

# THE FUTURE OF TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS:

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Turning a new page on enhanced  
cooperation amid new security  
challenges

THE FUTURE OF TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS:

Turning a new page on enhanced cooperation amid new security challenges  
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On the eve of 2022, the project aimed to focus on the transatlantic relations in the dynamic security environment and in the midst of paradigm shifts as well as the possible implications of the European strategic autonomy for their future.

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# European Strategic Autonomy: What are the Implications for Transatlantic Relations?

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**Monika Panayotova, PhD**

Vice President of Sofia Security Forum

2021 marks the 5th anniversary of the adoption of the EU Global Strategy as well as eleven years since the emergence of NATO's Strategic Concept in 2010. Both organisations have launched a key process of strategic rethinking, by considering the changing dynamics in the security environment.

Taking into account global threats, geopolitical shifts, and the unprecedented digital and environmental transformations of societies and economies, we all need to feel “the temperature of the water” in the transatlantic community and the world as a whole, to understand the new, complex, and hybrid security challenges, and to look for an adequate response in the generated strategic visions for the common European and Euro-Atlantic future.

More than ever, the European Union should build a common strategic culture, with a common understanding of risks, threats and patterns of action as well as to transform itself into a “smart power”, which means, according to J. Nay Junior, to have the ability to combine the resources of hard and soft power into effective strategies in different situations.

On the eve of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU 2022 when a summit on CSDP and the final stage of the elaboration of the so-called Strategic Compass are expected to take place, it is of key importance to discuss what European strategic autonomy means, and try to create a kind of “smart

strategic autonomy” that ensures the necessary European sovereignty and strategic independence, well calibrated for effective multilateral cooperation.

If the Union wants to create and implement a long-term European strategic autonomy concept and to build a more sovereign Europe, it should receive the European citizens' support, by responding to their expectations. In this regard, the Conference on the Future of Europe, the first ever pan-European exercise in deliberative democracy, is a very useful instrument to listen to EU public opinion.

According to the Second and Third Interim Reports [September 2021; November 2021] of the Multilingual Digital Platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe, European citizens call for the creation of an EU army and more specialised forces or defence institutions at the EU level (such as an Intelligence service); for fostering the strategic autonomy of the EU; for strengthening a common foreign policy; for continuing enlargement towards the Western Balkans and integrating Eastern Europe into the EU, and for a rethinking of the unanimity rule.

In such a way the EU could be seen as a “smart power” on the global stage by creating its smart strategic autonomy, by using smart strategies and EU citizens' opinion as a source of creative and democratic power.

In addition, according to the Conference on the Future of Europe platform: “some recent

geopolitical developments have generated significant public attention, and events discussing those subjects have multiplied across the Union. That is the case for the American withdrawal from Afghanistan. The AUKUS crisis between France and the US has also sparked debates about the EU's strategic autonomy and the role of its Member States in NATO." In this regard, Heraclitus' famous statement that the only constant thing is change is becoming increasingly relevant today.

In order to be able to derive the benefits from, or to overcome the threats of "constant change" and the (im)balance of power within international relations, the EU has to initiate and to implement innovative approaches.

Such an innovative approach could potentially be the diverse combinations of strategies and tactics in the Western Balkans and the Eastern

neighbourhood, by reordering the direction and sequence of Euro-Atlantic integration stages. That means that post-Soviet republics could join the EU first, before joining NATO. The Ukrainian crisis in 2014 and the recent developments at the Ukraine border add to the arguments in favour of the need for a clearer EU strategic vision and an early-warning system for conflicts, supported by all member states.

Living now in the post-Trump era, there is a great opportunity for good transatlantic relations to be restarted. The EU-NATO collaboration could have an important added value in this process.

As Konrad Adenauer often said: "When everybody else thinks it's the end, we have to begin." So, let's turn a new page on enhanced transatlantic cooperation amid new security challenges!





Exercise Winter Camp,  
Estonia, 2021





Fighter pilots test Quick Reaction Alert capability during QRA exercise in Belgium

# European Strategic Autonomy: What are the Implications for Transatlantic Relations?

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## Bruno Tertrais

Deputy Director of the Foundation for Strategic Research (FRS)

It is stated in the 2016 European Union Global Strategy that “an appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important if Europe is to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders.” A High Representative document later defined the EU ambition as “the ability to act and cooperate with international and regional partners as much as possible and to operate autonomously when and where necessary.”

