

# **Strengthening the EU's Defence Cooperation**

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## **Abstract**

In an expeditiously changing world, security challenges have become more intricate, multifaceted and complex. The 21st century is an epoch of strategic competition and multisided relations. The influence and rate of occurrence of hybrid security threats are constantly rising and deepening. World is in era of transition, characterized by creating new dynamics by emerging players along with significant shift of geopolitical and economic power, and currently, global attention is drawn to the Russian aggression against Ukraine, which is the consequent catalyst for the EU states, obligating them to take more responsibility and improve security and defence. Russia does not use force only to dominate on Ukraine, but this war aims to reverse and strike down western dominance - it is a big threat-economically, militarily, and politically. In an international competition, other powers are challenging the European countries' ability to protect their interests and values that was the motivation for the idea of collective security building called "strategic sovereignty". For this reason, both defence and security fields are essentially important for the European Union. The EU leaders have long been trying to improve common defence

policy - the European Union External Action Service in 2011, and later in 2016, the EU Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker called for a common defence fund, a “European headquarters.” In March 2022, the EU council approved the Strategic Compass. The Compass gives the European Union an ambitious plan of action for strengthening the EU's security and defence policy by 2030 (EU, 2022. French President Emmanuel Macron urged Europe to invest in its own collective security framework in the face of Russian military moves on the bloc's doorstep - "Europe needs to finally build its own collective security framework on our continent." We argue about the prospects of collective security and the fact that it may now be time for the EU member States to take the necessary decisions.

**Key words:** security challenges, hybrid security threats, collective security, strategic sovereignty, defence policy, the Strategic Compass.

### **Introduction**

We, human beings, tend to over-rationalize the past, over-dramatize the present and underestimate the future. Now if you look at the post-cold war era, we will see that in the beginning it was unipolar, which was driven by the undisputed superpower of the world - the United States, and at the same time, it was partially ideology-driven as well as identity-driven. That was the time when Francis Fukuyama, one of the greatest academics and intellectuals, coined the phrase at the end of history - a belief that all 200 nation-states in the world would start transitioning towards the best combination of governance that is liberal democracy, the social market economy, and globalization, and this was a genuine belief. That's why there is increasing acceptance that the European Union is becoming an important factor in foreign and security matters (Smith, 2005). A significant factor in the rising importance of the EU security activities derived from the Russian-Ukrainian war (Michael Merlingen, 2008). Inside the EU, they also have to accept to pay a price to stop this outrageous and unprovoked war: the future of European security and their democracies depends on it. The price to pay is the price of freedom.

The EU's toolkit for maintaining international security and peace includes diplomacy, humanitarian aid, development cooperation, human rights, climate action, economic

support, and trade regulations. These various tools are put together in a certain way to match the unique circumstances of each crisis or emergency. The EU's so-called Integrated Approach, as outlined in the EU Global Strategy, is a customized, multifaceted strategy constantly updated to changing circumstances (European Union, 2016). When it comes to encouraging security and advancing European interests and values, all of these strengths - collectively known as Europe's soft power - are beneficial but Defence is a vital part of the EU's distinctive toolbox and is essential to safeguarding European interests both now and in the future. Because of this, a more stable basis has been created to further progress and reinforce Europe's defence cooperation.

When the UK, France and Benelux signed the Treaty of Brussels in 1948, the concept of a common defence policy for Europe first emerged. In 1948, the EU countries have been trying to improve security and defence, but crucial steps were taken when they were necessary. It was obvious that the EU needed to address its duties in the area of conflict prevention and crisis management after the end of the Cold War and the subsequent wars in the Balkans (Brussels Treaty. Economic, Social and Cultural Collaboration and Collective Self-Defence, 1948). It is essential to acknowledge that the EU has always been trying to enhance defence and security. The Western European Union Council had already approved the conditions for the deployment of military units in 1992, but the "Petersberg Tasks" was now included in the 1999 Treaty of Amsterdam. For the Union to comment on foreign policy issues with "one face and one voice," the position of "High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy" was established (Nicolaidis, 1999).

After the Treaty of Amsterdam, there was another important moment in relations between the countries of the EU. Member States reiterated the Union's readiness to build autonomous action capabilities, supported by effective armed units during the 1999 European Council in Cologne. The "Berlin Plus Agreement," which granted the EU access to NATO resources and capabilities under specific restrictions, was a significant advance. The Lisbon Treaty, which became valid in December 2009 and served as a fundamental factor in the creation of the Common Security and Defence Policy, is another significant treaty (CSDP) when it comes to the EU defence cooperation.

