

Colonel GS (ret.) Assoc. Prof. Dipl. Eng. Radoslav Ivančík, PhD. et PhD., MBA, MSc.
Department of Management and Information Science, Academy of the Police Force in
Bratislava, Slovakia
Email: radoslav.ivancik@akademiapz.sk

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ON SOME ASPECTS OF EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF WAR IN UKRAINE

Abstract: *The European security environment is currently significantly affected by Russian aggression against Ukraine. However, right from the start of the war, the European Union and its member states acted decisively, they unequivocally condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and began to help it politically, economically, humanitarily and by supplying military equipment, weapons, ammunition, and training members of the Ukrainian armed forces. And although no European member state of the European Union or the North Atlantic Alliance has been attacked, the ongoing conflict negatively affects European stability and disrupts the European security and defence system. That is also why the authors, using relevant scientific methods and approaches within the framework of interdisciplinary research, deal in the article with some selected aspects of European security and defence in the context of the conflict in Ukraine. They point out how Russian aggression has influenced discussions about the roles of the European Union in ensuring security and defence on the European continent, shed light on the Union's security and defence policy, deal with issues of European strategic autonomy and related relations between the EU and NATO, and at the end of the article indicate challenges, which are closely related to European security and defence in the context of the war in Ukraine.*

Keywords: *European Union, security, defence, war, Ukraine, aspects, challenges.*

INTRODUCTION

The Common Security and Defence Policy (hereinafter referred to as "CSDP") (EEAS, 2021) was established in 1999 as an integral part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (hereinafter referred to as "CFSP") (EC, 2023) of the European Union (hereinafter referred to as "EU" or "Union") in response to the conflict in the Balkans, which clearly demonstrated the EU's inability to respond adequately to international crises and conflicts and also pointed to the absence of mechanisms for a coordinated common approach (Fiott et al., 2018; Kazanský - Andrassy, 2019). The CSDP thus became the framework for the military and defence aspects of the EU's foreign and security policy and enabled the Union to assume part of the responsibility for security and peace in the world. One of the objectives was to have an instrument enabling the EU to carry out crisis management in similar ways as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (hereafter referred to as "NATO" or "the Alliance") was doing at the time in Bosnia and Herzegovina and then in Kosovo. Since 2003, the EU has started to conduct its own military and civilian CSDP operations and missions, particularly in the Western Balkans and Africa. CSDP thus established itself as one of the components of the European security architecture (Tardy, 2015).

Although the EU has not conducted coercive military operations like NATO or some of its member states, it has nevertheless conducted a dozen stabilization military operations along with more than 25 civilian missions (Ivančík – Jurčák, 2023). These activities played a key role in shaping the security identity of the Union (Kazanský, 2020), but their success was questioned from the beginning, and political support from EU member states was also not always certain. Another problem was that the creation and conduct of CSDP operations and missions was not accompanied by a parallel effort to develop European military capabilities and capacities, the European defence market remained fragmented and European states did little to facilitate the joint development and procurement of defence capabilities and capacities (EDA, 2023a).

The EU, aware of the mentioned shortcomings, in the context of the implementation of the EU Global Strategy for Security and Defence from 2016 (EEAS, 2019), adopted a series of initiatives, which include, for example, the establishment of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) (EDA, 2023b) and of the European Defence Fund (EDF) in 2017 with the aim of moving forward in this sphere. Through the above instruments, but also other efforts, the EU

focused on solving the structural deficiencies of the European defence industrial base at a time when there was less demand for CSDP operations and missions. So far, PESCO has led to the creation of 60 projects in 7 areas, while EDF has funded 61 defence industry projects for a total of €1.2 billion in 2022 (EC, 2022).

Through these initiatives, the EU's defence agenda has shifted from operations and missions to greater development of military capabilities and capacities. The Strategic Compass for Security and defence approved in March 2022 captured this development. Drafted before the outbreak of war, hastily revised, and adopted a few weeks after the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, the document provides a joint assessment of the strategic environment in which the EU operates and the threats and challenges it faces. It also proposes a series of initiatives to improve the EU's ability to act decisively during crises, ensure its security and defence and protect its citizens. It also proposes the creation of a rapid deployment capability of up to 5,000 soldiers for crisis management operations (EEAS, 2023).

