

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AFTER THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR: IS A EUROPEAN ARMY A REALISTIC GOAL?

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Abstract

This study analyzes the European Union's capacity to establish a "European Army" independent of NATO following the Russia–Ukraine War that began in 2022, focusing on institutional, political, and strategic dimensions, and questions whether a transition toward a centralized military command structure is feasible within the EU's current level of integration under the anarchic structure of the international system and the evolving security architecture. In this context, the transformation of EU security policy, along with the differing threat perceptions and strategic priorities of member states such as France, Germany, Poland, and Italy, is examined through the theoretical lenses of realism, liberal institutionalism, and neo-functionalism; while realism emphasizes defense as a core element of sovereignty that is difficult to transfer, neo-functionalism highlights limited integration dynamics through mechanisms such as PESCO and defense industry cooperation. The analysis demonstrates that the unanimity requirement in EU treaties, NATO's institutional dominance, the United States' security guarantees, and member states' reluctance to delegate military authority constitute the main structural barriers to a centralized European army, while divergences between NATO-oriented countries like Poland and the Baltic states and France's strategic autonomy vision represent a key political constraint. In addition, Türkiye's position within NATO, its strategic role in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean, and its growing defense industry capacity are identified as important variables in the European security architecture. Overall, the study concludes that a fully-fledged European Army is not realistic in the short to medium term, whereas a crisis-oriented, rapidly deployable, modular, and flexible "European Rapid Reaction Force" appears to be a more feasible alternative.

Keywords: European Army, NATO, PESCO, Russia-Ukraine War, Strategic Autonomy

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RUSYA-UKRAYNA SAVAŞI SONRASI AVRUPA BİRLİĞİ'NDE ORTAK SAVUNMA POLİTİKASI: AVRUPA ORDUSU GERÇEKÇİ BİR HEDEF Mİ?

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Öz

Bu çalışma, 2022 yılında başlayan Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı sonrasında Avrupa Birliği'nin NATO'dan bağımsız bir "Avrupa Ordusu" kurma kapasitesini kurumsal, siyasi ve stratejik boyutlarıyla analiz etmekte ve modern uluslararası sistemin anarşik yapısı ile değişen güvenlik mimarisini çerçevesinde AB'nin mevcut bütünleşme düzeyiyle merkezi bir askeri komuta yapısına geçişinin ne ölçüde mümkün olduğunu sorgulamaktadır. Bu kapsamda, AB'nin güvenlik politikalarındaki dönüşüm ile üye devletlerin (Fransa, Almanya, Polonya ve İtalya gibi) farklılaşan tehdit algıları ve stratejik öncelikleri realizm, liberal kurumsalcılık ve neo-fonksiyonalizm teorileri ışığında incelenmektedir. Realist yaklaşım savunmanın egemenliğin çekirdeğini oluşturduğunu ve devredilmesinin güç olduğunu vurgularken, neo-fonksiyonalist perspektif PESCO ve savunma sanayii iş birlikleri üzerinden sınırlı bir bütünleşme dinamiğine işaret etmektedir. Yapılan analizler, AB antlaşmalarındaki oybirliği şartı, NATO'nun kurumsal ağırlığı, ABD'nin güvenlik garantileri ve üye devletlerin askeri yetkilerini devretme konusundaki isteksizliklerinin merkezi bir Avrupa ordusu önündeki temel yapısal engeller olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, Polonya ve Baltık ülkelerinin NATO merkezli güvenlik anlayışı ile Fransa'nın stratejik özerklik vizyonu arasındaki farklılıklar sürecin en önemli siyasal kısıtını oluşturmaktadır. Öte yandan Türkiye'nin NATO içindeki konumu, Karadeniz ve Doğu Akdeniz'deki rolü ve gelişen savunma sanayii kapasitesi Avrupa güvenlik mimarisinde dışlanamaz bir değişken olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Bu çerçevede, kısa ve orta vadede tam teşekküllü bir Avrupa Ordusu hedefi gerçekçi görünmemekte; buna karşılık kriz odaklı, hızlı konuşlandırılabilir, modüler ve esnek bir "Avrupa Acil Müdahale Kuvveti" modeli daha uygulanabilir bir seçenek olarak öne çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avrupa Ordusu, NATO, PESCO, Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı, Stratejik Özerklik

Introduction

Throughout the historical process, states have established alliances for security, economic interests, and ideological reasons, over time, these alliances have transformed into broader political partnerships. Due to the anarchic structure of the international system, states have turned toward balance of power policies or institutionalized collective structures to guarantee their security. Since the emergence of the modern state, thinkers have articulated the idea of a united Europe beyond national interests (Dinan, 2008: 17). The function of alliances has not remained limited to being merely military tools but has also been decisive in the formation of political identity and norms. In this context, the concept of security has moved beyond military capacity in a narrow sense and has been shaped by a perception of shared threats and an understanding of a collective destiny. European states, exhausted by wars, aimed to make war impossible and preferred to establish a legal order. The quest for peace made possible the establishment of a European union shaped around universal values and international law (Cesim, 2019: 18). This process demonstrates that security in Europe has been reconstructed on a corporate, normative, and collective basis, moving away from the understanding of the balance of power.

Following the Second World War, the international system accelerated both security institutionalization and economic integration in Europe. The destruction caused by the war led to the questioning of modernity's understanding of progress. While trying to end European civil wars, Europe faced a new ideological polarization. The destruction of the war and Soviet expansionism led Western European states to establish collective defense mechanisms. Thus, security turned into a shared responsibility. The Cold War created a bipolar system that divided states into Eastern and Western blocs (Özcan, 2025: 18). The leadership of both blocs was shaped in line with ideological and geopolitical approaches. Within this framework, in line with the need for the institutionalization of the emerging security architecture, NATO (NATO, 2026), established in 1949, became the fundamental pillar of European security. Europe met its security needs under Soviet pressure through the USA and NATO. However, this situation limited Europe's independent defense capacity and increased dependence on the USA (Göktepe,

2024: 164). NATO also became an institutional reflection of the transatlantic value system. The presence of the USA reduced the need for European states to pursue independent power policies. Since its establishment, the USA has played a central role in NATO's strategy, providing the bulk of military capacity and nuclear deterrence (Ercan, 2025). For this reason, NATO has become not only a military alliance but also one of the most important structures of the Western world, institutionalized on the axis of security, political solidarity, and strategic cooperation.

