

ON “EUROPEANIZATION” OF EUROPEAN CONVENTIONAL DEFENCE: THE CASE FOR A EUROPEAN SECURITY COUNCIL

Andrius Kubilius*

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We are witnessing global geopolitical changes on an unprecedented scale. On the one hand: Russian aggression in Ukraine and the possibility of a Russian attack on EU or NATO member states during the next 2 to 3 years, predicted by intelligence services of EU countries. On the other hand: the understandable demand by the US for burden sharing in Europe and the possibility of their presence diminished to a supplementary role in the case of need (including nuclear umbrella), and shifting their conventional resources from Europe to the Indo Pacific or Western Hemisphere, as is very clearly stated in the new National Defence Strategy.¹

“This is Europe’s independence moment,” Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told the European Parliament in her recent statement.² I cannot agree more! This is Europe’s independence in defence moment!

Similarly, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz recently warned that the “times of “Pax Americana” are over”. He summarized the European defence agenda in four guiding points: “*support for Ukraine for as long as it needs it; cohesion within the European Union; the preservation of the NATO alliance for as long as possible; and finally, massive investment in our own defence capabilities.*”³

President Macron in his recent powerful speech on defence spoke about a “Europe of defence” and stressed: “*To remain free, one must be feared, and to be feared, one must be powerful. To be powerful in this brutal world, we must act faster and stronger.*”⁴

Independence and power of European defence have become a clear strategic priority for the European Union.

* Andrius Kubilius is EU Commissioner for Defence and Space. This text reflects his personal opinion.

¹ U.S. Department of War, “2026 National Defense Strategy”, 26 January, 2026, available at: <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>

² European Commission, “Speech by President Ursula von der Leyen at the European Parliament plenary debate in preparation of the European Council meeting of 18-19 December 2025, in particular the need to support Ukraine, transatlantic relations and the EU’s strategic autonomy.” 17 December 2025, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_25_3102

³ German Chancellor Friedrich Merz. Speech at CSU Party Conference. Facebook, December 13, 2025. Accessed 06/01/2026, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/live/qWHeL9lwOXw?si=OYMUV4fi2mrAnX-q&t=12805>

⁴ Sophia Khatsenkova, ‘To remain free, one must be feared’: Macron says of France’s defence priorities, Euronews, 15 January 2026. Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2026/01/15/to-remain-free-one-must-be-feared-macron-says-of-frances-defence-priorities>

NATO and the transatlantic partnership will certainly remain the cornerstone of Europe's security architecture, but at the same time Europe needs to be prepared to take on more and more responsibility for defence of the continent on its own shoulders. This is also a very clear message of the US National Defence Strategy: "*As U.S. forces focus on Homeland defense and the Indo-Pacific, our allies and partners elsewhere will take primary responsibility for their own defense with critical but more limited support from American forces.*"⁵

Independence for Europe means responsibility and readiness.

Both European and American experts have recently published important analytical commentaries and papers on the future of European independence in defence, such as the European Policy Centre's *Roadmap to a European Way of War*⁶ and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS): "*How Europe can defend itself with less America*".⁷

CSIS warn us that the "*United States would run out of essential munitions—particularly long-range missiles—within a few days of entering a conflict with China over Taiwan. This would severely limit Washington's ability to supply Europe with certain critical munitions in the short-to-medium term.*"

This is an additional reason why we need to urgently build our own defence capabilities: we cannot live with empty hopes that Americans will always be able to provide us with what is needed for our defence.

A historical tectonic shift is starting to happen: Europeans are on their way to independence. At least, they are starting to understand that this is unavoidable.

But the road to defence independence is not an easy one. Europeans have repeatedly discussed this over the last decades.

Already in 2017, then Commission President Jean Claude Juncker stated: "*The protection of Europe can no longer be outsourced.*"⁸ In 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron, while commemorating the centenary of end of the First World War, declared that "*Russia had shown it could be a threat and Europe had to be able to defend itself better alone.*"⁹ One week later, German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned the European Parliament: "*The times when we could fully rely on others have ended. This means nothing other than that, if we Europeans want*

⁵ Supra, fn 1

⁶ Torben Schütz and Christian Mölling. "Managing the Transatlantic Divorce: A roadmap towards a European way of war." European Policy Centre, 5 March 2025. Available at: <https://www.epc.eu/publication/Managing-the-Transatlantic-Divorce-A-roadmap-towards-a-European-way-o-62bd58/>

⁷ Max Bergmann and Otto Svendsen. "How Europe Can Defend Itself with Less America." Centre for International and Strategic Studies Report, 8 October 2025: 1-42. available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-europe-can-defend-itself-less-america>

⁸ European Commission. "Speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the Defence and Security Conference Prague: In defence of Europe." European Commission. 9 June 2017, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_17_1581

⁹ Emmanuel Macron in Radio Europe 1, cited BBC "France's Macron pushes for 'true European army'", BBC, 6 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46108633>

to survive as a community, we must make a greater effort to take our destiny into our own hands”.¹⁰

But until now these statements have not had real world consequences.

We need to answer the simple, but most important question: why not? And what do we need to do differently in order to overcome this *impasse*?

One of the possible answers to the question “why not?” has been proposed by Max Bergman, director of the Europe, Russia, and Eurasia Program at CSIS. He argues that until now the United States have resisted European initiatives to strengthen their own defence capabilities: “*After all, the biggest opponent of an integrated European defense, of the European Union doing anything on defense, or of NATO creating a European pillar was the United States. This leaves Europe in the lurch.*”¹¹

But now positions change as we see fundamental global and geopolitical changes taking place. As German Chancellor Friedrich Merz recently put it: “*We can no longer rely on the US to defend us, on China to supply us with raw materials, or on Russia to eventually return to the path of peace. /.../ The world is changing, and Europe must respond.*”¹²

That is a clear conclusion about our times: they demand from us to think, to speak, and act differently, than we did before.

