

Europa o nada: cómo evitar la tormenta perfecta y construir un pilar militar europeo

Resumen:

Europa atraviesa una coyuntura de ruptura del orden de seguridad, marcada por la guerra en Ucrania, el posible desenganche de Estados Unidos de la OTAN y el auge de amenazas híbridas. El principal riesgo para la Unión Europea no es solo externo, sino interno: confundir un cambio de narrativa con un cambio real de capacidades y seguir refugiándose en una unidad formal que bloquea la ambición estratégica.

Sobre la base del marco del Tratado de Lisboa, se analizan los límites de la cláusula de asistencia mutua del artículo 42.7, el déficit de mando y fuerzas de la UE y las posibilidades de una PESCO revisada y reforzada que permita dotar de contenido efectivo a una defensa común. Se examinan las propuestas recientes —fuerza modular de 100.000 efectivos, Consejo de Seguridad Europeo, europeización de la estructura de mando aliada— y se plantean cuatro escenarios de futuro, desde una autonomía complementaria dentro de la OTAN hasta la «tormenta perfecta» de ruptura transatlántica y fragmentación europea.

Solo una integración militar más profunda permitirá a Europa evitar la irrelevancia estratégica.

Palabras clave:

Autonomía estratégica, arquitectura de seguridad, artículo 42.7, OTAN, Unión Europea, ejército europeo.

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Introduction

In late November 2025, the weekly magazine *The Economist* published its special issue 'The world ahead'¹ in which it stated that the old-world order we knew had broken down; it had ceased to exist as a result of the dismantling of multilateralism in the international system.

In the new world, rules are flouted, institutions are ignored and there is no referee among the three major players: the United States, China and Russia, who dominate the chessboard, aware that nothing remains the same.

The United States remains determined to demonstrate that power passes through Washington and that it is prepared to continue leading simply because it can, starting by regaining control of territories it considers within its sphere of influence—Venezuela—and formulating territorial ambitions regarding Canada and Greenland.

At the same time, China is seizing what it sees as a historic opportunity to regain its central role in the world, and is doing so through investment in technology and a growing military power, which is already significant on a global scale.

Meanwhile, the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East are becoming the new normal without being resolved. Conflicts are no longer exceptions to the international norm—they never were, even though we believed them to be so for a long time—, but rather form part of the new context to which European states and their societies must adapt in order to survive.

From the geopolitical spaces of Europe and Canada², there continues to be a call for 'soft power'—human rights, multilateralism, normative standards— and the importance of law in shaping a realistic international order based on values³.

¹ THE ECONOMIST. *The World Ahead 2025*. London, The Economist Group, 21 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/the-world-ahead/2024/12/19/the-world-ahead-2025>

Note: All hyperlinks in this article are active as of 22 May 2026.

² CARNEY, M. , 'Principled and Pragmatic: Canada's Path', *Special Address at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting* . Davos, Switzerland, 20 January 2026. Available at:

<https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2026/01/20/principled-and-pragmatic-canadas-path-prime-minister-carney-addresses>

³ STUBB, A. ' : The West's Last Chance: How to Build a New Global Order Before It's Too Late' , *Foreign Affairs*, 105(1). January/February, 2026. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/wests-last-chance>

This laudable endeavour, however, comes up against the persistent difficulty of articulating a single European voice on the international agenda. Internal coherence and unity of action thus become all the more urgent the more difficult it becomes to use soft power to address European security issues, in a world that has become sceptical regarding the defence of the values that have shaped the international order and is increasingly transactional.

China, Russia and the United States exploit their direct investments or employ military pressure in accordance with a stark logic of defending their interests, without undue regard for international law. Faced with such behaviour, the European Union—whose governance is anchored in the Treaty of Lisbon—seeks to uphold the value of negotiation and consensus as valid tools of international policy.

Europe's traditional approach does not sit well with the pace and nature of the geopolitical rivalries and tensions of the new world disorder: chequebook power, coercion, blackmail or, quite simply, the use of force have all become part of a new normality that has gradually asserted itself on the international stage, as the dizzying pace of events has imposed a succession of rapid adaptations in which narratives and discourse have bent to the new geopolitical reality. Faced with it, Europeans are beginning to recognise that the terms 'power' and 'military capability' are no longer taboo, and that a system of governance based on negotiation and treaties is ill-suited to geopolitical struggles in which these disruptive forms of conduct prevail.

New approaches to security are now being promoted for a Europe seeking to transition from being a 'peace project' to becoming a 'security actor' in an increasingly hostile environment. Even on the thorny issue of funding, the EU is beginning to devise imaginative approaches to encourage the development of the dual capabilities needed to move from European soft power towards a more intelligent power⁴, capable of deterring any threat.

However, the shift in language and ambitions should not be confused with a shift in capabilities. Europe may have overcome certain conceptual taboos, but it continues to be hampered by structural limitations that constrain any real transformation. These limitations stem from weak growth, a declining population and a common policy that lacks

⁴ NYE, J. S. 'Get Smart: Combining Hard and Soft Power', *Foreign Affairs*, 88(4). 2009, pp. 160 -163.
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/responses/get-smart>

cohesion, fragmented into national dossiers that are frequently incompatible when it comes to the continent's security and defence.

Disagreements over how to address threats, with what means and with which allies, persist, precisely when the environment demands the opposite. Not to mention that the institutional and geopolitical issues associated with Ukraine's future place within the European architecture—inside or outside the EU, once the NATO option has been ruled out—powerfully condition the realization of a new security architecture⁵.

At present, Europe lacks significant military capabilities and, so far, the political will to evolve from a peace project — typical of a security community⁶ — into a security actor that is militarily comparable to a genuine alliance⁷ operating in a hostile environment. If it fails to find a path to transformation, it will ultimately fall into irrelevance. Avoiding this situation requires a clear assessment of the threats and accurately identifying the necessary drivers of change.

It is a matter of urgently redefining a new security and defence architecture that resolves the questions and dilemmas posed by the establishment of a genuine European defence pillar⁸.

From strategic comfort to the harsh elements

The European continent finds itself at a critical juncture. The security architecture designed at Helsinki in 1975 and maintained throughout the remainder of the Cold War has collapsed. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has laid bare the fragility of European security, which had been sheltered behind the walls of a NATO protected by the United States.

For many years, the European project prioritized enlargement to include more members rather than focusing on strengthening the continent's security and defence, with the supposed increase in soft power failing to sustain the growth of a European military

⁵ CASTILLA, J. C. *Time bomb: Ukraine in the EU, but not in NATO*. IEEE Analysis Paper, 55/2024, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, 18 September 2024.

https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2024/DIEEEA55_2024_JUACAS_Ucrania.pdf

⁶ DEUTSCH, Karl, et al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organisation in the Light of Historical Experience*. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1957.

