lacittadinanzaeuropeaonline
Rivista di studi e documentazione sull'integrazione europea
ISSN 2785-4183
lceonline 1/2026 (*www.lceonline.eu*)

The impact of the war in Ukraine on the future of EU-NATO cooperation

Daniela IRRERA*, Katerina VELJANOVSKA BLAZHEVSKA**

Summary: 1. Introduction 2. Defining NATO–EU relations 2.1 The role theory in explaining NATO–EU relations 2.2 Balancing powers and benefits 3. The impact of the war in Ukraine on EU–NATO cooperation 4. Towards a new security architecture? 5. Conclusions and policy recommendations

1. Introduction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has profoundly reshaped the European security architecture, triggering an unprecedented acceleration of cooperation between the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). While EU–NATO relations have historically evolved through incremental institutional coordination, the war has intensified both the strategic interdependence and the political urgency of their partnership.

Despite a growing body of policy-oriented literature, there remains a lack of theoretically grounded analyses explaining *how and why* this crisis is transforming EU–NATO relations. In particular, existing accounts tend to describe institutional developments without sufficiently theorising the underlying drivers of change or the conditions under which cooperation deepens.

This article addresses this gap by asking the following research question:

How has the war in Ukraine reshaped EU–NATO cooperation, and to what extent can role theory explain the evolving patterns of interaction between the two organisations?

Building on role theory, the article argues that the war has intensified intra-role tensions and external expectations, pushing both the EU and NATO to renegotiate their strategic identities and functional responsibilities. These dynamics are further reinforced by processes of securitisation, which elevate certain threats—such as Russian aggression and technological vulnerabilities—to the level of existential concern.

Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative approach combining document analysis and elite interviews to trace the evolution of EU–NATO cooperation before and after 2022. This enables an assessment of both structural developments and actor perceptions. The article draws on two semi-structured interviews conducted with experts in international security and EU–NATO relations. The interviewees were selected based on their professional expertise and direct engagement with policy debates. The interviews aim to complement documentary evidence, provide insight into elite perceptions of EU–NATO cooperation, and identify emerging trends not yet reflected in official documents.

Given the limited number of interviews, the findings are exploratory rather than representative, and are used to support, rather than determine, the analysis.

The article is divided in three parts. First, it develops a theoretically informed framework based on role theory and securitisation. Second, it analyses the evolution of EU–NATO relations in light of

* Professor of Political Science and International relations, School of Advanced Defence Studies (CASD), Roma.
** Professor of Political Science, Faculty of Security Sciences, MIT University, Skopje.

the Ukraine war. Third, it examines the implications for capabilities, technology, and strategic coordination. Finally, it discusses the emerging contours of a new European security architecture.

2. Defining NATO-EU relations

While EU–NATO relations have been analysed through institutionalist and realist lenses—emphasising respectively functional cooperation and power balancing—these approaches only partially capture the dynamics triggered by the war in Ukraine. Institutionalist approaches emphasise functional cooperation and institutional overlap, highlighting mechanisms of coordination and division of labour. However, they tend to underestimate political contestation and identity-driven change. On the other side, realists focus on power asymmetries, US leadership, and burden-sharing dynamics. While useful in explaining dependence and strategic hierarchy, they overlook normative constraints and internal dynamics shaping organisational behaviour. Role theory offers a more suitable framework, as it allows for the analysis of how international actors adapt their behaviour in response to both domestic expectations ("ego") and external pressures ("alter"). This is particularly relevant in the context of EU–NATO relations, where overlapping memberships and shared strategic environments generate constant role negotiation.

The analysis of the EU-NATO relationship and future perspectives point to the need for a new culture of building these relationships. At the same time, setting up a new concept also initiates a process of transformation, as a need for a new Marshall Plan. The transatlantic process needs a new Grand Strategy, dedicated to the new global security challenges.

When it comes to the NATO strategic evaluation, it takes place in the following order: (1) Cold War, static warfare – nuclear deterrence; (2) Post-Cold War, partnerships – crisis management; (3) September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, combating new threats – force projection out-of-area; 2015, collective defence, projecting stability – deterrence and defence. It is of particular importance to present the NATO Essential Core Tasks (the 2010 Strategic Concept), considering: (1) collective defence; (2) Crisis Management; (3) Cooperative Security.

In the context of the above, to present a relevant analysis, it is necessary to consider the Summit in Brussels of 23-24 June 2022, the G7 in Germany in 2022, and the Summit in Madrid on 29-30 2022.

In addition, the NATO Strategic Concept comes at a critical time and the need to unite the alliance, to continue to guarantee international peace and security. The NATO 2022 Strategic Concept represents a step forward towards cooperative security. The core tasks of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concepts are: (1) Deterrence and Defence; (2) Crisis Prevention and Management; (3) Cooperative Security; (4) Resilience.

