



50/2024

10/07/2024

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**Reflections on European defense and its identities. NATO and EU, competition or cooperation?**

## *Reflections on European defense and its identities. NATO and EU, competition or cooperation?*

### *Abstract:*

The changing geopolitical landscape, which in just a few years is shifting from a unipolar world to a return to great power competition, of which Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a clear example, is pushing defence issues to the top of the Brussels agenda.

For the past 75 years, Europe has approached security and defence in the NATO framework from a realist and pragmatic perspective, to which it has added over the past 25 years a more constructivist vision, more aligned with the post-modern identity of the European Union. While NATO has normally focused on deterrence and defence tasks, after the fall of the USSR, during the years of the so-called "unipolar moment" of US global hegemony, it oriented its activities towards crisis management, where it has sometimes competed with the EU's recently born CSDP, which has focused almost exclusively on these tasks, without addressing defence, essentially due to a lack of consensus among EU member states and its lack of military capability.

The war in Ukraine has brought NATO back to its tasks of deterrence and defence, and the EU to rethink the need to move away from its expectations of 'strategic autonomy' in defence, and actively contribute to developing a strong 'European dimension' to defence within the Alliance.

### *Keywords:*

*European Union (EU), NATO, defence, identity, cooperation, competition, realism, postmodernism, constructivism, narrative.*

**\*NOTE:** The ideas contained in the **Analysis Papers** are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defence.

## Reflexiones sobre la defensa europea y sus identidades. OTAN y UE, ¿competición o cooperación?

### Resumen:

El cambio de escenario geopolítico, donde en pocos años se está pasando de un mundo unipolar a una vuelta a la competición entre grandes potencias, donde la invasión rusa de Ucrania es una clara muestra, está provocando que los asuntos de defensa se sitúen como prioritarios en la agenda de Bruselas.

Durante los últimos 75 años, Europa ha abordado la seguridad y defensa en el marco OTAN desde una perspectiva realista y pragmática, a la que ha sumado desde hace 25 años una visión más constructivista, más alineada con la identidad posmoderna de la Unión Europea. Si bien la OTAN se ha centrado normalmente en tareas de disuasión y defensa, tras la caída de la URSS, durante los años del llamado «momento unipolar», de hegemonía global de EE. UU., orientó sus actividades a la gestión de crisis, donde en ocasiones ha competido con la recién nacida PCSD de la UE, que se ha centrado de forma casi exclusiva en estas tareas, sin abordar la defensa, en esencia por falta de consenso entre los Estados miembro de la Unión y por su falta de capacidad militar.

La guerra de Ucrania ha devuelto a la OTAN a sus tareas de disuasión y defensa, y a la UE a replantearse la necesidad de apartar sus expectativas de «autonomía estratégica» en defensa, y contribuir activamente a desarrollar una sólida «dimensión europea» de la defensa en el seno de la Alianza.

### Palabras clave:

Unión Europea (UE), OTAN, defensa, identidad, cooperación, competición, realismo, posmodernismo, constructivismo, narrativa.

### How to cite this document:

ROMERO JUNQUERA, Abel. *Reflections on European defence and its identities: NATO and EU, competition or cooperation?* IEEE Analysis Paper 50/2024.  
[https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analisis/2024/DIEEEA50\\_2024\\_ABEROM\\_OTAN-UE\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2024/DIEEEA50_2024_ABEROM_OTAN-UE_ENG.pdf) and/or [link bie](#)<sup>3</sup> (consulted day/month/year)

## Introduction

After almost a quarter of a century without high-intensity conflict on the continent, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has brought war back to the heart of Europe. This situation, to some extent predictable after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, has turned the geopolitical situation in Europe on its head, creating an intense sense of concern and unease, particularly in the European Union (EU).

Security and defence have once again become a priority in the Old Continent, and both NATO and the European Union, in its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) dimension, are increasingly prominent on the agendas of European leaders. Their statements have intensified in recent years, including those of Angela Merkel in the European Parliament (where she advocates a Europe of defence, but linked to NATO), those of Emmanuel Macron in November 2019 on NATO and its brain-dead status, or those of Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in the 2021 State of the Union address where she stressed the need to develop "a Europe of Defence Union", among others<sup>1</sup>. Trump's explosive remarks during his time as US president, about the possibility of the US leaving NATO added further uncertainty to the already worrying situation.

In recent years, new strategic documents have also been published, such as the EU's *Global Strategy* (GS) (2016), in which the Union expresses its ambition to be a global actor at the geopolitical level and to address more than crisis management tasks, or the EU's own *Strategic Compass*<sup>2</sup> (2022), a kind of EU security and defence action plan, approved only a month after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. On the occasion of the latter document, High Representative Josep Borrell recalled the words of Jean Monet in his memoirs: 'We thought we had ruled out any possibility of conflict on the [European] continent and deactivated the detonator of the world wars. Well, history has come to shake us up, in its own turn and in its own way, that is to say, fortuitously<sup>3</sup> ', and which

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378474407\\_La\\_politica\\_de\\_defensa\\_europea\\_El\\_futuro\\_ejercito\\_europeo\\_en\\_el\\_marco\\_de\\_la\\_guerra\\_de\\_Ucrania](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378474407_La_politica_de_defensa_europea_El_futuro_ejercito_europeo_en_el_marco_de_la_guerra_de_Ucrania)

**Note:** All hyperlinks have been checked as of 8 July 2024.

<sup>2</sup> High Representative Borrell defines the BE as a new EU security and defence strategy, to move towards a forward-looking strategic culture, and to provide a roadmap for action with concrete and time-bound deliverables.