This situation led to the emergence of a functional division of labor between security and integration. The security umbrella provided by NATO made it possible for Western Europe to focus on economic recovery and integration processes. In this context, the integration process that began with the European Coal and Steel Community (Önen, 1989: 42), aimed to establish permanent peace through economic interdependence. The main objective of the community in question was to create an economic union by removing trade barriers between Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Italy, and especially Germany and France (Ayanoglu, 1995: 50; Bilici, 2005: 11). Thus, strategic sectors constituting the capacity for the reproduction of war were left to the supervision of a supranational authority. Following the resolution of France's concerns regarding Germany's rearmament, the idea of the "European Defence Community (EDC)" (NATO, 2026), which aimed to integrate Europe's military capacity and create a common army, came to the agenda (Demir, 2009: 18). This development shows that Europe's quest for strategic autonomy and collective security has been a subject of discussion since earlier periods. Throughout the Cold War, a de facto division of labor was formed between European security and European integration. Within this framework, while military security was left to NATO, European communities deepened economic and institutional integration. This situation led European integration to deliberately acquire a "non-military" character. Thus, the European Union developed as a normative peace project rather than a project based on accumulating power in the classical sense. However, the complete externalization of security also created a structural dependency relationship in the long run. In the post-1990 period, the European Union began to become a more visible actor in the field of defense through the Common Security and Defence Policy.

This development is a reflection of Europe's effort to redefine security within the framework of its own political identity.

The large-scale military intervention by Russia against Ukraine in 2022 created a new breaking point in the European security architecture. This war shook Europe's "post-historical" peace assumption and showed that continental security is still subject to classical geopolitical competition. This development brought discussions of "strategic autonomy" and a European Army back to the agenda within the European Union; it made the question of whether the EU can create a defense capacity independent of NATO more visible. Thus, the tension between the normative foundations of European integration and power politics has reappeared.

Today, the European Army debate is not limited only to military capacity; it is also related to the sharing of sovereignty, democratic legitimacy, and European identity. Although the European Union has deepened economic and legal integration, defense continues to be one of the fundamental dimensions of national sovereignty. Since a common army would require the transfer of war and peace decisions to a supranational level, this situation represents a radical stage of integration. This study analyzes the extent to which the current institutional and political structure of the European Union is conducive to establishing a European Army independent of NATO following the Russia-Ukraine War. The main argument here is that due to weak political integration and the sovereignty sensitivities of member states in the short and medium term, the probability of establishing a centralized European Army is limited; conversely, security crises are deepening a gradual and functional integration in the field of defense.

1. The Possibility of a European Army in Light of Theories

The realist approach defines the international system as an anarchic structure and treats states as rational actors trying to maximize their security. Within this framework, defense policy constitutes one of the core areas of authority of the state and is where the transfer of state sovereignty is most difficult. According to Weber, the state is a human community that claims the monopoly of the legitimate

use of physical force within a given territory (Weber, 1998: 131). According to realist theory, states follow strategies to increase their power capacities and ensure their security in order to survive in the international system. In this context, the development of cooperation between Germany and France against the Soviet threat despite their historical rivalries, and their becoming the central powers of the European Union today, reveals the transformative effect of systemic pressures on state behavior (Şöhret, 2012: 300). The realist approach attaches importance to the national security capacity of the state and the principle of self-help, therefore, the European Army debate is evaluated from a cautious and limiting perspective in the context of the transfer of military capacity, one of the core elements of sovereignty, to a supranational structure. In this framework, the realization of the idea of a European Army is seen as possible only with the presence of a common and high-level perception of external threats. Indeed, although the Russia-Ukraine War has increased the perception of threat in Europe, from a realist perspective, the security priorities of member states are not homogeneous, while Russia poses an existential threat to the Baltic countries and Poland, migration, Mediterranean security, and energy stability emerge as more priority security issues for Southern European countries. This differentiation significantly complicates the sustainability of a common military command structure and an integrated European defense architecture. Additionally, realists evaluate the existence of NATO as the fundamental determinant of the European security architecture and argue that European states already have an institutional structure that meets their security needs under the US umbrella. Especially the nuclear deterrence and advanced military capacity provided by the USA make the necessity of a separate defense structure for Europe controversial. In this context, the European Army initiative is seen as a limited possibility in the realist perspective because it carries the risk of creating a second security architecture competing with or parallel to NATO. From the US perspective, the US's distanced stance towards a European army that it understands it cannot lead can be explained by a realist level of distrust (Erkul, 2023: 994). It will be a tool for understanding the explanation of the action.

Liberal institutionalism, on the other hand, argues that cooperation is possible in the international system and that international institutions can shape

state behavior. This approach suggests that institutions reduce uncertainty and facilitate cooperation by increasing interdependence between states. According to neo liberal institutionalism, peace and prosperity are possible through independent states combining their resources and creating integrated structures aimed at economic growth and the solution of regional problems by delegating authority in certain areas of their sovereignty (Aytaç and Yorulmaz, 2023: 97). In this context, Fukuyama (1999: 118) states that societies tend to integrate into global developments, but they can achieve this largely to the extent that they comply with the principles of economic liberalism. Accordingly, international institutions function not only as structures that facilitate cooperation but also as institutional frameworks that guide the preferences of states and deepen integration processes in the long run.

Viewed from this perspective, the European Union already represents a high level of institutional integration, and the field of defense can be considered an advanced and complementary stage of this process. Accordingly, the liberal institutionalist approach predicts that the existing institutional structure of the European Union can expand toward the field of defense. In an environment where economic interdependence deepens, increasing institutional coordination in the field of security emerges as a rational and functional necessity. A common defense policy can develop gradually through defense industry cooperation, common fund mechanisms, and the harmonization of military standards. In this framework, the idea of a European Army is evaluated not as a sudden and radical break but as a natural and cumulative continuation of the existing institutional integration process. However, the progress of this process can be limited by the sovereignty sensitivities and strategic priority differences of member states.

