

# The EU's Common Security and Defense Idea in the Context of EU-NATO Relations

*AB-NATO İlişkileri Bağlamında  
AB'nin Ortak Savunma ve Güvenlik Politikası Fikri*

**Elif ÖZDİLEK**

Dr., Ufuk University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Political Science  
International Relations, ORCID: 0000-0003-0907-8771, email: elif.ozdilek@ufuk.edu.tr

## Abstract

The European Union (EU) has historically depended on the United States (US) and NATO for its security and defense policies, particularly during the Cold War. Despite aspirations for a self-sufficient security and defense policy, the EU has yet to realize this goal, necessitating a reassessment of its strategies in light of emerging threats and crises in the post-Cold War era. This study evaluates the EU's pursuit of an independent security and defense policy, revealing that collaboration with the US and NATO enhances the EU's ability to implement such a policy, rather than opposing these entities. The proposed European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) aims to integrate the EU's security efforts within the broader framework of NATO, which currently defines NATO-EU relations as a "strategic partnership," indicating that the ambition for an independent European defense system remains predominantly a French initiative at this time.

**Keywords:** European Union, NATO, Cold War, Security Threat, Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP).

## Öz

Avrupa Birliği (AB), özellikle Soğuk Savaş sırasında güvenlik ve savunma politikaları için tarihsel olarak Amerika Birleşik Devletleri (ABD) ve NATO'ya bağımlı olmuştur. Kendi kendine yetebilen bir güvenlik ve savunma politikası özlemlerine rağmen, AB henüz bu hedefi gerçekleştirilememiştir ve bu da Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ortaya çıkan tehditler ve krizler ışığında stratejilerinin yeniden değerlendirilmesini gerektirmektedir. Bu çalışma, AB'nin bağımsız bir güvenlik ve savunma politikası arayışını değerlendirerek, ABD ve NATO ile işbirliğinin, bu varlıklara karşı çıkmak yerine, AB'nin böyle bir politikayı uygulama yeteneğini artırdığını ortaya koymaktadır. Önerilen Avrupa Güvenlik ve Savunma Politikası (AGSP), AB'nin güvenlik çabalarını, şu anda NATO-AB ilişkilerini "stratejik ortaklık" olarak tanımlayan NATO'nun daha geniş çerçevesine entegre etmeyi amaçlamaktadır ve bu da bağımsız bir Avrupa savunma sistemi arzusunun şu anda ağırlıklı olarak bir Fransız girişimi olmaya devam ettiğini göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Avrupa Birliği, NATO, Soğuk Savaş, Güvenlik Tehdidi, Ortak Güvenlik ve Savunma Politikası (OGSP).

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## Introduction

The signing of the Treaty on the European Union (EU) in 1992 marked a significant advancement for EU members concerning the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). In 1998, during the St. Malo Summit, a collective agreement was reached to incorporate a military aspect into the EU's foreign relations by establishing an independent security and defense policy. Following this decision, the Cologne and Helsinki Summits in 1999 outlined the principles for the creation of a European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). The legal framework for this security and defense policy was solidified with the Lisbon Treaty, which came into effect in 2009, resulting in its renaming as the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP).

Following World War II, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established in 1949, primarily under the guidance of the United States of America (USA), to ensure the security of Europe. NATO encompasses a significant majority of EU members, with 22 states being part of both organizations. The alliance was designed in response to the dynamics of the Cold War, providing collective security for European nations against the Soviet Union. However, with the Soviet threat diminishing after the Cold War, European states began to reassess their reliance on NATO, while simultaneously fostering a desire among EU member states to pursue independent security and defense strategies. Recent terrorist attacks on EU soil over the past decade, alongside conflicts in nearby regions, have underscored the necessity for the EU to act on its commitment to establish a distinct security and defense policy. In academic discussions, it has often been noted that the security and defense strategies promoted by the US and NATO during the Cold War, along with the EU's aspirations for an independent security and defense policy in the post-Cold War era, ultimately aim toward a common objective.

This study explores the concept of the EU establishing an autonomous security and defense policy, set against the backdrop of historical dialogues and political-military changes since the end of the Cold War. The objective of this study is to determine the degree to which the EU has successfully implemented this policy through its various strategies over the years. The findings indicate that the EU can only achieve the goal of creating an independent security and defense policy through collaboration with the US and NATO, as outlined in the newly released security strategies.

This study stands apart from other research in the literature by assessing the concept of establishing an independent security and defense policy for the EU, along with the specific actions it has undertaken as a whole, strictly within the context of previously declared strategies. Employing document/text analysis—a qualitative data collection method within qualitative research—this study investigates institutional written materials associated with the EU, cites contributions from other scholars in the field, and seeks to foster a comprehensive understanding through an inductive approach.

This study is divided into three sections. The initial section examines the historical discussions surrounding the concept of the EU creating its own independent security and defense policy, emphasizing the motivations behind the EU's desire to establish this policy separate from the US during the post-Cold War era. The second section addresses the security strategies formulated by the EU to implement its security and defense policy effectively and EU-NATO relations in terms of security and defense. The final section

offers a comprehensive evaluation of the article, analyzing the EU's efforts to forge an independent security and defense policy in relation to its connections with the US and NATO. This section also defines the new security landscape and assesses the EU's security and defense policy in light of recent developments.