We cannot predict the strategies of our transatlantic partners. We can hope that for some time they will continue their engagement with the security of Europe, but it would be tragic mistake on our side to again postpone important decisions about ourselves for another ten years. Especially if we take into account media reports, that “*the United States wants Europe to take over the majority of NATO's conventional defense capabilities, from intelligence to missiles, by 2027.*”¹³

For the time being, both internally and externally we are in a whirlpool of different emotions, ideas and pragmatic considerations.

On the one hand, the new USA National Security Strategy shows that the US administration is concerned about the European Union becoming stronger and more united,¹⁴ on the other hand, the Washington D.C. based think tank CSIS, advises us the opposite: “*Europeans must transform their defence efforts with an eye toward the task of fighting as Europe.*”¹⁵ That means,

¹⁰ Angela Merkel via German Federal Government Archive. “Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 13 November 2018”. 13 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/bregen/service/archive/speech-by-federal-chancellor-angela-merkel-to-the-european-parliament-strasbourg-13-november-2018-1550688>

¹¹ Max Bergmann. “Why It's Time to Reconsider a European Army”. Centre for Strategic and International Studies Commentary, 28 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/why-its-time-reconsider-european-army>

¹² The Diplomatic Insight News Desk. “German Chancellor Pushes for European Defense Union Amid Global Challenges”. The Diplomatic Insight, 18 November 2025. Accessed 06/01/2025, Available at: <https://thediplomaticinsight.com/german-chancellor-european-defense-union/>

¹³ Gram Slattery and Humeyra Pamuk. “Exclusive: US sets 2027 deadline for Europe-led NATO defense, officials say”. Reuters, 6 December 2025, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/us-sets-2027-deadline-europe-led-nato-defense-officials-say-2025-12-05/>

¹⁴ Andrius Kubilius. “What Really Worries Americans: European Values Or European Unity?”. Andriuskubilius.lt, 10 December 2025. Available at: <https://andriuskubilius.lt/en/what-really-worries-americans/>

¹⁵ Max Bergmann and Otto Svendsen, *supra* fn 7

fighting not as a collection of 27 “bonsai armies” (as former EU High Representative Josep Borrell called national EU armies back in 2022)¹⁶ but as one single entity.

And in addition, there is Ukraine, where the future of the whole of Europe is going to be decided.

And there is also Russia, which in 2025 spent 7.2% of its GDP for military needs, which in PPP terms amounts to 85% of defence spending of the entire European Union: 514 billion USD (Russia) versus 614 billion USD (EU).

Something big and sometimes difficult to grasp is happening or is going to happen with defence on the European continent. That is why there is a clear need for big answers.

In 2025, the European Commission presented the ReArmEU programme, with new financial resources and a new defence industrial policy. As Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated in the European Parliament, more was done during this one year on the EU level on defence than it was possible to do in the whole last decade.¹⁷

Those are big enough decisions.

But are they big enough?

Will we really be ready for 2030? What about 2027?

Is it enough for our defence readiness if EU Member States simply spend more on defence?

Is it enough for us just to increase the defence capabilities of 27 European armies (in some cases “bonsai armies”) to face a single Russian battle tested army, when Russia is spending for military needs almost the same amount as all 27 EU Member States are spending together?

These questions are worth discussing, because simply increasing investment into defence does not solve all the most important issues related to our defence readiness.

As Max Bergman critically points out in his remarks: “*...the focus of European discussions is almost entirely on funding, not the tremendous structural problem of Europe's fractured defense landscape made up of 25 or more bespoke militaries. To put it bluntly, these militaries are not designed to defend Europe. It is good that Europe is thinking big when it comes to funding, but they also need to think big when it comes to reform and integrating Europe's forces.*”¹⁸

The same point is made by Christian Mölling and Torben Schütz:

“Thus far, some European leaders seem to have persuaded themselves that managing US withdrawal is a mix of money and material: Europe simply has to buy what it would otherwise lose. /.../ Before buying kit, however, Europe must replace something harder to substitute: US political and military leadership. The US has been the centre of gravity due to its military and economic power, enabling NATO collective strategy and military operations. Without the ability

¹⁶ European External Action Service. “Blog entry by Josep Borrell: “Foreign interventions and the future of European defence””. 27 August 2022. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/foreign-interventions-and-future-european-defence_en

¹⁷ European Commission, *supra*, fn 2

¹⁸ Max Bergmann, *supra*, fn 11

and authority to lead, more weapons would be useless: who decides what to buy, based on which defence plans, and who authorises the use of weapons?”¹⁹

Such critical remarks by experts remind us we should not become complacent by increased defence spending and production.

It reminds us that our defence readiness is based on three key pillars. If any of these three pillars fail, our entire defence readiness fails. And the development of each pillar raises its own questions:

a) the pillar of material defence readiness: how do we build our defence capabilities: production, procurement, finances, etc?

b) the pillar of institutional defence readiness: how do we organise defence on the European continent, especially when the Americans are going to diminish their presence; how are we going to build a “European Pillar of NATO”; how are we preparing ourselves “to fight as Europe”?

c) the pillar of political defence readiness: how do we mobilise the political will to deter, defend, if need be, to fight? How do we defend the “hearts and minds” of our people against Russian hybrid attempts to undermine the political will of our societies to defend ourselves?

Until now we have concentrated our efforts only on the first pillar, on “material defence readiness”. We have achieved a lot, but even developing our material defence readiness has limits, which we can only surmount if we overcome deep-seated challenges, related with our institutional defence readiness.

