the second and third highest scorers, but with an interesting nuance: better integration of immigrants came second (10%), while limiting immigration came third (8%). Investing in stability in Europe’s near neighbourhood also scored highly.
- Finally, there was, predictably, a great range of ideas for unexpected wild card events between now and 2020. The most widely predicted shock was a nuclear exchange between states, followed by two different scenarios of Chinese collapse. The full list is reproduced at the end of this note. Overall, participants proved rather pessimistic: 88% of ideas were gloomy rather than upbeat. Two participants imagined a democratic China, however – and one cheery colleague wondered whether we might witness the outbreak of world peace.

Possible wild cards between now and 2020

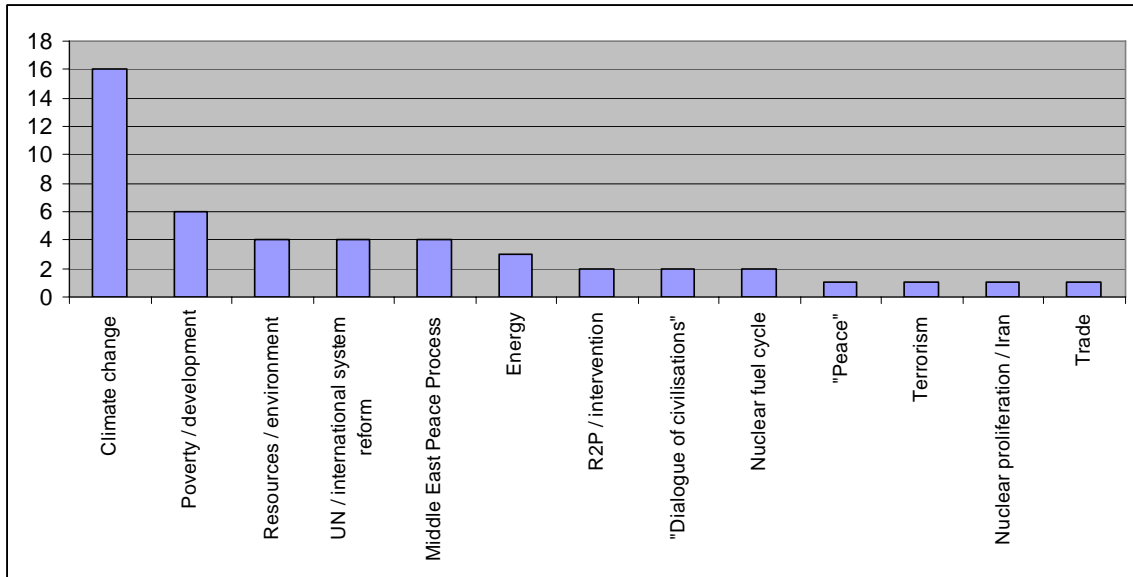
Pessimists

Inter-state nuclear exchange	6
China implodes, can't control territory	5
China economy collapses	5
End of close transatlantic relationship / NATO collapses	4
Megaterrorism (e.g. involving WMD)	4
Global financial meltdown	4
Russia implodes	2
China becomes more aggressive / China invades Taiwan	2
Europe suffers extended energy interruption	1
Russia slides into dictatorship	1
Iran acquires nuclear bomb	1
Europe suffers massive natural disasters	1
Total failure of international system	1
A whole country disappears beneath sea due to climate change	1
China invades Taiwan	1
Tokyo earthquake	1
Pakistan implodes	1
Massive global pandemic	1
Nuclear accident in EU	1
War in Europe	1
Russia invades a neighbour	1
Major European electricity infrastructure crash	1