A certain level of strategic autonomy has always been justified by the very nature of the European project: it cannot be complete if it excludes security and defense. Over the years, it has also encompassed the need to be able to act if the United States is unwilling or unable to do so, principally in the EU's neighborhood. Many Europeans recall the US hesitations over Bosnia in the mid-1990s, over Libya in 2011, and over Syria in 2013. Then came Donald Trump. Subsequently Joe Biden confirmed that his country has lost its appetite for military interventions, pointed to Asia as the US's new priority, and surprised allies with decisions over the withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the forging of the AUKUS partnership.

There has been so much debate over the past five years over what “strategic autonomy” is that it might be useful to define it by what it is not.

1. It is not a French fantasy but, as stated, an agreed EU goal.

2. It is not about complete independence from the United States but rather about reduced dependence, perhaps best defined as increased freedom of action.
3. It is not a grand plan but rather a guiding principle.
4. It is no longer only about security and defense but also, increasingly – especially for the French – about other areas such as cyberspace, supply chains, norms, or data protection.
5. It is not only about decreased reliance on the United States but also on any other major power, notably China.
6. It is not only about the European Union. With regard to defense, for instance, the creation of the European Intervention Initiative or the Takuba force are non-EU innovations.
7. Finally and to address directly the main topic of this roundtable, it should not be seen as a threat to NATO but as a complement to the Alliance.

There are three arguments in the 30-year old debate about possible negative consequences for NATO of the development of a militarily stronger Europe.

The first is that the French are seeking to weaken or replace NATO. There is, however, no evidence of that and to the contrary, Paris has reinforced its presence in the Alliance since rejoining the military structure in 2009.

The second is that it might eventually lead Washington to lose interest in Europe. But this confuses cause and effect. It is a US choice to focus more on Asia and less on other parts of the world. Might it then accelerate the process? Not only is there no evidence of that, but most importantly this overlooks the fact that Washington has direct and material interests in staying engaged in European security. This includes deterring Russia, but also maintaining strong defense links with NATO members, including through the sale of US military equipment.

The third is that Washington opposes it or is reluctant to endorse it. There have been, however, multiple statements to the contrary, the latest being the Biden-Macron communiqué from September 2021, in which the “United States recognizes the importance of a stronger and more capable European defense that contributes positively to global and transatlantic security and is complementary to NATO.” Many in Washington

understand that an additional rationale for increased defense spending and capabilities-building is a win-win for Europe and NATO as it can enhance burden-sharing.

There remain however two important questions.

1. How much strategic autonomy in the area of defense is acceptable to the United States? Is a stronger European defense industry, one that competes with American companies, a threat to the US? Most importantly, would a fully independent capability to organize, plan and conduct military operations be a problem for Washington?
2. How will we articulate European and US strategies in the Indo-Pacific region? It seems unrealistic to imagine a clear-cut “division of labor” whereby Europe would take care of Russia and the United States of China. As stated, the US has an interest in maintaining peace on the continent – and Europe has a stake in Asia. But the discussion on the best peacetime and wartime articulation of our strategies and force deployment is only beginning.





NATO ships exercise  
in the Black Sea





NATO EADRCC Exercise,  
North Macedonia 2021

# Transatlantic Relations in the Dynamic Security Environment?

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**Mariya Dellevska**

EEAS-Security and Defence Policy/Partnerships and Task Force NATO

## SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND THE EU RESPONSE

The world we face is characterised by strategic competition and complex security threats, which have become more diverse and unpredictable. We face geopolitical shifts and increasing instability on our borders, while transnational threats like the global pandemic or climate change affect us all.

Starting with the EU Global Strategy back in 2016, the EU has increased its level of ambition and has assumed more responsibility in the field of security and defence, including by strengthening its capacity to act as a credible global actor and reliable security provider. This is demonstrated by the EU's flagship defence initiatives such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation/PESCO, the European Defence Fund/ EDF, and the Action Plan on Military Mobility. We also have the long-standing EU's engagement in operational theatres, with 18 civilian and military crisis management missions and operations currently deployed.

In the constantly changing environment, the EU needs to adapt. The reflection process launched in 2020 will be completed with the adoption of the Strategic Compass in March 2022. It aims to set up a common strategic vision for EU security and defence policy over the next 5-10 years. This will help the EU build a common strategic culture, strengthen its unity and solidarity, and enhance its capacity and willingness to act together – to protect its

interests and defend its values. A stronger and more capable EU is a better partner for both NATO and the US.

