
Safeguarding Multilateralism: The Urgency of European Defense

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While it is true that the idea of a common European defense has been developing since the early 1950s, it was not until the end of the 1980s—with the signing of the Single European Act and the momentous changes in Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain—that there was a genuine political will to create a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The experience of the wars in the Balkans and, in particular, the course of events surrounding NATO's intervention in Kosovo unmistakably demonstrated the necessity of an autonomous defense capability to Europeans. During the military operations in Kosovo—carried out by NATO but under exclusive leadership of the United States—the lack of influence and operational capabilities on the European side was drastically revealed. Moreover, in a precedent-setting breach of international law, NATO operations were carried out without a United Nations mandate. Picking up on the impetus given by these events, the EU Member States began to take significant steps toward creating a credible European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). In order to understand both the background and objectives of CFSP as well as the urgent

need for European defense at a time when the United States has chosen the path of unilateralism, an outline of the new challenges of European security—mainly as they are perceived by European Socialists today—will be presented in this article. The steps the European Union has taken since the war in Kosovo to build CFSP and ESDP as a way of implementing and defending its own values in maintaining international peace and security, based on the spirit and the principles of international law, will then be discussed.

Facing the New Challenges of European Security

The end of the Cold War has called for a new definition of security. Poverty and the lack of development are the greatest enemies of peace and democracy, as they are the direct causes of tension and conflict. In order to guarantee continued security and stability on the European continent, the fight against poverty and social injustice must therefore be at the top of the agenda. In the same way, the destruction of natural resources and the environment is a serious threat to our global security and that of future generations. Inside Europe, the threat of a

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military confrontation between states no longer exists. We have been and continue to be confronted, however, with organized crime and drug trafficking, ethnic and religious strife, massive violations of human rights, nationalism, and fundamentalism. As a result of these developments—and the 11 September 2001 attacks in the

United States, in particular—the fight against terrorism has become one of the main priorities on the agendas of states and international security organizations. In contrast to the times of the East-West confrontation, these security threats cannot primarily be dealt with by military means. Instead, we must develop non-military security strategies and instruments as equal alternatives to military measures. At the same time, when all other instruments have failed, the EU must have the capacity to react quickly and efficiently to restore peace and stability by its own military means, without depending upon other states and organizations to take the lead. This new security concept, which has been developed in the debates of the Socialists in the European Parliament, is based on three fundamental principles: common security, sustainable security, and democratic security.¹

The concept of common security and solidarity is one learned from Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. No country can enjoy complete stability and security if its neighbors are not assured of economic and political stability, as well. Thus

one main element of a new security strategy must be to cooperate with our neighbors on the basis of equality, justice, and reciprocity. One example of this policy is EU enlargement, which will contribute to the maintenance of peace and stability on the European continent and further develop economic prosperity in the applicant countries. The EU's stabilization and association agreements, which are concluded as a means of institutionalizing a continuous dialogue with third countries and working toward a close integration of their economies with the EU, are further elements of this strategy. Moreover, external aid and cooperation with developing states throughout the world are high priorities for the Union, also in the broader context of the EU's Human Rights and Democratization Policy.

Sustainable security, the second principle of the security concept, is based on the conviction that it makes no sense to try to solve international conflicts by military or other means without taking their longer-term causes into consideration. A greater effort must thus be undertaken to develop methods and strategies of conflict prevention and civil crisis reaction mechanisms. This point was driven home during the wars in the Balkans and most particularly in Kosovo, where Europeans were unable to prevent the renewed outbreak of war and allied military intervention turned out to be the only means to restore peace. Since then, methods of enhancing conflict prevention have become the priority. The EU has developed new capabilities for civilian crisis management, such as supporting police training, establishing and maintaining the rule of law, aiding and restoring civilian administration in crisis situations, and coordinating community policy closely with third states in the area of national civil protection.