<sup>3</sup> Available at: [https://publicaciones.defensa.gob.es/media/downloadable/files/links//a/la\\_nueva\\_europa\\_defensa\\_y\\_brujula\\_estrategica.pdf](https://publicaciones.defensa.gob.es/media/downloadable/files/links//a/la_nueva_europa_defensa_y_brujula_estrategica.pdf) These words referred to North Korea's invasion of South Korea in 1950, which meant major geopolitical changes in Europe and the post-war world, including among others the entry of (West) Germany into NATO.

places us in a new geopolitical upheaval, this time closer to home, with Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

In the NATO sphere, a political-military alliance oriented towards deterrence and collective defence tasks, the new *Strategic Concept*<sup>4</sup> (Madrid) was approved in 2022, identifying Russia as the most direct and significant threat to the security of the allies and to the peace and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area. A new (classified) *Military Strategy*<sup>5</sup> had already been agreed in 2019, and in the wake of the Russian invasion, the number of forces on the eastern flank (forward presence<sup>6</sup>) has been significantly increased in clear deterrence tasks, defence planning has been revised (agreed at the Vilnius Summit in 2023), and the Alliance's new "Force Model" is being implemented.

We find ourselves in a new geopolitical scenario where the Western rules-based order is giving way to a new situation of great power competition, with Russia and China as the main revisionist powers, and where Europe is suffering first-hand the consequences of this new Russian attitude, which has abruptly awakened it from its Kantian dream of perpetual peace.

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Europe had relegated defence to the background, and while there was some debate, it was not really felt as an existential necessity. Various options were being discussed: maintaining defence responsibilities within NATO, a position advocated by the *Atlanticists*; moving towards a European defence within the EU framework, emphasising strategic autonomy (without fully qualifying from whom we would be autonomous, although in clear reference to the US<sup>7</sup>), an option advocated by the *Europeanists*; a third option advocating a coexistence between the first two, advocated by a significant number of European countries; and even a fourth, that of the supporters of multilateralism as the main option, could be added.

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<sup>4</sup> Available at: [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> The military strategy is not accessible because it is classified. The news of its approval is available at: <https://www.act.nato.int/article/nato-chiefs-of-defence-focus-on-the-alliances-military-instrument-of-power>

<sup>6</sup> Enhanced Forward Presence. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_136388.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm)

<sup>7</sup> BROEKE, Han ten. "It is time for Europe to think and act like a superpower", *Elcano*. ARI 78/20224 of 12 June 2024. Available at: <https://media.realinstitutoelcano.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/ari78-broeke-ya-es-hora-de-que-europa-piense-y-actue-como-una-superpotencia.pdf>

Brezinski said<sup>8</sup> that there was no such thing as a fully "European" Europe, that it was a conception, a notion, and a goal, but that it was not yet a reality. He stated that:

"Western Europe, and also - to an increasing extent - Central Europe, remain a US protectorate, with allied states reminiscent of former vassals and tributaries. This is not healthy, either for the United States or for the European nations themselves".

He added that "Europeans deplored US 'hegemony', but were comfortable under it".

In a recent interview<sup>9</sup>, and somewhat in the same vein, former spanish foreign minister Arancha González Laya, in response to a question on what was at stake for Europe in the recent European elections (june 2024), stated that "Europe must decide its future or the future of the EU must be decided by the Chinese or the Americans. It is time to decide whether we want the European Union to be a leader or a vassal". She identified fragmentation, in various sectors such as energy or telecommunications, but also in defence, as the biggest obstacle to the EU's future.

The question we should ask ourselves is whether Brezinski's analysis is still relevant given the evolution of Europe's defence over the past 25 years, or whether we have managed to change the scenario (at least somewhat).

To better understand the situation, we will look at what NATO and the EU really are, their nature, their ambitions, their evolution<sup>10</sup>; and how they have interacted over the years, how they have coordinated, cooperated and even competed with each other.

A relevant fact to bear always in mind is that 23 of the 27 EU Member States (MS) are NATO allies at the same time. In overall terms, these 23 countries account for almost 98% of the EU's population and 97% of its territory. It can be said that the vast majority of EU population and territory (except for Austria, Ireland, Malta and Cyprus) is protected by the North Atlantic Treaty. In addition, the defence spending of these 23 countries accounts for almost 98% of the total spending of the EU 27, which means that "practically" all defence spending in EU countries is at the same time NATO spending.

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<sup>8</sup> BZRESINSKI, Zbigniew. *The great global chessboard. La supremacía estadounidense y sus imperativos geoestratégicos*. Paidós, Barcelona, 1998. Detailed in chapters 2 (Eurasian chessboard) and 3 (democratic bridgehead).