## EU-NATO STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

In the ever-evolving security threats and challenges, transatlantic unity is a must and close cooperation between the EU and NATO remains a necessity. Strengthening EU-NATO strategic partnership remains a key political priority for the EU and its Member States. The Warsaw and the Brussels Joint Declarations provide a solid framework for this cooperation and the implementation of the 74 common actions deliver concrete results.

Now, with the strong support from both Member States and Allies and in light of the ongoing reflection processes on both sides – the EU Strategic Compass and the next NATO Strategic Concept, there is political momentum to further advance this strategic partnership in an ambitious manner. A renewed political commitment in the form of a new Joint Declaration on EU-NATO cooperation will highlight a common vision and convey a strong political message regarding the strength and solidity of the transatlantic bond.

On top of calling for further deepening of cooperation in the existing key areas (such as political dialogue, crisis management, countering hybrid and cyber threats, disinformation or military mobility), the new Joint Declaration should embrace new areas

for cooperation, such as resilience, climate change, emerging and disruptive technologies and space.

## EU-US RELATIONS: SECURITY AND DEFENCE DIALOGUE

When it comes to EU-US relations, we often say that we share common values and strong historical, cultural and security ties, but we also share the same security threats and challenges; furthermore, we have a common understanding of their impact on the security of our citizens.

This was reaffirmed at the EU-US Summit held in Brussels on 15 June 2021, marking the beginning of a new phase in the transatlantic partnership. As part of the new transatlantic agenda, the EU and US leaders committed to launch a dedicated dialogue on security and defence, and to pursue closer cooperation in this field. This is now a reality with the Joint Statement of 3 December 2021 by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission Josep Borrell and the US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, which announced the launch of this dialogue.

The decision to launch the EU-US security and defence dialogue does not come in isolation. In November 2021, the Steering Board of the European Defence Agency approved a negotiating mandate for an Administrative Arrangement with the United States. Following the EU decision of May 2021, the US, together with Canada and Norway, joined one of the PESCO projects – Military Mobility in December 2021.

The complex geostrategic environment and the increased contribution by the EU to the transatlantic burden-sharing have only made the need for regular EU-US exchanges on security and defence issues all the more important and relevant. The first meeting of the EU-US dialogue is expected in early 2022, thus establishing a direct channel for regular communication and structured exchanges on security and defence going beyond the NATO framework, which will further strengthen trust and confidence on both sides, while developing concrete steps towards practical cooperation.





Swift Response 2021 – a US Army-led multinational exercise involving more than 7,000 paratroopers from 10 NATO Allies





Exercise Steadfast Defender 2021 in Romania.  
A NATO-led exercise involving over 9,000 troops  
from more than 20 NATO Allies and partners

# European Strategic Autonomy or Responsibility: What are the Implications for Transatlantic Relations?

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## Roland Freudenstein

Vice President of GLOBSEC, Head of GLOBSEC Brussels

The debate on EU Strategic Autonomy is already a few years old. The term has been heavily pushed by France, especially in view of the acute transatlantic divergences during the Trump administration in the US, but also under the assumption that the US is, in the long run and no matter who is President, pivoting to Asia and decreasing its security presence in Europe. In some West European EU member states, especially Germany, this concept has received support: Angela Merkel's famous 2017 dictum that Europe will have to 'take its fate into its own hands' is a case in point. But it has been more or less severely criticised in Eastern flank countries (the 'Bucharest-9'), accusations ranging from low credibility, in view of Europe's limited military capacities, to hidden anti-Americanism. Partly in order to defuse such criticism, there have been several innovative terminological proposals, such as 'strategic sovereignty' (in the Berlin coalition agreement) or 'European sovereignty' (in French EU Council Presidency documents). I would propose to speak of 'strategic responsibility' for the EU. That implies several basic elements: realism, i.e. an idea of what the EU can and cannot do; adulthood, because especially Germany and France each need to 'grow up' in their own way; and a constructive attitude to transatlantic relations. Three ideas in this context:

### The overarching global conflict

Our era is increasingly characterised by a global systemic confrontation between liberal

democracy and authoritarianism: we are facing a network of authoritarian regimes (Anne Applebaum calls it 'Autocracy Inc.') led by China under Xi Jinping and Russia under Vladimir Putin, and reaching from Venezuela via Belarus and Iran to North Korea. For these autocrats, democracies are an existential threat simply because they are living proof of a humane alternative to their kleptocratic dictatorships. That is why they invest so much money and energy in destabilising democracy. Sure enough, democracy has its problems and internal enemies – just look at figures like Donald Trump and Viktor Orbán. But they frequently interact with autocracies and are often supported by them. This global confrontation means that democracies must stay united and support each other. That goes particularly for the transatlantic partnership which must be at the heart of a global alliance for democracy. Whatever our transatlantic differences, be it on digital regulation or China strategy, we should seek common ground and work towards compromise.