After assessing that Europeans spent 3.1 trillion euros on defence in the last ten years with unimpressive outcomes, the famous British economist and historian Adam Tooze angrily comments: *“To justify the increase, you have to believe that new money will transform Europe’s moribund and demoralised relics of 20th-century militarism into 21st-century fighting forces. You have to believe that a quantitative surge in spending will somehow bring about a qualitative improvement.”²⁰*

Qualitative improvement will come only if our institutional defence readiness is essentially transformed and unified at the EU level.

To see why, let’s ask ourselves an out of the box question, which is easy to answer: would the United States be militarily stronger, if they had 50 armies on the states’ level, 50 sovereign state level defence policies and 50 defence budgets?

If we understand that unity is stronger than fragmentation, than what are we waiting for?

Especially when European citizens are dramatically shifting in their opinion to demand more European unity in defence and more European defence.

¹⁹ Torben Schütz and Christian Mölling, *supra*, fn 6

²⁰ Adam Tooze. “The Emperor has no tanks”. Financial Times Opinion, 6 June 2025. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/f450f1e7-4344-4ab0-af7-d190ffd1e462>

Our citizens have a very clear understanding what they want for their defence: a recent publication in “Politico”²¹ and an opinion poll survey quoted in the article,²² show that in Spain, Belgium and Germany around 70% of citizens prefer defence of their country by a European Army instead of a national army (10%) or NATO (12%).

Why we are not asking ourselves the “historical” question: if in 1954 the ratification had not failed of the Treaty establishing a European Defence Community with a single European Army, proposed by Pleven, Adenauer, Schuman, Monnet, would we now be stronger in our European defence or not?

If our answer to this question is “yes”, are we going to correct the mistakes of the past?

And when, if not now?

If defence policies in Europe stay fragmented, our defence industries in Europe will remain fragmented²³, and will become even more fragmented with larger national defence spending.

If we continue with the same institutional defence policy arrangements we have today, we will also have the same duplications, fragmentations, lack of standardization and lack of harmonization.

And it is obvious even bigger institutional issues need addressing when considering the question “how can Europe defend itself with less America?”.

Not only which European country will send its general to become a new SACEUR, but what the back-bone military force on the European continent will look like, if the Americans would significantly diminish the number of their troops in Europe: will it be a rapidly growing German military army, or a loose association of 27 national “bonsai armies” of Member States, or maybe a pan-European military force, established in complementary to national military forces?

Or maybe there is a possibility, as Denys Shmyhal, Prime Minister of Ukraine at that time, proposed almost a year ago: following a peace in Ukraine to transform at least part of Ukraine’s 800,000 battle tested military force into the backbone of a European new defence architecture, of a new European army?²⁴

Those are the questions, which we shall need to answer in the nearest future.

The question is: how and where to find those answers?

²¹ Nicolas Vinokur. “Forget the Far Right. The Kids Want a ‘United States of Europe’”. Politico, 15 December 2025. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/united-states-of-europe-online-propaganda-social-media-memes/>

²² “In the face of war and Trump, taking the measure of European public opinion: 10 points on our exclusive Eurobazooka survey”, Le Groupe d’études géopolitiques, 20 March 2025. Available at: <https://geopolitique.eu/en/2025/03/20/in-the-face-of-war-and-trump-taking-the-measure-of-european-public-opinion-10-points-on-our-exclusive-eurobazooka-survey/>

²³ Mario Draghi. “The Draghi Report: In-depth analysis and recommendations (Part B)” European Commission. 1-328. 9 September 2024. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/draghi-report_en

²⁴ Denys Shmyhal. “Ukrainian PM: The EU might not survive without us”. Politico Opinion, 14 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-volodymyr-zelenskyy-vladimir-putin-russia-pm-eu-survive-without-us/>

At the moment, the major institutional problem with the transformation of European defence is that there are no effective institutional platforms where discussions and decisions can be made on the development of European level defence policies.

Individual Member States prefer to concentrate only on their own national defence capabilities. Structural, European level problems of European defence industry, very precisely described in the famous Draghi report, do not attract enough attention from national decision-makers.

One reason is that defence policies according to EU treaties are considered an issue of national sovereignty. That is why Member States are suspicious of any Commission initiative on European defence, and see in them signs of a “power grab”.

However, it's difficult to expect that only a bottom-up approach will bring the needed answers at the European level.

So far voluntary defence cooperation by Member States in the format of PESCO has not been very fruitful.

And even the Defence Council of 27 Member States, as part of the EU Foreign Affairs Council, does not play a significant role. As has been rightly observed: “... *the membership of the EU has grown to 28 and the Union's competences in security and defence have increased, but the quality of strategic debates between the ministers has decreased. Today, ministers meeting in the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) tend to read pre-prepared statements around the table, leaving very little room for in-depth discussion on major long-term strategic challenges.*”²⁵

To put it simply, the primary challenge faced by European defence is how to establish an effective platform for effective leadership in European defence policy development and institutional transformation.

The same conclusion is made by Mölling and Schütz: “*Europe cannot implement an effective security strategy without more unified political leadership.*”²⁶ They stress that defence transformation requires organised political leadership: “*A transition strategy into a European Way of War is needed. Besides a different approach to generating war fighting capabilities, industrial bases and spending money, this implies first and foremost a way of organising political leadership that ensures Europe's security and defence*”.

The Commission alone cannot play this role of leadership platform. Member States individually also are not able to fill the gap. And it would be difficult to ask NATO as a transatlantic organisation to lead efforts on European defence transformation and build-up of European independence.

An answer how to create “unified political leadership” could be built on experience of informal EU decision-making on security and foreign policy. A bigger and bigger role is now being played by the informal leadership formats of the E5+ or G5+, where usually German, French, Italian, British, Spanish, Polish and EU leaders or foreign (G5+) and defence (E5+) ministers come

²⁵ Niklas Novák. “EU It Yourself: A Blueprint for a European Security Council”. Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 1-53. 25 March 2019. Available at: <https://www.martenscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/european-security-council-blueprint.pdf>

²⁶ Torben Schütz and Christian Mölling, *supra*, fn 6

together to discuss the most important and urgent European issues: security guarantees to Ukraine; relations with the USA; defence capability developments in Europe. Usually, they are joined by the leadership or representatives of the Commission and the Council.