Democratic security is the third principle upon which this security concept is based. International security is intimately linked with the existence of the rule of law, the respect of freedom and human rights, and the stability of democratic institutions all around the world. Consequently, on the international level as well, a democratic framework is needed to regulate inter-state relations on the basis of equality. The League of Nations and the United Nations have represented models of how to create such a framework on the basis of international law. Just as the League of Nations was obsolete soon after its establishment, however, the United Nations is in dire need of reform. There is a growing consensus that the veto system in the UN Security Council is not only a major impediment to the organization's capacity to act efficiently, but that it also puts other states with large populations at a complete disadvantage in comparison to the permanent five members of the Council. Still, the political will toward real reform of the UN structures is lacking.

Developing CFSP and ESDP

The ideas and principles described above have influenced the definition of the EU's priorities in strengthening and developing CFSP and ESDP to an important degree. In order to fully understand the conceptual background and development of European defense, it is important to look at its various stages since the Maastricht Treaty of 1993, when CFSP was established as the second pillar of the Treaty on European Union.

The motivation of EU Member States to make further progress in harmonizing their individual foreign and security policies after 1993 was both a result of the experience in the Balkans, where the limitations of Europe's common foreign policy had dramatically been laid bare, and of the achievement of European Monetary Union, a far-reaching step in European integration which made it clear that other steps should follow. A first attempt at defining the principles of a Common Foreign and Security Policy was therefore made in the Treaty of Amsterdam, which was signed in October 1997. Article 11 of this treaty defines CFSP as having the following objectives:

- to safeguard the common values, fundamental interests, independence, and integrity of the Union in conformity with the principles of the United Nations Charter;
- to strengthen the security of the Union in all ways;
- to preserve peace and strengthen international security, in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter [...].²

Article 17 of the Treaty on European Union contains a first—if still vague—basis for a legal framework defining a common European defense policy:

1. The common foreign and security policy shall include all questions relating to the security of the Union, including the progressive framing of a common defense policy [...], which might lead to a common defense [...].
2. Questions referred to in this Article shall include humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking.³

The fulfillment of these so-called Petersberg tasks is the objective the European Union has set for the development of its common defense policy.

It is interesting to note the references to the UN in Article 11 of the Amsterdam Treaty, which highlight the priority of the UN's role in maintaining international peace and security from the viewpoint of the European Union. In fact, NATO's subsequent air war in Kosovo—in which several EU Member States participated—took place without the necessary UN Security Council

mandate. Sadly, the highly placed references to the United Nations in the Amsterdam Treaty were forgotten rather quickly. Not only in this respect, however, was the war in Kosovo a lesson to Europeans. During the military operations, the European states quickly learned that their role was to remain purely on the sidelines, while the United States assumed full leadership and control. Even when their participation was requested, the European allies were unable to do much to influence the course of events. While it is, to a certain extent, understandable—though not desirable—that military operations led and carried out almost entirely by the United States leave no room for debate and discussion on the part of other participating allies, it is also clear that to avoid such humiliation in the future, the European Union will have to acquire the means and capabilities to act on its own behalf in crisis situations.

At their summit in St. Malo in December 1998, British Prime Minister Blair and French President Chirac had in fact already made an urgent call for Europeans to establish an autonomous military capacity. Two arguments were set forth. One, defended by the British but also by other EU Member States, posited that the Europeans would not be marginalized in the decision-making of the Atlantic Alliance (i.e. NATO) if they had significant military capabilities to contribute during operations. Moreover, by making an effort to narrow the technology gap separating them from the United States, the Europeans would be able to contribute more efficiently to NATO peacekeeping tasks or even mount operations on the European continent themselves when the United States did not want to or could not become involved. The other argument, held most prominently by the French, posited that the reason to establish a credible European military force would be to allow the EU to act independently of NATO. As it later turned out, the two reasons for building a European defense capacity were motivated by diametrically opposed principles, which were in fact reflected in the respective definitions and interpretations of the word “autonomous.” We will return to this point later.

As a result of the St. Malo dynamic and the experience in Kosovo, the European heads of state declared that they would take decisive steps toward establishing their own military crisis reaction mechanisms at the Cologne Summit in June 1999. It is striking to note how much clearer the language was in comparison to the Amsterdam Treaty:

1. [...]The Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises without prejudice to actions by NATO. The European Union will thereby increase its ability to contribute to international peace and security in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter.