It is about a key document for the Alliance, setting its strategy and providing a collective assessment of the security environment. It outlines NATO's fundamental security tasks and specifies the elements of the Alliance's approach to security and provides guidelines for its political and military adaptation. Since the end of the Cold War, the Strategic Concept has been updated approximately every 10 years to take account of changes to the global security. The previous Strategic Concept was adopted at the NATO Lisbon Summit in 2010. The 2022 Strategic Concept describes the new security scenario facing the Alliance and define NATO's key purpose of ensuring Allies' collective defence. Furthermore, the 2022 Strategic Concept is the 8th release since 1949.

The Concept reaffirms NATO's key purpose to ensure the collective defence of its members (Art. 5) and continue to accomplish three core tasks: (1) deterrence and defence; (2) crisis prevention and management; (3) cooperative security. The three core tasks are complementary to ensure collective defence and security of all Allies. NATO will enhance global awareness and reach to deter, defend, contest, and deny across all five domains, against all threats, from all directions, in line with the 360-degree approach. NATO's deterrence and defence posture are based on an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional and missile defence capabilities, complemented by space and cyber capabilities.

From the point of view of the '360-degree approach' to security – both thematically and geographically – foresees a strong availability of military assets and risks to overstretch the member countries. In the light of this approach (commitment at the 2015 Warsaw Summit) Alliance must take the opportunity to seek closer support from the EU in terms of their membership – only Austria, Cyprus, Ireland, and Malta are members of the EU but not NATO. This membership requires increasing spending pressures in term of burden sharing as established in Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

Accordingly, the 2022 Strategic Concept confirms the NATO 2010 Strategic Concept core tasks: defence and deterrence (previously collective defence); crisis prevention and management (previously just crisis management); cooperative security. Moreover, the document re-prioritises away from crisis management and towards defence and deterrence, reflecting the changes in the strategic environment and goes back to its 'traditional' core mission: the collective defence of the Euro-Atlantic area (Deterrence, Defence, Dialogue). It is important to point out that for the first time, the Strategic Concept includes environmental issues, technological innovation, climate change, human security and the Women, Peace and Security agenda (all issues not typically for a military-political defence organization).

2.1 The Role theory in explaining and interpreting NATO-EU relations

According to the role theory, societal actors which are influenced by domestic norms and expectations from outside, constitute the foreign policy role of states. Members of the society share specific values that define a corridor of acceptable foreign policy choices. The domestic site thereby forms the "ego part" of the role. The ego part of national roles goes beyond mere self-description. It draws from domestic norm reservoirs, such as collective identities, past experiences, and societal norms, to define an appropriate function of the state within a specific group. Societal actors such as voters, parties, and Parliaments influence the make-up of national role conceptions. In that regard, role theory shares the basic insights of liberal International Relations theory, which underscores the impact of domestic politics.

As an example, in the case of Germany, the shifting pattern of Germany's role within the context of NATO, that is its primary international security institution, presents a puzzle for traditional approaches to the study of German foreign policy. A linear explanation of continuity, which highlights the relevance of traditional norms and a "culture of reticence", fails to grasp the significant changes of Germany's foreign and security policy. At the same time, Berlin has rejected a path of "normalization" as some analysis argued employing a neorealist perspective. The role of Germany in NATO can be seen along two key indicators: firstly, Germany's contribution to military interventions after the end of the Cold War; and second, military expenditures considering burden-sharing debates among allies and within Germany[1].

There are several variants of the form of role change. One is connected to the consideration of internal changes within the domestic role construction. If the ego part role changes, the new role conception also reduces a distinct of "alter casting"[2], actors may seek to push, limit, or prescribe certain role elements of others in a social relationship. If the articulated expectation is met by a compatible ego part, the role can adopt to new expectations. However, if the ego part of the role and the external expectation are incompatible, an intra role conflict emerges.[3] The intra-role conflict then triggers domestic debates which either result in the rejection of the new expectation or their

[1] E. Hallams, B. Schreer, *Towards a 'Post-American' Alliance? NATO Burden-Sharing After Libya*, in *International Affairs* 88(2)/2012, p. 315.
[2] G. Friedrichs, S. Harnisch, *Alliances Rebalanced? The Social Meaning of the U.S. Pivot and Allies Responses in Northeast Asia*, in *Korean Journal of International*, Studies 15(1), 2017.
[3] H. Tewes, *Between Deepening and Widening: Role Conflict in Germany's Enlargement Policy*, in *West European Politics*, 21(2)/1998.

adoption. Intra-role conflict is therefore an important source for foreign policy role change. Ego as alter-parts of national role conceptions, need to be considered to grasp the shifting pattern of the EU member state role within NATO.

The role theory suggests that growing expectations by key allies may trigger an intra-role conflict if few expectations collide with domestic traditions. In fact, throughout the 1990s, the German public remained sceptical toward participation in military missions outside NATO's borders[4]. Role theory offers three analytical advantages. First, it captures **inter-organisational dynamics** beyond state-centric analysis. Both the EU and NATO can be understood as corporate actors with role conceptions (e.g., civilian power vs. military alliance) and role expectations imposed by member states and external partners. Second, it explains **simultaneous cooperation and tension**. As expectations converge (e.g., regarding Russia as a primary threat), cooperation deepens. However, conflicting expectations—such as EU strategic autonomy versus NATO cohesion—generate persistent friction. Third, it provides a mechanism for **crisis-induced change.** The war in Ukraine represents a critical juncture in which heightened threat perceptions amplify alter expectations, forcing both organisations to reassess their roles. NATO's reassertion of collective defence and the EU's expansion into security and defence can thus be interpreted as processes of role adaptation triggered by intra-role conflict.