Nevertheless, defense policy possesses the characteristic of an extremely sensitive area in terms of sovereignty and political authority. Decisions such as sending troops, participation in military operations, or direct intervention are evaluated not only as foreign policy preferences but also directly as one of the most critical areas of use of national sovereignty. For this reason, the decisions in question are based on a strong ground of domestic political legitimacy in member states and are subject to parliamentary approval processes in most cases.

In democratic systems, public sensitivities, the attitude of opposition parties, and social perceptions regarding security risks also directly affect these decision-making processes.

Neo-functionalism is an original theory developed to explain European integration, arguing that integration creates a “spillover” effect from one area to another. According to Ernst B. Haas, integration is a gradual process that is non linear but deepens over time. Within this framework, cooperation that began in economic and technical fields among European countries tends to expand toward political, cultural, and social fields over time through functional needs and increasing interdependence (Haas, 1958: 13–14). According to neo-functionalist theory, as economic integration deepens, the interdependence emerging in these areas gives birth to the need for coordination in new policy areas, and thus functional pressures emerge at the political level. This process leads to integration becoming a self-sustaining mechanism, making further institutional arrangements mandatory. Within this dynamic, with the “political spillover” effect, decision making processes carried out at the national level in different policy areas gradually become more compatible with the supranational level, so that the powers of supranational institutions expand over time not only through formal agreements but also through processes of negotiation, compromise, and institutional socialization (Toprak, 2007: 71). Neo-functionalist theorists also claimed that functionalist theorists (specifically Mitrany) ignored the element of power in their explanations. They argued that power is not merely an instrument, but also a tool that actors utilize to achieve welfare; in this context, they asserted that actors could come together for a common prosperity by pooling their power (Sancaktar, 2013: 133). Viewed from this perspective, the European Union requires stronger institutional coordination in the field of defense due to the high level of integration it has reached in economic and legal fields. Areas such as the sustainability of the common market, energy policies, border security, and the capacity to intervene in external crises indirectly necessitate making military capacity and crisis management mechanisms more compatible. Accordingly, the European Army can be evaluated as a natural but delayed stage of the integration process within the framework of the neo-functionalist approach. However, the field of defense contains much higher levels of sovereignty sensitivities compared

to economic policies. This situation leads to the integration process progressing more slowly in this area and having a more fragile institutional structure. Therefore, European integration does not follow a linear line of development; on the contrary, it emerges as a fluctuating process accelerated at times by crises but limited by the political will and sovereignty concerns of member states.

When the three theoretical approaches are evaluated together, it is seen that the European Army debate is a multi layered process where dynamics of sovereignty, security, and integration intersect, rather than a one-dimensional institutional design issue. The realist approach sees the capacity for the realization of a European Army as limited due to the state-centered understanding of security and high sovereignty sensitivities; especially differences in threat perceptions and the security umbrella provided by NATO further weaken this possibility. Liberal institutionalism, through the dynamics of interdependence and cooperation created by existing institutional structures, sees integration in the field of defense as possible as a gradual and functional expansion. The neo-functional approach, on the other hand, suggests that with the “spillover” effect created by economic and institutional integration, the field of defense will inevitably be subject to integration pressure over time and that a European Army could be a natural continuation of this process. Nevertheless, all three approaches overlap on the point that the field of defense is the most sensitive and slowest-progressing dimension of European integration, albeit at different levels. This situation indicates that rather than the European Army gaining full reality in the short term, it may show a gradual and fragmented development within the framework of current geopolitical conditions and institutional dynamics.

2. Concrete Policy Tools and Mechanisms for Deepening in the Defense Sector

The idea of a European Army emerged in the early periods of the European integration process, specifically with the Pleven Plan proposed in 1950 and the subsequent European Defence Community initiative, however, it failed to institutionalize due to the collapse of this initiative in 1954(Ercan, 2024: 39). This initiative aimed to merge the defense capabilities of European states

under a common military structure, thereby providing continental security within a supranational framework. However, the non-ratification of the EDC, particularly due to France's concerns over national sovereignty, caused the idea of a common army in Europe to remain a "strategic ideal" for a long time. Despite this historical background, the concept of a European Army has persisted as a goal that occasionally resurfaces in EU integration debates but has never fully institutionalized in any period. The idea of common European defense, rather than a goal of "creating an army," signifies closer cooperation among member states in areas of defense planning, military capacity building, crisis management, and operational coordination. Within this framework, common defense is built more upon the harmonization of military capabilities and the enhancement of interoperability rather than the total unification of national armies in the classical sense. The idea of a common army represents a more advanced stage and carries a much more politically controversial character, as it requires the transfer of defense authority from nation-states to a supranational structure. Consequently, while "common defense" has emerged as a more pragmatic and applicable goal in the process of European integration, the "European Army" has remained a long-term vision. Since the Russia-Ukraine War, the EU's defense transformation has moved beyond the level of rhetoric, progressing through institutional, financial, and industrial-based mechanisms. Although a European Army has not yet been formed, integration has deepened through practical tools. The Common Defence Policy began with the 1999 Treaty of Amsterdam and was renamed the Common Security and Defence Policy with the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon. Despite institutional progress, many states approach the matter cautiously due to sovereignty concerns and overlap with NATO. While France and Germany support deeper military integration, countries like Poland and the Czech Republic oppose it due to sovereignty and alliance priorities.

Therefore, cooperation in the field of defense has progressed through specific stages in harmony with the historical and institutional evolution of common European defense and common army debates. First, the European Defence Agency (EDA, 2026) was established in 2004, aiming to develop defense capabilities, increase coordination, and strengthen interoperability among member states. This was followed in 2017 by Permanent Structured Cooperation

(PESCO) and the European Defence Fund (EDF). While PESCO (European Union, 2026) aims to create more binding defense projects and operational cooperation mechanisms among member states, the EDF (European Union, 2026) aims to deepen financial and technological integration through common defense industry projects and R&D investments. The EUFOR operations in 2003 and the 2011 Libya intervention are limited and coordinated military operations carried out within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) rather than indicating the existence of a European army. Nevertheless, although mechanisms like the EDF and PESCO have provided a certain degree of progress, European defense integration still possesses significant structural limitations. In this context, PESCO's institutional architecture differs from many CFSP mechanisms that involve the participation of all EU member states and are at risk of being blocked by individual vetoes in inflexible intergovernmental decision-making processes, and has the potential to significantly contribute to the development of the EU's defence actor role (Turhan, 2019: 349). In particular, the continued national control over defense expenditures and the sovereignty sensitivities of member states limit the formation of a permanent and unified military structure. While the CSDP remains a fundamental reference framework for European defense cooperation, its current institutional structure does not produce a level of political integration that would allow for the emergence of a unified military force. In this context, the idea of a European Army has remained a normative and idealized goal indicating the direction of the deepening reached in the defense dimension of European integration, rather than a concrete institutional result in the short and medium term.