## **Literature Review**

An examination of the national and international literature concerning the EU's counterterrorism processes reveals that studies are constructed within a multifaceted framework encompassing the root causes of terrorism, legal cooperation, intelligence sharing, the terrorism experiences of EU member states, and legal measures (Bendiek, 2006; Büyükbaş, 2006; D'Amato and Terlizzi, 2022; Karayığit, 2008; Monar, 2008). The primary topics of discourse in this domain include the legal framework and legislation, intelligence sharing and collaboration, root causes of terrorism and radicalization prevention, border security and migration policies, the EU's cross-border partnerships related to these issues, and debates surrounding human rights (Tangör & Sayın, 2012; Öztürk, 2019; Mogherini, 2016; Kaunert, MacKenzie, & Leonard, 2022). Given the evolving nature of counterterrorism policies, various agendas and themes emerge at different times within the literature (König & Trauner, 2021). The most notable instances of this phenomenon are observable in the periods preceding and following the September 11 attacks. Furthermore, research indicates that discussions surrounding the previously mentioned topics have surged immediately following significant terrorist incidents in Europe, including the attacks in Madrid, London, and Paris (Battır, 2021; European Council, 2001; Council of the EU, 2005; EU Global Strategy, 2016; Pishchikova and Piras, 2017). It is evident that the national literature on this subject remains restricted, highlighting the necessity for studies that consider contemporary advancements in this area.

## **The Changing Security Understanding after the Cold War and the Threats Emerging in Europe**

### ***Security Understanding during the Cold War***

Security is derived from the word *securitas*, which is formed by combining the Latin words *se* (without) and *cura* (concern) (Yiğit, 2017). People understand what security is by knowing what insecurity feels (Booth, 2012). The concept of security has been an important concept throughout human history; people have resisted throughout history for their security and have protected their security by fighting when necessary. In this sense, people are in constant conflict in the natural state in order to ensure their security. Thomas Hobbes thinks that people are rational egoists by nature (Moehler, 2009). Hobbes's state of nature is not a benign state; it is a state in which everyone fights everyone else due to the lack of a higher authority to maintain order (Nye and Welch, 2013). From here it is clear that the main reason why Hobbes proposed *Leviathan* is that when people live without a general power to keep them all in fear and to make them submit, they are at war, and this war is a war of all against all (*bellum omnium contra omnes*) (Hobbes, 1992).

With the beginning of World War II, the declaration of the failure of idealism continued with the rise of realist theory. Within the theories of International Relations, the realist

school accepts nation-states as the most fundamental actors of the international system (Yiğit, 2017). Therefore, the development and increase of the welfare of any actor is seen as a threat to the welfare of other actors (Carr, 1946). In this sense, E. H. Carr, one of the pioneers of realism, saw the outbreak of war as the failure of the idealist approach and stated that states are the most fundamental actors in the system, emphasizing that the power struggle of these actors is the most important feature of the international system.

Carr, who stated that the First World War occurred as a result of the inequality in the distribution of power between the status quo and revisionist states, stated that states pursued power in international politics (Carr, 1946). In this sense, the realist theory, which was dominant in the international relations literature after the Second World War, became an important international relations theory in understanding the power struggles between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Although the idea that the state is the most important actor in international relations is accepted by realists, criticisms of classical realism over time have led to the development of neorealism. In this sense, Kenneth Waltz is considered the pioneer of neorealism with his book *Theory of International Politics*, which he wrote in 1979. While neorealists continue to see the state as the most important actor of the international system, they focus on the concept of “international structure”, unlike classical realists (Waltz, 1979). International structures are defined by the basic principle of the system, and this principle is “anarchy” according to Waltz (Türker, 2018). The main difference between these two theories is that while classical realists focus on the state, neorealists focus on the international structure. It can be said that the main reason for this change is that states, especially during the Cold War and the post-Cold War period, tended to come together and form permanent blocs and alliances (Türker, 2018). In this sense, for a global actor like the EU, which has completed its economic integration and taken steps towards political integration as of 1980, significant regional and global cooperation in the field of security has almost become mandatory. Since its establishment, the EU has addressed defense and foreign policy issues with policies that emphasize national sovereignty and keep them under the control of nation states; however, after the Cold War, the Union has been forced to act more independently from NATO in the areas of defense and foreign policy. Although it wanted to act independently of the US and NATO, the Union has had to continue to produce defense policies within the framework of cooperation with the US and NATO, especially in the face of tensions and security problems experienced on the continent in the post-Cold War period.

### ***Post-Cold War Debates and Developments***

Security has always been a fundamental concern for people living in communities, and people’s efforts to create a stable security environment have constituted an important part of political life (Birdiqli, 2020). Today, nation-states have to act with other actors such as supranational regional organizations and subnational civil society organizations, which has necessitated that their sovereignty be recognized only together with these actors (Keyman, 2006). This has led to the need to re-evaluate the concept of security by taking into account the differences between the “national” and the “other” (Aydın-Düzgit, 2015). Within this framework, the EU, a supranational regional organization, has also found a

place for itself in international security studies, especially in the post-Cold War period, with the idea of developing an independent security and defense policy.

Throughout history, periods in which conflicts were resolved created stable peace environments, while periods in which conflicts were not present were defined as uncertain periods (Rumelili, 2018). The post-Cold War period was also a period in which this uncertainty was experienced, causing EU member states to struggle to ensure their security. The idea of the EU developing a security and defense policy independent of the US and NATO after the Cold War brought different discussions to the agenda. These discussions formed the main reasons for the EU developing an independent security and defense policy in the following years. Within this framework, it would be useful to first focus on these discussions and then on the reasons.