### The indispensable ally

The United States of America remains the only valid security guarantor for Europe. Europe cannot, and even in 10 years will not be able to, defend itself territorially against threats of powers like Russia under Putin, on all levels of deterrence: strategic nuclear, tactical nuclear, conventional and hybrid. Even the French nuclear 'force de dissuasion' ultimately depends on the Extended Deterrence by the US.



Of course, French and other colleagues are right in asking what happens to the alliance if in 2024 or 2028 Trump or someone like him returns to the White House. The answer is twofold. First of all, it is our obligation as Europeans to help Joe Biden make his presidency a success in the eyes of American citizens. That includes compromise with the US (see above). More importantly, we should do everything to assure that not only the current, but any future administration, too, would see added value in maintaining the alliance. It's not like Trump didn't have a point when complaining about most European NATO members' low defence expenditure. Strategic responsibility means assuming a greater role and making bigger efforts in European security, but with the goal of keeping the US engaged and present in Europe, not to replace it.

China also plays a huge role here: While the EU has at last started talking to Washington about common interests vis-à-vis China, there is still way too much emphasis on how Europe has economy-related core interests different from the more power-focused ones of the US when it comes to China. EU leaders still too often preach equidistance or mediation between Washington and Beijing and claim that while the EU may be in a 'systemic rivalry' with China, the US are in a great power rivalry. We have elevated fence-sitting to an art form, ignoring the fact that we Europeans are already too weak in relative terms to stand our ground vis-à-vis China alone, be it in defending democracy at home as well as globally, or even in creating a level playing field in trade and investment. In all these areas, our only chance to defend ourselves is together with the US and other democracies, which is why we should emphasise what unites us vis-à-vis the authoritarians, not what divides us.

### The impossible partner

Russia under Putin has, in the past, been regularly declared a necessary partner for European and global security by European leaders as well as experts. The mantra used to be that 'peace in Europe is not possible without or even against Russia'. The Kremlin's protracted

aggression against Ukraine, its occupation of territories in neighbouring countries, open aggression against citizens in Western countries and brazen violation of all treaty-based norms in European security has led an increasing number of observers to believe that Russia under Putin is a revisionist power which must be contained and deterred, but with which peace in our definition is not possible.

That does not exclude verifiable arms control agreements in precise language, but in my opinion it makes the search for any new 'grand bargain' on European security or a 'Helsinki 2.0' futile because negotiations and agreements in good faith are impossible with Vladimir Putin. NATO is back in fashion these days for a reason. And EU leaders need to adjust their statements, and policies, accordingly.

### Conclusion

- ▶ When talking about the future security strategy of the EU, we should speak of 'strategic responsibility', not autonomy. And our goal is a better intervention capacity, not territorial defence. The opinions of Nordic, Eastern and Southeastern member states must count, too.
- ▶ Decision making structures in EU security would optimally make use of Qualified Majority Voting, but will always have to contain a great deal of flexibility and goodwill by all member states.
- ▶ As the borderlines between external and domestic, as well as military and civilian spheres are getting increasingly blurred, NATO-EU cooperation should be enhanced even more.
- ▶ Looking at the threat from authoritarian powers led today by Russia and China, the unity of the West is key, which is why our legitimate and necessary efforts to shoulder more of the burden for European security, should aim at keeping the US engaged in Europe, not to replace it.



US Army helicopter training  
in Germany





US Explosive Ordnance Disposal team  
in NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR)

# EU Strategic Autonomy and the EU-US Relations?<sup>1</sup>

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## Marie Brethous

Associate Analyst in charge of the Transatlantic Relations and EU-NATO affairs portfolio at the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)

When it comes to EU strategic autonomy, one must consider the following three aspects: military strategic autonomy, political strategic autonomy, and financial strategic autonomy. The focus of this analysis is on military strategic autonomy, and its implications on transatlantic relations.

This paper first addresses the debate around EU strategic autonomy, whether it still is or should be a priority given the recent change of administration in the White House, followed by an analysis of the effects of EU defence efforts on EU-US and EU-NATO relations, and concluding on what's to come for EU strategic autonomy and transatlantic relations in the next year.