⁷ SNYDER, G. H. *Alliance Politics*. Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press. (Cornell Studies in Security Affairs), 1997.

⁸ CASTILLA, J. C. *Defence between two pillars: NATO, the EU and the battle for the European voice*. IEEE Analysis Paper, No. 14/2026. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, 17 February 2026. Available at:

<https://www.defensa.gob.es/ceseden/-/ieeee-2026-otan-ue-defensa-dos-pilares-analisis14>

ambition. The observation of the Ukrainian philosopher and political scientist Volodymyr Yermolenko⁹ is worthy of note: he points out that possessing a powerful economy or significant military power does not in itself guarantee the success of a political project, control over the context, nor the vagaries of US policy, rising energy prices or the effects of China's economic superiority.

Europe now faces the NATO paradox. On the one hand, it depends on a transatlantic bond mired in a serious identity crisis¹⁰, undermined by statements questioning the credibility of Article 5 and by Washington's unilateral decisions.

On the other hand, NATO is unable to act without critical US military capabilities—which are increasingly reported to be limited—relating to logistical support, satellite and intelligence capabilities, and nuclear deterrence. All this at a time when the United States' primary interest is shifting from Europe towards its own hemisphere, as reflected in its latest security and defence¹¹ strategies.

Europe faces the threat of a Russian army hardened by years of war in Ukraine, which is striving to reach a strength of up to one and a half million troops. The possibility of a Russian military victory would deprive the rest of Europe of the security buffer that the ongoing war currently provides; whilst the Russians are engaged in Ukraine, they cannot be significantly involved in other parts of the continent.

The redrawing of borders on Europe's eastern flank would demonstrate, once again, the EU's inability to defend its own neighbourhood. A ceasefire agreed upon in Ukraine seems to be eagerly awaited, but if it ultimately ends up benefiting Russia, it will undermine the credibility of the European Union and NATO as providers of security.

Any European deterrence strategy must also take into account the current scale of the challenge posed by the increase in Russian hybrid actions, to which must be added those of China, which are particularly worrying in the cyber domain.

⁹ YERMOLENKO, V. ' : The focus on humanity: Why Ukraine is resisting' , *Eurozine*. 10 May 2022. <https://www.eurozine.com/the-focus-on-humanity/>

¹⁰ CASTILLA, J. C. *NATO between Washington and The Hague: identity crisis and discourse*. IEEE Analysis Paper, 57/2025. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, 17 September 2025. https://www.defensa.gob.es/ceseden/-/ieeee/la_otan_entre_washington_y_la_haya_2025_dieeee57

¹¹ MILLER, Z. " : Trump says commitment to NATO mutual defence guarantee depends on your definition" , *PBS NewsHour*. 24 June 2025. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/trump-says-commitment-to-nato-mutual-defence-guarantee-depends-on-your-definition>

In recent years, there have been attacks on critical infrastructure, including, amongst others, undersea cables, electricity grids, etc.

Russia views its hybrid activities as a preliminary or initial phase of a continuum of war; it escalates or de-escalates them depending on how it manages the escalation of the conflict it seeks to control against its adversary.

Any EU security and defence strategy must take into account Ukraine's future institutional role within the Union¹².

Including Ukraine means having a clear understanding of how to undertake and coordinate territorial defence (in principle, without NATO support); in other words, how to implement the controversial Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union —the mutual assistance clause — as well as the solidarity clause (Article 222 of the TFEU).

A Ukraine outside the Union, but still threatened by Russia, would require the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) to provide for support to Ukraine in the event of a new conflict as part of security guarantees, which is an area for which the current CSDP instruments are not equipped.

The statement by the US President — 'we will always be there for NATO, even if they are not there for us'—¹³ fails to dispel the uncertainty surrounding the strength of the commitment championed by the second administration Trump and which became evident in the run-up to the Allied Summit in The Hague in June 2025.

In the Arctic, Washington's threats regarding Greenland — a Danish autonomous territory — have opened up a new source of tension with the potential to cause a systemic rupture within the Alliance.

The mere possibility that the principal ally might attack another poses an existential dilemma: if Article 5 does not protect Denmark, the collective defence clause loses all credibility.

¹² CASTILLA, J. C. Ibid. d. *A ticking time bomb: Ukraine in the EU, but not in NATO*. 2024.

¹³ TRUMP, D. J. Interview with Nigel Farage. *GB News*. 19 March 2024. <https://www.gbnews.com/politics/donald-trump-nato-comments-nigel-farage-exclusive>

Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has put it succinctly: ‘If the United States chooses to launch a military attack on another NATO country, then everything comes to a halt, including NATO’¹⁴ .

Moreover, the US justification—to strengthen the defence of the North Atlantic against Russia and China—amounts to an implicit acknowledgement that NATO is incapable of fulfilling that role on its own, which undermines the fundamental principle of collective defence.

The US *National Defence Strategy* of January 2026 requires its allies and partners elsewhere to “assume primary responsibility for their own defence with critical, but more limited, support from US forces”¹⁵ .

This, in principle, interpreted positively, could support the necessary transformation required in Europe to become a global security and defence actor; although the text and tone of the US *National Security Strategy* leave little doubt about Washington’s current hostility towards the European Union project.

The war with Iran has exacerbated this dynamic.

The European allies, who were not consulted in advance regarding the operation, have so far refused to join the military operation in the Middle East and to contribute to the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump has warned that NATO faces “a very bad future”, with even publicly raising the possibility of leaving the Alliance.

The message from Secretary of State, Rubio, indicating that Washington will ‘re-examine’ its commitments to its allies once the conflict is over is unequivocal: the US security guarantee is no longer unconditional and is subject to political reciprocity, always interpreted unilaterally by the United States.

Its potential disengagement or decoupling from the Alliance—accelerated by its reorientation towards the Indo-Pacific and exacerbated by tensions over Greenland and

¹⁴ EUROPA PRESS. “ : Denmark’s Prime Minister foresees the end of NATO if the US attacks Greenland”, *Europa Press*. 5 January 2026. <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-primera-ministra-dinamarca-preve-final-otan-si-eeuu-ataca-groenlandia-20260105151243.html>

¹⁵ KUBILIUS, A. :“ On the Europeanisation of European Conventional Defence” , *andriuskubilius.lt* . 25 September 2024. <https://andriuskubilius.lt/en/on-europeanization-of-european-conventional-defence/>

Iran—has moved from a hypothetical scenario to a contingency that must inevitably be factored in.