#### *Discussions on the Development of an Independent Security and Defense Policy for the EU*

Following the Cold War, the EU expressed its desire to create a security and defense policy that would operate independently from the US and NATO, and it accelerated efforts to develop related policies. This initiative has sparked discussions at multiple levels within the international community. Initially, the EU's move was viewed as a balancing strategy aimed at countering the influence of the US and NATO in light of the shifting dynamics post-Cold War. Additionally, this endeavor was scrutinized as a manifestation of the tensions that arose between the EU and the US at the transatlantic level. Furthermore, the disagreements among member states were also assessed in relation to this issue. Analyzing these internal disagreements sheds light on why the EU has not achieved notably successful outcomes regarding security and defense. Understanding these three aspects is crucial for appreciating the historical context surrounding the EU's initiative.

The initial questioning of the EU's efforts to create an independent security and defense policy took place at both the US and NATO levels. There were discussions regarding whether this initiative served as a balancing act against the US and NATO. Posen (2006) argued that the EU's move to establish an independent security and defense policy was not aimed at countering the US in the global sphere. He contended that the EU, composed of states that uphold liberal policies similar to those of the US and share fundamental values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, does not view the US as a threat. Additionally, Press-Barnathan (2006) noted that since EU member states do not perceive any threat from the US, it is unlikely that the EU would engage in a power-balancing strategy against it. Furthermore, Narramore (2008) pointed out that the strategic partnership the EU sought to cultivate with China following the Cold War should not be interpreted as a move against the US.

The general view is that the EU's initiative does not aim to balance the US in the international arena. One reason for this is that the EU and the US act together on many issues. Calleo (2008) emphasized that the parties are extremely successful within the international system, but that each actor achieves its success thanks to the other. Jones (2006) also stated that if the EU develops a security and defense policy independent of the US, it will bring the EU and the US closer together. According to the author, the EU will increase its ability to make common policies with the US by working on new



technologies and developing new weapons in line with the idea of developing an independent security and defense policy. Therefore, the relations between the EU and the US will be determined by the relations between the two actors rather than their relations with third countries (Wang, 2009). Similarly, since no state can be successful in space on its own, the US also needs a partner for its space program. In this case, the EU will be the closest partner of the US. Drath (2007) emphasizes that the EU and the US should focus more on common interests such as the space program, so that problems can be easier to solve.

Another development that emphasizes the partnership between the EU and the US is that France has changed its anti-US policy over time. Merand (2010) explains France's return to the military wing of NATO as the strengthening of the US and NATO alliance in Europe. According to the author, although this decision by France does not eliminate the problems between the EU and NATO, France will not bring up its old rhetoric. France's return to the military wing of NATO has created a situation in which France will support the process of establishing an EU independent of the US, while not threatening the US (Mahncke, 2009).

Another view supporting the understanding that the EU does not aim to balance the US in the international arena is that a policy of standing by the US after the Cold War would be more profitable. For example, Wivel (2008) states that instead of pursuing a balancing policy against the US, which appeared to be the sole power in the international system after the Cold War, it would be more profitable for EU member states to cooperate. Dyson (2008) states that a policy of standing by the US is the policy with the least risk when a risk-cost analysis is made, and that this is one of the ways to influence the US, albeit at a low level. Hyde-Price (2006) also emphasizes that a policy of standing by the US could be a way for weak states in particular to benefit more from the US and have a greater say in the international system.

The EU's attempt to establish an independent security and defense policy has been the subject of discussion, secondly, through the transatlantic disagreements between the EU and the US. In this regard, it has been discussed whether the EU's initiative is a reflection of the problems experienced between the EU and the US. Regarding this issue, Kanet (2008) stated that the disagreements between the EU and the US are mostly related to "strategic incompatibility" and "fragmented security space". According to the author, since the relations between the EU and the US started to change in the post-Cold War period, some initiatives such as the transatlantic security project failed because they could not respond to new developments and threats. In addition, there are ideological differences between the EU member states and the US. While the US is liberal-idealist, the EU member states are realists. For example; the EU, which tries to establish its security and defense policy independently of the US, takes into account its "real interests" (Antoniades, 2008).

The EU's attempt to establish an independent security and defense policy has been evaluated thirdly within the framework of disagreements among member states. Kanet (2008) indicated the disagreements among EU member states as the reason for the disagreements between the EU and the US. The author stated that member states hesitated to establish a common policy because they were divided into groups and each group had

its own policy preferences. Tocci (2016) also drew attention to the disagreements among member states. According to the author, although some member states wanted to take bold steps in security and defense and develop an independent policy, some member states insisted that NATO's superiority should not be challenged. These disagreements caused conflicts and even hostilities between member states.

The differing perspectives on security and defense among EU member states have posed challenges for the establishment of an independent security and defense policy within the EU. This divergence has also complicated the nature of the EU's relations with the US and NATO. For instance, France has consistently advocated for the EU to develop a defense capability that is separate from the US. In contrast, Germany, constrained by historical political and military limitations, has sought a robust European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) while maintaining strong ties with NATO (Diedrichs, 2005).

Indeed, the primary distinction among EU member states concerning security and defense matters in the post-Cold War era is evident between France and England. For instance, Oswald (2006) notes that France's proposal in Saint Malo concerning the ESDP clearly embodied the notion that Europe ought to cultivate a security and defense policy separate from the USA. In contrast, England embraced a perspective that aimed to bolster NATO.