In their article, Mölling and Schütz recognize the E5+ format as an important precursor to a “unified political leadership” on defence matters.²⁷

Already in practice, this smaller leadership format has proved to bring added value to the whole European Union. It allows constructive discussions, to maintain a security dialogue with the United Kingdom, to create consensus in the dialogue with the USA and to agree on support to Ukraine. The leadership of the E5+ format and the political positions elaborated there are usually supported and followed by a broader “coalition of willing”.

Such an informal gathering can become even more important if it would become at least partly formalised. This could be realised by revitalizing suggestions for a European Security Council, as put forward by French President Macron and then German Chancellor Angela Merkel between 2017 and 2019.²⁸

Such a Security Council could have different formats for internal EU and for broader, European discussions.

First of all, on internal EU defence matters the European Security Council could consist of permanent members (E5: Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Poland) plus the EU leadership (Commission President, Council President), plus 3 rotating EU Member States (including the Member State that has the Presidency of the EU Council).

When broader “European defence” issues are discussed – (not only “EU defence”), then also the United Kingdom should be invited to join the meeting.

The highest level of the European Security Council would be the meeting of heads of states and governments, but lower-level meetings of defence or foreign affairs ministers would also play important roles.

Already in 2018 Chancellor Merkel pointed out such a Council could be very effective in taking swift action: *“I have proposed that we establish a European Security Council with rotating member state membership, in which important decisions could be more swiftly prepared”*.²⁹

Now this task – “to swiftly prepare important decisions” – is becoming the most important task of European leadership. We need to move from repetition of prepared statements to urgent, effective implementation and delivery of major reforms in European defence.

The establishment of a European Security Council in the nearest future is the best way to create a “unified political leadership” for Europe, capable of preparing a long-awaited major defence institutional transformation on the European continent.

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Luigi Scazzieri. “Towards a European Security Council?”. Centre for European Reform, 1-4. 27 November 2019. Available at: <https://www.cer.eu/insights/towards-european-security-council>

²⁹ German Federal Government Archive, *supra*, fn 10

How such a European Security Council can be established institutionally and politically, I will elaborate a little bit later below. First, it is important to understand what kind of responsibilities it will have and why we need it.

In order to better understand why we need more effective institutional defence readiness, in terms of more effective EU defence decision-making arrangements, let's look more deeply into some European defence policy issues, which even now or in the nearest future will demand much more of our attention and proper institutional leadership not so much on a national, but essentially on a European level.

I. Implementation of TEU Art. 42(7) on “mutual assistance”

Former President of Finland Sauli Niinisto stated in his influential report “Safer Together: Strengthening Europe’s Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness”³⁰: “*We do not have a clear plan on what the EU will do in the event of armed aggression against a Member State. The threat of war posed by Russia to European security forces us to address this as a centerpiece of our preparedness, without undermining the work to prepare for other major threats.*”

The Mission Letters to members of the EU Commission speak about the measures, which must be implemented for “*readying the EU and Member States for the most extreme military contingencies*”, which means - for a war of aggression against us.³¹

Article 42(7) of the Treaty of European Union defines the obligation of Member States to offer “mutual assistance” “with all the means available” in the case of military aggression against any of them.

However, as President Niinisto recognized - we are not ready to use the power of this Treaty provision for “mutual assistance”: “*Paradoxically, however, preparatory work in anticipation of the possible activation of these provisions has, for different reasons, remained sub-optimal. This creates a political, strategic and operational risk in case they would be invoked during a sudden and severe crisis situation.*”

Niinisto in his report urges the EU to be ready to use this Treaty article and to operationalize it. This means the EU needs to create legal procedures so Member States can put their obligation of assistance into practice.

Not in terms of who will give the orders to Member States, since the Treaty speaks about automatic obligation of Member States to provide mutual assistance, but in terms of who will coordinate all the efforts of Member States and who will take the lead and make the needed coordination decisions on the EU level.

³⁰ Sauli Niinistö. “Safer Together: Strengthening Europe’s Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness”. European Commission, 1-163. 30 October 2024. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/5bb2881f-9e29-42f2-8b77-8739b19d047c_en?filename=2024_Niinisto-report_Book_VF.pdf

³¹ President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen. “Mission Letter: Andrius Kubilius, Commissioner for Defence and Space”. European Commission, 1-7. 1 December 2024. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/missions/andrius-kubilius-commissioner-defence-space/mission-letter-andrius-kubilius-commissioner-defence-space_en

It would be difficult to imagine that in the case of military aggression crisis management would be executed by the traditional EU institutions, based on the consensus of 27 Member States.

In order to develop the legal language of “operationalization” for Art. 42(7), we need to understand that it demands definition of an effective architecture of EU institutional responsibilities and decision-making procedures during military aggression.

The precedents are there. A similar approach has become a “new normal” in some recent Commission proposals and approved EU regulations, related to EU actions during a military crisis in different areas of defence policy: for example, the draft Regulation on “military mobility” or the Regulation on European Defence Industrial Policy (EDIP). Both of those Regulations define specific “crises regimes”, detailing which specific rules should be implemented and specific decision-making and executive institutional bodies should be activated in times of crisis.

The same logic should be applied to help the EU prepare to manage military crisis and to be ready to operationalize article 42(7) on the highest level of EU institutions: Council and Commission needs to have a proper institutional arrangement and decision-making procedures in place to manage this gravest of crisis.

These crisis management arrangements should allow EU institutions to act quickly and to mobilize substantial resources, prepared in advance on national and EU levels.