2. [...] This requires the maintenance of a sustained defense effort, the implementation of the necessary adaptations and notably the reinforcement of our capabilities in the field of intelligence, strategic transport, and command and control.⁴

Two points are especially important when examining the language of the Cologne document. First, the reference to the United Nations is made to underline its continued priority—at least on paper—where the resolution of international crises is concerned. Second, it is striking that in this text, the EU called for the procurement of precisely those strategic instruments and capabilities—strategic transport, intelligence, and command and control structures—that would enable it to act independently of NATO. Though formulated in a very diplomatic way, the presidency conclusions of the Helsinki Summit, which took place six months later, make even clearer reference to the objective of greater independence of NATO:

26. The Union will contribute to international peace and security in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter. The Union recognises the primary responsibility of the United Nations Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security.

27. The European Council underlines its determination to develop an autonomous capacity to take decisions and, where NATO as a whole is not engaged, to launch and conduct European Union-led military operations in response to international crises. [...]”⁵

While this shows that there was a tangible effort toward achieving a higher degree of independence from NATO, it does not mean that coordinated and close cooperation with the Atlantic Alliance was no longer seen as essential in order to establish an efficient European defense capacity. Thus, the European Council expressed its wish to maintain its relations and cooperation with NATO on a high level and on a basis of equality:

28. [...] Modalities will be developed for full consultation, cooperation, and transparency between the European Union and NATO, taking into account the needs of all EU Member States.⁶

The need for a continuous dialogue between the two organizations and for transparency in their respective actions was frequently underlined in the conclusions of the following EU summits in Santa Maria da Feira in June 2000, Göteborg in June 2001, and Laeken in December 2001.⁷

The decisions taken at the Cologne Summit in June 1999—immediately following the Kosovo crisis—unleashed a major political and institutional dynamic in advancing the cause of CFSP and ESDP. At the Helsinki Summit in December 1999, the EU Member States agreed on the establishment of three

major institutions, similar in structure and function to those of NATO: the standing Political and Security Committee (PSC), composed of national representatives of senior or ambassadorial level; the Military Committee (MC), composed of the national Chiefs of Defense; and finally, the Military Staff (MS). More importantly perhaps, from the perspective of operational capacity, the European Union also agreed to the headline goal of establishing a force of 50,000-60,000 soldiers, capable of fulfilling the Petersberg tasks, and equipped with the necessary command, control, and intelligence capabilities as well as air and naval elements, as needed. This force, it was agreed, should be deployable within 60 days and be able to remain engaged for at least one year.⁸ These decisions were confirmed at the Laeken Summit in December 2001, when the ESDP was declared operational.⁹ Finally, the Nice

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Treaty in March 2001 provided for the possibility for EU Member States to resort to enhanced cooperation concerning joint actions or common positions—both major instruments of CFSP—thereby allowing for increased efficiency in this area.¹⁰ No progress was made concerning the introduction of qualified majority voting, however, which would have constituted a major step in creating a genuine European foreign policy. The question of parliamentary control of CFSP and ESDP (i.e. the democratic legitimacy of these instruments) is a further difficulty yet to be surmounted. If Europeans are serious about ensuring a democratic basis for all EU institutions, there must also be parliamentary control of EU Council decisions where foreign and security policy is concerned. Of course, defense policy is seen by most Member States as necessitating a certain degree of secrecy in order to be efficient. Nonetheless, parliaments in Member States always hold the ultimate lever of control in their hands—if a majority in the parliament does not agree with government policy, it can always censure it afterward. The European Parliament does not have this, or any other, option. The lack of democratic control is a serious mistake that must be rectified as soon as possible. The European Parliament has therefore demanded to be included in all stages of the development of CFSP and ESDP, proposing a “European Interparliamentary forum for Security and Defense,” in which both European and national members of parliament dealing with these matters should participate.¹¹

Such is the legal (Amsterdam Treaty, Nice Treaty) and political (presidency conclusions) basis upon which CFSP and ESDP are being developed. Though important steps have been taken, much remains to be done in order to follow through with the high expectations raised especially at the Helsinki