Several years ago, in December 2017, when the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) was established, it has brought defence cooperation between the participating European Union Member States to a different level. To create a more cohesive European capacity landscape, a collaboration between the participating EU Member States will gradually transition from isolated projects to plan and impact-based cooperative activities. It is a framework and systematic procedure for progressively strengthening defence cooperation to deliver the necessary capabilities in order to carry out both the most difficult missions and consequently increase security for the EU residents. There are two other crucial initiatives: the European Defence Fund, which will provide financial support for certain collaborative projects, and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), which will assist Member States to better identify the opportunities for new collaborative initiatives. The concept of a European army is as old as the European Union and the unity of European countries. The idea of developing European defence regularly appears in the discourse of European leaders as a result of increasing security issues either in the international arena or on the internal European political agenda, but the European Union has still been hesitant to make risky international commitments.

According to economists, the war in Ukraine is the third asymmetric shock, experienced by UN in the last two decades after the 2008 financial and economic crisis and the following Eurozone crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. The war in Ukraine is indeed having a much greater impact on neighboring countries due to the influx of refugees and their heavy dependence on Russian gas. With the invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin is forcing the EU to urgently rethink many elements of their internal organization and worldview. They must rise to this challenge to defend their security and democratic values. To handle the wider impact of the war against Ukraine, the EU needs to bolster European economic resilience, end its energy dependence on Russia and further strengthen the European defence.

According to analyses by Eurobarometer, a large percentage of the EU residents desire increased security, stability, and a coordinated EU response towards the existing dangers. The EU citizens expect the EU to gradually reduce its dependence on Russian

energy sources (87%), and they strongly support a common security and defence policy (81%). The survey also confirms the overwhelming support for the EU's response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine (59%). Along with their international partners' expectations that Europe should be able to respond to crises rapidly and effectively, the recently increased degree of desire to cooperate in the domain of defence is a clear answer to this demand by European citizens.

In other words, the European Union must be able to defend its security interests and shoulder its full amount of responsibility as a guarantor of international security. Among the current processes adopting the “Strategic Compass”, which is a 2030 action plan to strengthen the EU's security and defence policy, it also responds to the requirements of the European Union residents. The work on the Strategic Compass began nearly two years ago, but due to the increased dynamics of security problems and the war in Ukraine, the working version of the document was significantly updated, highlighting the European Union's collective military ambitions.

The "Strategic Compass" is an overall assessment of the EU's strategic environment, including threats and challenges. For the first time in the EU history, concrete and practical proposals with a well-defined implementation schedule are documented aiming to strengthen the EU's ability to act decisively in crises as well as to protect both its security and citizens. The Compass encompasses all aspects of security and defence policy and is built on four pillars: act, invest, partner, and secure. When a crisis emerges, the EU should be prepared to respond quickly and forcefully, with partners or alone. The EU will establish a strong EU Rapid Deployment Capacity of up to 5000 troops for different types of crises, will be ready to deploy 200 fully equipped CSDP mission experts within 30 days, including in complex environments, will conduct regular live exercises on land and at sea, and enhance military mobility (<https://www.eeas.europa.eu/> 2022).

A variety of considerations influenced the Member States' decision to cross the Rubicon as well as gave the Union independent military capability. There is a revival of war in Europe, as well as a decreased American readiness to provide security and defence assurances to Europe, which is more essential in geopolitical terms than it was during the Cold War.

Many continental European nations have sought to confirm the EU's role as a global political player. (Michael Merlingen, 2008).

In the new millennium, the EU has gained prominence in security and defence issues. The Member States provided the union with a new institutional framework and major operational capabilities by creating and expanding the ESDP (European Security and Defence Policy). Their goal in promoting international security and stability via preventative action and crisis management in civilian and military operations has been realized. To increase its capacities, the EU had been developing and implementing foreign and security policies.

The debate over European security and the role of the EU, as well as its strategic partners, is raging. The recent NATO summit in Madrid was a success for the Transatlantic Alliance in terms of both strategic unity and concrete decisions. The summit reemphasized NATO's collective defence mission, including plans to strengthen the alliance's presence on the eastern flank as well as to increase the overall number of high-readiness forces. All leaders underlined their determination to support Ukraine in defending itself against the Russian aggression, until full sovereignty is restored.

The debate over the division of geopolitical responsibility and burden between NATO and the EU has a long history (Michael Merlingen, 2008). Since the end of the Cold War, it has been clear that the development of a long-term and effective security and defence relationship between NATO and the EU is as necessary as it is unavoidable. The two organizations are linked in many ways, including strategic vision, a sense of responsibility, membership similarities, and vulnerability to security threats and challenges. Budgetary constraints bind NATO and the EU together; member governments cannot afford to maintain two separate security and defence organizations. It would also be counter-productive (Competition? 2006). However, in terms of practical cooperation, the results are mixed, and the overall result is neither cooperation nor competition, but dysfunction.