The varying opinions among EU member states have hindered their ability to create a unified security and defense policy, leaving the EU caught between the aspiration for independence in this area and the need for collaboration with the US and NATO. Nonetheless, over time, shifting perspectives and diverse international agendas have enabled member states to reach a consensus (Toje, 2008). In addition to progressing towards an independent security and defense policy, the EU member states have also discovered methods to maintain their cooperation with both the US and NATO.

#### *Reasons for the EU to Develop an Independent Security and Defense Policy*

The most obvious reason why the EU is thinking of developing an independent security and defense policy and trying to place security and defense within an institutional structure is that the US mostly makes decisions on its own, especially on issues related to Europe's security and defense, and sometimes leaves the EU out of this process. The EU has also aimed to create its own independent security and defense structure in order not to be affected by this negative situation (Wivel, 2008). In this case, the EU felt less of the security support that the US provided to Europe, while the US began to reduce its military presence in Europe (Oswald, 2006). In fact, the most suitable environment for the formation of an independent security and defense policy among EU members emerged when the US began to partially withdraw its forces from Europe after the Cold War and allowed the EU to fill the partial power vacuum that emerged. The gradual decrease in the US's interest in Europe; The increasing demand for international crisis management skills and the changing concept of the balance of power both in Europe and globally have caused the ESDP issue to gain importance (Irondelle and Merand, 2010).

Another reason for the EU's idea of developing an independent security and defense policy is that the EU wants to share the work of the USA in terms of security and defense (Press-Barnathan, 2006). In this sense, the EU can be considered as the partner of the USA and NATO in the international arena. For example, since political-military issues such as Afghanistan take up a large part of the energy of NATO members, the EU has

taken on the task of conducting smaller-scale operations of the USA through the ESDP (Irondele and Merand, 2010). In military terms, the common denominator defined by the ESDP for EU member states is that it is a tool for “crisis management” (Schroeder, 2009), that it provides additional power to NATO’s military capabilities and that it provides the EU with military tools in the EU’s external relations (Menon and Sedelmeier, 2010). In political terms, the ESDP is an important tool for EU member states that supports the idea of political integration put forward by the EU through the CFSP (Duke, 2008).

Other reason for the EU to develop an independent security and defense policy is that the EU wants to be a reliable international actor. In this regard, Posen (2006) emphasizes that in order for the EU to become a truly international actor, it should focus on foreign policy after taking important steps for economic and monetary union. For Wivel (2008), for an actor to have a say politically depends on its military strength. Accordingly, the EU’s increasing its military capabilities through peacekeeping and conflict prevention will enable it to become an important actor in the international system (Eriksen, 2006). Therefore, the activities that the EU has put forward to develop cooperation in foreign policy can be shown as a legitimate example of the role that the EU wants to play as the “architect of international relations” (Bickerton, 2010). The EU’s establishment of a comprehensive strategic partnership with China, its active participation in energy-related organizations in Southeast Asia, and its agreements on cooperation with Russia reveal the concrete activities of the EU in terms of multilateralism (Maull, 2005). Within the developing multilateral structure, the EU will begin to take bolder steps in foreign policy, which will make it easier for different regional powers to adapt to a multipolar structure (Fischer, 2006).

Furthermore, for the EU’s idea of developing an independent security and defense policy is the view that the EU will share the costs that the US has to bear due to transatlantic relations. Although EU member states perceive new security-related regulations as initiatives that will contribute to their independence, the US sees the initiative as an opportunity to share the financial burden on it with EU resources (Wivel, 2008). Since the EU cannot be effective enough to create a global order on its own, it can be assumed that EU member states will work in cooperation with other actors. In this sense, it can be predicted that the partnership relationship between the EU and the US will be extremely important on a transatlantic basis (Poettering, 2007).

When the independent security and defense policy that the EU is trying to develop is evaluated in a broad context, it is understood that the EU has taken an important step within the European integration project (Duke, 2008). This issue also shows us that the EU aims to contribute to the development of a regular international order, well-functioning international organizations and a strong international society (Hemmer, 2010). Emphasizing that the EU has generally been an actor that consumes security throughout its short history, Duna (2010) states that it has now risen to the position of an actor that provides security with its new security and defense perspective. As a result, it is seen that the role of Europe has increased in the changing global order after the Cold War and that EU member states have taken important steps in terms of international security and peacekeeping towards becoming a civilian power instead of being the junior partner of the USA (Toje, 2008).



## **EU–NATO Relations in the Post-Cold War Era**

The dissolution of bipolar politics and the collapse of the Soviet Union led to collaboration among regional and global actors, resulting in the creation of new regional policies. To foster stability and peace on the continent amid emerging developments, the EU formulated strategies aimed at establishing strong ties with the relevant countries, while also working to prevent the former Eastern Bloc nations from coming under the sway of the Russian Federation once more. In this framework, the EU embarked on a period of expansion following the Cold War, increasing its membership and enhancing its relationship with NATO to bolster continental security. Meanwhile, NATO, which faced questions about its relevance after the Cold War, also engaged in an expansion process to reaffirm its purpose. In this new global landscape, both the EU and NATO have undertaken significant steps to redefine their security strategies.

### ***EU–NATO Relations after the Cold War In Terms of Security and Defense***

The recent identification of a bipolar structure within the international system has raised questions regarding the European Union's reliance on the USA and NATO for security, particularly as the threat elements in NATO's framework have evolved. Following the military intervention by the USA in Iraq after September 11, significant divisions in viewpoints within the EU have become evident, thereby reinforcing criticisms related to "federalism" (Kıratlı, 2006).