<sup>9</sup> 2 June 2024. Available at: <https://elordenmundial.com/entrevista-arancha-gonzalez-laya-espana-mundo-geopolitica/>

<sup>10</sup> YILDIZ, Sara. "La autonomía estratégica de la Unión Europea ¿realidad o utopía? A critical analysis of its main dimensions and obstacles". *IEEE Journal*, no. 22/2023. Available at <https://revista.ieee.es/article/view/5877>



## **NATO. A defensive military alliance**

NATO is a politico-military alliance<sup>11</sup> which, after the recent integration of Finland and Sweden, is made up of 32 "allied" countries, whose purpose is to guarantee the freedom and security of their countries by political and military means.

In terms of its *nature*, it can be framed within the so-called structural current of realism (or defensive neorealism), of which Stephan Walt, who theorises on the nature and function of alliances<sup>12</sup>, is one of its most relevant representatives. Walt sees alliances as a formal or informal commitment between two or more states to cooperate on security issues. He identifies four basic elements in all of them: their main purpose, which is (for most) to combine the capabilities of their members in a way that favours their respective "national interests"; their level of institutionalisation, which in the case of NATO is considered a formal alliance, highly institutionalised and with specific decision-making processes; the functions they perform, usually to pool resources to achieve common (or at least compatible) goals; and finally, the form of cooperation, usually being exclusive institutions<sup>13</sup>, which imply a commitment to the other members against a state outside the community (but not between allies). They are driven by the interests of the parties, not really by morality or friendship. In the case of NATO, however, it has clear liberal components, because of its defence of the principles and purposes of the UN Charter, and specifically of democracy, individual liberties and the rule of law, as stated in the preamble to the Washington Treaty. NATO is an organisation composed of democracies, joining forces for the collective defence and preservation of peace and security.

Walt argues that alliances tend to be less robust in a multipolar world, as great powers have more options to choose from, and defends that the main reasons for their dissolution are often due to changes in threat perception, or when the ability and/or willingness to honour their commitments begins to be questioned among their own members.

In its current *Strategic Concept* (Madrid 2022), NATO reaffirms that its *objective*, its fundamental purpose, is to ensure the "collective defence" of its members, from a 360-

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<sup>11</sup> Available at: [https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index\\_es.html](https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index_es.html)

<sup>12</sup> WALT, Stephen. "Why alliances endure or collapse", *Survival*, 39(1). 1997, pp. 156-179. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396339.708442901>

<sup>13</sup> An alliance is not a collective security arrangement, which would be an inclusive institution that commits its members to oppose any act of aggression, even if committed by one of its members.

degree approach. It also reiterates that its three basic tasks are: deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security.

As a formal alliance, NATO members make binding *commitments*, the aforementioned collective defence; participation in operations, and contribution of assets (capabilities) that are made available to the collective.

One of the most significant commitments in NATO is the reiterated 2 per cent of GDP defence spending to be achieved by all NATO allies by 2024, although some members such as Poland are already calling for an increase at least to 3 per cent<sup>14</sup>. In addition, and as a consequence of the war in Ukraine and ongoing deterrence activities in Eastern Europe, the Alliance's "force model" is under review, with the idea of increasing the commitment of recent years to have some 40,000 troops available in less than 15 days<sup>15</sup>. The idea is to increase the commitment to a new, much more ambitious model<sup>16</sup>, which, by staggering readiness in three levels, aims to have: 100,000 troops at a level of alert for deployment between 0 and 10 days; 200,000 between 10 and 30 days; and a third one that could be as high as 500,000 between 30 and 180 days. To ensure the required readiness, and to avoid limitations arising from a lack of preparation and training, it is intended to grant certain commanders<sup>17</sup> the authority to conduct exercises and/or inspection visits (without prior notice) to national units, and thus confirm that (national) forces are adequately equipped, trained and equipped.

The Alliance has undergone a rather particular *evolutionary process*; it has gone from being a solid and robust alliance during the Cold War, in a bipolar world with a clear threat, the USSR; to becoming an alliance without a clear threat, in a unipolar world, where its main task shifted from deterrence and defence to crisis management, in which to some extent it came to compete with the EU itself, which launched its first crisis management missions in the first years of the millennium.

Some realist authors consider that after the Cold War NATO abandoned its realist roots and became something akin to a regional collective security system, embracing the strategy of defending liberal democratic values, particularly during the Clinton presidency.

<sup>14</sup> <https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-03-11/polands-president-calls-on-nato-allies-to-raise-spending-on-defense-to-3-of-gdp.html#>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220629-infographic-new-nato-force-model.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220629-infographic-new-nato-force-model.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Available at: <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1937>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* Consideration is being given to how to address this issue so that it is acceptable to all allied capitals.

They say that the normal evolution for an alliance would have been to disappear once the enemy has been defeated, but with NATO not only did it persisted, but expanded as well. This could be attributed to the historically unprecedented structural situation of unipolarity, generated by the fall of the USSR, since according to realists uncontrolled power is dangerous, not only to everyone who confronts it, but to its possessor, who can succumb to overextension<sup>18</sup>.

Since 2014 (Russia annexed Crimea), and faced with a geopolitical scenario of a return to competition between great powers, it has once again prioritised its main task of deterrence and defence, with Russia as the declared threat, although without abandoning its other two basic tasks.