PESCO was established by the European Union in 2017 and entered into force in the same year. This mechanism, created before the Russia-Ukraine War, envisions a more binding and operational cooperation framework through the development of common military projects among member states, the increase of defense capabilities, and the harmonization of defense expenditures to a certain extent. In this respect, while strengthening European defense capacity at the institutional level, PESCO increases military interoperability and functions as a de facto coordination mechanism without the creation of a European Army. However, its structure based on the principle of voluntarism limits the speed

of the integration process and prevents the transfer of defense authority to a supranational structure by largely preserving the sovereignty areas of member states. The European Defence Fund, on the other hand, supports defense research and development activities through the European Union budget, aiming to reduce the fragmented structure of the European defense industry and strengthen common production capacity. In this context, the EDF serves as an important financial tool constituting the economic and industrial foundation of the European Union's search for strategic autonomy; it contributes to deepening integration in the defense production chain rather than the formation of a military command structure. However, although such financial and institutional integration processes in the field of defense industry allow for the development of common systems and increased cost-sharing, they do not lead directly to political or military integration or the formation of a unified European Army.

The 100-billion-euro special defense fund announced by Germany following Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been an important turning point for European security (Centre for European Reform, 2025). This decision has not only meant an increase in Germany's defense expenditures but has also accelerated a paradigm shift regarding defense policies across Europe. While this process marks a significant break for Germany, historically defined by military caution and a low-profile defense approach, it has also brought about a strategic transformation toward the modernization of the Bundeswehr and the reconstruction of military capacity. Therefore, *Zeitenwende* (Scholz, 2022) the remilitarization of defense consciousness in Europe rather than a transition to a European Army. This process may encourage more coordination in the field of security within the European Union, however, a federal military structure that necessitates the transfer of sovereignty has not yet produced political legitimacy. Germany's decision can be seen as an increase in capacity and a reshaping of self defense reflexes. Furthermore, Russia's attack on Ukraine has radically changed the perception of security not only in Germany but across Europe; many European countries have turned toward increasing defense budgets, accelerating military modernization processes, and developing more autonomous national defense policies in line with the increasing perception of threat. Especially in Eastern European countries, the tendency to strengthen national defense capabilities in

addition to NATO's deterrence capacity has become prominent. This situation has brought about a hybrid transformation process in the European defense architecture that highlights both national capacity building and coordination at the EU level simultaneously.

In the post-Cold War period, Germany's security policy was largely built on a NATO centered collective defense understanding and the principle of limited military engagement. However, developments after 2022 led Germany to increase its defense capacity, modernise the Bundeswehr comprehensively, and take on a more active security role. The German security approach, traditionally based on a balance between European integration with France and transatlantic relations with the USA (Bardakci, 2025: 10), has gradually moved away from the concept of "military hesitation" during this process. Increasing defense expenditures and the transformation in threat perception across Europe have shown that diplomatic tools alone can be insufficient in providing security as conventional warfare becomes decisive once again. Nevertheless, this transformation does not mean a direct progress toward a European Army; on the contrary, the focus is shaped toward strengthening national defense capacities, increasing burden-sharing within the NATO framework, and developing strategic autonomy capacity.

Following the Russia-Ukraine War, security policies in Europe have been significantly reshaped, leading to different strategic orientations in different member states. France, leading the approach of European Strategic Autonomy, has brought the idea of a "true European Army" back to the agenda, proposing a more autonomous but coordinated European defense capacity while maintaining its commitment to NATO. Italy focuses on defense industry integration by viewing NATO and existing EU mechanisms as the primary framework, remaining cautious toward structures based on the transfer of sovereignty. Poland, evaluating Russia as an existential threat, has rapidly increased defense expenditures and prioritized NATO and US security guarantees. Spain, following a more institutionalist and balancing line, provides active participation in mechanisms like PESCO and the EDF while preferring a crisis-oriented defense model compatible with NATO (Euronews, 2025). While Greece increases its deterrence through high defense expenditures and bilateral cooperation developed

with France, it remains cautious in practice toward the idea of a European Army (Bloomberg, 2025). The Netherlands shows that deep cooperation is possible in Europe even without army-like integration through integrated military structures developed with Germany, maintaining a NATO centered security understanding. Sweden and Finland have reinforced the importance of the Atlantic structure in the European defense architecture by turning toward NATO due to the Russian threat. Portugal similarly bases its approach on a NATO centered security understanding and does not see the idea of a European Army as realistic in the short term. This general picture shows that despite the deepening of defense integration in Europe, structural progress toward a unified European Army remains limited due to sovereignty concerns and NATO dependency.

3. Obstacles in the Path of the Idea of a European Army

Although concrete steps have been taken toward a European Army, significant structural and political obstacles persist. These obstacles include the requirement of unanimity in EU defense policies, the institutional weight of NATO and the security guarantee of the USA, sovereignty concerns and reservations toward the transfer of national military command authority, different strategic threat perceptions, imbalances in defense expenditures, and limited public support. The lack of a common vision regarding EU defense and strategic autonomy limits the effectiveness of current initiatives; furthermore, divergences among member states regarding capability development deepen the mismatch between goals and results (Oğuz and Oral, 2022: 77). This situation reveals not only institutional mismatches but also the still-incomplete nature of European integration in the field of security and defense. In this framework, while the partially cautious supportive approach of Germany alongside France, and the more flexible stance of Italy and Spain open to developing an EU centered defense capacity represent Western and Southern European countries supporting the idea of strategic autonomy like Eastern European countries such as Poland, the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), Romania, and Bulgaria see the NATO centered security understanding and the US security guarantee as the fundamental strategic pillar. This differentiation complicates the institutional integrity of European

defense integration and continues to be shaped by the tension between normative goals and the national security priorities of member states.