THE SECURITY AND DEFENCE AGENDA OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

The European security environment is currently significantly affected by Russian aggression against Ukraine. The decisive way in which the EU responded to Russian aggression and the outbreak of war in Ukraine confirmed its efforts to play the role of a relevant security actor. Adopting (so far) twelve packages of sanctions against Russia (EU, 2023a), accepting more than 4 million Ukrainian refugees and the associated humanitarian and economic aid (EU, 2023b) and financing the supply of arms to Ukraine by its member states through the European Peace Facility – EPC) (EU, 2023c) the Union played its part in the Western response to the war in Europe. The relative ease with which decisions were taken, especially during the first year of the war, also testified to a sense of political cohesion among EU states and their unification in sharing outrage over the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

At the EU level, political unity culminated when the Union offered Ukraine (along with Moldova) the status of a candidate country at the European summit in June 2022. The EU member states thereby showed that they are willing to support Ukraine politically, economically, humanitarily and by supplying lethal weapons, equipment and ammunition, while refraining

from taking measures that could lead to a direct confrontation with Russia. Nevertheless, some differences were generally seen in how far European states were willing to go in supporting Ukraine. For example, France and Germany are sometimes seen as less willing to supply advanced lethal weapons than countries like Poland and the Baltic states, which are more directly exposed to the Russian threat (Vergeron, 2016). A typical example was the discussions on sending battle tanks in early 2023, when Germany and France resisted the decision to provide the Ukrainian army with Leopard 2 and Leclerc battle tanks. Germany later agreed (Debusmann, 2023), while France only agreed to send light wheeled tanks (Terzian, 2023).

At the same time, the EU established the EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM) as part of CSDP in October 2022, the task of which is to train 15,000 (later the number was increased to 30,000) Ukrainian soldiers. The mission is implemented in Poland and Germany, while several EU states participate in the training (EEAS, 2022).

In connection with the above information, it is also necessary to mention the fact that while the low level of defence spending by European states resonated in the discussions before February 24, 2022, and how this could negatively affect transatlantic ties, the Russian invasion of Ukraine was for many from European countries as an alarm clock. Most European states have reassessed their perception of threats and taken decisions to strengthen their defence potential, either from the point of view of the budget (by increasing defence spending) or in the area of building new and modernizing already existing military capabilities and capacities (Tocci, 2023; Davidson, 2023; Strupczewski, 2023). Following this, for example, Germany decided to create a special defence fund of 100 billion euros (Hansen, 2022) and Finland and Sweden applied to join NATO (NATO, 2022). In the meantime, Finland has already become the 31st member state of the Alliance (NATO, 2023) and Sweden is awaiting admission in the near future (Amaro, 2023).

A BRIEF LOOK AT SOME ASPECTS OF EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

From the point of view of ensuring European security and defence, one of the very important aspects of the developments so far in the context of the war in Ukraine is the fact that the EU and its member states have acted decisively since the beginning of the war, clearly from the very first moment they condemned Russia's aggressive war and began to help Ukraine

politically, economically, humanitarially and through supplies of military equipment, weapons, ammunition and training of members of the Ukrainian armed forces (EU, 2023d). It can be said that the EU has chosen a geopolitical approach to the crisis that combines short-term and long-term elements together with various other components of the extended security agenda. What the Union and its Member States have done so far also testifies to the reality of the functioning of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, in contrast to what was done (or rather not done) in response to the war in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, the Arab Spring or the Libyan or Syrian crisis.

The second important aspect from the point of view of ensuring European security and defence is that, in the light of the Russian attack on Ukraine, European states have re-evaluated their previous approach to defence and have begun to realize the reality that they do not have sufficient military capabilities and capacities, and therefore it is essential in a fundamental way increase efforts in this area. Uncertainties in this context exist on at least two levels: one concerns the medium-term reality of the defence efforts promised by current governments, and the other concerns which institution – the EU or NATO – will benefit more from the changes. At the first level, Germany's reluctance to implement a defence spending allocation of 2% of GDP and the use of a €100 billion military modernization fund showed how long-term threat perceptions and domestic politics can influence decisions taken immediately after the outbreak of war (Burchard, 2022). On the second level, although the Russian invasion promoted further rapprochement between the EU and NATO, together with the clarification of their respective roles (see below), it did not erase the deep inter-institutional competition that may re-emerge after some time when states, in an effort to strengthen their defence positions, may be tempted to prioritize NATO over the EU in defence (Lucas et al., 2023).

Another very important aspect relates to the concept of European strategic autonomy. The 2016 EU Global Strategy framed the concept of strategic autonomy, as its foreword states that the strategy supports the ambition of strategic autonomy for the EU, which is seen as essential to promote the common interests of our citizens as well as our principles and values (EEAS, 2019). In the following years, the concept of strategic autonomy primarily concerned the area of security and defence and was implicitly defined in relation to NATO and the role of the US in the defence of Europe. A strategically autonomous EU would mean the ability to decide, plan and execute a number of demanding military activities without European member states having

to rely on the Alliance or the United States of America (Fiott, 2018). This term has gradually expanded to include not only the European defence industrial base, but also other broader components related to energy, supply chains, infrastructure and critical economic sectors.