### **The European Union. A post-modern approach to security and defence. A model and an architecture to be developed**

Trying to understand the EU's security and defence dimension, it is useful to go back to the period of the late 1990s, when the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), the precursor to the CSDP, was born, and to recall what was happening and how the world (and Europe in particular) was doing in those years.

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the world was moving towards what was called the "unipolar moment"<sup>19</sup>, with the US as the only hegemonic power on a global level, after 45 years of Cold War in a bipolar world. *Fukuyama's* thesis on the end of history and the victory of liberalism and democracies<sup>20</sup>, gave way to a world where liberal theses and interdependence (especially economic and commercial) had prevailed, with China beginning to grow notably in a market economy model, and Russia, although not yet recovered from the *shock* of the Soviet collapse, maintaining good relations with the West and in particular with Europe.

In Europe, the Balkan crisis had been closed (the fire was controlled and suppressed, although the embers were not completely extinguished), where the Europeans had

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<sup>18</sup> SCHEWELLER Randall. «America and the World. The effects of the Trump Presidency», H-Diplo- ISSF Policy Series. 28 Apr 2021. Available at: <https://issforum.org/policy/ps2021-26>

<sup>19</sup> KRAUTHAMMER, Charles. "The Unipolar Moment", *Foreign Affairs*. 1 Jan 1990. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1990-01-01/unipolar-moment>

<sup>20</sup> FUKUYAMA, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man. The boldest and most brilliant interpretation of history. present and future of humanity*. Planeta, Barcelona, 1992.



played a minor role, between passivity and disagreement, which meant that NATO, with the United States in the lead, had to "solve" the crisis.

It was against this backdrop that the ESDP, the EU's Security and Defence initiative, was established in 1999 on the basis of the Saint-Malo Declaration<sup>21</sup> between the French and British, who had reached a minimum agreement to launch it, establishing the basic elements, the pillars. The project was born with significant limitations, as it does not address defence in its traditional sense (deterrence and defence of territory), and only involves crisis management issues, and moreover, only outside the territory of the Union. There is no provision for the military forces of EU countries to act on European territory under the EU flag (which they could do under the NATO flag).

A few years later, in the text of the Lisbon Treaty (approved in 2007, in force in 2009), the "E for European" was changed to "C for Common", so that the ESDP became the CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy). The change of name does not imply a change of content, as this policy is still not a defence policy and furthermore it is not common, at least in the EU's sense of "community" or "supranational", so this change is more declarative than conceptual, and is more oriented towards expectations than reality.

Analysing CSDP in a similar way as in the previous section with NATO, the *nature* of the EU's approach to security and defence, is quite different. First of all, it is not intended to be a military alliance of EU Member States (inside or outside NATO), nor is it based on the thesis of realism, on self-interest, but rather on an idea of Europe, and on a "European identity" with European interests that would need to be defined (and above all agreed) among the Member States. We are talking about an initiative that seeks to combine elements of liberalism and "democratic peace" (expansion of democracies and economic and commercial interdependence as factors underpinning peace), with others of social-constructivism, where the "construction" of a "European identity" is sought, which encompasses or even absorbs national identities to its benefit, and where narrative, discourse, is used to construct this "European reality" in defence. In this conceptual

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<sup>21</sup> ROMERO, Abel. *25 years of the "Saint-Malo Declaration", cornerstone of the common security and defence policy.* IEEE Analysis Paper 82/2023. Available at: [https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analisis/2023/DIEEE\\_A82\\_2023\\_ABEROM\\_Declaracion.pdf](https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2023/DIEEE_A82_2023_ABEROM_Declaracion.pdf) The content of the Saint Malo Declaration and its implications for the construction of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) are analysed.

framework, Robert Cooper's thesis<sup>22</sup> on the post-modern state, the most notable example of which would be the European Union itself, set up the conceptual basis of the first *European Security Strategy* (ESS) in 2003, which, although a necessary and relevant document for EU's external action, does not address the defence dimension in its content.

In terms of *objectives*, the CSDP does not really address defence objectives, but only in the area of crisis management and cooperative security. The EU in foreign and security policy seeks a more active, globally oriented Europe. However, in order to be a strategic actor, as Bzrezinski stated<sup>23</sup>, "will and capacity" are needed, and at present the Union does not have a clear will (national prevails over European will, and furthermore they are not in tune), and the capabilities of the EU's Member States (the Union hardly has any capabilities of its own, at least as yet) are insufficient to be a relevant actor, to which must be added that, considered as a whole, they show serious problems of duplicity and fragmentation.

In relation to *commitments*, unlike NATO, the participation and contribution of the Member States to CSDP actions is voluntary, and the decision-making process, like NATO, requires unanimity. An example of the important difference between expectations and reality is the case of the means available for CSDP. In 1999, with a view to building itself with capabilities for crisis management actions, the EU agreed to create a force of up to 60,000 troops<sup>24</sup> to deploy in a scenario outside EU territory for a period of at least one year (which required at least double the number of troops for relays). In the absence of progress of this initiative, Battlegroups were created in 2007 (with some 1,500 troops but at very high readiness status). Finally, in 2022, the *Strategic Compass* (BE) points to a Rapid Deployment Capability (RDC), with some 5,000 troops, which should be operational in 2025. What has happened indicates that in addition to lowering the stakes, it seems that we have not materialised any of them, and in any case it is clear that we are

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<sup>22</sup> Cooper argues that the postmodern state arises from the collapse of the modern state (built on the concept of the nation state), and although it may seem paradoxical, it drifts towards a more orderly situation. This is the case of the European Union, which creates a new order out of the failures of the previous one, which was based on the modern state. This new order is not based on the balance of power, nor does it emphasise sovereignty or the separation between internal affairs and international relations. It replaces balances of power based on force and mistrust with a security that is built on mutual trust, transparency, and common morals and principles, which apply to international relations as well as domestic affairs.

