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## Overview – Jean-Louis Bourlanges Conference

17/01/2022

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On January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the President of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the French National Assembly, Jean-Louis Bourlanges, opened the new cycle of conferences of the Contemporary Strategic Issues Chair entitled: "Technological Wars and Political Rivalries" in the Richelieu amphitheatre of the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. Drawing on his previous experience as member of the European Parliament (MEP), President Bourlanges shaped his speech around new security challenges of our time. According to him, it is essential to rebuild collective security by combining three "tools": nationality, alliance systems and multilateralism.

The end of "Neolithic" societies, whereby crises and solutions were naturally national, have led to the establishment of a "general society". Indeed, new global challenges require appropriate responses from States.<sup>1</sup> However, tensions in the international system which until now have been dominated by the Western democratic model, tend to show the opposite. The end of Western hegemony and the extension of the field of struggle are maintaining an increasingly uncertain international system, especially for Europe. Contrarily to what the end of the "Neolithic" era could suggest, President Bourlanges reaffirms the preponderant role of nations in this new world.

Going back to the origins of modern political thought, Jean-Louis Bourlanges recalls the difference between the sovereignty of the people, of the nation and of the state. The "social contract", which originated in France, is said to have erected an outdated boundary which gives prominence to competition between states at the expense of democratic power. The State, as the sole bearer of "competence", has kept its' exclusivity of democratic life, thereby constraining the very purpose of the Enlightenment: unity of mankind. Now, with the end of the "Neolithic" era, these three sovereignties are being abused: the digital revolution is making the architecture of the general will of a people more complex. National sovereignty now takes the form of independence in its refusal to be subdued to an asymmetrical order. Jean-Louis Bourlanges also stresses the necessity to implement relevant intergovernmental bodies to guarantee equality between States. This does not put the sovereignty of the State in peril. Indeed, so long as the State maintains the possibility of abstaining or rejecting certain characteristics of an alliance or of an international organization, its "competence" is guaranteed.

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<sup>1</sup> BADIE Bertrand, *Les puissances mondialisées. Repenser la sécurité internationale*, Paris Odile Jacob, 2021.

However, a nation cannot be thought of without a search for alliances in this "first 21st century".<sup>2</sup> The pursuit of an equilibrium within a system of alliances to resist to all types of pressure and to preserve the independence of one's country was the policy of the non-aligned countries. Besides, the predominance of geopolitics over an ideological consensus and respect for the independence of states is favourable to the development of the States. However, the task of decision makers is complexified by an unstable international system. An exclusive alliance-based system, depending on the circumstances, mostly generate asymmetrical relations and the globalization of risks - the phenomenon of escalation to war - but also leads to the limited nature of their ambitions.

The respect of national interests within a system of alliance, is thus to be the preferred version of a limited multilateralism. As a fine connoisseur of the organization of the European Union, Jean-Louis Bourlanges recommends pursuing the extension of the legal norm on political arbitration to ensure the loyalty of member states, but also to refuse any geographical particularism. The Union should then resolve itself to frustrating arbitrations, even if it means rethinking the European Constitution. Furthermore, he argues against the EU's principle of subsidiarity and for qualified majority decision-making – especially on foreign policy and defence matters – to sharpen the complementarity between member states' governments and the Union.

Lastly, the current situation, added to the attractivity and growth of the Chinese model, compels European governments to rethink their collective security system. The acceptance of the particularity of the Member States, the need to build capacity to defend and affirm European democratic values, and the obligation to clarify the *modus operandi* of the Union by clearly explaining the nature of the pact that unites the Member States, are all essential for this 'metamorphosis'.

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<sup>2</sup> GUEHENNO Jean-Marie, *Le premier XXI<sup>ème</sup> siècle*, Paris, Flammarion, 2021.