Both defence and security policy are two of the most important aspects of sovereignty, and this notion has been perceived for centuries. The initial reluctance of the EU states to grant the EU such a powerful tool is surprising. We believe it is worthwhile to

analyze the possibility of establishing a unified European army from today's perspective. **The** EU is rising as a significant security and defence actor. Russia's invasion of Ukraine with its widely spread devastation, tens of thousands of deaths, millions of refugees, possible war crimes, and narrowly avoided nuclear disaster is forcing European nations to rethink how to maintain their collective security. This makes the concept of European "strategic autonomy" and collective defence as important as it has never been since it refers to the EU's increased ability to operate independently and with preferred partners on defence and security issues. Between February and April, the European Council approved successive assistance measures under the European Peace Facility totaling €1.5 billion. The ability of the EU's 27 members to quickly agree on these key decisions demonstrates that when there is a shared understanding of the threat, the concept of European defence becomes concrete and effective (**Pezard, 2022**).

This situation creates all of the necessary conditions and the greatest environment for the formation of a European army. In the context of establishing a unified European army, in addition to the organizational and logistical difficulties that can be overcome in the future, it is vital to emphasize the political level, because it determines the goals and circumstances of using the army as a policy tool. In 2017, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said: "We, Europeans, truly have to take our fate into our own hands." It is worth noting that the statements of European leaders, particularly of Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel, are broad in scope. More specificity is required to gain support for the European army. In order to implement the idea we need to define the roles of the European army, the timeline, and other requirements that are necessary before the proposal can be put into practice. To deal with the challenges of today and the future, it is essential to define the political decision-making processes for the use of military force as well as to achieve agreement on the army's mission and functions. Furthermore, an agreement is required on whether a unified European military force will be used only in response to an attack on an EU Member State or preventive measures will be permitted as well. All of these are political questions, and considering the answers must necessarily precede the formation of the army

because the possible and potential missions of the army must be taken into account during the organizational formation.

In the current geopolitical situation, the concept of a European army would be impractical, since Europeans would struggle to agree on a unified military leadership - especially France, not Germany, which is a nuclear power. France, unlike Germany, is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. Furthermore, because there is no "European country," the choice to send soldiers, who risk their lives is only feasible within the framework of a national decision. The EU and NATO have 27 and 30 member nations, respectively, of whom 21 are members of both, making the concept of an EU army extremely unrealistic. Parallel effort is required to bring together conflicting perspectives on geopolitical diagnosis, security perceptions, and identification of common interests in order to move on the road of tighter military cooperation. This would ultimately pave the door for a more in-depth discussion of European goals.

### **Conclusion**

The challenge now is to improve the EU's strategic alliance with NATO and show how the EU can assume greater responsibility for its security. It is obvious that they are two different sides of the same coin, and three significant characteristics are appearing as we move forward:

1. They necessitate more deployable and interoperable troops capable of coping with a diverse set of threats and dangers. This means that Europeans should spend more on defence and, more crucially, spend better as a group. The EU Member States' statement that they will raise defence expenditure by around €200 billion is highly positive. However, there is a risk that much of the increased expenditure may be lost, unless the share spent on cooperative development and procurement grows. The defence investment gap study delivered to the EU leaders in May indicates both the magnitude of the problem and what may be done, as the Commission and the European Defence Agency aiding Member States are moving forward with joint procurement. One important example is the rebuilding of stocks depleted by the shipment of military equipment to Ukraine. Acquiring capabilities



collaboratively not only benefits the EU's security and defence agenda, but it is also essential for NATO Allies to secure Europe from Russian threats.

2. Second, demonstrating a desire to employ the essential capabilities and serve as a security provider is just as vital as gaining them. Over the previous two decades, the EU has gathered substantial expertise in crisis management activities. What has begun in the Balkans has developed into a potent instrument, with the EU today conducting 18 missions and operations - 11 civilian and 7 militaries across three continents.

3. This gets us to the third factor: the EU's ability to adapt and learn from their mistakes. The velocity of change in the world frequently outpaces our ability to keep up. They must improve their agility and ability to apply lessons learned, including in the field of CSDP. The Strategic Compass is vitally pertinent to this debate, and it contains actual ideas as well as a timeframe enhancing their combined influence.

The overall point is simple: in a dangerous world, Europeans must assume their strategic responsibility, both within the EU and NATO and give themselves the means and agility to do so (BORREL n.d.).

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