These ideas on the concept of postmodernism in international relations are detailed in his book *The Breaking of Nations. Order and chaos in the 21st Century*. London, Atlantic Books, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> BZREZINSKI. *Op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> It was called Helsinki Headline Goal (HLG), then HLG 2003, and finally HLG 2010, and never materialised.

not talking about defence, neither in capital letters nor in small letters. Voluntariness<sup>25</sup> and commitment are two concepts that do not always go hand in hand.

On the *evolution of CSDP*, although EU has consolidated itself as a relevant actor in crisis management tasks, has not developed a proper defence dimension. This is an issue that has been discussed for years in Brussels, with endless debates, proposals and expectations, but which has been focused more on what it should or would like to be (in a sort of Alice thinking<sup>26</sup>), than on what it really is or could be, generating a significant gap between expectations and reality, and which in no way benefits the EU itself in its intended ambition to become a global actor<sup>27</sup>.

Article 42.2 of the Lisbon Treaty, in line with what was agreed in 1998 in Saint-Malo, states that "*the Common Security and Defence Policy shall include the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy, which shall lead to a common defence, once the European Council has decided unanimously*". Although this text may be subject to different interpretations, we understand that we are talking about sovereignty, about a common (not collective) defence under a "European identity", which is conceptually more ambitious than an alliance (where sovereignty is not ceded). Although we can consider cases such as the European Central Bank or the Euro itself<sup>28</sup>, where there is a clear transfer of sovereignty towards "Europeanisation", in defence matters national identity clearly prevails over European identity, since the Member States, or at least a significant number of them, want to maintain their intergovernmental character and unanimity (right of veto) in decisions.

In this sense it is relevant to note that a recent survey<sup>29</sup> found that, after the outbreak of the Russian war of aggression, almost nine out of ten citizens in Europe believe that the

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<sup>25</sup> In terms of commitment, many of the force generation conferences for EU military operations fall short of the minimum capability requirements. For example, the ATALANTA operation has for years had only one or two naval units for long periods of time. In the case of EUFOR TCHAD/RCA, a military crisis management operation launched in 2008, where transport helicopters were required. In the absence of contributions from EU countries, it was finally Russia, which in December 2008 contributed to the operation as a *third state* with 4 helicopters. Available at: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/lessons-eufor-tchadrca> and <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-to-help-eu-in-chad/>

<sup>26</sup> ROMERO, Abel. *Europe's growing concern for defence. NATO as the only real option*. IEEE Analysis Paper 24/2024. Available at: [https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analisis/2024/DIEEEAEA24\\_2024\\_ABEROM\\_OTAN.pdf](https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2024/DIEEEAEA24_2024_ABEROM_OTAN.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> YILDIZ. *Op. cit.*

<sup>28</sup> Common currency of 20 of the 27 Member States.

<sup>29</sup> Survey of 13,000 citizens conducted in December 2023. Available at: <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/publications/publication/did/the-war-and-the-voteen>

EU needs a common defence policy; the opinion of elites and governments does not always align with that of citizens.

In 2017, the Commission (which does not really have defence competences in accordance with the provisions of the Treaties) published a "Reflection paper on the future of European Defence"<sup>30</sup>, in which for the 2025 horizon, depending on the political will of the Member States, it proposed three scenarios, namely: (increasing) cooperation in security and defence matters; (moving towards) shared security and defence; and (cooperation and integration towards) common security and defence<sup>31</sup>. With the deadline approaching, it is clear that we have remained in the first scenario, and we are still articulating new instruments and taking the first steps to enhance cooperation. Security and defence at the EU level remains in the hands of capitals (as in NATO, but in this latter by definition), which do not want Brussels to monopolise these policies. The CSDP is neither configured as an instrument of collective defence, nor does it coordinate the common action of the Member States in defence matters.

In 2016, the *Global Strategy* (GS) was approved, updating and replacing the 2003 *European Security Strategy* (ESS), with the idea of the EU's "Strategic Autonomy" (SA) in security and defence taking a center stage.