Transatlantic cooperation, warn critical European voices, would only be maintained at the cost of 'total submission to Washington and turning a blind eye to its violations of international law'¹⁶.

Europe is beginning to accept that, in the new international environment, military force has starkly regained its central role as an instrument of foreign policy — as illustrated by Ukraine, Venezuela, Greenland and Iran — dismantling the normative architecture built after 1945.

Europe's 'bonsai' armies for a shattered security

The European illusion that peace was the natural state of affairs has died with the return of war between states to the continent.

The United States and Israel have set the Middle East ablaze, and Sino-American rivalry is undermining the peaceful conduct of international relations.

The pressure on Europe's security now comes as much from the east —Russian aggression— as from the west —uncertainty over US commitment and hostility towards the EU —, but also from the so-called Global South, where a new and increasingly brutal geopolitical competition between powers is taking place.

The EU Commissioner for Defence, Andrius Kubilius, forcefully explained this new context at the *Folk och Försvar* conference (Sweden, January 2026): 'Europe cannot be a spectator of its own security. We cannot allow the fate of 450 million Europeans to depend on a few thousand votes in states such as Pennsylvania or Michigan'¹⁷.

Faced with a scenario where US defence guarantees are no longer assured, Europe must confront the reality of its '27 bonsai armies' — an expression coined by the Commissioner— consisting of national forces with structures that are, in some cases,

¹⁶ RICCIARDELLA, J. " : The Illusion of Permanent Protection: Europe's Strategic Awakening" , *European Defence Review*. 2025. <https://www.edr-journal.eu/illusion-permanent-protection>

¹⁷ KUBILIUS, A. *Europe Under Pressure* , speech at the Folk och Försvar National Conference, Sälen, Sweden, 11 January 2026. Brussels: European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_26_1101

complete, but on such a small scale that they lack the critical mass required for a high-intensity conflict.

The 27 defence budgets, with their 27 different procurement systems and independent logistics chains, create redundancies and prevent the synergy needed to provide real and significant power in the event of a potential conflict with Russia.

The consequence of a divided Europe is weakness; the result, irrelevance.

Furthermore, Mark Rutte, in his role as Secretary-General of NATO, explained the situation regarding the US with brutal frankness before the European Parliament on 26 January 2026: 'If anyone thinks that Europe can defend itself without the United States, they can keep dreaming'¹⁸.

The Autumn 2025 Eurobarometer shows that European citizens are calling for a more ambitious and united EU in the face of a turbulent global environment, placing defence, security and the economy as top priorities, with particular concern for ongoing conflicts¹⁹.

This opens a window of opportunity to create a permanent European force of its own, enabling Europe to provide its own deterrent, or at least part of it, and to act independently when its interests are at stake.

If US forces stationed in Europe were to be withdrawn — more than 80,000 troops — this European force would need to be in a position to take on their roles within the allied defence plans for the continent, filling the gap that the Americans might leave in the structure of the 'new force model approved at the allied summit in Madrid in 2022.

Furthermore, a potential European force ready to act on a permanent basis, with the necessary standing forces, would also be a way of realizing —better late than never — the level of ambition set for the Common Security and Defence Policy in 1999.

Ultimately, the aim is to resolve the debate on European identity in relation to the defence of its territory in a positive manner, so that the European Union becomes a genuine

¹⁸ NATO. *Remarks by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte at the meeting of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE)*. Brussels, 26 January 2026. [Remarks by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte | NATO Transcript](#)

¹⁹ EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. *Eurobarometer Autumn 2025: Europeans Alarmed by Security and Conflicts*. Brussels, European Commission, 2026. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/>

geopolitical actor capable of defending itself, ceasing to be a common market protected by others²⁰.

It is clear that, as yet, Europe cannot protect itself.

Europe's structural fragmentation makes its dependence on Washington not so much a strategic choice as an operational necessity.

The tragedy is that hypothetical US support does not depend on Europe's decision, nor even on NATO's, since within the Alliance each country interprets sovereignly how to provide support to fulfil Article 5, regardless of the existence of operational plans designed and intended for the deterrence and defence of the continent.

Deciding how long it will take for Europe to become sufficiently autonomous and whether the United States will allow it are questions yet to be resolved.

The European Union itself also has its limitations when it comes to transforming itself from a facilitator of security — and, to a limited extent, of defence — into a genuine provider of internal and external security for its member states and its geographical neighbourhood.

Between Lisbon and reality: the limits of European defence

The Treaty on European Union (TEU) offers some interesting possibilities for moving towards greater strategic autonomy.

The reforms of the Treaty of Lisbon introduced the legal foundations necessary for Europe to cease being a passive actor, starting with Article 42.2, which explicitly states that 'the common security and defence policy shall include the progressive definition of a common defence policy for the Union. This shall lead to a common defence once the European Council has decided so unanimously'.

For the time being, this progressive approach has not been sufficient to move beyond the framework of foreign policy and achieve territorial defence through the use of military means; this area remains primarily entrusted to NATO.

²⁰ FUENTE COBO, I. *United we are stronger. Let us seriously imagine a European Army*. Academy of Military Sciences and Arts, 26 March 2026. <https://www.acami.es/publicacion/unidos-somos-mas-fuertes-imaginemos-seriamente-un-ejercito-europeo/>

A flexible interpretation of the above text might lead one to believe that a new treaty is not required to create a common defence based on a 'European army', although it would first be necessary to define what is meant by such an army.

The main legal problem facing the European Union in moving towards a common defence based on a European army is the necessary and difficult requirement for unanimity; Article 31 of the TEU unequivocally requires this for most decisions, not only in foreign policy, but also in matters having 'implications in the military or defence sphere' (paragraph 4).

A unanimous decision by the heads of state seems unlikely in the current circumstances, unless we are forced into a scenario of extreme crisis that makes it necessary.

Institutions such as the EU External Action Service²¹ believe that moment has arrived; other analysts²² have not yet reached that conclusion, although they would surely have changed their position had the Greenland crisis had a more serious outcome.

The mutual assistance clause (Article 42.7 TEU), invoked for the first time by France following the Paris attacks in 2015, is the European equivalent of NATO's Article 5.

Sven Biscop refers to it as 'a legally binding but militarily empty declaration of intent'²³.

On paper, Article 42.7 represents an even stronger commitment than that of NATO, as it requires all member states to provide support using all means at their disposal.

In practice, putting this into effect presents serious political and structural problems that make it impossible, or at least very difficult—at present—for the EU to act in a unified manner.