2.2 Balancing powers and benefits

Relations between EU and NATO should also be analysed in a broader perspective and considering the transatlantic dimension. As pointed out by Valentin Yakushik, EU and NATO are two interconnected forms of regional self-organisation of the Global West, functioning in the general environment of the US global political, economic, and cultural/conceptual leadership. They are provided with different structures and tasks, but also with common goals and interests in the field of security and defence. The functional convergence has been achieved by significant discretion of the main goals: NATO is about defence and security; the EU is on the rule of law and economic development.

At the same time, disagreements, and difficulties in cooperation between them often arose. And after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the collapse of the USSR, relations between NATO and the EU were generally in a period of uncertainty. During this period, voices were often heard in the EU about the need to closely examine the feasibility of significant military costs and demands on European members from NATO, and even about the very existence of the organization. At some point, the relevance of the existence of NATO, which was created at one time as an instrument of collective security in the face of a threat from the communist USSR, from the special view looked unconditional and not obvious. Moreover, many sceptics within the EU began to view NATO as a tool for advancing the political interests of the United States and creating additional conflicts, which did not always meet the political and economic interests of all EU countries. In the EU, voices were increasingly heard about the need to create their own security and defence forces, which could lead to duplication of NATO functions[5].

Relations are particularly complex and incompletely defined, especially because of various external global influences. In addition, it also points to the national identity and specificities of each country individually, which further creates an incentive for a certain need for balancing, weighing the benefits, on the one hand, and the declared costs, on the other hand.

It is about a set relationship of mutual long-term interaction between the two sides of the Atlantic, through various defence and security arrangements, with certain occasionally manifested Euro-Atlantic dilemmas.

[4] Z. Juhász, *German Public Opinion and the Use of Force in the Early 1990s*, in Ph. Everts and P. Isernia (eds,), *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force*, London, 2001, p. 69.
[5] Interview to Valentin Yakushik by Katerina Veljanoska, made online on 14 May 2023.

Determining the strengths and weaknesses of EU and Alliance capacities is a particular challenge. The challenges are growing, especially with the unfolding military conflict between Russia and Ukraine and all the additional involved parties in the wider international community. What is needed is to take leadership in the EU-NATO relationship, as well as a strategic deepening of these relationships.

One particularly important initiative in this domain is the adoption of the European Global Strategy (EUGS), within the framework of a document that calls for the strengthening of partnership relations between the EU and NATO on a strategic basis[6]. There is a clear need to synchronize mutual ambitions, which, on the one hand, enable EU member states to preserve their autonomy, but on the other hand, to strengthen security and defence relations with the NATO Alliance.

It is a document that, in one way, brings to the surface all the global and security phenomena of the 21st century, as a priority for solving through a structured, strong, and safe EU. The importance of migration, the balancing of policies for the protection of human rights, diplomacy, the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), climate, as well as the overall necessary coherence in relation to all these manifested challenges is highlighted. In particular, the need to consider security terms, terrorism, hybrid threats, which are not only internal but also external actions, independent of the EU commodity, based on which strategic cooperation with the NATO Alliance is needed[7].

The adoption of EUGS is preceded by the document 'Capacity building in support of security and development'[8]. This document is particularly important because it initiates the possibility of cooperation between partners, to prevent and manage crises. The focus of this EU policy is the measurability of the current, available security capacities, the application of appropriate instruments, as well as a focus on building effective, legitimate, and sustainable institutions, especially in the domain of the justice and security, border control and coast guard sectors. However, the need to apply international instruments, dialogue, and cooperation in the field of research and innovation is emphasized. This cooperation is crucial in the international framework, so that the goals, values and ideals of the EU and NATO perspectives can be followed and realized.

The mutual balancing of EU-NATO relations needs to be constantly subjected to long-term debate, weighing of intentions, the level of ambitions, especially in the domain of security and defence. In addition, some researchers point to only a transcendence of the "relationship" itself, through the emergence, via NATO, of a genuinely autonomous European defence capacity, can produce the healthy and balanced transatlantic partnership that was envisioned when the Washington Treaty was signed [9].

The Euro-Atlantic security is undermined by strategic competition and pervasive instability. According to a series of existing analyses, the Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. A certain ambitious policy of China also challenges and affects the course of Alliance interests, security, and values. All this is complemented by terrorism, which still remains a persistent direct asymmetric threat. It is also worth mentioning the impact of instability in Africa and the Middle East, as well as the process of development of nuclear and missile programs by Iran and North Korea. It is necessary to pay attention to Chemical, Biological, Radiological & Nuclear threats (CBRN) by Syria, North Korea, and the Russian Federation, along with non-state actors. There are additional global and interconnected threats and challenges, including trafficking and irregular migration, climate change, cyberspace, emerging and disruptive technologies, as well as the erosion of the arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation architecture[10].