First, multiple catalysts, which have increased the relevance of EU strategic autonomy in the last few years are identified. The previous Trump administration has done considerable damage to the notion of US leadership in Europe and multilateral organisations such as NATO. This consolidated the EU's aim for increasing its strategic autonomy and actively developing its own capabilities in the event the US would no longer guarantee the security in its neighbourhood. President Trump was certainly an extreme embodiment of the 'America first' rhetoric, but not the first time a US administration has hinted at a pivot away

from Europe, and towards Asia, for instance. EU strategic autonomy efforts will likely not fade soon, now that President Biden is in the White house. One can see a renewed focus on EU capability developments, especially since transatlantic relations have suffered from recent hiccups such as the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the AUKUS deal.

Furthermore, Biden's 'Foreign Policy for the Middle Class' signals that the US's influence and engagement on the world stage will strongly depend on domestic factors. American interventions will likely be selective and may not always prioritise the EU. Nevertheless, the Biden administration represents a good opportunity for the EU to develop its strategic autonomy further in line with the US and NATO, now that 'America is back', fully committed to the multilateral order. It also needs to be noted that the US is increasingly unable to maintain all its potential theatres of influence, in the face of an increased economic burden caused by a still on-going pandemic. In order to avoid military overstretch, some level of mutual reliance on both sides of the Atlantic is necessary in the foreseeable future. This makes cooperation with the EU paramount.

Second, positive trends toward EU strategic autonomy are identified.

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<sup>1</sup> The title is given by the editor



On multiple occasions this year during his first Europe trip, President Biden underlined that a strong European Union remains in the US interest. The Biden administration has welcomed increased EU efforts in terms of military capabilities as a basis for a more equal defence burden. Building on this, progress in EU-NATO cooperation such as military mobility, third country participation in the EU's defence projects, and renewed trust, could reduce tensions around the misguided narrative of the EU decoupling from the US.

EU strategic autonomy is not meant to create friction between the EU and US. Instead, it is about creating a relationship that is more on equal footing. The EU, US and NATO should continue discussing how to cooperate when joint action is required in the face of new emerging threats, which will always be the first recourse, but also cooperate on how to proceed when the US or NATO cannot intervene. This creates a strong argument for EU strategic autonomy. A more capable EU, with stronger military capabilities on top of its already broad foreign policy toolset would benefit NATO and the US, as recent years have shown that security requires more than just military capabilities. Hybrid threats, pandemics, and disinformation campaigns are just a few of the challenges transatlantic actors are facing. In this context, an increased role for the EU is not only about contributing economically to burden-sharing in NATO, but also developing the EU's ability to act on the global stage.

The US would also benefit from a stronger EU, especially while facing domestic pressure on 'ending its forever wars'. It is in Biden's interest to push for a division of labour within NATO, to provide better military deterrence vis-à-vis China and Russia, while still prioritising US national security interests. To achieve this, the focus should lay on increasing European military and defence capabilities. If the EU

and US, through NATO and bilaterally, can agree on a positive sum solution to address and prioritise the diverse set of threats each of them faces in terms of relevance to their respective security interests, the US will have no choice but to encourage EU strategic autonomy efforts.

Lastly, looking at the year ahead, one can conclude that the renewed engagement we have seen in transatlantic relations will materialise in a series of concrete steps, likely establishing strong foundations not only for EU strategic autonomy and its use in the multilateral context, but also creating cohesion, common mechanisms, and threat perceptions to best address emerging threats the US, EU and NATO are bound to face in the future.

Thus, the newly implemented dialogue on security and defence between the EU and US, which is set to start in early 2022, will be invaluable in creating an updated common approach to security and defence, and to discuss the role of the EU, should diverging interests arise, and the EU need to become a first responder in its region.

The developments we see in EU-NATO relations with the upcoming third joint declaration, the EU Strategic Compass on one side and the NATO Strategic Concept on the other, indicate that the EU and NATO could pursue new forms of cooperation on a broader agenda that goes beyond traditional defence and embraces areas such as climate change, supply chain management, critical infrastructure, and China, which would create a more central role for the EU and its expertise in these fields. Furthermore, the common threat analysis resulting from the Concept can also be helpful in clarifying what instruments and capabilities the EU needs to develop further and include in its strategic autonomy process.