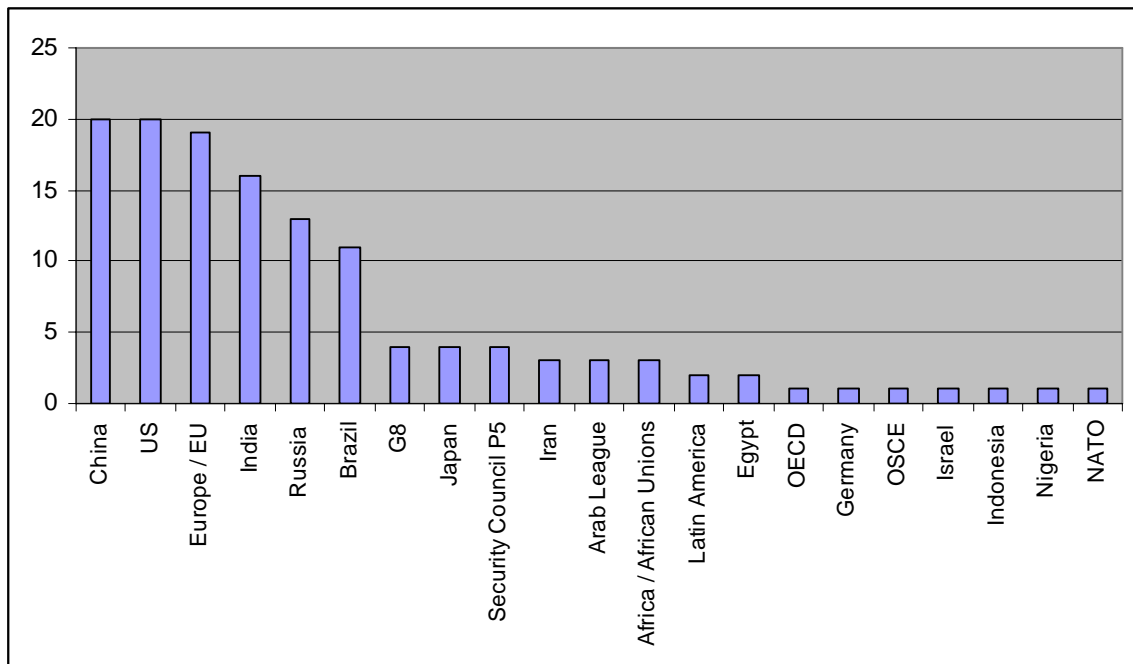
Optimists

China becomes a democracy	2
World peace breaks out	1
Regime change in North Korea	1
Climate change proves much less serious than feared	1
Oil supplies rise dramatically	1