---

[6] Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe - A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, Council of the European Union, Brussels, 14 November 2016.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 53

[8] Capacity building in support of security and development - Enabling partners to prevent and manage crises, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and The Council, Brussels, 28.4.2015 JOIN(2015) 17 final.

[9] J. Howorth, *Strategic Autonomy and EU-NATO Cooperation: A Win-Win Approach*, in *L'Europe en Formation*, 2/2019, p. 85 ff.

[10] M. Testoni, *NATO and transatlantic relations in the 21st Century, Foreign and Security Policy Perspectives*, London & New York, 2021.

The growing need to military balance risk to opening 'old wounds' on burden sharing, especially between the US and European allies, and affect. the transatlantic relationship. COVID-19 has caused a severe economic crisis who see European members struggle to maintain their previous military budgets. The strong increasing of US military presence in Europe is good for the Alliance, but it also shows how much the Region still depends on the United States in the short/medium-term. Due to the China's rapid military rise, the US will be forced in the future to shift the main effort to Asia, and this means that EU will need to rearm rapidly to assume the primary responsibility of defending its own land, sea, and air (it is unlikely that Washington will be able to support the major burden in both Regions).

The Warsaw Declaration plays a major role in strengthening NATO's defence and deterrence capabilities, especially for projecting stability within and beyond the borders of NATO countries [11]. Within this Declaration, the essential meaning of fundamental responsibility is encouraged. All this, on a realistic basis, should mean that NATO will be stronger and project long-term stability, based on accepting collective defence as a basic responsibility. The NATO concept, according to the Warsaw Declaration, is respectful of the European security architecture, which is based on a hierarchy of rules. At the same time, the possibility of dialogue with Russia or any country that feels threatened by the actions of the NATO Alliance is enhanced. The most important thing is to encourage the minimization of the risks of military incidents, as well as to initiate constructive relations.

Among the relevant documents that define the framework of NATO's presentation between the member states and beyond is NATO's Strategic Concept adopted at the Madrid Summit, known as Compass. It is an effective display of a clearly shaped vision, with a sharp assessment of the current security and a realistic confrontation with possible threats to Euro-Atlantic securety, such as renewed Russian aggression. All of that has a big part in shaping NATO's political and military challenges. Subsequently, in 2017, the EU adopted the Permanent Structured Cooperation, where the possibility of cooperation between EU countries on projects in the field of defence development is specified and framed. In addition to this concept, a European Defense Fund is being established to support joint defence research and development. It is about a Fund that includes a budget of 8 billion euros for 2021-2027.[12] In addition to the above, the EU presents the "Strategic Compass" during the German Presidency of the EU Council in 2020, and two years later, on March 24, 2022, Russia's war on Ukraine begins[13].

Following the events, a "New Compass" was adopted between the leaders of the EU member states, which refers to the security and defence of the EU. This document is the first that gives the right to the EU member states to allow an EU security strategy. The compass follows a thread that, in one way, was missing in the EU, in the direction of initiating the need for greater coherence and coordination of security and defence policies. It is this document that is initial in setting a certain level of EU awareness of existing deficiencies in defence and security and the need to fix them. The compass focuses on four key domains, with the help of which it covers opportunities for action and crisis management; encouraging security for its citizens; identifying investment needs for technologies from different domains; as well as promoting a partnership relationship, and above all a strategic partnership in and towards the EU, to achieve common goals. Following, the main idea of the Strategic Compass is to create special expedition that will allow EU to intervene when is needed.

The NATO Defense Planning process[14] actually includes the following aspects: (1) Each country should see their capability area; (2) Need to have skill to do it, especially small state; (3) Need to cooperate not to build obstacles; (4) Cost-effective way to spend budget.[15] Moreover, all of these

[11] The Warsaw declaration on Transatlantic Security, Warsaw 8-9 July 2016.
[12] Regulation (EU) 2021/697 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 establishing the European Defense Fund and repealing Regulation (EU) 2018/1092 (Text with EEA relevance), EUR-Lex, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/697/o
[13] Will the Strategic Compass be a game-changer for EU security and defense?, European Policy Centre (EPC), Apr. 5, 2022.
[14] In February 2023, NATO Defence Ministers approved the Political Guidance for Defence Planning 2023, perhaps heralding the most significant change in Defence Planning since the end of the Cold War.
[15] NATO Defence Planning Process, Feb. 2023.

aspects are especially important because It's not only political issue, it's also economical issue - re-shaping and re-inventing of the whole supply chain. Furthermore, it is not only a matter of countries and entities, but also about global contribution.

It is particularly important to discuss on an academic and research basis what is happening with the current EU-NATO relationship and what are the future perspectives leading this relationship. Basically, the strategic partnership between Europe and NATO becomes a necessary scenario, for the security of current and future generations in the Euro-Atlantic area, but also in a broader concept, within the framework of which a certain redefinition of the globalization process can be seen, which may in due course include additional stakeholders. This can influence the "shaking" of the security structure, thereby influencing the need for new ways of overall (re)defining security, especially global security, and its long-term perspectives. The stability of EU-NATO relations is built in such a way that a constant analysis of the current security processes as well as facing the complex and developing security risks is needed in focus.

