

DOI: 10.46340/eppd.2026.13.2.6

THE ARCHITECTURE OF EUROPEAN SECURITY IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICAL CHALLENGES

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Citation: Gamsakhurdia, M., & Chkhikvishvili, G. (2026). “The Architecture of European Security in the Context of Contemporary Geopolitical Challenges”. *Evropský politický a právní diskurz*, 13, 2, 71-76. <https://doi.org/10.46340/eppd.2026.13.2.6>

Abstract

The article examines and analyzes the transformation of the European security architecture in the conditions of the formation of a new world order. New geopolitical challenges in global politics, changes in the balance of power, and the intensification of regional and international conflicts place the issue of the evolution of the European Union on the agenda of international politics, namely, from an economic union to a military-political actor. The existence and status of the European Union depend on how effectively it will be able to ensure its own security.

The article discusses political discourses on the problems of European security, which became particularly relevant during the course of the Russia–Ukraine war. This war has had a fundamental impact on both the internal and external policy of the European Union. It has accelerated the necessity of implementing reforms in European security policy and highlighted the issues of further enlargement of the European Union and internal reforms, both in terms of defense and security, as well as political and institutional changes.

The paper pays special attention to the concept of strategic autonomy of the European Union, the dynamics of transatlantic relations, and the risks of isolationism.

The aim of the article is to identify, analyse, and assess the ongoing discourses on the institutional transformation and enlargement of the European Union. The research is based on complex analytical approaches used in international relations studies.

Keywords: European security architecture, institutional transformation, economic union, peace project, military-political actor, strategic autonomy, risk of isolation.

Introduction.

The study of the architecture of European security in contemporary international relations represents one of the most important issues, which makes it possible to assess the prospects for the development of the European security system and its role in the global security environment. The problem of European security was revealed in its full intensity during the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, which radically changed the strategic security environment of Europe and placed it before an existential choice: to remain dependent on the security guarantees of other powers, or to become an independent strategic actor. In this context, political debates related to the institutional and strategic future of European security have acquired particular significance. The main emphasis in these debates is placed on strengthening the military-political capabilities of the European Union in the context of contemporary security challenges and on the issue of transforming it from a peace project into a military-political actor, as well as on the necessity of EU enlargement and institutional reforms, including the reform of decision-making mechanisms, etc. Along with the European

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Union, NATO also occupies a central place in the European security system, which has been established as the main institutional mechanism of Europe's collective defense during the post-World War II period. Therefore, in contemporary discussions, the issue of the correlation between EU defense initiatives and NATO capabilities is actively considered.

These processes are directly related to the future development of the European security system and to the European Union's ability to respond more effectively to contemporary geopolitical challenges.

The aim of the research is to analyze the transformation of the architecture of European security in the context of contemporary geopolitical challenges and to assess the processes that determine the modernization of the European Union's role in the international security system.

Based on the research objective, the following tasks were set:

1. To analyze the process of the transformation of the European Union into an active military-political actor;
2. To examine the dynamics of the transatlantic security system and analyze the correlation between EU defense initiatives and NATO capabilities;
3. To analyze contemporary discourse on EU enlargement and institutional reforms and determine its possible impact on the future architecture of European security.

In the course of the research, the following hypothesis was identified: in the context of contemporary geopolitical challenges, the architecture of European security has transformed toward a political model in which the European Union seeks to transform from a project of economic integration into a military-political actor, to strengthen its strategic autonomy in the field of security, to carry out internal institutional reforms, to maintain transatlantic partnership, and to establish a balance of institutional interaction with NATO.

As the theoretical framework of the research, one of the oldest and most fundamental concepts of international relations, the Balance of Power Theory, has been used. Based on the views of the authors of this theory, the founder of classical realism Hans Morgenthau (*Politics Among Nations*, 1948), the representative of structural realism Kenneth Waltz (*Theory of International Politics*, 1979), and the founder of offensive realism John Mearsheimer (*The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 2001), the processes of transformation of the European security architecture and its impact on the modern international security system were assessed, and the proposed hypothesis was substantiated.

The present research is based on complex analytical approaches used in international relations studies. In particular, it combines: the historical-analytical method, through which the stages of the formation of the European security system and its transformation processes in the context of contemporary geopolitical challenges are analyzed; the comparative analysis method, which makes it possible to assess the institutional transformation of European security in the context of relations between the European Union and NATO; discourse analysis, through which contemporary political debates on EU enlargement and institutional reforms are analyzed.

Transformation of the European Union: from a Peace Project to a Military-Political Actor

Although the European integration project was born after World War II, the very idea of a "united Europe" emerged long before 1945. The idea of European cooperation and the establishment of an international political subject was developed as early as the 18th century by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Henri de Saint-Simon. Later, in the 19th century, Giuseppe Mazzini and other thinkers also developed this idea, although until the second half of the 20th century, these ideas were hopeless and utopian. Only after the end of World War II, when European countries, deeply shaken by the consequences of the war, realized that achieving lasting peace on the continent was possible only through economic cooperation at the supranational level. As a result, the foundation was laid for what Winston Churchill later called the "United States of Europe".