Within the EU, England, often referred to as Atlanticist, has consistently highlighted the significance of the USA and the influence of NATO on security matters. Conversely, France has traditionally positioned itself as the advocate for Europe taking charge of its own security. This ongoing dilemma has influenced both the successes and failures of Europe in establishing its own security and defense framework during the Cold War. Additionally, smaller states that joined the Union later have also supported a security policy centered on the US. Currently, the roles of NATO and the EU in addressing international crises are crucial not only for the stability and security of the Euro-Atlantic region but also for conflict resolution, particularly in Asia and Africa (Çelik, 2013). In this regard, the Atlanticist and Europeanist perspectives within the Union can be assessed through the lens of new defense and security initiatives concerning NATO and EU relations following the Cold War.

Following the Cold War, the USA, which claimed military dominance in a unipolar world, sought to maintain its presence in Europe with England's backing. Nevertheless, the questioning of NATO's relevance compelled the organization to adjust to the changing landscape. Notably, in the early 1990s, the EU initiated the political integration process through the Maastricht Treaty, while NATO also recognized the need for transformation with its "Strategic Concept" during the same timeframe (Akgül, 2008). As NATO began its expansion to align with the new global order, the EU aimed to preserve its political cohesion in an increasingly globalized environment by implementing restructuring measures in security and defense. However, the inability of institutions like the United Nations (UN) or the EU to address the "regional conflicts" that emerged as primary security concerns in the 1990s highlighted the renewed necessity for NATO (Akgül, 2008).

In addition, from the EU's perspective, the steps taken to revive the Western European Union are an important development in terms of Europe's ability to provide its own defense and security independently of NATO. The WEU, which lost its importance after the establishment of NATO in 1949, was dysfunctional until 1984. It is known that efforts were made to reactivate the WEU in security issues after 1984. In this context, the Maastricht Treaty is the fundamental document determining the role of the WEU. The Amsterdam Treaty is an important agreement in terms of indicating that the WEU has a role that encompasses all the problems of the union. However, the Union has always stated that these steps are not separate from NATO but within the framework of cooperation with NATO. At this point, the 1998 St. Malo meeting is seen as a turning point in terms of the autonomy of European security and defense. During the annual bilateral summit meeting held by the British and French governments in St. Malo in December 1998, Europe's defense capabilities were highlighted (Akgül, 2008). While not denying the importance of NATO, the first official sign that Europe would move towards establishing its own military power in order to play a more dominant and independent role in international relations was given by Britain and France in 1998 (Akgül, 2008). On the other hand, the Berlin Summit introduced the system of relations known as "Berlin-Plus", which allows the use of NATO's capabilities and means in crisis management operations to be undertaken by the European Union (NATO, 2004). In this context, the EU's intervention in the Kosovo crisis with NATO support will be an important example for cooperation between NATO and the EU.

After the Cold War, NATO sought to foster positive relations with the European Union concerning defense and security, while simultaneously initiating various measures involving Ukraine, the Balkans, and Russia. The establishment of strong ties between NATO and Ukraine is recognized as crucial for both European security and U.S. national interests. This interest stems from NATO's emphasis on Ukraine and its classification of the nation as part of Central Eastern Europe (Kuzio, 1998). Consequently, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, along with escalating Russian pressure on Ukraine, prompted NATO to take action. The Wales Summit, which took place on September 4-5, 2014, amidst the Ukraine Crisis, marked a significant moment for what is referred to as the "New NATO" (Oğuz, 2016). In this context, NATO criticized Russia's stance towards Ukraine and proposed an increase in its military presence in Eastern Europe (DW, 2014). The positions of Eastern European nations, particularly those influenced by the former Soviet regime, regarding Russia have become increasingly significant, further elevating NATO's role and influence in the region.

The significance of NATO for European security remains evident even after the Cold War; however, the shift in the US's approach to NATO during the Trump administration has led Europe to consider a unique framework. Following Donald Trump's election as President, Central and Eastern European nations grew increasingly apprehensive about NATO's future and their own safety. Meanwhile, Germany and France, the key players in Europe, indicated that transatlantic relations might alter in response to these changes (Özen, 2018). Established in light of these circumstances, PESCO aimed to create a military policy aligned with European principles. In 2017, 25 EU member states, excluding Denmark, Malta, and the United Kingdom, approved PESCO (Council of the European Union, 2017). While PESCO highlighted the differing interests between

Germany and France, the union's stance on armament and emergency responses led to tensions with the US.

The recent developments have instilled a sense of unease in the Transatlantic region of Europe. Concerns have arisen regarding Europe's desire to cultivate a defense and security framework that operates independently from NATO and, by extension, the United States. Nevertheless, the challenges faced within the Union indicate that the objective is not to disengage from NATO, but rather to bolster the European component of NATO. Furthermore, the proposed establishment of the ESDP aims to function as the European segment of the organization without excluding NATO. Currently, NATO-EU relations are characterized as a "strategic partnership" (Akgül, 2008). This partnership underscores that the vision of an independent European defense and security system remains, for the time being, largely a French aspiration.