The EU's current legal framework is based on the principle of unanimity in decision-making processes in the fields of defense and security, which constitutes a significant structural limitation to deep military integration. For this reason, the establishment of a common European Army or a federal military structure requires not only policy alignment but also comprehensive changes in EU treaties (Euro-Lex, 2026). The fact that such changes must be approved by the national parliaments of all member states and, in some cases, be subject to referendum processes makes the process extremely complex and unlikely from both a legal and political standpoint. In addition, NATO's institutionalized command structure and operational capacity already offer a functional coordination and deterrence mechanism within the European security architecture, making the need for an alternative military structure debatable. Especially for many member states including Poland, the Baltic countries, and Germany, the security guarantee provided by the USA is seen as one of the fundamental elements of the current security order; this situation limits the political will toward a European defense structure parallel or alternative to NATO. As a result, European defense integration continues its development within the framework of mechanisms complementary to and coordinated with NATO, rather than an independent and federal army model.

Another significant limitation is the substantial absence of the political and institutional conditions necessary for the transfer of military authority to a supranational level. Within the framework of the current understanding of national sovereignty, critical decisions such as declaring war, deploying armed forces, or integrating national armies still reside within the exclusive jurisdiction of member states, and the transfer of these powers to the EU level faces serious political resistance. Particularly in high-sovereignty areas like defense and security, the tendency of states to protect their decision-making autonomy constitutes a structural obstacle to more advanced military integration. Additionally, differences in threat perceptions among member states make the formation of a common strategic culture difficult; while Eastern European countries see

Russia as the primary security threat, the fact that the security agenda in Western European countries focuses more on areas such as cyber threats, terrorism, and energy security weakens the common definition of risk. Inequalities in defense expenditures and differences in military capacity also complicate the development of a common defense budget and capability-sharing mechanism, which limits the financial and operational dimensions of integration. Finally, the relatively limited public support for defense integration at the European level weakens political will, especially in non-crisis periods, making the deepening of the process even more difficult.

The Arab Spring, which began in 2010, created significant effects on the European Union's foreign policy and made visible the structural problems in the Union's capacity to respond to crises. The rapidly spreading regime change processes in North Africa and the Middle East weakened the EU's stability assumptions regarding its neighborhood and revealed the need for a more holistic and coordinated approach in foreign policy making. Although the EU tried to overcome this fragmented structure through the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (Consilium Europa, 2026), it struggled to develop a common and rapid response due to different priorities and interests among member states. In the example of the Arab Spring, the EU's stance toward crises in countries like Libya, Syria, and Egypt was often delayed, divided, and inconsistent, revealing the lack of coordination and problems of strategic integrity in the Union's capacity for external action. In this context, the developments in question showed that functional problems in EU foreign policy persist and the Union's capacity to intervene in international crises remains limited (Altın, 2018: 4747). This situation has made the need to deepen the EU's institutional integration in the field of foreign policy even more evident.

When a general evaluation is made, the obstacles in the path of the idea of a European Army stem not only from institutional arrangements but also from the deep structural and political limits of the EU. The decision-making mechanism based on the principle of unanimity, national sovereignty sensitivities, and the reluctance toward the transfer of military authority to the supranational level limit comprehensive defense integration. In addition, NATO's institutional

capacity and the security guarantee provided by the USA weaken the motivation of European states to develop an independent security architecture. Differences in security perception and strategic priorities among member states reinforce this picture; while France advocates for an integrated defense structure focused on strategic autonomy, Germany follows a balanced approach compatible with NATO, and Poland prioritizes the US-centered security guarantee. The fact that other countries act in line with different regional and national security priorities shows that a common and homogeneous security understanding has not yet been formed in Europe. As an example, described as a forum for coordination and dialogue, and acting through consensus, NATO witnessed one of the political crises frequently experienced by the EU as a result of disagreements among allies on the eve of the Second Iraq War, and the developments that led to the interpretation that there was a growing rift within the alliance were the US's inability to persuade Alliance members to invade Iraq without a UN intervention resolution, and subsequently its unilateral action with the support of the UK, an EU member (Özer, Uysal Oğuz and Atvur 2010: 268). Nevertheless, high participation in defense cooperation processes points to a trend of integration, albeit limited. However, historical experiences, as seen specifically during the Yugoslav Crisis, reveal that Europe's economic capacity does not always transform into a common military power (Britannica, 2026). Within this framework, European defense integration possesses the character of a structurally limited and gradual process that progresses depending on the common perception of threat and the integration of political will.

4. Türkiye's Strategic Impact in the European Security Architecture Scenario

Türkiye, by virtue of its geographical location, serves as a bridge between Europe and Asia and stands as a strategic actor possessing one of NATO's largest military capacities, holding central importance in the European Army debates. This characteristic makes Türkiye an indispensable component of the European security architecture, not only in terms of military capacity but also in its power to generate geopolitical balance. Conversely, the fact that Türkiye's European

Union membership process has remained in uncertainty for many years has deepened the institutional and normative incompatibilities between the two sides. Developments regarding energy resources and maritime jurisdiction areas in the Eastern Mediterranean, related to the Cyprus issue, have also been another source of disagreement between Türkiye and the EU and its member states (Boyras, 2025: 161). Differences arising particularly in areas such as democracy, the rule of law, and foreign policy priorities have led to the de facto halting of membership negotiations while creating an environment of mutual mistrust in the field of security.

Within this framework, the perception that Türkiye has not received sufficient political and military support from the European Union regarding regional crises has strengthened a distinct trend toward autonomy in Ankara's foreign policy behavior. During this process, Türkiye developed a multi-dimensional foreign policy strategy based on independent decision-making capacity centered on national security priorities. Türkiye's ability to intervene rapidly and independently in examples such as the Syrian civil war (BBC, 2023), the Libya crisis, and the Karabakh conflicts stands among the concrete indicators of this trend toward autonomy. This situation has not only signaled a search for a new balance in Türkiye's relations with the West but has also increased confidence issues regarding the European security architecture.

