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JEAN MONNET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE (2024-27),
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Working Group 3

Foreign, Security and Defence Policy of the EU

Research Plan and Directions

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Title: Future of European Defence Union. Strengthening and deepening European defence integration

Objectives

This research aims:

- to assess the current state of European defence cooperation,
- to examine and analyse the process leading to the establishment of the European Defence Union and strategic autonomy,
- to identify key challenges and opportunities of the EU's involvement in defence policy,
- to investigate whether the European Union as a security community has the capability to provide security in its immediate environment,
- to describe the spillover effect of external factors on the evolution of the European Defence Union,
- to assess the process of creating a Single European Defence Equipment Market
- to contribute to the ongoing debate on European defence integration.

Background

The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is the European Union's youngest policy area, emerging in the late 1990s. It was created as integral part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). It integrated tasks and institutions from the Western European Union (WEU) and launched its first missions and operations in 2003. The first European security strategy was accepted in 2003. From the outset, the CSDP encompassed both crisis management tools and capability development priorities. The Battlegroup concept was created in 2004. Although the CSDP has seen significant progress during the last decades, but there are some doubts regarding the success of its future.



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Initially, the EU's internal market regulations did not cover the defence industry, that is why the gradual integration of the European defence sector and the capability development processes was needed. In 2003, the European Commission aimed to create a "European Defence Equipment Market" to foster a more open market among member states, crucial for strengthening the European defence technological and industrial base. However, despite the 2009 Defence and Security Procurement Directive's goal to enhance transparency and openness, member states achieved these objectives only partially and European defence remained fragmented and underfinanced. Due to these challenges the technology gap started to increase. During the last two decades, alongside the development of crisis management structures and debates on the EU-NATO relations, the concepts of a European Defence Union and strategic autonomy have repeated surfaced. The EU institutions and member states have advocated for deeper security and defence cooperation.

Several factors have driven this accelerated process, including the Arab Spring, Russian aggression in Ukraine, mass migration and refugee crises from conflicts in the EU's southern neighbourhood, and increasing hybrid threats. Additionally, the shifting USA geostrategic interests, the worsening EU-US relations during the two Donald Trump's presidencies, the Brexit referendum, and a changing global environment leading to a new arms race have all contributed to this evolution. Significant developments have been witnessed in the international system; the world order is more fragmented and unstable than ever. It is also characterised by rising nationalism, protectionism, geopolitical rivalries and military conflicts. The emergence of new powers has posed new challenges to the multilateral liberal global order and multilateralism. The return of great power competition and geopolitical rivalries are also characterised by sharp technological fights.

During the last decades, a geopolitical shift can be witnessed and the post-Cold War world order has transformed significantly. The unipolarity developed after the collapse of the Soviet Union was replaced by complex multipolarity following the global financial crisis of 2008, as Josef Borell, former Vice President of the European Commission, describes the transition. According to Borell the world economic order is comprised of 'three dominant poles: the United States, China and the European Union'. Politically the world structure is more complex. Because there is 'an emerging Sino-American bipolarity; 2. and there are strong regional political and military powers like Russia and Turkey.; and 3. there are world actors between the two like the EU that has a strong economic weight but without military power. The EU is struggling 'to close the gap between economic power and geopolitical influence'." (Peters, 2022) Some critics argue that the world order is multipolar. (Bekkevold 2023)

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring and currently, with the war in Ukraine after the Russian aggression, there has been an imperative to enhance defence cooperation within the EU to become a credible security provider. The changing international environment forced the EU to redefine itself as a new type of power, and to adapt itself to the world of great powers.



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Currently, with the evolution of EU crisis management structures and the discourse surrounding defence capability development, the notion of a European Defence Union and the concept of European strategic autonomy have emerged on numerous occasions (Molnár 2024). Investment in the European defence industry plays crucial role in reaching strategic autonomy and overcoming technological gap.

The discourse surrounding the future of CSDP is not limited to the EU level; it is also a subject of political discussion at the Member State level. The standpoint adopted by individual Member States with regard to European strategic autonomy is also subject to variation. It is the result of differing perceptions of security and threats, geographical location and foreign and security policy orientation. This variation can also be observed in regional cooperation arrangements.

The acceptance of the EU Global Strategy in 2016 can be considered a turning point in the development process of CSDP. Since 2017, the gradual realisation of deeper European defence cooperation has been built on at least seven pillars: the establishment of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), the establishment of the PESCO, the introduction of the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), the creation of the European Defence Fund (EDF), and the establishment of the European Peace Facility (EPF), the Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC), and the development of European rules for the procurement of arms, munitions and war material. (Molnár 2024)

For its security the EU relies heavily on the US and on the NATO. Regarding the cooperation with the NATO the EU is committed to the principle of 3 D (no decoupling, no discrimination and no duplication). It is still not clear that the EU can fulfil its ambition to become a real global player (a power), from a global payer. In the new multipolar world order when European security and defence is determined and largely financed by Washington. The European Union faces several challenges, including underfinanced and fragmented defence capabilities, varying levels of political willingness among member states, and a rapidly changing and worsening security environment.

Research Questions:

1. What are the primary challenges facing European defence capability development and cooperation?
2. How have recent geopolitical developments, such as Russian aggression and the US's shifting foreign policy, influenced European defence priorities?
3. How might technological advancements impact the future of European defence strategies?



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4. What role do EU institutions and member states play in enhancing defence cooperation and strategic autonomy?
5. What are the most effective policies and initiatives on European level to strengthen European defence capabilities and cooperation?

Methodology

The research is based on a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data analysis. The following methods can be used:

- literature review to analyse existing academic research, policy papers, and official documents related to European defence.
- semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including EU officials, member state representatives, and defence experts.
- case studies to examine specific defence cooperation initiatives, such as PESCO and the EDF, to assess their effectiveness and impact.
- interpretive policy analysis of the key strategic documents on European security and defence.
- content and discourse analysis of political speeches of EU leaders and politicians.



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