NATO works with states and organizations that share its values and interests, to uphold the international rules-based order. What needs to be done in the future is to raise the level of security and capacity-building assistance to vulnerable partners in the Alliance neighbourhood and beyond. Following, the Indo-Pacific is important for NATO but there is the Balkans too, given that developments in that region can directly affect Euro-Atlantic security.

In this context, it is important to encourage the sharing of responsibility between countries, as well as to work on long-term trust between partners, which leads to a better strategic partnership. Improving the perspective of EU-NATO relations is largely based on resilience building in the society; educational systems; life-long learning systems and practices. All that can be synchronized, if common methods of cooperation are set up; coordination and sharing and system of spreading information's. Furthermore, an approach that pays attention to state and non-state actors is needed. This can be achieved with an effective communication campaign – targeting the population. It will also contribute to greater trust within institutions and building their capacities. In fact, re-defining this concept is particularly important, especially after the war in Ukraine. However, setting up the concept of capacity building in the states also depends on the governments themselves, available resources, as well as a clear insight of those who work against effective reforms in the country.

This article advances the argument that the war in Ukraine has triggered a process of role reconfiguration, whereby NATO has reasserted its traditional role as a provider of collective defence, while the EU has expanded its role as a security actor beyond its traditionally civilian orientation. This dual transformation generates both complementarity and friction, which role theory is particularly well suited to explain.

3. The impact of the war in Ukraine on the EU-NATO cooperation

Over the past decade, there have been significant political tensions between Russia and the West, particularly since the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine between Ukrainian government forces and separatist groups supported by Russia. These events have strained relations between Russia and Western countries, leading to economic sanctions and political disputes. After the military invasion of Ukraine, in his speech, Putin ambiguously mentioned his willingness to re-establish control over other parts of the former Russian Empire and the need to protect Russian speakers and citizens abroad. This naturally brought to the suspicion that he was referring to the Baltic States and Poland.

The NATO's new Strategic Concept was published at a very timely moment, in which the organization is under stress. However, it did not provide concrete recommendations to face the challenges and implications that such escalation has produced, particularly in the relations with the EU[16].

As Sperling and Webber argue, such challenges may be analyses through the lenses of securitisation theory. Although, main scholarship has neglected, in the empirical application of this theory, the military sector and regional security organisations, this theory can powerfully explain at least two implications that current events are generating. First, NATO is engaged in securitization efforts across various issues. Securitization refers to the process by which political actors, such as states or international organizations, frame specific issues as essential security threats, thereby justifying exceptional measures and the allocation of resources to address those threats. A recursive interaction between NATO and its member states occurs. Member states' perspectives and priorities influence the issues that NATO focuses on, while NATO's actions and initiatives can shape member states' perceptions of security threats. This recursive interaction reinforces the securitization process, as both NATO and its member states continually respond to and influence each other's security agendas.

Second, the Ukraine crisis indeed had a significant impact on NATO's perception of security threats and its approach to collective security. Russia has been explicitly identified as a source of threat to the Euro-Atlantic region. This has led to a (re)securitization process within the Alliance, where Russia's actions have been framed as a challenge to the security and stability of NATO member states, pushing more deterrence and defence posture[17].

The first implication deals with the effects of the war on the relations among different actors, particularly European states, and the EU. To this point, Europeans have shown an unexpected high degree of unity in respect to Russia. They have provided military deployment to the eastern side and ensured heavy sanctions, although the existence of divergent views on the effects of an oil and gas embargo on Russia. This unity may be, however, not always maintained in the future, at the same level and with the same credibility. The extent to which Europe will be able to adapt itself to the future political scenarios represents the main test[18].

The consequences of the current crisis for the European security policy framework in the medium and long term will be considerable. It may expose differences in priorities among Western powers, highlighting the challenges of maintaining unity and a common approach in the face of evolving security threats. The crisis could also challenge the prevailing world view that the West's policy has been based on, as it reveals Russia's willingness to use military means to achieve its goals. It may require a reassessment of EU foreign policy, its strategies, including the effectiveness of diplomatic measures and economic sanctions. It could also lead to discussions on the need for a more robust defence and security policy, as well as the protection of vulnerable member states, particularly those in Eastern Europe, such as the Baltic States. This also means that NATO must rethink and review its obligations under Article 5, as well as defence capabilities, contingency plans, and strategies for the protection of Eastern European member states[19].

Different scenarios may develop. In recent years, there have been discussions within the EU about enhancing its common defence policy and military capabilities. The EU has taken steps to strengthen its defence cooperation through initiatives like Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defence Fund. These efforts aim to enhance defence capabilities among EU member states and improve coordination on security and defence matters. The EU could represent one of the elements of the Global West collaborating closely with other conceptually homologous economic,

---

[16] H. Larsen, *Adapting NATO to Great-Power Competition*, in *The Washington Quarterly* 45(4)/2022, p. 7 ff.

