



EU ARMY: THE ONLY SOLUTION TO PREVENT A WAR?

ANDA MANEA



Source: S. Hermann & F. Richter de Pixabay



SUMMARY

Reflecting on the future of Europe implies reflecting on the future of its security. In the context of the most recent events in Ukraine, invaded by the Russian army and under attack for more than two months, European security is under threat. The current conflict between Russia and Ukraine may direct the EU to reconsider its course of action in the field of security and defense. Discussions about an EU army are now more intense than ever.

CONTENTS

1. New conflicts – new perspectives about the EU security?
2. Reviving the EU army ambitions?
3. Possible solutions for the future

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Anda Manea is a Master student in diplomacy and negotiations in the Department of International Relations and European Integration at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) in Bucharest.

EDITORIAL TEAM

Marc López (Agenda Pública), Luis Bouza (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid) and Álvaro Oleart (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam).

Guest editor: Miruna Butnaru-Troncotă

DISCLAIMER

This policy brief series is made with the financial support of the European Union Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). The policy briefs only reflect the views of the authors and the Commission and the Agency cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



NEW CONFLICT – NEW PERSPECTIVE ABOUT THE EU SECURITY?

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. The attack is viewed as an international war of aggression, and it caused a significant refugee crisis. The invasion exacerbates the conflict between Russians and Ukrainians, which emerged long before even 2014 the illegal annexation of Crimea. The invasion is justified by the statements of President Vladimir Putin, who supports separatist views and calls into question Ukraine's right to statehood by falsely accusing the state of being dominated by neo-Nazis and persecuting the Russian-speaking minority. The Russian leader also claims that NATO has continued to pose a security threat to Russia by expanding eastward since the early 2000s, a claim that NATO denies, and has demanded that Ukraine [never join the alliance](#).

In response, NATO has immediately condemned Russia's actions. The alliance is urging President Putin to stop the conflict, withdraw all forces from Ukraine, and engage in genuine diplomacy. Furthermore, NATO is sending weapons, ammunition, medical supplies, and other materials to Ukraine in the areas of cyber security and protection against chemical, biological, radioactive, or [nuclear threats](#) (which supports one of the main principles of the NATO Strategic Concept - [collective security](#)).

The impact of these rapidly unfolding events on the EU is troublesome, because the conflict can develop numerous concerns about NATO's ability to defend the Eastern flank if its actions remain effective, as well as the possibility of a much stronger European sentiment that would bring the North Atlantic link to a pause. Furthermore, the nature of the divergence calls into question both the military and cooperative capabilities of states, as well as NATO's ability to defend the Eastern flank. New manifestations emerged within the international system, convincing international, and regional European organizations to reconsider their policies in the face of impending threats.

REVIVING THE EU ARMY AMBITIONS?

The desire to strengthen the Union's military capabilities in order to play a more active role in security and defense crises revived the long-lasting debates for an EU army. According to [the French President Emmanuel Macron](#), *"the European Union will continue to work with the United States on defense, but it must develop its own common military structures and become less dependent on non-European nations"*. Referring to the conclusions of the most recent European Council summit, Emmanuel Macron stated that there have been *"developments in the field of defense and security on the European continent"* over the last two years. According to Le Figaro, Emmanuel Macron stated, *"Our task is to develop a common military culture, to invest more in defense, to have more autonomous capabilities, and to intensify the innovation we involve for our army"*.

In this perspective, an EU army can be a solution to the current security threats, particularly in the light of NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan or regarding the present situation, which can be perceived as a wake-up call about its capabilities. I will hereby present my main arguments.

First of all, the European military corps could also serve as an alternative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in defending EU's values. However, the presence of an EU military could easily undermine NATO's action capacities, but some assert that it would in fact add to its strength. The implementation of an EU army has been impeded by those believing that military protection is



a national responsibility, not an EU one, and that it may be an overstep of NATO's influence. The protection of EU citizens heavily relies on NATO's assistance, as 90 percent of EU citizens live in NATO countries, and EU members contribute only to 20 percent of NATO defense spendings. An example of an EU military action can be seen in the French EU supported initiative to generate and maintain the necessary conditions for stability and development activity in the Sahel region.

In my opinion, an EU army in this form cannot be an effective solution at this time because it could seriously undermine the authority of Member States and NATO, and would only benefit the initiating States of such initiative instead of promoting a federalist approach to an EU army corps.