Indeed, in 1967, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the European Economic Community (EEC), and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) merged and created the European Community (EC).

In 1973, the "six" of the Community, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg, were joined by the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Denmark, and in 1993 they joined. Ultimately, after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, the union was formed as the "European Union".

Gradually, economic integration was followed by the harmonization of trade regulations among European countries. This was later followed by the removal of trade barriers. The creation of a single

European market and successful economic integration placed on the agenda the deepening of cooperation in political fields as well, including justice, defense, and foreign policy.

The geopolitical challenges of the 21st century, the forceful alteration of the borders of sovereign states, the growth of alliances of autocratic regimes, and the rise of radical nationalist-populist movements, have placed on the agenda the need for a fundamental revision of EU policy and a change of strategy (European Union. n.d. "Déclaration de Schuman – mai 1950). The idea of the Schuman Declaration remains as relevant today as it was 76 years ago.

The philosophy of the European Union, which for decades was based on Immanuel Kant's idea of "Perpetual Peace", where economic interdependence, democratic values, and legal norms would automatically exclude war, has gradually acquired the character of "Hobbesian realism" in accordance with political processes and has recognized that norms and law in the international system cannot exist without the existence of military mechanisms to protect them.

One of the most paradoxical instruments of such transformation is the "European Peace Facility" (EPF). Despite its name, the fund has become the main mechanism through which the European Union, for the first time in its history, began financing the supply of lethal weapons to a country at war.

At the current stage, the EU political agenda includes not only the armament of individual countries but also the creation of a unified "European Defence Union", which implies the integration of the military industry, the standardization of armaments, and a unified procurement system. The EU's policy in this direction has also been intensified by the transactional approach of the 47th President of the United States, Donald Trump. His systematic criticism of European allies and the rhetoric that the alliance should be financially "profitable" for the United States; that security guarantees would not be automatic and that the "hegemon" is not obliged to ensure the security of others free of charge, created a sense of strategic uncertainty in Europe, which in turn contributed to the instrumentalization of a model of European security in which the European Union would be able to manage crises independently on its periphery. Europe realized that fragmented military budgets (where each country produces different modifications of tanks or aircraft) would not be effective. Accordingly, the main vector of transformation has now been directed toward strategic changes, from a peace project to a military-political actor capable of defending its values also by force of arms.

European Strategic Autonomy

This rather old idea of "European strategic autonomy" was revived after 2017, following the election of Emmanuel Macron in France (Elysee, 2017). After the start of the war in Ukraine, it acquired even greater importance and relevance. For the first time in the history of the European Union, member states unanimously supported the "idea of increasing unified military and defense capabilities" to strengthen "European defense" (European Council, 2022).

The European Union was forced to develop mechanisms for financing armaments in order to prevent war, maintain peace, and strengthen European and global stability. Since the organization could not spend military expenditures from the common budget, unlike member states, by the decision of the Council on March 22, 2021 (CFSP 2021/509), the EU financial mechanism, the European Peace Facility (EPF), was created, which allows the European Union to respond quickly and in the long term to conflict situations. In this way, the European Union seeks to create strategic autonomy and increase its influence in the international security architecture, which became especially visible in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine did not mean aggression against a member state of the European Union and therefore did not trigger the necessity of activating the Lisbon Treaty, according to which: "if a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power." (Eur-Lex, Article 42.7).

Despite this circumstance, the European Union's response to Russian aggression was coordinated and agreed. For the first time in its history, the European Union provided massive military assistance to Ukraine from the European Peace Facility (in the amount of 2.5 billion euros), which was an unprecedented example of collective response by the European Union.

The fragility of current transatlantic relations increasingly drives the need to ensure European strategic autonomy. Compared to the Cold War period, for the first time today, European and American interests differ, and accordingly, the degree of transatlantic unity is not high and reliable. The sharply expressed confrontation of the United States with China and its greater focus on the Asia-Pacific region instead of Europe make the necessity of Europe's self-defense increasingly inevitable.

Risks of European “Isolationism”

After the Russia–Ukraine war, discussion intensified on how necessary it is for the European Union to have military resources independent from NATO. In this context, emphasis was placed on the possibility that the EU’s attempt to become an independent military actor and its aspiration toward “European strategic autonomy” may cause the threat of so-called “European isolationism”, which may end not in strengthening the European Union, but in weakening the transatlantic connection. At the same time, there is a risk that focusing on itself will distance Europe from the United States, which will create a vacuum that Russia or China may exploit.

Despite such risks, some experts believe that it is necessary to strengthen the role of the European Union as a “security shield”. The decision of EU member states Finland and Sweden to join NATO made it clear that the European Union is not considered a sufficient security framework. One of the reasons for this may be the fact that the European Union traditionally shows restraint in using military capabilities within the framework of the “Common Security and Defence Policy”. In the discourse, various possibilities are considered to strengthen the global role of the European Union. For example, strengthening the framework of “PESCO” in order to achieve more integrated cooperation in the defense field. For this, the possibility of joint investments is considered, as well as increasing participation in military missions. There is also discussion of the possibility that the newly established “European Political Community” may be used to create formats of cooperation in the field of joint defense and security with countries outside the European Union (Lowings, 2022).