Article 42.7 legally obliges Member States to provide aid and assistance 'by all means at their disposal' in the event that a State is the subject of an armed attack on its territory. The clause allows EU countries to act individually; that is to say, there is no requirement to act as a coordinated bloc, an aspect which is, however, provided for in the solidarity clause of Article 222 of the TFEU.

²¹ EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE. *Europe's security and defence: the way forward*. European Union, 20 June 2020. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/seguridad-y-defensa-de-europa-el-camino-seguir_es

²² CALVO ALBERO, José Luis; FRÍAS SÁNCHEZ, Carlos and GARCÍA BLÁZQUEZ, Fernando. 'The debate on future European armed forces', *Foreign Policy*. 2 October 2025. <https://www.politicaexterior.com/articulo/el-debate-sobre-unas-futuras-fuerzas-armadas-europeas/>

²³ BISCOP, S. *Grand Strategy in 10 Words: A Guide to Great Power Politics in the 21st Century*. Bristol, Bristol University Press, 2024.

The wording is forceful, yet equally ambiguous²⁴, as it neither clarifies nor defines the scope of the obligation to provide mutual assistance. There is no EU mechanism capable of sanctioning or determining the liability of a Member State that fails to provide sufficient military aid, nor does it specify whether this constitutes part of the resources available to the partner in such circumstances.

Another aspect worthy of comment is the procedure for activating the clause. It is not invoked on behalf of the Union, but any country that feels under attack may invoke it without requiring the approval of the Council²⁵.

Despite the clear security and defence implications it may trigger; it does not require unanimous approval within the Union; it is a process strictly between capitals. This prevents, in principle, the EU from acting as a single political entity vis-à-vis the aggressor: it simply becomes a sum of bilateral aid, at best coordinated.

By whom? By the state under attack — one that may have been so severely damaged as to be incapable of doing so? This problem does not help to link the concept of military deterrence with the invocation of Article 42.7.

Article 42.7 of the TEU also stipulates that the obligation of mutual assistance shall not affect the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States. This can be interpreted in two ways: firstly, as a reference to obligations within the framework of NATO; secondly, as a form of respect towards neutral countries²⁶.

The latter case is known as the 'Irish clause', which was incorporated into the Treaty of Lisbon to preserve the traditions of neutrality and non-alignment of Ireland, Austria, Finland, Sweden and Malta. However, the world is changing and Finland and Sweden are now allies.

In the event of an armed attack against a Member State, countries may choose to limit their response to non-military forms of assistance — such as humanitarian, medical or logistical aid — without this constituting a breach of the Treaty. This erodes the automatic mutual defence dimension of Article 42.7 and highlights the Union's strategic

²⁴ DUMOULIN, A. 'The mutual assistance clause in Article 42(7) TEU: what added value for defence in European Union law?', in Hamonic, A. (ed.) *The specificity of defence in European Union law*. Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2025, pp.177–199.

²⁵ Unlike the provisions of the solidarity clause in Article 222 TFEU.

²⁶ EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH SERVICE. *The EU's mutual assistance clause: Article 42(7) TEU*. European Parliament, 2023.

heterogeneity, which contrasts with the logic of collective defence that underpins Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

The practical conclusion is that, at present, the operational scope of the clause is, at best, unpredictable or very limited, if not non-existent. For to become a reality, within the Union, the coordination of national resources — including military ones — would require a dedicated command and control structure, a definition of those resources that would need to be coordinated — if not all, at least those that would initially be made available to the state attacked — and a political decision-making mechanism to manage national efforts.

Only then could we begin to use the term ‘European army’ with any meaning; it would be an option.

NATO has the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) as its permanent headquarters with the capacity to plan and conduct high-intensity operations, supported by the rest of the allied command structure. The EU, by contrast, lacks an equivalent command and control structure.

The fledgling Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), created in 2017 and progressively expanded, remains scaled for non-executive training and small-scale missions, lacking the resources, personnel and authority necessary to direct a mutual or collective defence operation in the face of an aggression against European territory.

In the event of an invocation of Article 42.7 requiring a large number of military resources, at present, the only defined way of securing command and control capabilities would be to resort to the Berlin Plus agreements — subject to Turkey’s approval, in addition to that of the other allies — in order to draw on NATO capabilities. Leading analysts highlight the need for a renewed framework for NATO-EU cooperation —a reformed Berlin Plus—²⁷ .

Another option would be to develop EU’s own command and control capability, independent of NATO’s chain of command; undoubtedly a costly duplication that could involve transforming the Union’s current MPCC, mentioned above, into a permanent headquarters (HQ) capable of conducting large-scale war operations independently.

²⁷ ELLISON, Davis and FIOTT, Daniel. *Between the Berlaymont and the Glass Palace: The Relative Roles of the European Union and NATO in European Defence*. The Hague, HCSS (The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies), 2026. <https://hcss.nl/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Between-the-Berlaymont-and-the-Glass-Palace-2026.pdf>

It would be necessary to clarify beforehand what delegated or authorised powers the head of that Joint Command would have once Article 42.7 has been invoked; something similar to the authorizations available to SACEUR within NATO for crisis situations.

European defence cooperation has historically suffered from a structural tension: the EU has prioritized political unity over operational ambition, which has prevented the formation of forces with genuine military significance. The target of 60,000 troops set in Helsinki in 1999 never materialized and subsequent initiatives — the *Battle Groups* (approximately 1,500 troops), which were never deployed — also failed to establish a credible operational capability.

For its part, the Rapid Deployment Capability of some 5,000 troops, envisaged in the 2022 *Strategic Compass*²⁸, is manifestly insufficient to meet current challenges. This makes it impossible to implement the coordinated mutual assistance provided for in Article 42(7) TEU for territorial defence.

With these resources it is, impossible to deter Russia in Ukraine, in the Baltic or anywhere else on the continent; nor in Africa.

Faced with this shortfall in military capability, the European Commissioner for Defence, Andrius Kubilius, proposed in January 2026 the creation of an integrated force of 100,000 troops. This figure would constitute the minimum threshold of ‘critical mass’ to simultaneously cover the eastern flank and other crisis areas.

An integration model inspired by the Eurocorps would be used, based on modular blocks: each Member State would assign units of different categories to a joint European force that would train together and operate using standardized NATO procedures, although under EU command, utilizing, where possible, a dual role within the allied command structure.

National armies would not be disbanded; the units would continue to train on an ongoing basis and remain ready to integrate into a predetermined command structure, which would guarantee interoperability and, above all, avoid the political deadlocks that have hampered previous initiatives.