Meetings of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs - NATO HQ, Brussels, Belgium



Bilateral meeting between NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the President of the United States, Joe Biden





Exercise Combined Resolve XV, Hohenfels, Germany. The exercise hosted 4,700 troops from 10 NATO Allies and Partner nations.



# Transatlantic Relations: Challenges and Opportunities in the midst of Paradigm Shifts?

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## Alper Coşkun

Senior fellow within the Europe Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, DC

The transatlantic partnership has stood the test of time and is inherently resilient. Yet, this is not to say challenges are absent. In fact, for three specific reasons, we are at a defining moment in the transatlantic partnership.

1. The United States' reading of the international security landscape has changed, as have its priorities. Washington's focus is on a rising China and the Indo-Pacific. This reality presents a dilemma for the U.S. since any redirection of its energy and resources will potentially be seen as coming at the expense of the transatlantic partnership, and of U.S. commitments to Euro-Atlantic security. The degree to which this perception creeps in or can be precluded will be of consequential importance for the future of the transatlantic partnership.

The Biden administration's enthusiastic return into the fold as a member of the transatlantic family had come as welcome news for all of Washington's European Allies that wanted to leave the previous era behind them. But the euphoria was short-lived. The Afghanistan debacle and the fallout from AUKUS, as well as friction with Europe on trade, technology and COVID-related matters such as licensing rights and travel restrictions all raised doubts over the U.S. under Biden and begged the question: "America is back, but in what form?" The risks of over reliance on a U.S. that seems

to unforgivingly prioritize its national interests and is also pivoting to Asia began to dawn on (European) transatlantic partners.

2. The debate on European strategic autonomy has been rekindled and while many skeptics point to continuing challenges and differences of opinion on the matter, incremental progress is taking place. This trend may speed up because of three reasons. i) The U.S. pivot to Asia means that Europe needs to be prepared to shoulder bigger burdens in the defense and security realm. This is becoming increasingly evident for Europeans. ii) Again, despite many ongoing challenges, political Europe is gaining in strength and the desire to have a higher level of ambition in defense and security related capabilities is a natural component of this evolution. The genie is slowly coming out of the bottle. iii) The U.S. seems to be warming up to the idea of Europe strengthening its defense capabilities. This was manifested in the Biden-Macron statements that came after the AUKUS incident and their meeting on the margins of the G20 Summit in Rome at the end of October 2021. Meanwhile, the U.S. is negotiating its Administrative Arrangements with the European Defense Agency and a new channel of dialogue on security and defense related matters has been inaugurated between the U.S. and the E.U.

These all point to a new dynamic that could have implications on NATO and the transatlantic partnership as we know it. There are also potential implications to consider for non-EU European NATO Allies like Norway, Turkey, the U.K., and others.

3. NATO is undergoing a new cycle of comprehensive adaptation that comes on the heels of the NATO 2030 process, wherein among other things, the need to strengthen the political dimension of the Alliance was recognized. This, together with work on a new strategic concept will trigger heated discussions on numerous topics, including on how to counter the challenges posed by Russia and China. As always, the difficulty will lie in harmonizing diverging interests and priorities. This is not unfamiliar territory for NATO or for Allies, but the difference this time is that things may become harder than ever with the American focus shifting away from the Euro-Atlantic area. This reality could incentivize Allies to “take matters into their own hands” on many issues. On face value, this could be considered something positive, amounting to European Allies shouldering bigger burdens, but only if NATO’s core strength, i.e. the sense of unity among Allies can be preserved. Otherwise, centrifugal dynamics like over prioritizing regional or national agendas in comparison to collective interests would be tantamount to fragmentation within NATO.

As far as Turkey is concerned, this is a complex background fraught with challenges. Turkey has been a NATO

member for seven decades and has a legacy of strong contributions to Euro-Atlantic security that it continues to date. Yet, for various reasons, its standing in NATO and among many Allied countries has deteriorated, as has the Turkish perception of the Alliance and of some of its traditional Allies. Both Turkey and its Allies, particularly the ones with whom Ankara’s bilateral relations have taken a fall in recent years need to face up to the challenge and begin asking themselves some hard questions. The fact is that neither Turkey, nor NATO are stronger or safer without the other.