In context of under the strategic partnership EU has developed different strategies in line with changing threat perceptions in the post-Cold War period. These strategies support the EU's attempt to establish an independent security and defense policy. Of these strategies, the European Security Strategy, announced in 2003, can be considered a political initiative, as it focuses more on the EU's desire to find a place for itself in the international arena as an actor. However, changing global security and defense dynamics necessitated the creation of a new strategy in 2016. The Global Strategy, announced instead of the European Security Strategy, drew attention to the EU's military needs. The "strategic independence" announced by this strategy can be considered a breakthrough supporting the EU's attempt to establish an independent security and defense policy. The Strategic Compass, announced in March 2022 as both a strategy and an action plan, redefines changing threats and draws attention to cooperation at all levels. The Strategic Compass emphasizes the importance of the EU-NATO partnership in security and defense, while emphasizing the importance of the EU developing an independent security and defense policy. The Strategic Compass, which represents an important development in the EU's foreign policy, demonstrates that the EU can develop its independent security and defense policy in cooperation with the US and NATO, in a "complementary" manner. Accordingly, providing information about the previous two strategies and the Strategic Compass will facilitate the understanding of the changing nature of the steps taken by the EU over time.

#### *European Security Strategy and Global Strategy*

The EU's attempt to establish an independent security and defense policy as a civilian power consists of the duality of the traditional state structure and the international community that has been transformed by global powers (Rapnouil, 2009). Within this general dynamic, a document titled "A Secure Europe in a Better World" was presented at the summit held in Thessaloniki on 19-20 June 2003. The document, defined as the European Security Strategy, emphasized that states cannot deal with complex problems on their own and drew attention to the idea of effective multilateralism (Tocci, 2017). The document announced that a soft security policy was adopted instead of a hard security policy. Accordingly, the EU decided to use non-military tools and capabilities. The document declared international terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts and organized crime as important threats. The strategy

adopted the establishment of security in Europe's immediate vicinity and the establishment of an international order based on "effective multilateralism" as the main areas of activity for the solution of problems.

The terrorist attacks, civil wars and the resulting migration waves that have occurred in the ten years since the publication of the European Security Strategy Document have required the EU to reconsider security and defense-related issues. The European Council requested that the issues threatening the EU within the diversifying global structure be redefined and a new strategy be prepared. Accordingly, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, which announced its study in 2015, defined the world as a turbulent, competitive and complex place where states are interdependent. The High Representative also stated that the new strategy, referring to the referendum that would vote on the UK's withdrawal from the EU in 2016, also aimed to provide the EU with a sense of unity (Tocci, 2017). Within the framework of these studies, the European Council announced on 28 June 2016 that it had adopted a document titled "Global Strategy for EU Foreign and Security Policy." According to this document, the Global Strategy international environment; The European Security Strategy focused on the EU's desire to find a place for itself as an actor in the international arena, while the Global Strategy focused on developments related to security and defense.

The Global Strategy Document has stated that ensuring the security of EU member states is a priority. The "Security and Defense Implementation Plan", which includes the implementation of the Global Strategy, has set out an integrated approach for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the management of crises. The implementation plan has emphasized that the EU should conduct civilian and military operations in order to implement peace agreements and ceasefire arrangements, and thus create stable environments (Tocci, 2018). In addition to military operations and the use of civilian vehicles, the Global Strategy has also touched on issues such as law, policing, governance and education, and has underlined the issue of resilience (Tardy, 2018).

The Global Strategy Document takes the EU's goal of developing an independent security and defense policy one step further. The document emphasizes the idea of "strategic independence" as a fundamental characteristic of security and defense (Barbé and Morillas, 2019). In recent years, efforts made to achieve the "strategic independence" goal determined by the Council constitute the most important agenda item of the EU in terms of creating an independent security and defense policy. In this sense, the Council has determined political-military tasks and capabilities (Biscop, 2016). The EU has also set a new goal defined by the search for "strategic independence" (Duke, 2019). "Strategic Independence" aims to bring member states together under the goal of political integration at a time when the UK is leaving the EU (Koppa, 2019).

The Global Strategy has developed special tools such as CARD (Coordinated Annual Review on Defense) and PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) for the EU to take effective action. These tools have facilitated the political and military elements required to implement the idea of "strategic independence" of member states. The EU Council has launched the Coordinated Annual Defense Review (CARD) to strengthen the relationship between the EU's civil and military tasks. Announced in November 2016, CARD undertakes to share information and develop cooperation among member states to

develop military capabilities (Barbé and Morillas, 2019). CARD also examines member states' national defense budgets and suggests new methods for defense spending (Koppa, 2019). CARD, which was planned to ensure the realization of member states' priorities and to monitor their implementation (Besch, 2019), also evaluates the cooperation opportunities that may arise during the monitoring of implementation plans among member states (Fiott, 2017). In this sense, CARD will function as a mechanism through which member states can adjust their capability development practices related to their national defense planning (Tardy, 2018).

Another special tool developed by the Global Strategy is Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). PESCO, which includes commitments and special projects, aims to establish deep cooperation among the 25 EU members. PESCO is complemented by the "European Defense Fund", which provides financing to encourage the participation of member states (Leuprecht, 2019). PESCO can be said to be one of the most important steps taken in defense, as it is not an intergovernmental structure and unanimity is not required for decisions taken. In this sense, PESCO emerges as a cooperation practice that represents deepening within the integration process (Csornai, 2017) and is a good example of differentiated integration in this respect (Aydın-Düzgit and Marrone, 2018).