The second dimension of “European isolationism” is domestic political. A unified defense architecture requires unprecedented concessions from member states. In particular, states will have to partially relinquish national sovereignty in favor of common European interests.

The Process of EU Enlargement and the Necessity of Institutional Reform

The formation of the European Union as a “strong international actor” primarily depends on taking concrete steps in the direction of enlargement. If, before the Russia–Ukraine war, some EU member states, especially its two leading members, Germany and France, believed that there was room to maintain strategic relations with Russia, the war that began in 2022 effectively buried this illusion.

Germany’s new foreign policy doctrine was described in detail by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in an article published on December 5, 2022, in the journal “Foreign Affairs”, and he called it “Zeitenwende” (Scholz, 2022).

Germany’s new political doctrine can be said to return to the views of the Cold War era “policy of containment”, and the protection of the European space from Russia is named as one of the main priorities. The main task of the doctrine was defined as increasing Germany’s role as a guarantor of European security.

In the article, Chancellor Scholz states that the efforts of Germany and France to establish peace between Russia and Ukraine (the Normandy format) ended in failure and that Russia’s attack on Ukraine in 2022 brought back the “era of imperialism” to the European continent. Among other strategic directions, the German Chancellor names two priorities that are relevant in the context of this work: the necessity of strengthening the EU’s defense policy and promoting the acceleration of the accession of six Balkan states and three countries participating in the Eastern Partnership initiative to the European Union (Scholz, 2022). The acceleration of EU enlargement and the development of its military cooperation components were also supported by France (Sjökqvist, 2022).

The Russia–Ukraine war, although it demonstrated the capabilities of the European Union as a unified foreign policy actor and examples of unprecedented unity, also revealed serious challenges. Specifically, problems related to the requirement of unanimous decision-making by the European Council.

“Recently, we have modernized the procedures for negotiations related to membership in the European Union, however we know that today’s Europe, with its current functioning rules, is not the Europe that can become a union of 31, 32 or even 33 members,” stated Emmanuel Macron, in his capacity as President of France, the country holding the presidency of the Council of the European Union, during a speech in the European Parliament on January 19, 2022 (French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2022).

Although EU enlargement has again become a main priority of foreign policy, it faces serious resistance in a number of European countries. Public support for EU accession is lowest in Hungary, Slovakia, France, and Austria, that is, in countries where “far-right” parties have significant influence. Parties such as France’s RN, Austria’s Freedom Party (FPÖ), and Germany’s AfD are generally skeptical toward

further EU enlargement and support stricter control over the flow of immigrants from non-EU countries (Gamjashvili, 2024).

Since the beginning of the war, both the imposition of sanctions on Russia and the acceleration of Ukraine's EU accession process, and the mobilization of financial assistance for it have constantly faced resistance from the EU member state Hungary (Maldovic, & Magyar, 2023). Given that a necessary precondition for adopting foreign policy decisions in the European Union is the consent of all member states, Hungary's constant threat to use its veto power poses a risk to EU decisions.

Although over the past two years the European Union has managed, through various methods, to avoid Hungary blocking decisions, this experience has nevertheless made the revision of the decision-making rules a relevant issue.

To date, the most extensive and comprehensive study, commissioned by the governments of Germany and France, was prepared by German and French experts and published on September 18, 2023 (Notre Europe, 2023), where the active topic of discussion within the European Union is how the decision-making rules of the European Council can be reformed. The main trend that has emerged is that for Germany, the institutional reform of the European Union has become a priority, which would not allow any single state to impose a veto and would extend qualified majority voting to the areas of common security and foreign policy. France, to some extent, supports the idea of change but has its own vision. The countries of Northern, Central, and Southeastern Europe are more skeptical about the idea of fundamentally revising the founding treaties of the European Union. However, they believe that qualified majority voting should apply to common security, defense policy, and enlargement issues, but in a way that does not harm the vital interests of these countries (Samadashvili, 2023, p. 153).

EU enlargement will clearly place the European Union before new challenges in terms of its institutional structure. Whether these changes will require revising the founding treaties of the European Union, including the Lisbon Treaty, is unknown. However, the discussion on institutional reform of the European Union has begun.

Conclusion

The study of the new architecture of European security has shown that Europe is in a process of fundamental geopolitical transformation. The evolution from an economic to a military-political actor is driven by existential necessity. An important catalyst of this process was the Russia–Ukraine war, which clearly demonstrated the weakness of Europe's security system and the necessity of strengthening the European Union's defense capabilities. The European Union managed to overcome the ideological limitations of the "peace project" and began integrating instruments of hard power into its policy. However, this transformation requires a constant balance between military effectiveness and the democratic values that constitute the foundation of the organization.

The research also showed that the risk of "European isolationism" is real; however, its prevention is possible through a coordinated model with NATO. Within the framework of ongoing debates regarding all possible directions of the institutional structure and functioning of the European Union, it was revealed that the transformation of the architecture of European security is part of political and institutional changes, and taking concrete steps in terms of enlargement will depend precisely on these changes.

Acknowledgements. None.

Conflict of Interests. None.

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