²⁸ ARTEAGA, F. *The EU's strategic compass: from defence theory to practice*. Analysis by the Elcano Royal Institute. Madrid, Elcano Royal Institute, 2023. <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/la-brujula-estrategica-de-la-ue-de-la-teoria-a-la-practica-de-la-defensa/>

There is, however, a dimension that goes beyond the purely operational and has a symbolic character. These soldiers, assigned in peacetime to a permanent mission of deterrence and mutual defence on behalf of the Union, could permanently wear the EU flag on their uniforms — alongside their national flags.

It is a seemingly minor gesture, but one laden with significance: those who physically embody the EU's commitment to mutual and collective defence would also do so visibly. If the presidents and heads of state do so in many of their public appearances, why not the military?

That symbol would undoubtedly help to build the necessary European identity starting from the most sovereigntist core of a country, namely its Armed Forces . The aim would be to gradually build 'a European army' without deconstructing national identities.

The above could be combined with Commissioner Andrius Kubilius's proposal regarding the creation of a European Security Council that would act as the highest political authority for the defence of Europe. This would be an executive body with a small membership (10–12 members), in which some members would be permanent —the so-called E5 group: Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Poland—, whilst the remaining Member States EU would rotate.

Its main advantage would lie in streamlining decision-making through pre-authorized mandates for crisis situations. The main obstacle would be the possible reluctance of Member States, which, to a certain extent, would be making concessions or delegating sovereignty to the Council²⁹ and, by its mandate, to the command and control structures, in a manner similar to the pre- authorizations granted to SACEUR in the Allied crisis management system.

In the short term, the most pragmatic alternative involves continuing to gradually Europeanize the allied command and control structure, building on the approach begun

²⁹ POLLACK, M. A. This would represent a further step towards integration within the Union, in line with the theory agent- principal. *The Engines of European Integration: Delegation, Agency, and Agenda Setting in the EU*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003. <https://academic.oup.com/book/10502> ; DELREUX, T., & ADRIAENSEN, J. 'Twenty years of principal-agent research in EU politics: how to cope with complexity?', *European Political Science*, 17(2). 2018 , pp. 258 -275. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-017-0129-4> ; and LI, H. " Research on the Policy Network Efficiency of EU Defence Integration from the Perspective of the Principal-Agent Theory: A Case Analysis Based on the Peacekeeping Operations of the CFSP" , *Advances in Education, Humanities and Social Science Research*, vol. 14. ICHDAE, 2025, pp. 321– –331. ISSN: 2790-167X.

in 2026, with the assumption of European command at the operational-level headquarters in Naples and Brunssum.

In addition to this, the intelligence capabilities available to the Union should be strengthened. For example, by establishing a network of satellites with intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, whilst also enabling early warning for missile defence (the Joint Early Warning European Lookout project —JEWEL—, agreed by France and Germany, would be one way of achieving this).

The aim is to acquire or enhance the critical enablers that the United States has been contributing to collective defence and those that Europe lacks or possesses in insufficient numbers. Likewise, *ad hoc* funding for common defence would be necessary, allowing resources to be made available without waiting for budget votes in 27 national parliaments.

In short, the limitations of Article 42.7 are not only legal in nature, but also structural and operational: there are still no tools to implement the clause in a coordinated manner across the Union.

The Treaty on European Union provides the framework for a common defence, but the picture has yet to be painted. There are major initiatives underway linked to other EU policies, whose interests currently converge on security and defence, such as market, industry, innovation and space policies, and even territorial cohesion policy, in which the Treaty's competences have been utilised, interpreting them flexibly in all matters relating to defence, as well as dual-use technologies .

Future scenarios: autonomy, dependence or a perfect storm

By 2026 and after four years of heavy European involvement in the war in Ukraine, there is no shortage of those who are once again advocating for a two-speed Europe of defence, referring to different degrees of integration.

French President Macron recently stated that no state should be excluded from this dynamic, but also that 'no country should be able to block those who want to move faster or further'³⁰ . The reasoning is that a group of leading states should be able to move

³⁰ MACRON, E. ' ' *Initiative for Europe: Speech for a sovereign, united and democratic Europe*, speech delivered on 26 September at the Sorbonne, Paris. Paris, Élysée – Presidency of the Republic, 2017.

forward with specific projects, leaving the door open for others to join when they are ready.

Germany appears to be reconsidering its previous stance against partial initiatives and may be moving towards the line favoring positive differentiation³¹. On 27 January 2026, Lars Klingbeil, the German Vice-Chancellor, referred to a core group comprising the six largest economies in the EU (the 'E6' group: Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Poland and the Netherlands), which could move forward, in a differentiated and more intensive manner, in key areas to avoid institutional paralysis among the 27 regarding defence³².

It should be noted that Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) is not merely a framework for cooperation aimed at developing multinational capability projects that improve interoperability; it is also a broader political framework that enables advances towards the definition of a common defence, including territorial defence, through the coordinated implementation of Article 42(7) of the TEU.

To date, use has been made of the first dimension of PESCO, which consists of promoting and structuring multinational cooperative capability developments, so far with limited success, and mainly in relation to needs identified by NATO.

One example worthy of special mention is the PESCO military mobility project. The reason for addressing this issue within the EU is simply the translation of a military operational problem: enabling reinforcement towards the east via corridors that allow forces to be deployed for the territorial defence of NATO and, therefore, of its EU partners in Eastern Europe.

In other words, there are military issues identified within the Alliance that can be partially resolved through civilian policies and instruments within the Union.

Although PESCO was initially understood as an institutional mechanism linked to the CSDP, its role in developing capabilities, standardizing equipment and creating common

<https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/09/26/initiative-pour-l-europe-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-pour-une-europe-souveraine-unie-et-democratique>

³¹ HOUDÉ, A. and WESSEL, R. A. 'A Common Security and Defence Policy: Limits to Differentiated Integration in PESCO?', *European Papers*, 7(3). 2022, pp. 1317 -1337. <https://www.europeanpapers.eu/e-journal/common-security-defence-policy-limits-differentiated-integration-pesco> and MARTILL, B., & GEBHARD, C. 'Combined differentiation in European defence: tailoring Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) to strategic and political complexity', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 44(1). 2023, 97 -124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2022.2155360>

³² EUTODAY CORRESPONDENTS. " : Germany opens talks on two-speed EU as frustrations over unanimity grow", *EUToday*. 28 January 2026. <https://eutoday.net/germany-opens-talks-on-two-speed-eu/>

structures can have a direct impact on the viability and credibility of invoking Article 42(7) TEU when military assets are required.

The various batches of capability projects launched under PESCO — a bottom-up approach driven by Member States — have shown increasing alignment with the capability priorities established in NATO's defence planning process (NDPP). Thus, the new capabilities developed largely meet the operational needs of allied Member States and are directly applicable to territorial defence.