The three dynamics presented above as reasons why transatlantic relations are at a defining moment also conversely provide an opportunity for Turkey and its Allies to rekindle their relationship and trust. This is due to the presence of shared interests in all of these areas. In other words, if Europe needs to do more for its own security as a result of the U.S. pivot to Asia and willing actors to do this are needed; if the notion of a more capable Europe (not necessarily narrowly defined as the E.U.) is gaining traction and capabilities are in short supply; and if the U.S. is warming up to the idea of a more capable Europe and expects European actors to step forward, Turkey can bring significant added value on each count. Turkey’s NATO Allies and E.U. nations should recognize this reality, without any political blindness, and Ankara should seize the moment and step up to the plate in an ambitious and forthcoming spirit.



Exercise Steadfast Defender 2021 in Romania.  
A NATO-led exercise involving over 9,000 troops  
from more than 20 NATO Allies and partners





Exercise Steadfast Defender 2021  
in Romania.

# European Strategic Autonomy: What Are the Implications for Transatlantic Relations?

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**Elena Lazarou**

Acting Head of the External Policies Unit of the European  
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The move towards European strategic autonomy – still a contested term – has intensified due to a deterioration in security in the international order, and particularly in the EU neighbourhood, noted already at the time of the EU Global Strategy in 2016. Those trends accelerated in the subsequent years where the rise of China became a more dominant feature of global geopolitics, shifting US foreign policy towards Asia and the Indo-Pacific (a “pivot” already set off under the Obama administration). The return of great power rivalry also coincided with an increasingly unstable environment in the EU’s East and South, the proliferation of crises in Africa, as well as the emergence of new types of threats in the form of cyber attacks, hybrid threats combining several types of coercion with military aggression; it also coincided with the acceleration of climate change, a root cause of conflict and insecurity. Bringing an additional layer to the rising insecurity, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the link between security and supply chain resilience, including in components and materials necessary for critical technologies such as defence/dual-use technology.

It follows that the need for the EU to boost its capacity to act in security and defence came as a consequence of all the above factors. Yet, one of the most debated aspects of this move has been the implications for transatlantic relations seen as the cornerstone of European

security since at least World War II, and the subsequent creation of NATO. The coincidence of the core period of development of many of the EU defence initiatives (European Defence Fund, PESCO, and military mobility to name a few) with the presidency of Donald Trump, a critic of NATO and the EU among other multilateral institutions, gave rise to a sense of a growing rift between the EU and the US. Some argued that the development of EU strategic autonomy and a potential distancing from NATO would mean a deterioration of transatlantic relations.

However, the debate should not be framed in binary terms but in qualitative ones: in the past year part of the signalling of the US administration has been towards a parallel move for strategic autonomy with a special partnership. Major objectives of the EU’s global ambition – on climate, multilateralism and human rights – are fronts on which a stronger EU and Biden’s US will work side by side. In defence, progress in EU-NATO cooperation and in third-country participation in the EU’s defence plans, coupled with trust, are smoothing out tensions surrounding the misguided narrative of the EU “going it alone and separately.” An EU-US Security and Defence Dialogue was launched in December 2021 while the respective format for transatlantic high-level consultations on China is increasingly gaining a defence/security dimension in the context of geopolitics in the



Indo-Pacific. The Transatlantic Trade and Tech Council, also launched in 2021, addresses key issues for defence for example export controls for dual-use items and resilience of supply chains, to name a couple. And a new EU-NATO joint declaration is expected in 2022, the year of the final adoption of the EU's Strategic Concept. In short, a recalibration of transatlantic relations in security and defence is taking place.

It would, of course, be an omission not to refer to the nature of the US and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan as well as to the announcement of the AUKUS defence pact, both of which laid bare the need to step up the work to bolster the transatlantic alliance in terms of coordination and sharing of intelligence. These events also reopened a critical conversation about the priorities of EU and US defence respectively. However, following the summer of 2021, consultations on China, Russia, the Indo-Pacific, and the Sahel took place in the transatlantic space; during the same period, the US National Security Advisor, Jake Sullivan, openly supported the building of more European military capabilities, albeit still sceptical of the use of the term strategic autonomy. In short, a natural link between transatlantic communication/coordination and mitigation of any misunderstandings that the concept of "strategic autonomy" may be causing seems to be emerging.

The European Parliament has reiterated its support for the concurrent development of EU strategic autonomy and a strengthening of transatlantic relations. In successive resolutions it has stressed that EU strategic autonomy presupposed improved decision making, capacities and adequate defence capabilities (including in technology such as AI) and called for a strengthening of EU and member state capacity to act autonomously. It has also pointed out the need to enhance CSDP missions with human and material resources to reinforce the EU's identity as an actor in peace and security, also linked to its autonomy.