Different authors consider that SA has several dimensions: the political (through planning, objectives and capabilities are established, which requires a strategic culture that the EU does not have today); the industrial (supplying goods and services for defence); and the operational (the capacity to act autonomously, linked to the planning of strategies and procedures for developing capabilities, which the EU does not have in the defence dimension)<sup>32</sup>; to which some add a fourth dimension, the nuclear<sup>33</sup>. The lack of any of these dimensions would imply the non-existence of the alleged autonomy. At present, it

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<sup>30</sup> Available at: [https://commission.europa.eu/publications/reflection-paper-future-european-defence\\_es](https://commission.europa.eu/publications/reflection-paper-future-european-defence_es)

<sup>31</sup> CALATRAVA, Adolfo and MARTÍNEZ, Rafael. "Europa durante la guerra de Ucrania", in coordinador Miguel Ángel Benedicto. *La política de defensa europea. El futuro ejército europeo en el marco de la guerra de Ucrania*, chapter 2. Colex, La Coruña, 2024. Available at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378474407\\_La\\_politica\\_de\\_defensa\\_europea\\_El\\_futuro\\_ejercito\\_europeo\\_en\\_el\\_marco\\_de\\_la\\_guerra\\_de\\_Ukraine](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378474407_La_politica_de_defensa_europea_El_futuro_ejercito_europeo_en_el_marco_de_la_guerra_de_Ukraine) In relation to the previous document, they argue that no scenario envisaged the idea of a European army, but the third indicated that the EU would be in a position to carry out high-intensity defence and security operations, supported by a certain integration of forces.

<sup>32</sup> YILDIZ, Sara. *Op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> BENEDICTO, Miguel Ángel. *Op. cit.* Some authors believe that Europe needs its own nuclear power, especially since the arrival of the Trump Administration in 2017. The big difference between NATO and the EU in the face of the Russian threat is the Alliance's nuclear power.

can be said that the EU is only making progress, and not exactly rapid progress, in the industrial dimension. For the others, there is no minimum consensus among the 27.

While the EU has undoubtedly made progress on the CSDP's security "S", the "C" of Common and the "D" of Defence are still to be developed, and given the evolution of the last 25 years, there does not seem to be an appetite, at least on the part of a significant number of Member States, to make progress on this issue "autonomously" and "separately" from the NATO framework.

### **Cooperation or competition?; are NATO and the EU complementary?**

#### ***Early years. Formal cooperation, but also some competition***

Since the birth of ESDP 25 years ago, the EU and NATO have coexisted side by side in the field of security, and to some extent also in the field of defence. Contacts between the two organisations have become institutionalised (with meetings at all levels), now on a permanent basis, resulting, among other things, in three Joint Declarations<sup>34</sup> seeking to improve cooperation in various different fields. Although the latest progress report indicates that cooperation is increasingly solid<sup>35</sup>, the inability to exchange classified information between organisations, or political disagreements between some allies, are factors that make tangible results at the executive level really very limited.

Going back to the 1990s, the birth of the ESDP generated some concern in the US<sup>36</sup>, because of its possible impact on the cohesion of the Alliance, which at the time was going through a period of uncertainty (absence of a clear threat). This concern has been also compounded by other elements such as tensions (of different types) between EU countries and non-EU NATO allies (Greece and Turkey; the US and France; Turkey and various others; EU elites themselves with statements on issues such as strategic

<sup>34</sup> EU NATO Joint Declarations (2016, 2018 and 2023). Available at:

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-security/eu-nato-cooperation/>

<sup>35</sup> Available at: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/nato-s-washington-summit-between-expectations-and-reality>

<sup>36</sup> Statements by US Secretary of State M. Albright, in which she acknowledged European initiatives to develop their own foreign affairs and security cooperation policies, but emphasised that these should be consistent with the basic principles that had underpinned the Alliance for 50 years, and therefore what have come to be called "the three D's" (*decoupling, duplication, discrimination*) should be avoided. The aim was to avoid decoupling, so that decision-making at the European level would not be disconnected from the Alliance; to avoid duplication, in terms of scarce defence resources for force planning, operational command structures and military procurement; and to avoid discrimination against any NATO member that was not a member of the Union. ISS-WEU. "From St Malo to Nice. European defence: core documents", *Chaillot Paper* 47. May 2001. Available at: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/cp047e.pdf>

autonomy, etc.), which have meant that NATO-EU relations have not always been the most desirable, which can sometimes be difficult to understand given that 23 European countries belong to both organisations at the same time.

These tensions, coupled with actions and statements that were not always fortunate, in a framework where narrative and expectations did not always align with reality, have generated a certain dialectical "fog", especially in relation to the CSDP's objectives, which have influenced, not always positively, its relations with NATO.

However, the real spheres of action of both organisations have always remained clear. The CSDP has only acted in (low-intensity) crisis management actions using civilian and military instruments, outside the territory of the Union and without ever entering into matters of territorial defence, while NATO, in the first decade of the century, without content in deterrence and defence tasks (absence of threat), has to some extent competed<sup>37</sup> with the EU in crisis management.

### ***Situation in Ukraine points the way towards cooperation***

However, this situation has changed in the last decade. The new geopolitical landscape resulting from the return to great power competition, of which the annexation of Crimea and Russia's aggression in Ukraine are clear examples, has served to begin to dissipate this "fog", contributing with a dose of realism, derived from the events themselves, to a more pragmatic approach to European defence.

NATO has thus been strengthened as an alliance, the organisation's cohesion has increased in the wake of the war in Ukraine, and it is effectively carrying out deterrence tasks in Eastern Europe. In short, it is returning to its roots of defensive realism as a new threat emerges, while maintaining the liberal principles it emphasized in the 1990s.