As Niinisto stresses, such crisis management needs to deliver *“in particular the protection of the EU’s decision-making capacity – starting from the highest political level. The EU must be able to support Member States in the provision of citizens basic needs (e.g. food, water, housing and shelter, protection, health and sanitation), as well as ensure the continuity of its essential services and functions, such as the Single Market, public order and security, energy, transport, telecommunications and digital services, border management, economic and financial management, and satellite-based services.”*

The role of the European Security Council in such a crisis would be crucial. Both as an institution where the most important, existential decisions could be thought through, discussed and decided. And also, as an institution which would lead coordination of all the efforts, related with implementation of Art. 42(7), and also of all the efforts related with general crisis management, which in the case of aggression against a single Member State would hit very hard the entire Single Market, Euro zone, and even Schengen area; the European Union and beyond.

In the case of such a crisis, the European Security Council needs in advance to have a mandate to operate without any limits as supreme EU coordination and decision-making body, with the obligation to receive ex-post approval of the decisions in the Council.

Relations between the European Security Council, EU Council and EU Commission Presidents during such a crisis should be more precisely defined in a special EU Regulation on military crises management.

II. The European Security Council and development of pan-European defence projects and the need of defence industrial defragmentation and of a Single Market in defence

The European Security Council should not only play a role in crisis management, but also in the much-needed defragmentation of defence production.

Even though a lot has been achieved in 2025 by national, EU and NATO level efforts to ramp up European “material defence readiness”, the momentous material needs ahead of us are of a scale and urgency that demand much better institutional coordination and decision-making capabilities on the highest European political level.

Draghi in his famous report was very outspoken about the biggest structural problem of European defence industry – its fragmentation.

Because of this fragmentation our industries are not able to use the power of our huge Single Market to develop their global competitiveness, which is why Member States are spending a lot of their defence money in third countries, outside European defence industry. As a consequence, we are not investing into our defence independence, we are not using our financial resources to full effect. Fragmentation of defence industry is an obstacle to interoperability of European weapon systems and puts a brake on the urgent development of the most needed pan-European defence projects, including strategic enablers, where Europe is heavily dependent on American resources.

And we need to face the fact that increasing defence spending only on the national level only increases centrifugal and fragmentation forces within Europe’s defence architecture. As the 2023 CSIS report by Sean Monaghan³² shows: when EU Member States spend more on defence, fragmentation increases and cooperation among countries decreases; for the time being, ministers only start to look how to increase efficiency with increased cooperation, when they have less money.

As said before, such industrial “national” fragmentation is the legacy of the fact, that according to the EU Treaties, defence policy and defence financial resources in European Union are in fact also fully “nationalized”. And that problem will not be easily resolved even with increased defence spending in the next multiannual EU budget, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). As I said elsewhere, during the next 10 years the bulk of defence spending will come from the Member States (6.8 trln euros): 100 times more than from the MFF (around 60 bln euros).³³

New defence industrial policy instruments, created to incentivize joint procurement and joint development of defence projects financed by EU funds are important, but not sufficient to achieve a real breakthrough. It is clear that challenges of “material” fragmentation in our defence readiness will not be properly resolved, without an “institutional” remedy to overcome policy fragmentation. “Institutional defence readiness” is one of the most important means to speed up, to scale up and to harmonize ramp-up of our “material defence readiness”.

To better understand how “European defence readiness” can positively influence the defragmentation of defence industry and will help to resolve interoperability issues, it’s worth

³² Sean Monaghan. “Solving Europe’s Defense Dilemma: Overcoming the Challenges to European Defense Cooperation”. Centre for Strategic & International Studies, 1-22. 1 March 2023. Available at: https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2025-10/251008_Bergmann_Europe_America.pdf?VersionId=gU.6G8PzLlwKppQ7OW6zqlzXdGXYiQ.f

³³ “Speech by Commissioner Kubilius at the meeting of the North Atlantic Council, 4 November 2025”. European Commission, 4 November 2025. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_25_2588

to mention here the positive effect of the development of one major “institutional defence readiness” project – the creation of a “standing pan-European military force” or “European army” (later to be discussed in more details):

“Importantly, the [pan-European military] force would eventually operate equipment jointly procured for its specific needs. Thus, instead of dealing with interoperability issues from a flurry of equipment brought by various national militaries, the [pan-European military] force would gradually transition to a common set of equipment procured directly for it.”³⁴

It is evident that the European Security Council should be more than a crisis management instrument, and should also have the highest coordinating role in peace time or defence readiness time to ensure material defence readiness – for example, ensure the implementation of the Roadmap on Defence Readiness 2030.

That is another reason why the European Security Council should be established without delay: to take the political responsibility and leadership to coordinate and develop proper solutions and decisions to realise pan-European defence projects and diminish fragmentation of European defence industry. This is how industrial Defence Readiness 2030 can be achieved.

III. European Independence and European Pillar of NATO

The European Security Council, as a platform to discuss and decide on European security and defence matters, would be crucially important not only for “Art. 42(7)” crisis management, and not only for resolving major, pan-European issues related with ramping-up of our material defence readiness and development of flagship defence projects, or issues related with defragmentation and creation of Single Market in our defence industry.

Very soon really big questions will need to be answered on our “institutional defence readiness”, and a platform like the European Security Council can play a crucial role in finding the right answers to existential questions for our European security: how Europe can defend itself with less America?