From the perspective of the European Union, Türkiye's position possesses a paradoxical quality: Türkiye remains institutionally outside the Union, yet continues its existence as an actor inherent to Europe's security structure in terms of security practices. Especially in the context of the migration crisis in 2015 and thereafter, Türkiye's role in controlling migration flows originating from Syria has been a decisive element for Europe's internal stability. Likewise, its control over energy transition lines and trade routes has made Türkiye de facto component of the European security system.

In the context of a potential European Army structure, while Türkiye is expected to remain institutionally outside this formation, it does not seem possible to completely exclude it from de facto security processes due to its NATO membership and military capacity. This situation produces a hybrid

position for the European security architecture that can be defined as “outside but inside.” Specifically, Black Sea security, maritime jurisdictions in the Eastern Mediterranean, instabilities in the Middle East, and the strategic control mechanism provided by the Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits make Türkiye a critical component of the European security equation.

At this point, the contributions Türkiye can provide to the European security architecture possess a multi-dimensional character. Primarily, Türkiye can provide rapid reaction and crisis management capabilities to the European security structure with its high-readiness and large-scale military capacity. For instance, within the scope of the “enhanced forward presence” conducted on NATO’s eastern flank, Türkiye’s capacity to provide logistical support and force rotation through land and air elements in deterrence activities against Russia in the Baltic region is a significant advantage. Similarly, Türkiye’s active role in the KFOR mission in Kosovo (NATO, 2026), the EUFOR Althea operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and anti-piracy tasks off the coast of Somalia are concrete examples of its contribution to the European security system.

Looking from Türkiye’s perspective, the country has become indirectly integrated into the Common Security and Defence Policy to certain extents at the institutional and operational levels. The chapter on Foreign, Security, and Defence Policy constitutes one of the 31 chapter headings within the scope of Türkiye’s European Union membership negotiations. According to the European Commission’s progress reports, Türkiye is evaluated as a candidate country with a certain level of preparation in the fields of foreign policy, security, and defense policies (Baykara, 2022: 10). Furthermore, Türkiye possesses significant military capacity for the European security architecture with its status as the second-largest army in NATO, its advanced and increasingly autonomous defense industry capacity, its operational superiority in the field of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV/SİHA), its large-scale military operation experience, and its crisis management capability.

Domestic defense systems developed through institutions such as ASELSAN, TUSAŞ, and ROKETSAN position Türkiye as a potential production partner and operational contributor within the European defense ecosystem. In this

framework, while Türkiye is not a direct member of the EU's institutional deepening processes in defense specifically mechanisms like PESCO, the European Defence Fund, and crisis management operations that it is indirectly articulated within the framework of NATO membership and candidate country status.

In the context of maritime security, Türkiye's control over the Dardanelles and Istanbul Straits is of critical importance for European security in terms of regulating access to and exits from the Black Sea. Türkiye's mediator role in operating the grain corridor agreement (UN, 2026) during the Russia-Ukraine war produced direct effects on global food security and the European energy-trade balance. Likewise, mine sweeping operations and commercial ship security in the Black Sea demonstrate Türkiye's contribution to regional maritime security.

Türkiye's geostrategic position serves as a logistical and operational transition corridor between Europe and the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Africa. In this context, the Incirlik Air Base, the Kürecik Radar System, and NATO early warning infrastructures can be considered operational extensions of the European security system. This situation enables European countries to conduct evacuation, logistical support, and military shipment operations through Türkiye during periods of crisis.

The level Türkiye has reached in the defense industry in recent years also offers significant contributions to the European security architecture. The use of Bayraktar TB2 and Akıncı SİHAs in the Ukraine war demonstrated the effectiveness of these systems in global conflict environments. Poland's procurement of the TB2, Spain's purchase of the Hürjet trainer aircraft (TSKGV, 2025) and the Baykar–Leonardo cooperation developed with Italy (Savunma Sanayi ST, 2026) are concrete examples of Türkiye's integration with the European defense industry.

In the current conjuncture where debates on “common defense” and a “European Army” are intensifying in Europe, Türkiye stands out as a potential security provider and complementary actor due to its military capacity and defense industry infrastructure. However, the defense architecture of the EU, which progresses increasingly on the axis of strategic autonomy and institutional internal

integration, makes Türkiye's direct participation in these structures difficult due to political and institutional limitations. Despite this, Türkiye continues to be a de facto component of the European security structure through its operational alignment within the NATO framework and its crisis management capacity.

In light of this holistic evaluation, Türkiye stands out as both a structural necessity and a strategic variable in European Army debates. In 2026, Türkiye showed its efficiency in an exercise named Steadfast Dart Exercise (Anadolu Agency, 226). A European security architecture from which Türkiye is completely excluded could create serious gaps in NATO-EU coordination and lead to power imbalances on the Black Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, and Middle East axes. In contrast, integrating Türkiye into the European security system through flexible, project based, and crisis oriented cooperation mechanisms will both increase the European Union's operational capacity and preserve the integrity of the transatlantic security architecture. In this context, Türkiye is positioned not as a passive element of the European Army debate, but as a strategic variable with a high guiding influence.

Conclusion

The European security architecture is historically the product of a long transformation process evolving from balance of power policies toward institutionalized collective security orders. While the destruction Europe experienced after the Second World War made economic integration a tool for security production, the umbrella provided by NATO made European defense largely dependent on the transatlantic structure. This historical background explains why the European Union, despite being highly integrated economically, still exhibits a fragmented and state-centered structure in the field of defense. The Russia-Ukraine War has reopened this structure for debate, bringing the idea of a European Army back to the agenda by revealing that Europe cannot sustain its security solely through a normative peace project. Within this historical and structural framework, the European Army debate today transforms into a multi layered problem area defined by institutional, political, and strategic boundaries, therefore, the current institutional structure of the European Union

does not possess the capacity to create an integrated military force with a central command structure independent of NATO in the short and medium term. The fundamental reason for this is that European integration in the field of defense does not progress linearly as it did in economic integration and generates much higher resistance regarding the transfer of sovereignty.