#### *Strategic Compass for the European Union*

The Russia-Ukraine war that started in February 2022 right next to the EU and the hostile security environment required the EU to take a forward step. In addition to the war, EU member states saw the increase in strategic competition and sources of instability and realized that hybrid threats were expanding their impact. Member states understood that access to the high seas, space and digital space was becoming increasingly contested and that interdependence was losing its effectiveness. Under these circumstances, the EU felt compelled to increase its presence and influence in its neighborhood and decided to invest in both strengthening its resilience and diversifying its defense capabilities. At the summit held on 24-25 March 2022, the European Council adopted the Strategic Compass, a document containing a common view on the development of a stronger security and defense structure for the EU. The Strategic Compass outlines a new roadmap for the EU's security and defense goals over the next five to ten years. Strategic Compass, which aims to make the EU a stronger and more capable security provider, has announced that it aims to work with partners to preserve the strategic independence of the EU.

The Strategic Compass contains the first agreed EU threat assessment and adapts the EU's security and defense programmes to today's challenging security environment. The Strategic Compass emphasises both the vital collective defense role that NATO plays in defending EU territory and the need for capability and defense investment for the EU's strategic independence. With the Strategic Compass, EU Member States aim to make a joint assessment of the strategic environment, the threats and challenges faced, and to bring greater coherence and a sense of common purpose to security action, and to identify new ways and means to achieve this. To this end, the Strategic Compass presents concrete proposals in four directions.

The first aspect of the Strategic Compass is taking action. The EU aims to take more rapid and decisive action and make flexible decisions when faced with crises. To this end, member states need to strengthen their command and control structures. Within this



framework, the EU plans to establish a strong EU Rapid Deployment Force capacity of up to 5,000 soldiers and deploy 200 fully equipped CSDP mission specialists within 30 days. The EU also intends to conduct regular live exercises on land and at sea and to improve military mobility. Similarly, member states plan to strengthen the EU's civil and military CSDP tasks and operations by ensuring greater financial solidarity among themselves.

The second aspect of the Strategic Compass is securing. The EU aims to secure its citizens against rapidly changing threats. To do this, the EU considers protecting its security interests, increasing its intelligence analysis capacity, bringing together different tools and response teams to detect and respond to hybrid threats. The EU also aims to strengthen actions in the maritime, air and space domains by developing a space strategy. Thus, EU Member States strengthen their ability to anticipate, deter and respond to current and emerging threats and challenges.

The third aspect of the Strategic Compass is investment. The EU aims to invest in capabilities and innovative technologies where necessary. The aim is to fill strategic gaps and reduce technological and industrial dependencies. To this end, EU member states are considering spending more on defense and increasing capacity. Member states aim to jointly develop military capabilities and invest in technological innovations for defense. In general, the EU plans to develop collaborative capabilities and encourage member states to jointly invest in next-generation capabilities that will operate on land, at sea, in the air, in cyberspace and in space.

The fourth aspect of the Strategic Compass is partnership. The EU aims to partner with other actors to address common threats and challenges and achieve common goals, and plans to strengthen existing partnerships. To this end, the EU intends to strengthen its strategic partnership with NATO and the United Nations (UN) and to increase cooperation with other regional organizations. The EU aims to increase cooperation with bilateral partners that share its values, such as the US, Norway, Canada, the UK and Japan. In addition, the EU plans to develop special partnerships in the Western Balkans, its Eastern and Southern neighbors, as well as in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The Strategic Compass, which sets out concrete proposals under four main headings, represents the EU's latest step in establishing an independent security and defense policy. In this sense, the Strategic Compass outlines what the EU can do internationally as a security provider. Within this framework, it would not be wrong to consider the Strategic Compass as a turning point.

### **An Assessment of the EU's Independent Security and Defense Policy**

One of the most debated issues among EU member states in the post-Cold War period was the idea of the EU developing an independent security and defense policy. Since this policy constituted the political pillar of the European integration project and was almost seen as a prerequisite for the EU to become an international actor, it was quite challenging for member states. When the steps taken by the EU in this regard in the last 20 years are examined, three evaluations can be made.

A notable observation about the EU's pursuit of an independent security and defense policy is that, despite the limitations imposed by the institutional rivalry between the EU

and NATO (Torun, 2018), the EU has not succeeded in establishing a security and defense policy that is autonomous from the US and NATO. Nevertheless, by accepting the international landscape as it exists rather than as it desires, the EU has discovered that it can achieve the goal of creating an independent security and defense policy, paradoxically, through collaboration with the US and NATO rather than in opposition to them. The dual membership of EU states in NATO, along with their significant bilateral ties to the US, has hindered the EU from acting independently of NATO. Furthermore, the critical nature of the EU-NATO partnership for both sides has compelled the EU to work alongside the US and NATO on matters of security and defense. Noteworthy advancements in this area have been made particularly through the Global Strategy and the Strategic Compass. PESCO, created under the Global Strategy, was intended to serve as a mechanism for enhancing the military capabilities utilized by the EU and NATO while also coordinating the defense strategies of both entities. The Strategic Compass highlights NATO's role in safeguarding EU territory and emphasizes that cooperation between the EU and NATO continues to be a priority.