However, in this rapid evolving scenario, some uncertainties remain, such as the US's geopolitical shift towards Asia (President Obama's *pivot to Asia*), which could force it to deploy more resources in an area outside the Euro-Atlantic space. Consequently,

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<sup>37</sup> Examples include the crisis management operations ATALANTA (EU) and OCEAN SHIELD (NATO) with a similar mandate (fight against piracy) and a very similar area of operations (NW Indian Ocean), which coexisted for several years (from 2009 to 2016, the launch and closure dates of NATO's operation, as ATALANTA was launched in 2008 and is still ongoing today).



maintaining NATO's solidity will imply a greater effort by European allies in Europe, in an environment of lack of leadership and lack of consensus at the EU level on defence issues, which is not helped by the explosive declarations of Trump, once again candidate for the US presidency, on NATO, its future, and the possible participation of the US in that horizon, who is addressing the issue in a clearly realistic approach<sup>38</sup>.

A kind of consensus is beginning to emerge on both sides of the Atlantic that Europeans must take more charge of their own security, while being acutely aware that it is not just a matter of spending more on defence. The fact is that even if Europe's NATO 23 were to reach 2 per cent, it would not significantly reduce Europe's dependence on Washington<sup>39</sup>. It is not just a question of spending, it is a question of collective action. European countries treat defence policy as a national responsibility, and because they perceive few direct threats to their security, they invest little in defence.

The current reality is that Europe as a whole feels severely threatened by Russia, to which it should be added a volatile periphery from the Sahel to the South Caucasus. Given how deeply involved the US is in European defence, no quick fix can guarantee Europe's security, but given US priorities, for which Russia is not an existential threat, European countries need to strengthen, and above all, integrate their efforts. This is a process that is expected to be rather difficult, slow and will need to be coordinated not only at the EU level, but also between the EU and NATO. NATO Summit, currently taking place in Washington these days, may be an opportunity to take this issue further.

The new situation has led to a significant decrease in debate and declarations on strategic autonomy (SA) in the EU, and even further, on a possible European defence in the EU framework, which is currently almost unanimously assumed to be no more than in the NATO framework. The High Representative himself has recently argued that "there is no alternative to NATO for Europe's territorial defence<sup>40</sup>", and the entry of Sweden and Finland into the Alliance is clear proof of this reality.

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<sup>38</sup> BYERS, Andrew and SCHWELLER, Randall. «Trump the Realist», *Foreign Affairs*. 1 Jul 2024. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/donald-trump-realist-former-president-american-power-byers-schweller>

<sup>39</sup> BERGMANN, Max. "A more European NATO", *Foreign Affairs*. March 21st 2024. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/europe/more-european-nato>

<sup>40</sup> High Representative Borrell 's speech at the EU ISS (*Institute for Security Studies*) annual conference on 11 June 2024. Available at: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/l-258115>

The current debate is mainly focused on strengthening NATO's "European dimension", where authors such as Biscop<sup>41</sup>, considering the post-war scenario, propose three priority lines of action: that the EU and its Member States increase their support for the Ukrainian war effort; that they strengthen their own Armed Forces (particularly in relation to capabilities and ammunition) in line with the new NATO Force model (assuming the risk of paying less attention to actions included in the *Strategic Compass*); and finally, thirdly, to consolidate their capacity for expeditionary operations in the near abroad. Three compatible and coherent proposals to redouble efforts in the NATO framework for Europe's territorial defence, without forgetting the "European identity" oriented towards crisis management abroad.

### ***Achieving complementarity by strengthening the Alliance's European pillar***

At present, it could be said that the conditions are not in place to move towards an autonomous European defence in every sense of the word. The strong differences in strategic culture<sup>42</sup> between the Member States do not allow progress to be made towards a real "European identity" in defence, which leads to a clear lack of will (there is no minimum consensus between Member States, with countries that are clearly Atlantist, others that are more pro-European, some that are more in between, and others that support multilateralism and a post-modern approach).

Although the US has been reluctant to support a greater European role in NATO for 25 years, today, without a stronger European pillar in NATO, Russia will continue to threaten transatlantic security and the US will not be able to concentrate its efforts and resources on China<sup>43</sup>.

For some years now, without completely abandoning the debate on strategic autonomy, EU has focused its efforts on developing a stronger and more capable European defence industry. Instruments are being developed<sup>44</sup> to strengthen the Defence Industrial and

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<sup>41</sup> BISCOP, Sven. "European Defence in a new geopolitical environment", *Egmont Institute* (Commentaries). 2023. Available at: <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/european-defence-in-a-new-geopolitical-environment/>

<sup>42</sup> We understand strategic culture as a country's view of the threats to its security, as well as how to deal with them.

<sup>43</sup> DROIN, Mathieu, MONAGHAN, Sean, and TOWNSEND, Jim. "NATO's missing pillar", *Foreign Affairs*. June 14th 2024. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/natos-missing-pillar>

<sup>44</sup> Such as PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) with various projects involving different EU countries, or the Commission's EDF (European Defence Funds), which partially finance defence R&D projects.

Technological Base (at the European level), promoting cooperation and coordination between Member States, with the intention of developing European military capabilities (mainly contributing to NATO), which would reduce Europe's dependence on the US defence market, and also correct Europe's problems of fragmentation, duplication and lack of interoperability.