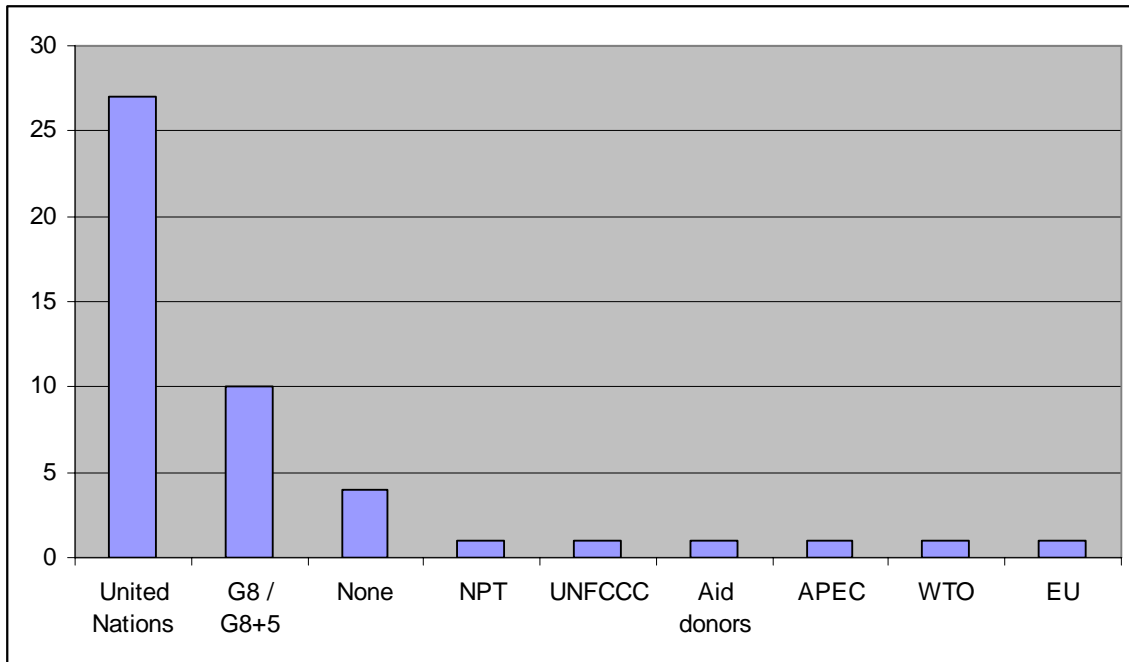
Most important issue for a global deal



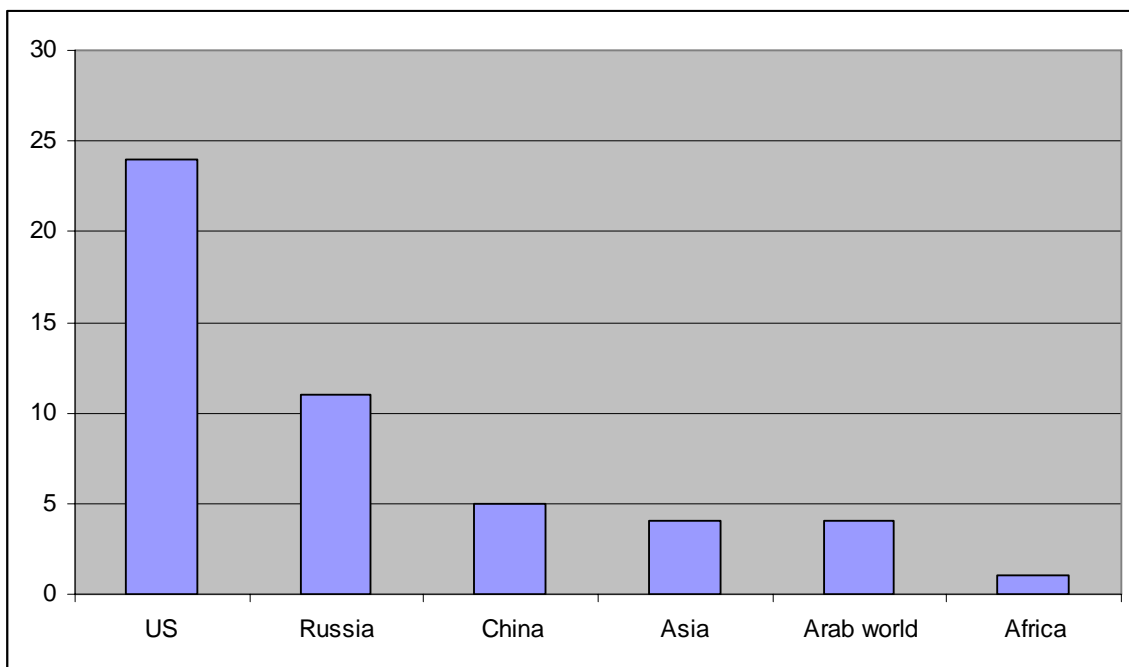
Countries / blocs needed to forge the key global deal



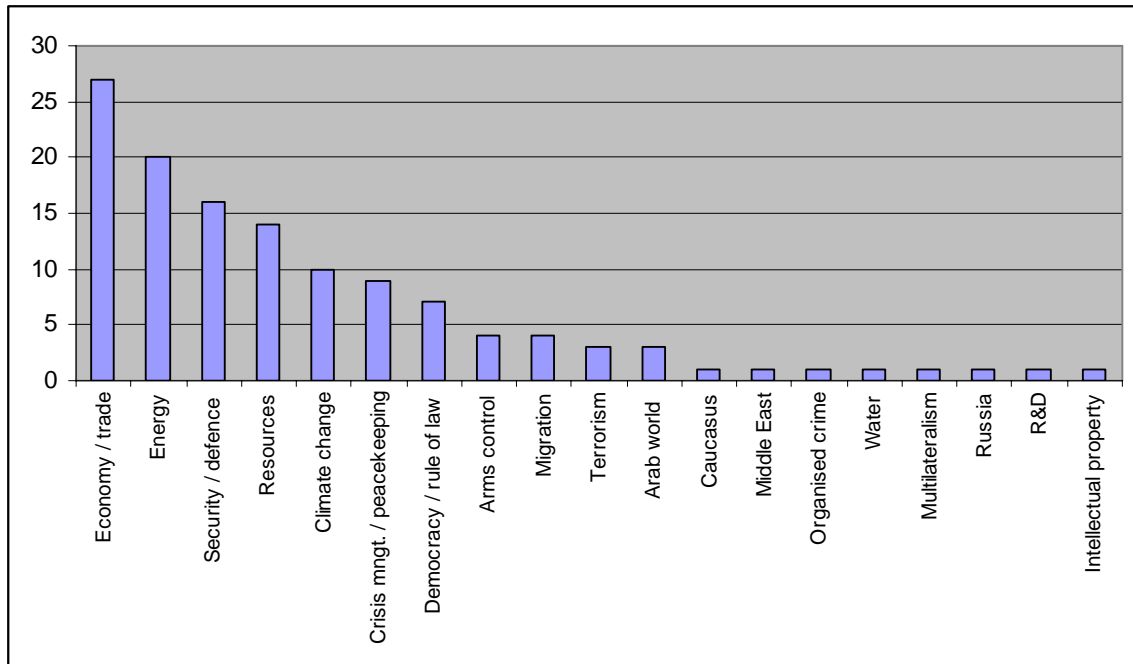
Best forum for negotiating the key global deal