It would be a strategic mistake to think that the answer to these questions is simply more European defence spending, more European defence production and more European defence capabilities. Those will be needed, for sure. But that will be not enough. As Max Bergman points out: *“It is good that Europe is thinking big when it comes to funding, but they also need to think big when it comes to reform and integrating Europe’s forces.”*³⁵

Recently there has been quite a number of very interesting analytical papers published on both sides of the Atlantic devoted to the same topic: can Europe defend itself with less America?³⁶

³⁴ Max Bergmann and Otto Svendsen, *supra*, fn 7

³⁵ Max Bergmann, *supra*, fn 11

³⁶ Amy Graham and Francis Harris. “Europe - Very Well, Alone”. Centre for European Policy Analysis, 23 June 2025. Available at: <https://cepa.org/article/europe-very-well-alone/>

Camille Grand. “Defending Europe with less America”. European Council on Foreign Relations, 1-24. 3 July 2024. Available at: <https://ecfr.eu/publication/defending-europe-with-less-america/>

It would be impossible to present an overview of all those papers in this text. But I shall give a few comments on one of those papers.

A very impressive, holistic analysis of what Europe needs and what kind of questions we shall need to answer, is presented in the previously quoted paper by Max Bergmann and Otto Svendsen "How Europe can defend itself with less America", published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, based in Washington D.C. (CSIS)³⁷.

I will not go into a detailed analysis of the conclusions of the paper, but it is obvious that these conclusions send us a very clear signal: some answers we need to find and some decisions we, Europeans, need to take now without delay, in order to be ready to be independent within the next 5 or 10 years, in order to be ready to have a real European pillar of NATO.

Our most important question is not about a European SACEUR, or about material capabilities or the strategic enablers, which we need to acquire. The most important question concerns the European backbone military force, which will need to replace the 100,000 American troops deployed in Europe and which at the moment effectively play the role of a European backbone military force.

That is what should concern us, because that is the issue where the biggest problems with our "institutional defence readiness" are and will be present. As Bergman and Svendsen rightly point out: *"With 1.86 million active military personnel across European NATO countries, it is striking—if not embarrassing—that the departure of fewer than 100,000 U.S. troops might create a strategic vacuum".*

Their conclusion: Europe needs to have its own pan-European fighting force, 100,000 troops strong, with the capability to be mobilized and transferred into whatever region of Europe, as the Americans are able to do it now. And of course, such a European fighting force will not replace national military forces, but being complementary to national forces will bring that added value, which is now brought by the standing force of American troops in Europe.

As they argue convincingly, it should be a permanently stationed military force: *"The goal would not be to create a solidarity force, or a trip-wire force, such as NATO's Forward Land Forces (FLFs). Rather, the goal should be to establish a highly ready, lethal European fighting force able to quickly deploy to defend Europe, anywhere on the continent. This would in essence become Europe's army /.../ The crucial shift, however, is that this force would be permanently stationed (potentially in Germany should the United States choose to close bases), allowing it to develop into a cohesive and integrated unit."*

Ben Barry, Douglas Barrie et al. "Defending Europe Without the United States: Costs and Consequences". International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1-31. 15 May 2025. Available at: <https://www.iiss.org/research-paper/2025/05/defending-europe-without-the-united-states-costs-and-consequences/>

Eloise Cassier. "Can Europe Defend Itself Without US Military Support?". The National Interest, 31 July 2025. Available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/can-europe-defend-itself-without-us-military-support>

Daniel Fioott, cited in The Economist. "Can Europe defend itself without America?". The Economist, 18 February 2024. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2024/02/18/can-europe-defend-itself-without-america>

³⁷ Max Bergmann and Otto Svendsen, *supra*, fn 7

As Max Bergman explains in his separate paper: “...the European Union should create a standing common EU force that would not belong to any nation but would belong to the EU collectively./this would be more like the EU marines.”³⁸

It’s important to understand why there is a need of a “standing EU force”. The answer is given by Sven Biscop, who says, - “the EU experience teaches an important lesson: temporary multinational formations, such as the EU Battlegroups, do not work”.³⁹

And Bergman also stresses the importance of establishing without delays a European command and control structure and military headquarters: “*Third, the European Union would need a unified command structure. The EU could develop its own command headquarters that could command both the EU force and sit as supreme European commander above the national militaries. This command could also be integrated with NATO.*”

The same idea of the need to create European headquarters is strongly stressed by the EPP group in the European Parliament: “*The time has come to build a permanent, fully equipped European Command and Control (C2) structure: a robust multinational military headquarters /...*”⁴⁰

The idea of a Pan-European fighting force or European army has a long, controversial and complicated history. It is worth remembering that the discussion about a European army started in 1950 with the so called “Pleven plan”.

But the idea of a European Army was promoted also more recently: in 2015 by then Commission President Jean Claude Juncker: (“... a common army among the Europeans would convey to Russia that we are serious about defending the values of the European Union.”)⁴¹, by French President Macron in 2018 (“French President Emmanuel Macron has warned that Europeans cannot be protected without a “true, European army”/.../”)⁴²; by Chancellor Merkel also in 2018 (“we ought to work on the vision of one day establishing a proper European army”)⁴³; by Ursula von der Leyen in 2015 (as Defence Minister of Germany) (“our future as Europeans will one day be a European army” and “I’m convinced a European army makes Europe stronger not weaker, and it makes the transatlantic alliance stronger, not weaker”)⁴⁴. The most recent appeal comes from President Zelenskyy during the 2025 Munich Security

³⁸ Max Bergmann, *supra*, fn 11

³⁹ Sven Biscop. “The New Force Model: NATO’s European Army?”. Egmont Institute. Egmont Policy Brief 285, 1-5. September 2022. Available at: https://www.egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2022/09/Sven-Biscop_PolicyBrief285_vFinal.pdf

⁴⁰ Christophe Gomart and Hélder Sousa Silva. “Europe Must Take Command”. EPP Group in the European Parliament. 11 September 2025. Available at: <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/europe-must-take-command>

⁴¹ DW. “Juncker calls for collective EU army”. Deutsche Welle, 3 August 2015. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/juncker-calls-for-collective-eu-army/a-18302459>