Evaluated from a theoretical perspective, the realist approach reveals that the most fundamental structural obstacle to the idea of a European Army is the different threat perceptions among member states. While Eastern European countries see Russia as a direct and existential threat, migration, Mediterranean security, and energy stability emerge as more priority security headings for Southern European countries. This differentiation prevents the formation of a common strategic culture, weakening the political foundation of a unified military command structure. Additionally, NATO's institutional capacity and the security guarantee provided by the USA significantly limit Europe's motivation to establish an independent security architecture. On the other hand, liberal institutionalism and neo-functional approaches emphasize that a functional and gradual transformation is occurring in the field of defense within the European Union, rather than an absolute break. PESCO, the European Defence Fund, and common defense industry projects show that significant institutional coordination is possible even without the transfer of military sovereignty. However, these mechanisms do not move the ultimate decision-making authority of defense policies to a supranational level that they progress more at the level of production, technology, and operational alignment. This situation shows that a European Army could emerge not through a sudden institutional transformation, but through a gradual integration process triggered by crises.

On the political plane, the different security priorities of key actors such as Germany, France, Italy, and Poland make it difficult to form a common strategic vision within the European Union. While France advocates for strategic autonomy and a more independent European defense capacity, Germany adopts a balanced approach compatible with NATO, Poland sees the US-centered security guarantee as its fundamental strategic pillar. While Southern European countries focus more on crisis management and Mediterranean security, Northern and

Eastern European countries bring the Russia centered threat perception to the forefront. This multi-faceted differentiation is one of the fundamental factors preventing European defense integration from gaining political integrity.

The Türkiye factor stands out as a complementary and simultaneously balancing element within this structural picture. Its strong military capacity within NATO, advanced defense industry, operational superiority in the field of unmanned aerial vehicles, and geostrategic location in the Black Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, and Middle East make Türkiye an indispensable component of the European security architecture. Conversely, the uncertainty in the European Union membership process and institutional incompatibilities limit Türkiye's full integration into the European defense structure. For this reason, Türkiye emerges as a strategic actor located in a hybrid and flexible position within the European security order neither completely excluded nor fully internalized.

When a general evaluation is made, the full realization of the idea of a European Army in the short and medium term does not appear realistic. Instead of it, the European security architecture is evolving toward a modular and multi layered structure that is compatible with NATO, does not completely eliminate national sovereignty areas, but can produce rapid reaction capacity in moments of crisis. In this framework, the European Army continues its existence as a normative goal determining the direction of European integration in the field of defense, rather than as a concrete military unit in the near term. The security future of Europe is shaped within a flexible, network-based, and multi-actor security architecture that provides coordination at different levels, rather than a single centralized army.

In this framework, certain structural and institutional steps must be taken to move the European Army debates to a more applicable ground. Primarily, it is of importance to develop regular common security assessment mechanisms for the purpose of strengthening common threat perception and harmonizing strategic culture within the European Union. Furthermore, the fragmented structure in the defense industry must be reduced, and projects within the scope of the European Defence Fund and PESCO must be brought into a more binding and integrative framework. Expanding common procurement mechanisms will provide cost-

effectiveness while simultaneously increasing military capacity alignment. At the institutional level, relaxing the principle of unanimity in decision-making processes in specific defense areas and moving toward qualified majority voting could be a critical step for creating rapid and effective crisis response capacity. Preserving the principle of complementarity with NATO will ensure that the European security architecture develops in harmony with the transatlantic structure rather than in conflict. Finally, developing flexible and functional cooperation models with actors possessing high regional military capacity, such as Türkiye, can be evaluated as an important element to increase the operational capacity of the European security architecture. Although such gradual and multi-dimensional reforms may not transform the idea of a European Army into full military integration in the short term, they will strengthen the institutional foundation of a more integrated and effective European defense structure in the long run.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Tarihsel süreçte devletler, güvenlik, ekonomik kalkınma ve ideolojik tehditler nedeniyle ittifaklar kurmuş, bu yapılar zamanla geniş stratejik ortaklıklara evrilmiştir. Uluslararası sistemin anarşik yapısı, devletleri denge politikalarına veya kolektif yapılara yöneltmiştir. İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası şekillenen sistem, Avrupa kıtasında güvenlik temelli kurumsallaşmayı hızlandırmıştır. NATO'nun 1949'da kurulmasıyla ABD, Avrupa güvenliğinin merkezi aktörü haline gelmiş, bu durum Avrupa devletlerinin güvenlik yerine ekonomik entegrasyona odaklanmasını sağlamıştır. Ancak 2022 yılında Rusya'nın Ukrayna'ya müdahalesi, Avrupa'nın "tarih sonrası" barış varsayımını sarsarak stratejik özerklik tartışmalarını yeniden alevlendirmiştir.

Avrupa Ordusu tartışmaları teorik olarak incelendiğinde üç temel teorik çerçevede analiz edilebilir. Realist yaklaşım, savunma politikasını egemenliğin devri en zor alanı olarak görür. Realistlere göre üye devletlerin tehdit algıları homojen değildir. Baltık ülkeleri Rusya'yı varoluşsal bir tehdit görürken, Güney Avrupa için göç ve Akdeniz güvenliği önceliklidir. Bu durum ortak bir askeri komuta yapısını zorlaştırmaktadır. Liberal kurumsalcılık teorisi, kurumların belirsizliği azaltarak iş birliğini mümkün kıldığını savunur. Bu açıdan savunma alanı, entegrasyonun son halkası olarak görülebilir. Neo-fonksiyonalizm teorisi ise ekonomik entegrasyonun ve katlanarak güçlenen işbirliğinin, siyasi ve askeri alanlara "sıçrama" (spillover) etkisi yarattığını ileri sürer. Ancak savunma alanındaki yüksek egemenlik hassasiyeti, bu sürecin belirli bir oranda ve düzenli bir şekilde ilerlemesini engellemektedir.