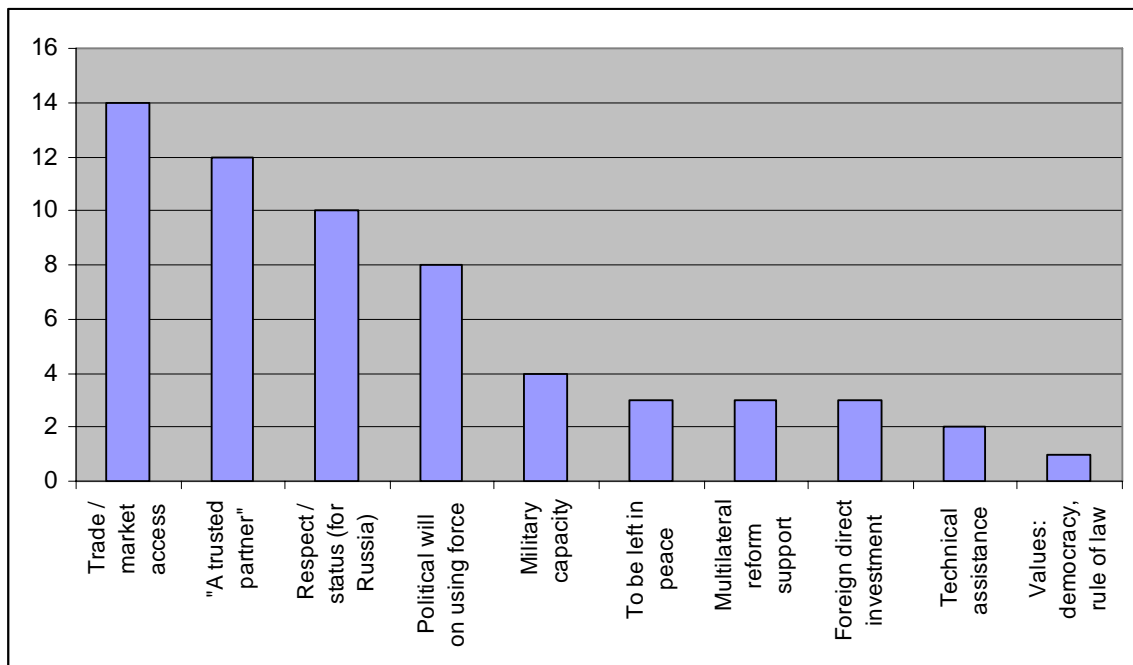
Europe's most important bilateral relationship in 2020



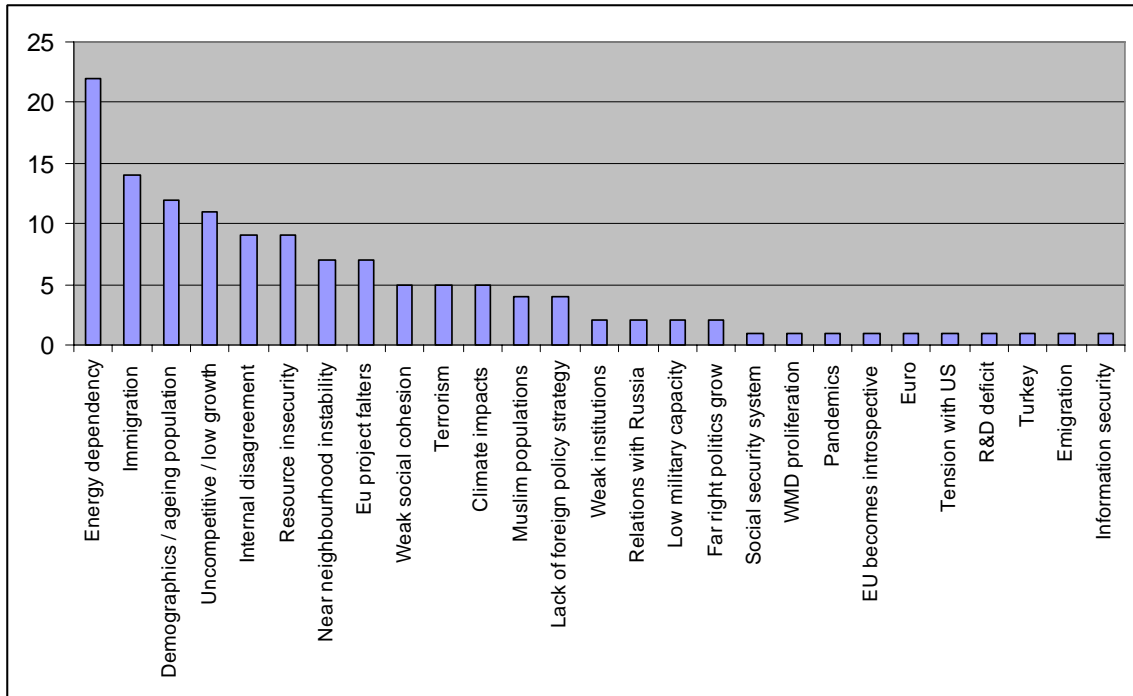
Key topics in Europe's most important bilateral relationship



What the EU's key bilateral partner wants from Europe



The EU's top vulnerabilities in 2020



How Europe can best reduce its key vulnerabilities