⁴² Emmanuel Macron via BBC, *supra*, fn 9

⁴³ Angela Merkel via German Federal Government Archive, *supra*, fn 10

⁴⁴ Andrew Sparrow. “Jean-Claude Juncker calls for EU army”. The Guardian, 9 March 2015. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/08/jean-claude-juncker-calls-for-eu-army-european-commission-military>
Kelsey Glover and Sarah Halls. “A European Army Makes Europe Stronger not Weaker” says German Defense Minister”. German Marshall Fund, 20 March 2015. Available at: <https://www.gmfus.org/news/european-army-makes-europe-stronger-not-weaker-says-german-defense-minister>

Conference (“*I really believe that the time has come that the armed forces of Europe must be created*”)⁴⁵ and was repeated by him recently at the World Economic Forum in Davos 2026.⁴⁶

Setting aside past discussions on a pan-European fighting force or European army, and the traditional arguments “for” or “against”, it is obvious that the perspective of American shifting from Europe totally changes the parameters of the debate.

Let’s remember that skepticism towards the idea of a European Army came from countries which relied exclusively on US leadership for security guarantees and defence of their country and defence of the whole Europe, and on the US army being the backbone military force of NATO. If this basic assumption changes, then previous arguments “against” lose their value.

Discussions and decisions on backbone European military forces are needed right now, even if we expect the American shift towards the Indo-Pacific or Western Hemisphere to happen in a slow, orderly pace. Building a European army, even if limited in size and complimentary to national military forces will take a substantial amount of time and resources, starting from the first steps to create European headquarters within NATO, with European command and control system.

It is obvious that these kind of discussions and decisions on such big institutional questions of the future of European defence architecture need to be organized in a platform like the European Security Council. In the history of the European Union, such major decisions always required first of all agreement and leadership among the most influential European countries. It is time to take the same approach on major issues related to the “institutional” future of European defence.

IV. European defence: EU alone or together with Ukraine, United Kingdom and Norway?

There are also major “geographical” questions related to institutional defence readiness and new European defence architecture, questions that go beyond the often repeated importance of EU security partnerships with so called “third countries”, from South Korea and Japan to United Kingdom and Canada.

There are very practical questions, related with our defence capabilities and they will demand answers in the nearest future.

Those questions are, first of all, related to the possibility of Russian aggression. In this case, EU Member States will face a Russian battle tested army which is much stronger than it was back in 2022. No NATO Member State in Europe has such a battle tested experience. Only the military forces of Ukraine have.

⁴⁵ Joshua Posaner. “Zelenskyy: ‘The Time has come’ for a European army. Politico, 15 February 2025. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-volodymyr-zelenskyy-time-has-come-european-army-munich-security-conference/>

⁴⁶ World Economic Forum. “Davos 2026: Special address by Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine”, 23 January 2026, available at: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2026/01/davos-2026-special-address-volodymyr-zelenskyy-president-of-ukraine/>

That is why we need to answer a very practical question: are we preparing to integrate Ukrainian battle tested military capabilities with our own defence capabilities, with the capabilities of the EU? How are we going to do that?

One of the answers to such a question could be an initiative to start to create European Defence Union, a task defined in the agenda of this Commission.

German Chancellor Merz recently also urged to do that: “*German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has called for the European Union to transform into a full-fledged European Defense Union, urging Europe to take greater responsibility for its security amid evolving global challenges*”.⁴⁷

What will a European Defence Union mean? Many questions and ideas still need to be discussed:

How much should the European Defence Union borrow from the unratified “Treaty establishing the European Defence Community” from 1952?

To what extent will the creation of a European Defence Union be a means to implement Art.42(2) of TEU, which demands from Member States the “progressive framing of a common Union defence policy” which “will lead to a common defence”?

The list of such questions can be extended.

The Reflection Paper on the Future of European Defence, published by European Commission back in 2017, defines key elements of the European Defence and Security Union: 1) more cooperation on defence inside the EU; 2) stronger alignment of strategic cultures, as well as a common understanding of threats and appropriate responses; 3) the nature of the transatlantic relationship is evolving; Europeans need to take greater responsibility for their own security; 4) increase the scope and efficiency of defence spending, avoid duplications, Member States’ defence spending should be better coordinated; 5) a true single market for defence should be created.⁴⁸

These are substantial and long-term issues, where the creation of a European Defence Union can play a very important role.

But most urgently we shall need to answer the questions raised at the beginning of this section: are we ready to include Ukraine into the architecture of the European Defence Union? Together with the United Kingdom and Norway?

Definitely, that would make us stronger!

Of course, realizing such an idea would raise many strategic and technical questions. And here again, there is a clear need of a platform of European Security Council to discuss, to decide and to lead on such strategic issues.

⁴⁷ Friedrich Merz via German Federal Government Archive, speech “Wiederherstellung der preislichen Wettbewerbsfähigkeit” at the economic forum by Süddeutsche Zeitung. 17 November 2025. Available at: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/kanzler-wirtschaftsgipfel-sz-2394206>

⁴⁸ European Commission. “Reflection paper on the future of European defence”. European Commission, 7 June 2017. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/publications/reflection-paper-future-european-defence_en

V. European Security Council and the way to have it

In this article I have outlined why we need a European Security Council as a platform to discuss and to decide on major European defence issues.

In brief, such a European Security Council would be responsible for:

- a) European crisis management in the case of military aggression against EU Member States (TEU Art.42(7));
- b) coordination of policies for defragmentation of European defence industry and for the development of pan-European defence projects;
- c) development of ideas on a “European pillar of NATO”;
- d) development of ideas on European Defence Union;
- e) integration of Ukraine's defence capabilities within an European Defence Union.