Savunma alanında derinleşme ve politika araçlarına bakıldığında, Ukrayna savaşıyla birlikte AB'nin savunma dönüşümü somut mekanizmalarla desteklenmiştir. 2017'de kurulan PESCO, üye devletlerin bağlayıcı savunma iş birliğini hedeflerken, Avrupa Savunma Fonu, savunma Ar-Ge projelerini AB bütçesinden fonlayarak sanayi entegrasyonunu amaçlamaktadır. Bu yapılar doğrudan bir ordu kurmasa da askeri kapasitelerin birlikte çalışabilirliğini artırmaktadır.

Üye devletlerin stratejik konumları gereği yaklaşımları, ulusal çıkarları ve tarihsel mirasları doğrultusunda farklılaşmaktadır;Almanya, *Zeitenwende* (tarihsel dönüm noktası) ilanı ile savunma bütçesini büyük bir ölçekte artırmıştır. Bu as-

keri çekingenlik, kimliğinden uzaklaşma olsa da bütçe supranasyonel bir ordu-
dan ziyade ulusal kapasiteyi güçlendirmeye ayrılmıştır. Fransa, stratejik özerklik
kavramının öncüsüdür ve NATO'dan bağımsız karar alma kapasitesini savunur.
İtalya ve Hollanda, daha pragmatik bir hat izleyerek, egemenlik devri yerine sa-
vunma sanayii iş birliğini ve NATO uyumluluğunu öncelemektedirler. Hollanda
ve Almanya arasındaki birlik entegrasyonu, *modüler entegrasyon* modeli olarak
öne çıkmaktadır. Polonya, İsveç ve Finlandiya, ülkeleri için birincil güvenlik
garantörü NATO'dur. İsveç ve Finlandiya'nın 2022 sonrası NATO'ya katılımı,
AB'nin savunma mekanizmalarının tek başına yeterli görülmediğinin en somut
kanıtıdır. İspanya Akdeniz güvenliğine odaklanırken, Yunanistan yüksek savun-
ma harcamalarıyla Avrupa Ordusu fikrini Türkiye'ye karşı bir dayanışma unsuru
olarak değerlendirmektedir.

Makalede, Avrupa Ordusu idealinin önündeki büyük zorluk oluşturabilecek
temel olarak, yasal, siyasi ve stratejik engeller olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. AB
anlaşmalarındaki oy birliği gerekliliği, federal bir askeri birliğin önündeki en bü-
yük hukuki engeldir. Ayrıca, NATO'nun kurumsallaşmış yapısı nedeniyle Avru-
pa Ordusu bir gereksiz tekrar olarak algılanmaktadır. Avrupa Birliği'ndeki ulusal
parlamentoların savaş ve barış kararını supranasyonel bir yapıya devretme konu-
sundaki isteksizliği ve duydukları endişeler, AB'deki siyasi iklimin bu dönüşüme
hazır olmadığını göstermektedir. Ortak bir savunma bütçesi oluşturulmasındaki
dengesizlikler ve kamuoyu desteğinin sınırlılığı, bu entegrasyonun önündeki ya-
pısal engellerdir.

Türkiye, "*Avrupa Ordusu Hayali*" konusunda stratejik bir değişken olup,
NATO'nun ikinci büyük ordusuna sahip olması ve stratejik konumuyla Avrupa
güvenlik mimarisinin vazgeçilmez bir parçası olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Türkiye,
AB üyesi olmasa da güvenlik mimarisinin kurumsal olarak dışında, fiilen için-
de yer almaktadır. Karadeniz güvenliği ve Montrö Sözleşmesi kapsamındaki rolü
kritik önemdedir. Son yıllarda savunma sanayiinde büyük bir ivme yakalayan
Türkiye, AB ülkeleriyle ekonomik tabanlı savunma entegrasyonları kurmakta-
dır. Baykar'ın İtalyan Piaggio Aerospace'i satın alması, İspanya'nın 30 adet Hürjet
alımı ve Eurofighter jetlerinin Türkiye'ye teslimi konusundaki gelişmeler, bu iş
birliğinin somut örnekleridir. 2026 yılında gerçekleştirilen Steadfast Dart 26 tat-

bikası, özellikle Türkiye'nin TB3 gibi platformlardaki askeri etkinliğinin Avrupa güvenliği için göz ardı edilemez olduğunu kanıtlamıştır. Türkiye'nin dışlandığı bir Avrupa Ordusu senaryosu, Doğu Akdeniz ve Karadeniz'de stratejik boşluklar yaratma riski taşımakta ve güvenlik konusunda derin açıklar oluşturmaktadır. Bu durum, Avrupa Ordusu fikrinde stratejik bir zafiyet anlamına gelmektedir.

Yapılan analizler kapsamında, ilgili konunun, gerçekçi bir zeminde düşünüldüğünde, Avrupa Birliği'nin kısa ve orta vadede NATO'dan bağımsız, merkezi komutalı bir ordu kurma ihtimalinin düşük olduğunu göstermektedir. Realist perspektifin vurguladığı egemenlik hassasiyetleri ve tehdit algısı farklılıkları bu sonucu desteklemektedir. Ancak bu durum, savunma alanında hiçbir gelişme olmadığı anlamına da gelmemekte, AB, PESCO ve EDF gibi araçlar ile fonksiyonel bir yakınsama yaratmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak, Avrupa Ordusu fikri mevcut siyasi ve hukuki yapıda olması gereken bir vizyon, bir fikir olarak kalırken, uygulamada ortaya çıkan olabilirliği en yüksek ihtimale dayalı yapı "*Avrupa Hızlı Müdahale Gücü*" modelidir. Bu model, NATO ile uyumlu, modüler, görev odaklı ve kriz anında aktive edilebilir bir müdahale kapasitesini temsil etmekte ve Avrupa Ordusu Hayali'ne bir alternatif sunmaktadır. Rusya-Ukrayna savaşı AB'yi bir ordu kurma noktasına tam olarak getirmese de savunma alanında daha esnek, kademeli ve işlevsel bir entegrasyon modeline itmiş olduğu bir gerçektir. Türkiye gibi stratejik aktörlerle kurulacak proje bazlı iş birlikleri ve ortak askeri güvenlik politikaları üretmek, bu esnek savunma mimarisinin operasyonel kapasitesini fazlasıyla artıracaktır.