[17] J. Sperling and M. Webber, *NATO and the Ukraine crisis: Collective securitisation*, in *European journal of international security* 2(1)/2017, p. 19 ff.

[18] D. Fiott, *The Fog of War: Russia's War on Ukraine, European Defence Spending and Military Capabilities*, in *Intereconomics*, 57(3)/2022, pp. 152-156.

[19] L. Bangert Struwe, et al., *The Ukraine crisis and the end of the Post-Cold War European order: options for NATO and the EU*, 2014, Centre for Military Studies, University of Copenhagen.

cultural, and defence entities from different regions. In this case, NATO might function as a sub-structure within a broader global defence alliance composed of Western and West-supporting states. The coordination between the EU's defence policy and extended NATO structures would largely depend on the specific institutional arrangements and agreements established among these entities. It could involve cooperation on defence planning, information sharing, joint exercises, and potentially shared defence capabilities. The exact nature and extent of such coordination would require detailed negotiations and agreements between the involved parties.

Ruslan Bortnik rather offers a broader scenario, according to which relations between NATO and the EU are entering a new era[20]. NATO has regained credibility and relevance in the eyes of elites and societies in the EU. It is increasing its strength and moving towards expansion and therefore playing a leading consolidating role, and the role of a key platform to counter security threats. The ongoing discussions about NATO's strategic goals and the evolving political landscape, including the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the competition between the US and China, indeed have implications for cooperation between NATO and the EU.

The complexity of the security and economic situation, along with emerging challenges such as hybrid warfare, cyber threats, and terrorism, may push NATO and the EU toward deeper cooperation.

Considering the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the political competition between major powers, there may be increased recognition of the importance of closer NATO-EU cooperation. The need for a comprehensive approach to security, encompassing military, political, and economic dimensions, could drive the two organizations to work more closely together. Ultimately, the future direction and depth of cooperation between NATO and the EU will depend on various factors, including political will, evolving security threats, and the ability to overcome potential barriers.

The second implication concerns the effects of war on capabilities and technological advancements. Any speech given by Vladimir Putin up to now demonstrate the Russian persistent opposition towards NATO's policy of eastward expansion. As Andrew Wolff argues, NATO's enlargement policy has been driven by several factors, including the promotion of stability, democratic values, and security in Europe. The inclusion of new member states has been seen as a way to extend security guarantees and enhance cooperation among countries that share common values and interests. Russia has expressed concerns about NATO's enlargement and has viewed it as a threat to its security interests. The conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine have added further complexity to this relationship. A politically driven enlargement policy could have implications for NATO's relationship with Russia. While it may provide flexibility in dealing with Russia, it could also further exacerbate tensions and increase distrust between the two sides[21].

Even the technological component is essential. The engagement with Emerging and Disruptive Technologies (EDTs) is a growing aspect of NATO strategic focus. EDTs encompass technologies with significant military potential and associated risks. This is coherent with the need to access innovation in the private sector, aiming to identify dual-use cases and regulate the application of emerging technologies. This approach allows NATO to stay at the forefront of technological advancements, particularly in areas like artificial intelligence (AI), where China and Russia are also investing heavily. Interoperability is a key aspect of NATO's approach to emerging technologies. The alliance seeks to establish gold standards for interoperability between defence systems of allies and partners, ensuring smooth information sharing, and compatibility of AI algorithms and datasets. This focus recognizes the varying implementation speeds and regulatory approaches between the United States and Europe. Interoperability is a key aspect of NATO's approach to emerging technologies. The alliance seeks to establish gold standards for interoperability between defence systems of allies and partners, ensuring smooth information sharing, and compatibility of AI algorithms and datasets. This focus recognizes the varying implementation speeds and regulatory approaches between the United States and Europe. By actively engaging in the development and regulation of emerging technologies, NATO

[20] Interview by Katerina Veljanovska, made online on 12 May 2023.
[21] A.T. Wolff, *The future of NATO enlargement after the Ukraine crisis*, in *International Affairs* 91(5)/2015, p. 1103 ff.

aims to maintain its technological edge, address security challenges posed by illiberal actors, and establish norms for responsible use. This strategic focus aligns with the changing nature of warfare and the increasing significance of technological advancements in defence and security.

Technological capacities and political stability are inextricably connected, as the war has demonstrated. Reducing harmful dependencies in the strategic sectors and prevent from supply strains and manipulation may also preserve Europe's capacity for independent decision-making. Efforts like the EU's Strategic Autonomy agenda, the European Green Deal, and the establishment of strategic reserves for critical supplies are examples of steps taken to achieve these objectives.

Although such investments in the defence industrial integration, up to now, European states have relied on US strategic enablers. One of the most challenging consequences of the war could be the need to replace existing US capabilities. The concept of European NATO allies taking on a greater role in upholding the regional balance of power is not entirely new. NATO member states have been working to enhance their defence capabilities, increase defence spending, and contribute more actively to NATO operations and missions. However, the idea of European NATO allies fully taking the lead responsibility for upholding the regional balance of power would be a significant shift in the alliance's dynamics and require careful coordination, planning, and resource allocation.