Furthermore, in the face of Russia's hybrid activities, we might ask: , in fact, is not the use of EU tools against Russian³³ activities on Union territory, also defence of EU citizens? Why not also make use of Member States' military assets in this task? Why use only civilian instruments when the Russian threat combines them all?

It stands to reason that combining the Union's hybrid toolbox — centered on resilience and early detection — with the legal robustness of Article 42.7, and the use of all available means, both civilian and military³⁴ , would enable the EU to move towards a more comprehensive and autonomous defence framework.

In other words, there are problems of a primarily military nature that can also be partially resolved through civilian instruments. This integrated approach would complement the deterrence and defence posture of NATO and the EU itself, in the event that the Alliance were to fail due to a decision by the US ally, a possibility that today cannot be ruled out.

For decades, technological and operational dependence on the United States was not a drawback. For Denmark, for example, it would have been very difficult or impossible to fly its US-made F-35 aircraft in Greenland in the event of a conflict against them; or, for Spain, using its F-18 aircraft in a hypothetical conflict with countries closely aligned with Washington would be equally difficult.

Since the second Trump administration came to power, the political and technical debate over the meaning and scope of European strategic autonomy has intensified.

From 2021 to the present day, various EU policy instruments have been incorporated into the priority set by security and defence needs. As mentioned earlier, industrial, market,

³³ HYBRID COE. *Countering Hybrid Threats: The EU's Toolbox*. Helsinki, European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, 2023.

³⁴ STOJANOVIC, B. 'EU Hybrid Toolbox and Article 42(7) TEU: Toward a Comprehensive Defence Framework?', *European Security*, 31(3). 2022, pp. 412 -430.

innovation and space policies, and even economic policies on territorial cohesion, are converging to address these needs, with a particular emphasis on harnessing the benefits derived from advances in dual-use technologies .

Through this set of policies, amongst other things, the aim is to establish a functional defence market within the EU; build a technologically advanced base in the defence and space industries; secure the key supply chains for these industries (rare earths and critical raw materials); promote innovation in disruptive technologies and space; accelerate the time-to-market for innovative solutions to military operational challenges; accelerate the deployment of such solutions; coordinate cross-border collaboration within the Union; and aggregate demand around European projects of common interest agreed for funding.

In relation to the above, key recent milestones include the publication of the *European Defence Industrial Strategy* (EDIS)³⁵ (March 2024), the *Defence White Paper 2030* (March 2025) and the adoption of the *European Defence Industry Programme Regulation* (EDIP) (December 2025), also related to resilience and security of supply for the aforementioned industry.

The points made in the previous paragraph allow us to identify parallels or isomorphisms in European initiatives to fulfil the role of dialogue with industry, a task that NATO has also undertaken. US interests, amongst others, are not immune to this dynamic. The Alliance (and with it the United States) and the Union cooperate whilst competing in this role of dialogue, which does not rule out the possibility of positive synergies between the two organisations³⁶ .

Current synergies can be summarized as follows: NATO establishes the capabilities that must be available in national inventories through its defence planning (NDPP); for its part, the EU uses its economic policies and instruments to incentivize and facilitate aggregated procurement of equipment or the collaborative development of military equipment, all of which aggregates demand at the appropriate scale, for example through the European Defence Projects of Common Interest (EDPCI). It is to be hoped that the results of these

³⁵ BRETON, T. « European Defence Industrial Strategy: Strengthening Europe's Readiness» , press release, Brussels, European Commission, 5 March 2024. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_1211

³⁶ SCHUETTE, L. A. ' . Institutional actors can shape overlap with other international organisations [...] organisations will merely coexist without synergetic effects' if they do not manage complementarity. ' . NATO's responses to EU security and defence initiatives since 2014', *Journal of European Public Policy*. SAGE, 2023. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/13691481221079188>

projects will prove beneficial both in improving the capabilities available to NATO and in promoting the autonomy to act independently at European level, should the need arise.

The need to achieve greater European autonomy may be driven primarily by two scenarios: a disengagement of the United States from European security — an undesirable but possible scenario — or the simultaneous occurrence of conflicts in the Indo-Pacific and in Europe.

The US *National Security Strategy* and *National Defence Strategy* address this possibility, painting a picture in which the United States would be unable to provide sufficient support to Europe in the face of Russia . For this reason, even if the Americans were to remain politically aligned with Europe within NATO, it is urgent and necessary to strengthen Europe's autonomous defence, so that responsibility for it lies in European hands. This process of 'Europeanisation ' of the Alliance has already begun, albeit modestly.

Another synergistic alignment is evident in the calls for Member States to increase defence investment.

In March 2025, the Commission called on Member States to make an additional effort of €800 billion on top of the 1.9 % of GDP invested by all 27 partners the previous year, to reach approximately 3.5 % of GDP. The aim was to rearm Europe³⁷ .

The supranational institutions were aiming for investment figures almost in line with what was subsequently agreed upon by the allies in The Hague in June. However, in the strategic review of PESCO at the end of 2025 it was not possible to agree on a specific percentage, which was frankly disappointing for those advocating an integrated and united Europe in defence matters.

Furthermore, the European Commission is leading the effort to draft a new EU *Security and Defence Strategy*³⁸ , updating the provisions of the *2026 EU Global Strategy* (drafted by the European External Action Service). This may involve a higher level of ambition,

³⁷ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Speech by President Ursula von der Leyen on the European Defence Industrial Strategy and the 'Re-arm Europe' plan . Brussels, Publications Office of the European Union, 5 March 2025. <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/>

³⁸ See <https://euractiv.es/news/ue-quiere-von-der-leyen-aporte-mas-claridad-en-nueva-estrategia-seguridad-bruselas/> and BISCOP, S. : ' A New European Grand Security Strategy' , *Ejércitos magazine* [Spanish translation of the original published by Egmont – Royal Institute for International Relations]. 2026. Available at: <https://www.revistaejercitos.com/focus/defensa-europea/una-nueva-gran-estrategia-de-seguridad-europea/>

which could translate into new objectives, forms and necessary means. are Significant developments to be expected, which will then need to be implemented.

It is certainly not a revolutionary strategy, such as a proposal for a common defence force.

What some call a 'European army' is not on the immediate horizon of the new strategy . Calls for such an army are like taking a conceptual leap backwards in history, towards the ill-fated European Defence Community (-Pleven Plan) of the early 1950s, or perhaps a utopian leap towards a future that is difficult to envisage, unless Europe assumes it is on the brink of a geopolitical cataclysm. As the former EU High Re , Josep Borrell, , said 'there is no army without a state, and the EU is not yet a state'³⁹ .