Let's remember that the first to raise the idea of a European Security Council were President Macron and Chancellor Merkel, back in 2017-2019, based on the strategic wish to hold on to defence and security relations with the United Kingdom after Brexit. At that time the idea did not materialize, but Russia's war against Ukraine provided new momentum, launching the E5+ format with its concentration on key issues related with security guarantees to Ukraine. The E5+ format and platform has demonstrated real added value to discuss and to agree on the most important issues.

In these dangerous times it is obvious that we need a similar platform to discuss strategic issues related with the future of European defence. There is a clear and urgent task to create a clearer institutional and legal basis for very much needed united, European political leadership. That is why this idea of European Security Council needs to have a new life.

Substantial analytical material is available on how such a Council can be created, on which legal basis and with what kind of mandate it would operate.⁴⁹

It will require more deep analysis, but it's clear that if we, Europeans, want to seriously answer the question: how Europe can defend itself with less America, first of all we need to resolve the institutional question: who is leading Europe to find the right answers? It's obvious that at the

⁴⁹ Niklas Nováky, *supra*, fn 22; Luigi Scazzieri, *supra*, fn 25

Jo Coelmont. “Will a European Security Council bring strategic relevance?”. Egmont Institute, Security Policy Brief No. 124., March 2020. Available at: <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2020/03/spb124-jo-coelmont.pdf?type=pdf>

Stefan Lehne. “Time for an EU Security Council?”. Carnegie Europe, Commentary. 19 November 2024. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/europe strategic-europe/2024/11/time-for-an-eu-security-council?lang=en>

Richard G Whitman. “Time for a European Security Council?”. RUSI. 22 April 2025. Available at: <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/time-european-security-council>

Sergey Lagodinsky. “Europe needs a Security Council of the willing”. Heinrich Boell Stiftung, Commentary. 6 June 2025. Available at: <https://eu.boell.org/en/2025/06/06/europe-needs-security-council-willing>

Francis Shin. “Europe Still Needs A Security Council”. New Eastern Europe. 29 November 2024. Available at: <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2024/11/29/europe-still-needs-a-security-council/>

moment the most effective and acceptable institutional arrangement of “unified collective leadership” would be: the European Security Council.

How do we create the European Security Council? That is the first question the existing informal E5+ format needs to answer. Choices depend on the agreed tasks and mandate: if the Council is to be only an informal platform, as Chancellor Angela Merkel said: “*in which important decisions could be more swiftly prepared*⁵⁰”, then the Council can be realized, through the Treaty provisions on “enhanced cooperation”. But if there’s agreement the Security Council also needs decision making power, then there would be a need for a new specific intergovernmental treaty, like was done with Schengen Treaty for free movement of people, goods and services.

Time and institutions matter. We no longer have the privilege to waste a minute of our time if we want to achieve our defence readiness in the nearest future.

Let’s learn the lessons from our own historical experience. Ideas of what we need to do with our defence, how we need to transform our defence industry and how we need to build pan-European defence forces have been discussed many times for many years by our political leaders and experts. Sometimes in a language and arguments very similar to those we are using today.

It’s enough just to read some sentences from the famous speech “In defence of Europe” by former EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, which he gave back on 9 June 2017 during the Defence and Security Conference in Prague. It allows us to understand how little we have changed during last almost 10 years. All the same arguments, which we are using now, were already used almost 10 years ago.

“Together, we spend half as much as the United States but even then we only achieve 15% of their efficiency.

That is because around 80% of defence procurement, and 90% of research and technology investment, is done at national level with no coordination between the Member States of the European Union.

That is both inefficient and costly. And it makes it harder for our troops to work together.

Our approach is a scattergun one. There are 178 – as the Prime Minister said – different weapon systems in the EU, compared to 30 in the U.S. We allow ourselves the luxury of having 17 different types of combat tanks while the United States is able to manage perfectly well with just one model.

Absurdly, there are more helicopter types than there are governments to buy them! We must do better.”⁵¹

Of course, we must do better! Because it’s absolutely clear, that after almost 10 years we haven’t moved far forward from the description of our weak situation, which Jean Claude Juncker gave back in 2017. Despite the fact, that according to Adam Tooze, Europe spent more

⁵⁰ German Federal Government Archive, *supra*, fn 10

⁵¹ *Supra*, fn 8

than 3.1 trillion USD for its defence during the last decade.⁵² And it's obvious that new money will not resolve all the problems, which we are facing.

After 10 years of repeating the same arguments and the same recipes of what to do with our defence, we need to understand that those statements were not enough for the strategic change in our defence to materialize. We need to understand why such change has not happened. A partial answer is clear: there is no effective platform for unified political leadership, that allows for discussions and decisions on strategic institutional reforms in European defence.

Strategic change in our defence is the task, first of all, for Member States, but without unity and a proper leadership platform for discussions and swift preparation of decisions we shall not move forward.

That is why now we must stop repeating the mistakes of the past. If we really want to do better now, we need first of all to create such a platform – a European Security Council!

We are facing a crisis. A dangerous crisis.

In the time of the crisis, the first thing what is needed is intellectual mobilization. For discussions not only about what others will do (we like to discuss this very much in Europe), but first of all what we need to do. And after discussions - swift decisions.

Let's finish with the words of Jean Claude Juncker from the same speech in Prague, even more appropriate today:

“But more than that, the clock is running on how long we can live in a house half built. A European Security and Defence Union will help protect our Union, which is exactly what EU citizens expect.

*So the call I make today is not only in favour of a Europe of defence – it is a call in defence of Europe”.*⁵³

⁵² Adam Tooze. “Chartbook 389: Europe’s zombie armies. Or how to spend \$3.1 trillion and have precious little to show for it.”. Chartbook. 8 June 2025. Available at: <https://adamtooze.substack.com/p/chartbook-389-europes-zombie-armies>

⁵³ Supra, fn 8