

The European Security and Defence Union

The European Union and its neighbours

Is the EU neighbourhood and enlargement
policy truly human and fair?



How to help the EU's eastern
neighbours solve major
challenges in peace and
security

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Putin's war of aggression
and its implications for
European security and
defence

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Europeans will not weigh in isolation

European sovereignty

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The issue of European sovereignty has been highlighted by Russian aggression in Ukraine. Beyond the necessary debates, the EU was able to react in a coordinated manner by six sets of sanctions against Russia, signs of its economic power. It was united in welcoming refugees. It broke a taboo by financing arms deliveries with money from the common budget. The effort was increased from €0.5bn to €2bn, including the supply of heavy weapons to Ukraine.

However, the United States forms the heart of the military reaction. It decided to increase aid to Ukraine to \$40bn, including \$10bn for direct military aid. The troops reinforcing the eastern flank of the Atlantic Alliance are mainly American. NATO appears to most Europeans as this “life insurance”, evoked in 2019 by Heiko Maas, the then German Foreign Minister. Finland and Sweden, so long attached to their status of neutrality, want to join it.

The Europeans belong to the unity of the western camp, clearly identified around the United States, as highlighted by the conferences in Ramstein, an American military base in Germany where the nations supplying weapons to Ukraine were gathered. Nevertheless, this American military centrality shows European weakness. Although with military spending far exceeding Russia, Europeans alone would not be able to defend their integrity against an attack.

The objective of a European defence

However, nothing says that NATO insurance will be valid regardless of the American president, the political situation in the US or the potential field of intervention. Russian aggression has saved Europeans years in the realisation that they need to build their own defence. If the Brexit crisis has allowed progress, this war has led to new steps. The mutual defence clause in Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union has been viewed with new interest, namely by Sweden and Finland. The Danes joined the European defence policy by referendum in June.

In March, the European Council adopted the “Strategic Compass”, the first European White Paper on defence. The Member States expressed their will to increase their military budget. In continuation of the March EU Summit, the High Representative and the Commission presented an analysis of the defence investment gaps and measures to address them, such as the joint acquisition of defence equipment, with the help of Community money, and the creation of a joint purchasing centre. The objective of European defence seems to be progressing, especially since the agreement to build it in complementarity

with NATO, as stated in October 2021 in Rome by Presidents Macron and Biden and as confirmed by the NATO new strategic concept adopted at the summit of Madrid in June 2022:

“(…) NATO recognises the value of a stronger and more capable European defence that contributes positively to transatlantic and global security and is complementary to, and interoperable with NATO.”

“The question of European sovereignty, which is not limited to defence, remains open.”

The path towards a federal Europe advocated by the German governmental coalition contract and by the Italian President of the Council Draghi, the desire for a “sovereign, united, democratic Europe” expressed in the Sorbonne speech of President Macron, all go in the direction of European sovereignty.

Sovereignty remains a challenge

However, this sovereignty remains a challenge, because if the Union brings together elements of sovereignty, both internal and external, the Member States remain fundamentally sovereign, and its progress ultimately depends on the will of these states to move forward. However, the Ukrainian crisis has highlighted the difference between the east and the west of Europe regarding the reaction to Russia; its neighbour countries, except for Hungary, being more in line with the Americans, followed by the British, than with the position of France and Germany. Will not the “new Europe”, which accompanied the United States in the Iraqi adventure, want to continue relying on only the American power for its defence while rearming, and prefer with also nations of “old Europe”, the purchase of American armaments to the creation of a real European defence industrial and technological base, an indispensable foundation of sovereignty? Will it not gain greater weight in the Union, to the detriment of the Franco-German couple, able to move Europe towards greater unity and sovereignty?

The question of European sovereignty, which is not limited to defence, remains open. It is true that in the face of continental states that are asserting themselves on the planet, Europeans will not weigh in isolation, but will only be sovereign in union. This reality is likely to support them on their path to sovereignty.

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