Nevertheless, something is stirring in the high-level political debate. Assuming that transatlantic relations are seriously damaged, Josep Borrell, Enrico Letta and other proposed a path which, building on the Treaty of Lisbon, would develop the strengthening of European defence, even going beyond the provisions of the Treaty if necessary:

- a) Activate Article 42.2 of the TEU, relating to common defence and unanimously approved by the Council, to make the mutual assistance clause (42.7) operational and create a European chain of command.
- b) If there is no unanimity, move forward through PESCO or via an *ad hoc* treaty outside the Treaty of Lisbon.
- c) Activate the passerelle clause to replace unanimity with qualified majority voting in foreign and security policy⁴⁰ .
- d) Initiate the reform of the Treaties on the basis of the European Parliament's 2023 proposal⁴¹ .

Table1 . Decisions on unanimity and territorial defence

³⁹ BORRELL, Josep. 1st Geopolitics Conference of the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies. La Granja, March 2025.

⁴⁰ The passerelle clause (Art. 48.7 TEU) allows, in principle, for unanimity to be replaced by qualified majority voting in areas covered by the TFEU by decision of the European Council, but its first paragraph contains an express and categorical exception for decisions with military or defence implications, which closes off this avenue for flexibility precisely in the area most sensitive to the construction of an autonomous European defence. This exclusion is complemented by that of Article 31.4 TEU, forming a coherent legal shield for national sovereignty in defence matters.

⁴¹ EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. European Parliament resolution of 22 November 2023 containing proposals to the Council and the European Commission following the conclusions of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs [TA-9-2023-0427]. Strasbourg, European Parliament, 2023. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0427_ES.html

Instrument	Legal basis	Scope	Limit
Bridge clause (Article, 31(3) TEU)	Within the TEU	Non-military CFSP	Excludes military decisions (Art. 31.4)
Bridge clause (Article, 48.7 TEU)	Within the TEU	General legislative procedures	Does not directly affect the CFSP/CSDP
<i>Ad hoc</i> treaty	International law	Full territorial defence	Outside the EU institutional framework

Own elaboration

The passerelle clause is a partial and elegant solution for moving forward without reforming the Treaties. However, its inherent limitation in the area of defence precisely reinforces the argument that the Lisbon Treaty framework is insufficient to make the leap towards a genuine common defence.

Any proposal to complete the transition from what is currently a security community, such as the EU, to an alternative alliance to NATO will not succeed without a prior Franco-German agreement and, most likely, with some involvement from the United Kingdom. It would probably require member states to make specific investment commitments in the form of percentages of GDP and, perhaps, future commitments to Ukraine.

The Coalition of the Willing for Ukraine could, should it finally materialise, serve as a think tank for the future of defence in Europe⁴². Furthermore, a new European defence treaty would have implications for capability-building coalitions and, consequently, for national industries and economies.

This new common defence alliance would likely have its own partnerships, with natural candidates being those states that have recently signed security and defence agreements with the EU, such as Norway, Canada, Japan and South Korea.

⁴² <https://www.crisisgroup.org/cmt/global/way-forward-europes-coalitions-willing> ;
<https://www.gmfus.org/news/coalition-willing> ;
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/statement_26_45

Furthermore, it is well known that the current administration US prefers to deal, in trade and defence, with individual countries rather than negotiate with the EU-27 as a whole . An *ad hoc* treaty for common European defence that did not include all Member States would expose those left out to greater US influence. For small countries, such as the Baltic states, this proposal, if taken forward, would present a real dilemma, as they would have to choose between European or US guarantees.

Nevertheless, the proposal for a new European military alliance for common defence would be based solely on the initial assumption that the transatlantic relationship is irreparably damaged. It does not seem prudent, at least not yet, to take this as a given, but neither should this possibility be dismissed.

Two variables underpin the nature of future scenarios: the degree of European political cohesion when it comes to agreeing to act together in the interests of a common defence; and the state of the transatlantic relationship, which determines whether the United States remains committed to the defence of Europe or, conversely, disengages.

Table 2. Scenarios matrix

	US maintains NATO commitment	US decouples / transatlantic rift
High European political cohesion	I. Complementary autonomy	II. Europe takes charge
Low European cohesion / fragmentation	III. Perpetuated dependence	IV. Perfect storm

Scenario I — European autonomy complementary to NATO

Europe reaches a sufficient political agreement — led by the E6 or a reinforced PESCO core — to build its own capabilities and make progress on reforming the Lisbon Treaty framework.

The United States maintains its commitment to NATO, albeit on more conditional terms. The result is a renewed Alliance, with a real and credible European pillar, capable of assuming the territorial defence of the continent with increasingly reduced US support and fewer critical enablers. However, US nuclear deterrence remains in place, whilst the United Kingdom and France continue to lead the coordination of a potential European nuclear umbrella.

This would entail deepening the complementary synergies between NATO and the EU; it would mean accepting a non-voting EU voice⁴³ in the Alliance's intergovernmental governance and in all matters relating to capability planning and allied military plans.

However, it would have a vote on matters relating to the defence industry and space, and on the autonomous implementation of Article 42.7 within the Union's territory, for which it could utilize allied command and control capabilities through renewed Berlin- Plus agreements.

The EU's voice would be strengthened by the existence of the embryonic 'European army' of some 100,000 troops, according to the proposal by Commissioner Kubilius.

It is a complex scenario, but pragmatically more feasible, which may even provide scope for an orderly roadmap in which the 23 EU NATO allies, and the rest of the Europeans, take on the responsibility for conventional defence against Russia (nuclear defence would remain essentially American), even within a NATO that remains relevant.

Scenario II — Europe takes charge of its own defence

The transatlantic rupture reaches its conclusion — whether through a formal US withdrawal from NATO, operational disengagement, or an open conflict such as that over Greenland — yet the Europeans respond with sufficient political cohesion to do what is necessary to activate Article 42.2 of the TEU in a coordinated manner, or alternatively decide to conclude a new *ad hoc* treaty that would amount to a renewal of NATO's founding Treaty, but without the United States.

The E6 group would lead the way, perhaps together with the United Kingdom. This is the most disruptive scenario, but also the one that would most rapidly accelerate European defence integration: the urgency of confronting an existential threat would be the factor forcing a political decision that decades of debate failed to achieve.

It would entail massive investment, perhaps defence Eurobonds and a European operational command that would have to be established within a very short timeframe.