However, it should not be forgotten that national interests in defence industry matters often prevail. It is not foreseeable that the path towards a certain degree of integration of the European defence industry will be easy, nor that the Member States will cede competences in favour of regulation and control from Brussels, especially given the almost abusive use that has traditionally been made of article 346<sup>45</sup> of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, whether or not one wishes to recognise it<sup>46</sup>. In this industrial sphere, the Commission, with the recent approval of an *EU Defence Industrial Strategy*, with the European Defence Funds (EDF), or with some proposals such as the creation of a post of defence commissioner<sup>47</sup> (with what competences?), is seeking a leading role that it is not very likely that the Member States will allow it.

From a purely industrial perspective, it is necessary to consider US arms sales to Europe, our dependence on the American market, all of which weakens and constrains Europe's industrial base. Therefore, in addition to pressuring European countries to spend more on defence, US support would be needed to encourage European defence industrial cooperation, which would result in a stronger European pillar in NATO, and above all to manage or limit the foreseeable strong opposition from the powerful American defence industry.

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<sup>45</sup> Article 346 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) states:

(a) no Member State shall be obliged to supply information the disclosure of which it considers contrary to the essential interests of its security; (b) any Member State may take such measures as it considers necessary for the protection of the essential interests of its security which are connected with the production of or trade in arms, munitions and war material; such measures must not adversely affect the conditions of competition in the internal market in respect of products which are not intended for specifically military purposes.

(2) The Council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission, may amend the list of products subject to the provisions of paragraph 1(b) which it drew up on 15 April 1958.

<sup>46</sup> BROKE, Han Ten. *Op. cit.*

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-defense-commissioner-the-flashy-new-job-that-aint-all-its-cracked-up-to-be/>

In any case, all these efforts should not lead us to confuse the defence industry<sup>48</sup> with defence itself; having a defence industry does not mean autonomous defence: it is possibly a necessary condition, but it is not sufficient.

### **By way of concluding remarks**

After the end of World War II, a security order was built in Europe based essentially on NATO, a traditional military alliance, where the interests of the parties come together to confront an external threat.

After the collapse of the USSR, and following a scenario where the Balkan wars were the main concerns, without abandoning NATO architecture, the European Union began a new approach to security and defence in Europe, with a more constructivist narrative and where the theses of post-modernism were the protagonists. Although this EU development has remained more in the realm of expectations, progress has been made in crisis management, where the Union has a wide range of instruments (economic, political, diplomatic...) but not in (territorial) defence, essentially due to the lack of political will (consensus among the Member States), the difference in strategic cultures, and the limited military capabilities of the Europeans.

The war in Ukraine and the change in the geopolitical scenario, which in just a few years has seen a shift from a unipolar world to a return to competition between great powers, is pushing defence issues to the top of the Brussels agenda. In the 25 years of the CSDP, neither a defence nor a common defence dimension has been achieved, so the issue is now being approached in a more pragmatic way, seeking more to develop a European dimension within NATO. This favours not only the Europeans, who take on a greater role in their own defence, but also the rest of the allies, particularly the US, which could devote more efforts and resources to its priority scenario in the Indo-Pacific, without neglecting the European one.

In this new situation, which is more realistic than post-modern, NATO and EU cooperation, which had at times turned into competition, strengthens the Alliance through

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<sup>48</sup> Defence industry is not defence policy. It is an instrument, but it is not an end in itself. Defence industries are driven by industrial, not political, criteria, so it is necessary to be aware of the danger that industrial policy can influence the choice of capabilities, and that capabilities are procured more for political and industrial incentives than for operational requirements.

a more solid European dimension, and the EU itself with a reinforced military capacity for crisis management. A sort of division of tasks, where NATO, with its 23 EU allies, takes responsibility for deterrence and territorial defence, and the EU, with its 27 Member States, prioritises crisis management tasks.

In the scenario of the *Strategic Compass*, which aims in the medium term to make the EU a global actor with the capacity to act in crisis missions, NATO's role in Europe's territorial defence is explicitly recognised. The strengthened European pillar in NATO will thus serve to complement<sup>49</sup> the Alliance, to refine and make it more complete, and in the current landscape of war in Europe, the European defence industrial base is also a fundamental element of the Alliance's strategy<sup>50</sup>.

To return to the initial question of whether European countries will remain vassals, as Bzrezinski said in 1997, in recent years, more out of necessity than vocation, steps are being taken by the EU to assume a greater role in defence, developing a stronger and more capable European pillar in NATO, consolidating a more equitable distribution, which will transform us from vassals to real allies.

The idea of the EU becoming a strategic (global) actor, while desirable, is currently unattainable; the conditions are not in place. The equation of an autonomous EU defence is nowadays unsolvable; there are too many unknown variables<sup>51</sup>.

*Abel Romero Junquera\**  
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<sup>49</sup> According to the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española de la Lengua*, complementarity means "that serves to complete or perfect something".

<sup>50</sup> CALATRAVA, Adolfo and MARTINEZ, Rafael. *Op. cit.*

<sup>51</sup> JANNING, Josef. "Your turn Berlin: a German Strategy for Europe" German Council of Foreign Relations, *DGAP* Comm. May 2024. Available at: <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/your-turn-berlin-german-strategy-europe>