Second, the European failure to cooperate in the field of defense gives credibility to the argument that an EU army is not the best solution to external threats. And this weakens the EU's geopolitical position. The European Defense Agency (EDA) report provides a concrete example in which joint investments and cooperation decreased, even though approximately € 200 billion were spent on defense in 2020, which represents a 5% increase over 2019. Nevertheless, expenses for acquiring high-performance equipment decreased by 13% compared to 2019, well below the average of [35% of investment](#) in the field provided by the commitment within the Permanent Structural Cooperation (PESCO). Moreover, the first EDA report entirely reflects the fact that the EU does not presently possess all of the military capacities required to fulfill its strategic autonomy, as well as the necessary capabilities to achieve the objectives of common security and defense. Concerns about the future of European defense can be heard, particularly as technological investments remain insufficient. In this regard, one could argue that the European Union is not yet ready to put the concept of a European army into action. However, in order to advance in terms of defense, the EU could invest heavily in crisis management by developing strategic air transport as well as in its IT capabilities, along with satellite surveillance.

The EU army is still only an idea. Post-communist member states from Central and Eastern Europe have undergone changes as a result of long-gone Soviet influence and are now in a state of geopolitical vulnerability, as we can see in the Ukrainian situation. In this context, the European Union must pay careful attention to managing relations with the respective national political and military structures, along with collaborating with representative structures, in order to maintain a moderate level of peace. Russia has brought war to Europe, which was something that it was not considered possible. When it happened, the shock caused a common response from the European Union.

Thirdly, another factor that necessarily involves the EU's attention in order to ensure balance is Britain's decision to leave the European Union. Leaders must maintain pleasant relations with the United Kingdom, whose participation is critical in the plan for European strategic autonomy, given that they are the main spenders in terms of defending the continent.

All of these arguments outline the idea that the European Union must become a strategic player on the international arena but has to do so by finding an alternative to the idea of an EU army that does not undermine either NATO's role or member states' sovereignty. Expert [Anand Menon](#) provides a concrete example of such a threat to national sovereignty: *"If small European countries share resources for a joint society, such as an air transport fleet, they lose the ability to use that fleet whenever they want"*. The main challenge to the concept of a European army is the coordination of the 27 Member States' forces and the implementation of integrated training and administration



capacities across the continent despite the language and cultural obstacles that exist in the European area.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Essentially, discussions about an EU army have been going on for a long time in the realm of the Union. Since its inception, the concept of an EU army has been debated in relation to the perceived Russian "threat" or other incidents, crises, or conflicts that have paved the way for the idea of defense cooperation to become central to the European debate. Despite the fact that many other initiatives have been launched, the concept of an army is real and has a place at the international level. Despite numerous criticisms, an EU army could have significant benefits for both member countries and the EU as a whole. Many questions, however, remain to be answered.

One major challenge is that if the EU army is not directly a NATO member, it would be costly because simultaneous contributions would be required from Member States for their national armies, NATO, and the EU army. Another factor to consider is that European countries perceive various threats differently. While the Eastern and Northern States are more concerned with the threat posed by Russia, Southern Europe countries are more concerned with the Mediterranean Sea and Africa. Indeed, as [Pierre Haroche](#) put it: *"this East-South dilemma has harmed the EU's cohesion several times"*.

In my view, the European Union is still at the beginning of the road in terms of security and defense development, and we are all morally obliged to contribute to the improvement of its capabilities. The following solutions may be considered:

- developing a cooperative framework between public and private institutions;
- expanding activities related to network and information system security and providing the necessary tools to regulate institutions and agencies (Europol, Eurojust) to ensure security in the context of threats;
- the creation of a unique legislative framework is a necessary stage. Even though most of the applicable regulations are provided by the EU Strategy for a Security Union, this is not enough to ensure their concrete application in EU member states. As a result, we can propose the creation and formulation of a unique legal framework to be implemented by Member States after prior consultations, so that each member states can sovereignly agree to take part in this framework and is fully aware of the importance of protecting citizens.

In the face of current serious threats, the European Union must embrace its responsibility in constructing a global security framework. However, in order to reach an agreement, a specially trained military structure to intervene in extreme situations could be imagined, such as terrorist acts, that is strategically located and capable of intervening in emergency situations.

Finally, in the face of new global changes, the European Union must become a pivot point for citizens, a source of safety and trust. With a war at its borders, the EU must expand beyond and maintain the goal that it was established for from the beginning: a security community in which all states and citizens feel safe in the face of threats, and in which states collaborate by implementing the best policies for their citizens, based on European values.