Trump's presidency has helped the idea of European strategic autonomy, especially his several unflattering statements towards allies, for example in connection with European states' defence spending. In the same way, the emergence of doubts about the commitment of the US to European security due to its pivot to Asia (Keneally, 2018; Todd, 2018; Blackvill, 2020) helped the development of ideas about autonomy. At that time, several European leaders – for example, German Chancellor Merkel or French President Macron – indicated that it was necessary for Europeans to unite and deepen cooperation in the field of security and defence (Puhl, 2018). The concept of European strategic autonomy also created tension with the United States, as it was seen as a disruption of the transatlantic partnership and thus harmful to NATO. Moreover, several European states also do not like the idea of autonomy because, according to them, it could mean a smaller role for NATO or the United States of America as the primary guarantors of European security or a will to separate Europe from North America (Grevi, 2019).

Given the central role of the US and NATO in the response to the Ukrainian crisis in February 2022, one of the conclusions of this sequence of events was that the debate about European strategic autonomy is no longer relevant. The United States has shown its full commitment to the defence of Europe, and the extreme European military dependence on the Americans that the war in Ukraine has revealed, or rather confirmed, has also indicated that Europe's ambitions for strategic autonomy are simply out of reach at the moment (Davidson, 2022). Moreover, in the European states most exposed to the Russian threat, the alliance with the US and NATO is considered irreplaceable and is not undermined by any concept of European strategic autonomy.

From the point of view of the aspect involving the mutual relationship between the EU and NATO, the partnership between the Union and the Alliance has been complicated since the first days of the existence of the European security and defence policy. However, in general, this partnership has benefited from a number of initiatives taken in recent years, particularly in the context of the EU-NATO joint declarations of 2016 (EU, 2016) and 2018 (EU, 2018). The 2022 Strategic Compass makes extensive reference to NATO, recognizing the importance of the

Alliance for the collective defence of its members and calling for the EU to complement NATO. Similarly, the new Strategic Concept of NATO characterizes the Union as a unique and indispensable partner for the Alliance. At the same time, it recognizes the value of a stronger and more capable European defence that contributes positively to transatlantic and global security and is complementary and interoperable with NATO (NATO, 2022, para. 43).

In practice, cooperation between the EU and NATO has developed tangibly in recent years, whether through political dialogue, coordination between the organizational components of both organizations or through operational projects (EU, 2022). The third EU-NATO joint statement, issued in January 2023, reaffirms the strength of the partnership, and speaks of renewed cooperation to address growing geostrategic competition, the challenges of resilience and protection of critical infrastructures, disruptive technologies, space, the security implications of climate change, as well as manipulations and interference from abroad (EU, 2023e). In this context, it is important that the war in Ukraine clarified the division of tasks between NATO, which "deterrents and defends" and the EU, which "sanctions and finances" (Bond - Scazzieri, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The European Union is quite often portrayed as overly bureaucratized, slow in decision-making, in processes, and often it really is, but on the other hand, the war in Ukraine showed that in times of crisis it can also be progressive, flexible, and quick in decision-making. In this context, it can be said that the EU has demonstrated its relevance through its various initiatives since the start of Russian aggression on February 24, 2022. Some of the measures taken (such as the use of the European Peace Facility for the supply of lethal weapons and ammunition, or sanctions and energy security measures) were complex and required careful consideration. The EU has managed it, but it will face many challenges in the coming months, especially in relation to Ukraine.

First, the EU will have to continue to show the highest level of political cohesion vis-à-vis Russia, which will have a huge political dimension (political unity of member states) that will affect the Union's ability to (a) maintain, strengthen or even adopt further sanctions against

Russia, (b) to keep up with the supply of arms, ammunition and financial and humanitarian aid, and (c) to offer a united front in any possible negotiations with Russia.

Second, in the context of the war in Ukraine, the EU will have to rethink the debate on European strategic autonomy and take into account the transatlantic link (expressed by EU-US relations) and the partnership between the Union and the Alliance. The main theme must be mutual complementarity with an effort to clarify the ambiguities raised by the debate on strategic autonomy and its meaning.

And thirdly, it will be necessary to prepare and present the EU's visions of the future European security regime in the post-Ukraine situation, what will be its relationship with NATO in this regime, what will be the degree of political and economic integration of Ukraine into the EU before its full accession, what type of security guarantees the EU will be able to offer Ukraine if Ukraine is not a NATO member, as well as other visions regarding European security and defence.

The European Union faces today and will face many other challenges in the future, not only those connected with the war in Ukraine. Regardless of what the challenges will be, Europe will have to think much more about ensuring its security and defence and also act much more in this area. It will have to turn promises into actions so that they do not remain only in the air or on paper, it will have to further develop current initiatives and through them modernize existing and, above all, build new deficient military capabilities and capacities so that it is able to guarantee its security and defence and protect its citizens.

Therefore, it is necessary and a great challenge for all humanity to identify potential scenarios in which terrorism, uprisings, riots, organised crime, instability and so on could be converted from abstract and hypothetical threats to real threats, causing people, groups, nations, very serious problems for States and all humanity. For this reason, more than ever before, effective and efficient measures must be taken at a timely level, seeking concrete solutions and creating tools and avoiding them. And that at the national, regional, and global levels.

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