More importantly, it would be a way to adapt to a new reality[22].

4. Towards a new security architecture?

Although the war in Ukraine has already demonstrated how significant changes will occur and that a different landscape is emerging, highlighting the different components of the new security architecture, and understanding how the NATO-EU relationship will evolve is not an easy step.

From the point of view of NATO, a reaffirmation of roles is needed. As seen in the first paragraph, at the Madrid Summit in June 2022, a new NATO Force Model was adopted for increasing the organizational reinforcement capability. The Model includes a high-readiness force of more than 300,000 troops. A part of them (about 100,000) can be deployed within 10 days, and the rest within 10-30 days. Therefore, allies committed to a significant increase in troops and in the rapid deployment capacity. However, as Larsen points out, this is also a confirmation of what the members expect from NATO. While it upholds democratic values and the rules-based order, its primary focus lies in areas directly related to its defence competence. This focus allows the alliance to effectively address security challenges, deter potential adversaries, and ensure the collective defence of its member states[23].

From the point of view of EU, a reaffirmation of independence is needed. According to Härtel, the EU has increased its role as a conflict manager in the war, but it is still indirect and incomplete. The emphasis on state building and the security nexus, as opposed to the exclusive focus on democratization and transformation, reflects a recognition of the need to address immediate security challenges and strengthen state capacities.

The EU's increased influence and ambition to play a more significant role beyond technical assistance is indeed evident in its pragmatism and the political involvement of EU representatives on the ground in Ukraine. This signifies a deeper engagement and a desire to have a tangible impact on the security and stability of the region. However, there may be limitations in flexibility and capabilities to respond appropriately to security policy developments in the region. This may pose challenges in responding rapidly to evolving security situations. Addressing these limitations and enhancing flexibility and capabilities to respond appropriately to security policy developments is an ongoing challenge for the EU and its member states, in the framework of the CSDP[24].

---

[22] H. Larsen, *Adapting NATO to Great-Power Competition*, cit.
[23] *Ibid*.
[24] A. Härtel, *EU Actorness in the Conflict in Ukraine: Between 'Comprehensive'Ambitions and the Contradictory Realities of an Enlarged 'Technical'Role'*, in *Ethnopolitics*, 22(3)/2023, p. 271 ff.

The debate on European strategic autonomy and the development of independent defense capabilities among member states is a complex and ongoing discussion. Different perspectives exist regarding Europe's ability and willingness to scale up and unify its political, industrial, and defence-related efforts.

Skeptics argue that Europe faces challenges in coordinating its political will, industrial capacities, and defense capabilities. They highlight issues such as fragmented defense industries, lack of interoperability and standardization, and deficient infrastructure. These challenges would require extensive and sustained political coordination and defence industrial cooperation, difficult to achieve.

On the other hand, optimists argue that the necessary tools to increase European conventional defense autonomy are already available. Reinforcing existing efforts and addressing interoperability and standardization problems could lead to significant progress. Also, European countries may have a favorable position in defending their eastern territory, particularly in a war of attrition against Russia.

The pursuit of European strategic autonomy and the development of independent defense capabilities are ongoing processes that require continued political, economic, and security cooperation among EU member states. The outcome of this debate and the progress made in these areas will depend on various factors, including political consensus, resource commitments, and evolving security challenges [25].

When it comes to foreign policy, there are some potential areas where EU member states could contribute to overcoming national divergences and enhancing security cooperation. These include internal security policy, the enforcement of EU sanctions, and border policy to prevent the intrusion of weapons, fighters, and saboteurs into the EU. However, a real EU involvement in territorial defence remains highly improbable, particularly in the face of Russia's military capabilities. As Freudlsperger and Schimmelfennig argue, the EU is unlikely to become a Westphalian state as ever[26]. The exit of the United Kingdom from the EU and the entries of Sweden and Finland into NATO further shape the dynamics of European defense cooperation. UK remains a key NATO member and contributes significantly to the alliance's collective defense efforts. Whereas, both Sweden and Finland have a strong tradition of non-alignment but have been developing closer ties with NATO in recent years, including participating in various initiatives and exercises.

In the end, the NATO-EU partnership plays an important role in enhancing Europe's ability to respond to external influence and potential coercion in various civilian areas. While the concept of European strategic autonomy often refers to the EU's ambition to have a more independent defence posture, the NATO-EU partnership focuses on broader security and resilience challenges, including civilian aspects. A stronger cooperation would allow for coordination and collaboration in addressing common security challenges beyond traditional military defense, such as countering illicit financial flows, sanctions policy, and promoting rules for tech import/export controls. In the realm of tech import/export controls, NATO and the EU can work together to establish common rules and standards to mitigate risks associated with emerging technologies and prevent misuse.

By pooling their resources and expertise, NATO and the EU can better address emerging security risks in these areas and protect European interests.

The war in Ukraine has thus contributed to amplify a series of potentialities and deficiencies which were already evident, both in the military and political domain, and which will constitute a part of the new security architecture, even before the end of the war.