⁴³ CASTILLA, J. C. *Defence between two pillars: NATO, the EU and the battle for the European voice*. IEEE Analysis Paper, No. 14/2026. Madrid, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, 2026. <https://www.defensa.gob.es/ceseden/-/ieee-2026-otan-ue-defensa-dos-pilares-analisis14>

Scenario III — Uncredible perpetuated dependence

The United States formally maintains the NATO umbrella, albeit one that is conditional and transactional. This is an Alliance that has not overcome its crisis of values, in which the provisions relating to the political and economic aspects of the Washington Treaty have been *effectively* sidelined, and the credibility of Article 5 is subject, on a case-by-case basis, to the US decision.

Some Europeans still have an excuse to avoid critical decisions that present them with major strategic dilemmas and feel relieved by minimal guarantees of collective allied defence. Their level of concern for the security of the European continent does not reach the degree of cohesion necessary to make the qualitative leap towards common defence within the framework of the Union.

PESCO and defence industry initiatives remain a *shopping list*; the *Strategic Compass* does not point north, and defence spending is growing in nominal terms, but without a commitment to real strategic integration at the European level. Europe is marginally improving its national military capabilities, but it is still not an autonomous security actor.

This is the scenario of continuity, perhaps the most likely and one that would see Europe continue on its slippery slope towards irrelevance.

Scenario IV — Perfect storm, disunity and vulnerability

The transatlantic relationship breaks down and, at the same time, Europe is unable to mount a cohesive response — due to vetoes, differences between north-eastern and Mediterranean countries, bilateral pressure from Washington on smaller nations, or the domestic political cost of defence spending.

The 27 fracture: some seek bilateral agreements with the US; others with the E6 ; others, such as the Scandinavians, organise themselves into regional security structures, whilst the smaller states are left at the mercy of their more powerful neighbours.

Without American guarantees and without a common European capability, the eastern flank remains in a position of extreme vulnerability.

Conclusions

Europe is at a critical juncture in its history. The security architecture established after 1945 and consolidated in Helsinki in 1975 has broken down. The war in Ukraine, Washington's strategic reorientation and the tensions surrounding Greenland are not passing anomalies, but symptoms of a structural shift in the international order. The risk of confusing a shift in rhetoric with a real change in capabilities remains the main danger for Europe.

It is essential to maintain a high degree of internal political cohesion, which implies that Europe must take on the role of deterrence and conventional defence against threats such as that from Russia or any other that may arise. This will require economic and social efforts across all Member States, to which other European countries should also contribute, and will demonstrate solidarity not only in military terms, but also in economic and financial terms.

Europeanizing the Alliance does not mean breaking away militarily from the United States or aspiring to positions within the command structure, but rather having more and better capabilities in the hands of the Union and at the disposal of the Alliance; it implies also partially modifying allied governance at a time when strategic prudence advises us to seriously consider how the European security architecture should evolve, as the Americans are gradually disengaging from it.

The future definition of the new European security architecture depends in part on actors such as the US and Russia, but also on the political will of the 27 EU member states and other Europeans. Europe's responsibility is to translate that political will into new and better structures, capabilities and concrete commitments.

The Treaty of Lisbon offers some possibilities, but also clear limits. The requirement for unanimity on decisions with military implications is currently the main legal obstacle to progress towards a common defence. The roadmap proposed by Borrell, Letta and others — invoking Article 42 as a pathway towards such a defence, resorting to a strengthened PESCO and even exploring an *ad hoc* treaty outside the Lisbon Treaty if necessary — shows that the paths exist, but also that they are all politically demanding and none is free of obstacles.

The mutual assistance clause (Article 42(7) of the TEU) is, *in practice*, militarily meaningless. Without a command and control structure, without a predefined joint force and without a streamlined decision-making mechanism, it cannot be implemented in a

coordinated manner in the event of an attack. Giving it real substance is the most urgent task.

Commissioner Kubilius's proposals converge around this objective: a force of 100,000 troops organised into modular blocks and a European Security Council with pre-authorized mandates. All of this is based on the logic that Member States, as sovereign actors, will have to progressively delegate powers to the EU institutions, assuming the political cost of this transfer in exchange for the benefits of collective action.

The embryo of the European army already has a name and a number. The 100,000 troops proposed by Kubilius, placed under EU command and operating under NATO procedures, would constitute the first force with real critical mass for conventional deterrence against Russia on the eastern flank.

Its significance goes beyond the operational: assigned in peacetime to a permanent mission of mutual defence, these soldiers would carry, alongside their national flag, the European flag, physically embodying mutual and collective commitment.

It would be a first step—modest but unequivocal—towards building a European strategic identity based on the most sovereign element of a state : its armed forces.

As long as the transatlantic link remains intact, the most desirable scenario continues to be that of progressive and complementary European autonomy within NATO, as long as this remains relevant to the US- . The aim is to establish a real and growing European military pillar, with clearly defined forces and an allied command structure that is increasingly Europeanized for conventional operations, capable of gradually taking on the roles and tasks that the United States leaves vacant.

Until European countries fully assume responsibility for their own defence, creating a guarantee of mutual and collective defence — automatic and binding — it is advisable for the Atlantic Alliance to remain, but transformed to reflect greater responsibility and influence on the part of Europeans.

The EU's voice, with or without a vote depending on the matter, must be heard in NATO's governance: informal cooperation frameworks and technical staff-to-staff contacts are not enough; the inter-institutional level must be strengthened.

Ultimately, it is a matter of realistically managing the complex transition from protected dependence towards responsible European autonomy, addressing questions with

profound political and emotional implications regarding the scope of military integration. To this end, a strengthened prior consensus is required among the 23 allies that make up the Union.

The paradox is that Europe has never been as prosperous, as educated, as peaceful or as strong as it is now. There is no shortage of money, knowledge or experience to undertake this transformation; what is lacking is political will.

The new security environment has opened a window of opportunity to correct the current strategic dependence, but that window is narrow. If this convergence of will, resources and strategic urgency crystallizes into concrete institutional decisions, Europe will gain the opportunity to become an autonomous and relevant security and defence actor, capable of facing any challenge.

The scenario of the perfect storm, in which the transatlantic relationship breaks down and, simultaneously, Europe is unable to mount a cohesive response, is a very real and plausible possibility. It is the likely fate if Europeans continue to prioritise formal unity over genuine ambition.

Only through integration will Europe be able to seize its opportunity — perhaps its last — to avoid being left fragmented and defenceless in the face of a Russia that poses a threat in the east and south.

Cor. Ignacio Fuente Cobo
Senior Analyst, IEEE
Cor. Dr Juan C. Castilla
Senior Analyst, IEEE