A notable observation about the EU's initiative to create an independent security and defense policy is that the actions taken to make this vision a reality have largely been driven by necessity. Member states of the EU have managed to implement this independent security and defense policy as a continuation or enhancement of developments initiated from outside the EU. The strategic documents produced nearly every decade since the end of the Cold War illustrate this point effectively. For instance, the European Security Strategy endorses an international framework grounded in effective multilateralism to address conflicts and foster peace. Being part of this framework requires that one is a political actor with a voice and the ability to make independent decisions, particularly on matters deemed essential for political integration, such as security and defense. Additionally, the Global Strategy was designed to counteract the adverse effects that the United Kingdom's departure from the Union would impose on member states in light of renewed international threats. The Global Strategy highlights the EU's focus on hard power, indicating that military operations will be included alongside civilian efforts. The EU has characterized the concept of strategic independence as a core aspect of its security and defense matters within the Global Strategy Document. As a result, strategic independence has emerged as a unifying factor for EU member states following the UK's exit from the EU. To address security concerns in its immediate vicinity, which have become increasingly tense due to the Russia-Ukraine War, the Strategic Compass was introduced. This document emphasizes that, in addition to the ongoing conflict, the rise of instability and the proliferation of hybrid threats necessitate an enhancement of the EU's effectiveness. Consequently, this evolution underscores the importance of a robust and autonomous security and defense policy.

The third striking assessment regarding the idea of the EU developing an independent security and defense policy is that the objectives and planned actions of the policy put forward by the EU are increasingly taking on a military character. For example, the European Security Strategy has adopted a soft power policy to end conflicts, establish peace and ensure stability. However, the Global Strategy Document has emphasized the importance of carrying out civil and military operations in order to implement peace

agreements. Within the framework of this idea, the Global Strategy has created tools such as CARD and PESCO. These two tools created to implement the idea of strategic independence particularly emphasize military applications. For example; CARD, which aims to strengthen the coordination and relations of military tasks between member states, focuses on information sharing for the development of military capabilities. Another tool, PESCO, is planned to develop and coordinate military capabilities to be deployed under the management of the EU and NATO. The EU has announced that it aims to take rapid action and make flexible decisions in the face of crises with the Strategic Compass. Accordingly, the EU, which announced that it has adopted a soft power policy with the European Security Strategy for the resolution of conflicts and the establishment of peace, reveals that it wants to create a real military force through live military exercises at the point it has reached with the Strategic Compass.

## Conclusion

In the process of European integration, it is evident that EU member states are more capable of executing common decisions related to economic and monetary matters; however, they struggle with foreign, security, and defense issues. Nonetheless, due to threats encountered in the post-Cold War era, such as the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, regional conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, and issues in Libya and Syria that have sparked a migration crisis, member states recognize the necessity of developing and implementing independent security and defense policies. The shifts in the international landscape have influenced the notion of security, yet its significance remains intact. Once viewed primarily as a military concept, security is now examined through political, sociological, economic, and ecological lenses. As the scope of security has broadened, many issues can no longer be addressed by individual countries alone. Problems like international terrorism, environmental degradation, hunger, and the plight of refugees have created an imperative for collective action in this new era.

The fact that the European security structure is based on NATO, led by the US, makes it difficult for EU member states to realize their desire to develop their own security and defense policies. Nevertheless, EU member states have been able to make some joint decisions on security and defense issues and, despite the difficulties they have encountered in implementing these decisions, they have been able to implement them to a certain extent. The biggest difficulty the EU has faced in this regard is that the independent security and defense policy it wants to create has had to be designed with the US and NATO. However, the fact that the EU is currently working on common policies with NATO is an element that makes it easier to overcome this difficulty. The EU, which wants to create an independent security and defense policy for itself with its strategy documents, has understood that it can only do this in cooperation with the US and NATO.

The efforts of EU countries to establish independent security initiatives outside of NATO, when evaluated within the framework of European exceptionalism, are closely linked to Europe's aspiration to position itself as a normative power on a global scale. The EU seeks to differentiate itself from the hard power-oriented structure of U.S.-led NATO by developing an alternative security model shaped by multilateral diplomacy, crisis management, and peace missions. Initiatives such as the European Defence Fund (EDF) and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) reflect the continent's goal of achieving

strategic autonomy and acting more independently in security policies, while Europe's historically ingrained anti-war identity aligns with its narrative of being a "peace actor." Additionally, the EU's efforts to integrate security policies signify its ambition to evolve beyond an economic union and become a military and geopolitical player advocating for a multipolar global system. This process aligns with the key tenets of European exceptionalism, emphasizing "strategic independence," "value-based security," and a "geopolitical identity distinct from the U.S."

The European Union's ability to develop an independent security system apart from the U.S. and NATO would lead to significant changes in national, regional, and international security. At the national level, EU countries could enhance their defense capacities, reducing reliance on external actors and gaining strategic autonomy; however, this process would require increased defense spending and investments in the military industry. Regionally, Europe assuming responsibility for its own security could deepen burden-sharing debates within NATO and create divisions among member states. Internationally, the EU's emergence as an independent security actor could shift global power dynamics, strain relations with the U.S., and necessitate a redefinition of NATO's role. However, this transition could also enable Europe to respond to crises more swiftly and collectively, positively contributing to global stability.

As a result, the study emphasizes the importance of taking more responsibility for ensuring the security of EU citizens and reveals the importance of working together with partners, especially NATO, in ensuring international peace and security. In this context, the EU will complement NATO, which continues to be the basis of collective defense for its members, but at the same time, with its new capabilities that are being developed, it will increase its support for the global rules-based order and take important steps for its political integration. In this context, it can be said that the new security understanding and strategies in the post-Cold War period will also be an important topic for researchers in the coming period.

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