---

[25] H. Larsen, *Adapting NATO to Great-Power Competition*, cit.; S. J. Smith, & C. Gebhard, *EU–NATO relations: running on the fumes of informed deconfliction*, in *European security*, 26(3)/2017, p. 303 ff.

[26] C. Freudlsperger and F. Schimmelfennig, *Rebordering Europe in the Ukraine War: community building without capacity building*, in *West european politics* 46(5)/2023, p. 843 ff.

5. Conclusions and policy recommendations

The article aims at contributing to the ongoing debates by shedding light on the future of NATO-EU cooperation, assuming that the war in Ukraine has been an accelerator of a set of processes which were already in place in an irreversible way. It also contributes to the literature by demonstrating that the war in Ukraine has not only intensified EU–NATO cooperation, but has also triggered a process of role renegotiation that reshapes the foundations of European security governance.

In this respect, the theory of roles is used to emphasize that, even though each state has set domestic norms, there are still external influences and expectations, which, in a way, dictate internal political and security relations. Even though the state can approach with its "ego" in a certain formed relationship, there are still new expectations for different situations, which in a way dictate the behaviour and strategic action with other states. This is exactly what can be seen in the scheme of EU-NATO relations. Each of the allies' points to different expectations, which may conflict with domestic traditions, but also with the common good of the other allies. This is where the strength for the future of NATO-EU relations should be drawn - respecting the set framework of roles and mutual relations and setting new projections for their strategic synchronization through a framework of perspectives for the transfer of competences and discussion on establishing a mutual identity of values. The NATO-EU relationship should also be based on strategic communication, finding an appropriate way in accordance with the social culture to communicate with the public and share the main idea and message. That way it is possible to guarantee security prosperity and democratic values.

Reconsidering partnerships and strengthening cooperation between NATO and the EU are important aspects of enhancing European security and addressing common challenges. However, as it has been described in the previous paragraph, it should pass through a reaffirmation of roles (for NATO) and of independence (for the EU).

In particular, NATO should:

- adopt a more strategic view of partnerships, considering how they can contribute to long-term security by developing institutions and capacities in partner countries.
- establish clear guidelines on how partnerships function during crises, by defining the roles, responsibilities, and obligations.
- include energy independence as part of NATO's defense planning process for providing European countries with a goal to reduce their dependence on Russia for energy supplies. Diversifying energy sources and promoting energy security can contribute to the overall security and resilience of NATO member states.

Implementing such measures would obviously require discussions, consensus-building, and alignment among member states and partner countries.

On the part of EU, new institutional mechanisms might be created to address matters of common concern, requiring member states to commit at higher level[27]. For example, conducting major operations outside Russia and smaller operations within the in neighborhood. Such commitments can help ensure that member states are prepared to contribute effectively to NATO's missions and demonstrate their shared responsibility for collective defense. Also, European NATO members need to clarify their preferences regarding the extent to which the EU should have command in non-Article 5 missions. This decision should be based on a careful assessment of the EU's capability to effectively command and lead such missions, as well as considerations of complementarity and coordination with NATO.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the increased tensions with Russia are likely to prompt discussions about defence spending in Europe and the optimal use of additional resources to enhance military capabilities. The objective would be to enhance Europe's ability to respond effectively to evolving security challenges and ensure the security and stability of the continent.

[27] M. O'Hanlon, *Beyond NATO: a new security architecture for Eastern Europe*. Brookings Institution Press, 2017.

Abstract

The article examines how Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has transformed cooperation between the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Moving beyond descriptive accounts, it develops a theoretically grounded explanation based on role theory and securitisation. It argues that the war has triggered a process of role reconfiguration driven by intensified threat perceptions and shifting mutual expectations. Using qualitative process-tracing based on document analysis and elite interviews, the article shows that while cooperation has deepened significantly, tensions persist due to intra-role conflicts and asymmetries in capabilities. The findings contribute to the literature by demonstrating how crises reshape inter-organisational relations and by refining the application of role theory to security governance. The article concludes with policy implications for strengthening EU–NATO coordination in an evolving European security architecture.

Key words: EU, NATO, security, cooperation, Ukraine, war, violence

*

L'articolo analizza come l'invasione su larga scala dell'Ucraina da parte della Russia nel 2022 abbia trasformato la cooperazione tra l'Unione europea (UE) e la NATO. Attraverso la teoria dei ruoli e la securitizzazione, si sostiene che la guerra abbia innescato un processo di riconfigurazione dei ruoli, determinato dall'intensificarsi delle percezioni di minaccia e dal mutamento delle aspettative reciproche. Utilizzando un approccio qualitativo basato sul process-tracing, lo studio evidenzia come la cooperazione si sia rafforzata, pur permanendo tensioni legate ad asimmetrie di capacità e conflitti intra-ruolo. L'articolo si conclude con implicazioni di policy per il rafforzamento del coordinamento UE–NATO.

Parole chiave: UE, NATO, sicurezza, cooperazione, Ucraina, guerra