At the same time, it has reiterated its consideration of the transatlantic partnership as "indispensable for security and prosperity on both sides of the Atlantic" and has stressed the need to further enhance EU-NATO relations, as well as their compatibility and strategic relevance for one another. Through parliamentary diplomacy, including the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue, the European Parliament is a key interlocutor for the US legislative and an important actor in transatlantic policy exchange and coordination. With the European Parliament's role in defence having been reinforced by the introduction of defence industrial issues (EDIDP; EDF) in the co-decision agenda, parliamentary diplomacy can be a critical asset in building strategic autonomy with strong transatlantic relations.



Shooting on skis in Latvia  
at minus 10 degrees celcius







Exercise Steadfast Defender 2021 in Romania.  
A NATO-led exercise involving over 9,000 troops  
from more than 20 NATO Allies and partners

# The Transatlantic Link: Relations Based on Shared Values?

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**Colonel Orlin Nikolov**  
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We all strongly believe that the transatlantic partnership firmly rooted in our history strengthens our collective defense, sustains our common values, and defends our common interests. It also reaffirms the commitment of all of us to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. Developing new strategies to engage, manage, and maintain the transatlantic relations is more critical than ever. Transatlantic NATO Allies continue to share interests and values in an era of increased geopolitical competition; these include rule-setting in trade, finance, access to dual-use technologies, the internet and cyberspace, human rights, and the climate crisis.

The future security environment poses a number of challenges, specifically in terms of the blurred boundaries between time and space, putting to the test and ultimately redefining traditional military paradigms to the conduct of operations. The complex character of the latter will, and already does, require improved abilities complemented by relevant civilian and military capabilities. Interconnectedness and interdependence in a context of a highly globalized world also provide opportunities for beneficial cooperation in the effective and efficient use of scarce resources. Establishing and sustaining viable security networks is a milestone in ensuring operational agility. In a highly globalized world, the effects of climate change have the menacing potential of seriously impairing development and, thereafter, peace and security. Global change impacts on nearly any human activity and serves as a compounding factor for existing issues.

NATO and the EU consider climate change a critical component of future peace- and security-related activities, including in military operations.

Fostering the relations and interactions between the civil and military sector reinforces collective defense, enhances NATO's capabilities, strengthens its resolve, puts at the top of NATO's agenda the necessity to enhance its civil preparedness as a central pillar of the Alliance's resilience and a cross-cutting factor within its three core tasks, and guards from hybrid and cyber threats. Risk assessment is the critical foundation for risk management and building resilience. It is the important first step towards obtaining a shared vision of the wider risk landscape, to help determine what risks are to be accepted, mitigated and/or transferred; and the reference guide for prioritizing where the resilience of individuals, communities, governments, and their institutions need to be reinforced.

In order to gauge our resilience, training should be tailored to replicate the realities of a complex environment and systems exercised to the point of failure. Such training must also take into consideration the interdependence of systems and how failure in one adversely impacts other systems. Furthermore, stimulating connectivity between the sectors requires modeling and simulation of risk and critical elements of resilience – the ability to resist and recover.

Notable opportunities exist for the US-European relationship to help shape the 21<sup>st</sup>



century's international system. The two sides of the Atlantic continue to share enduring vital interests and face a common set of challenges, both in Europe and beyond. These challenges are so many and diverse that neither the United States nor the allies can adequately address these regional and global concerns alone, especially in the light of growing domestic constraints on the implementation of foreign policy. Thus, promoting shared interests and managing common threats to the West in the years ahead will necessitate not only continued cooperation, but a broader and more comprehensive transatlantic partnership than in the past.

Today more than ever, we need to defend our common values, the core of our Transatlantic community, as we face the revisionist and aggressive strategic postures and policies that violate International Law and threaten the transatlantic interests, as well as regional stability. We should always keep in mind

that the security of one is the security of us all. This fundamental principle forges a solid framework for cooperation and preserving peace and stability across the North Atlantic and Europe. Admittedly, the current political and economic situation presents itself as new and extremely complex to both the US and Europe. Yet, we must not forget that NATO is still a formidable geostrategic player and the biggest military alliance in the world right now.

And I trust that all of us will take the opportunity to use this occasion to analyze transatlantic relations, their role for security in Europe in a wider geostrategic context, future relations within NATO, the meaning of transatlantic relations for Eastern European countries, and other issues in view of growing security risks. Based on the aforementioned, I believe that our conference offered invaluable opportunities for acquiring new knowledge, extensive sharing of expertise and thought-provoking discussions.