Summit. In times of economic downturn, such as those currently haunting nearly all EU Member States, it is particularly difficult for political leaders to convince electorates of the necessity of raising the defense budgets in order to invest in the necessary military and civil crisis-reaction capacities. Since acquiring our own autonomous capacity for action is absolutely essential, however, Europeans must be willing to face the financial burdens that this implies. The fruitless and difficult negotiations the European Union has held with Turkey on an agreement to employ NATO assets in order to take over the relatively small-scale peacekeeping operation in Macedonia (Amber Fox) have again demonstrated the urgent need for independent capabilities. The European Union is confronted with this problem: it is common knowledge that Turkey could not provide the needed equipment, particularly strategic transport and satellite intelligence. It is unacceptable that a non-Member State can seriously impede the EU's necessary capacity to act, and this should be a lesson to us in the future.

Moreover, a lack of political consensus persists even among the EU Member States as to what the main objectives of CFSP and ESDP actually are. As pointed out above, even at the culminating point of European moves toward a common defense in 1998 and 1999, the exact meaning of the term "autonomous capacity" was left open to interpretation. To this day, the exact understanding of this word and the underlying motivation for establishing a European defense capacity—to be capable of acting independently of the United States and NATO or in order to be better and more efficient allies—draw a dividing line among EU Member States. This division, however, is particularly counterproductive at the present time. When the world's only superpower has committed itself solely to the pursuit of its own national interests worldwide, the European Union should be playing a serious, independent role to defend the principles of international law, multilateralism, and the respect for human rights.

Developing European Defense To Promote Democratic Values

Since the end of the Second World War, Americans and Europeans alike have perceived transatlantic security relations as the expression of a community of values based on liberty, democracy, and the global respect for human rights. During the East-West confrontation and in the face of expansionist Soviet Communism, European nations had little reason to question the existence of this community of values. In August 1990, when Iraq invaded Kuwait and the UN Security Council condemned this action and authorized the use of force in order to liberate the country, world opinion held that in this "New World Order," the United Nations would be able to fully assume its role as the legitimate guarantor of international peace and security. There seemed to be a genuine willingness among the major powers, including the United States, to work

together along the lines of international law, thereby enhancing multilateralism and the rule of law on the international level. More than 10 years later, however, the scene has radically changed. The United Nations was unable to manage, much less prevent, the conflicts that arose in the Balkans and in Africa. It was, and continues to be, totally excluded from all efforts to mediate in what is perhaps the most urgent and complex conflict today: the tragedy in the Middle East. Since the war in Kosovo, when NATO carried out its bombing campaign despite the lack of a UN mandate, it has been clear that the UN is unable to assume its function of maintaining international peace and security.

Most recently, during the U.S.-led war against al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters in Afghanistan—which took place in reaction to the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States—even the role of the Atlantic Alliance was reduced to the formal invocation of Article 5 of its treaty, as a symbolic demonstration of allied solidarity with the American military effort. Since then, all military action has been carried out directly by U.S. forces or by allied forces under U.S. leadership. While allied coalition operations during the Kosovo war were dictated by U.S. military leaders, the current situation is one in which the United States, while appreciating political support by its allies, prefers to act unilaterally in the interest of its own policies. As U.S. Senator John McCain put it during the 2002 Security Conference in Munich in reference to the U.S.-led war on terrorism in Afghanistan, allied military cooperation may be welcome, but it is not longer necessary.¹² In any case, the United States certainly never considered waiting for the United

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Nations to approve its military action. In the aftermath of the military operations, the U.S. government's treatment of suspected al-Qaeda fighters captured and subsequently held at Guantánamo Bay has demonstrated the administration's disregard for international human rights conventions in a particularly plain way. U.S. refusal to support the International Criminal Court (ICC) is another example of its increasing disregard for international law and conventions. With the entry into force of the Rome Statute and the establishment of the ICC, individuals guilty of genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity can finally be brought to justice. If freedom, justice, and equality of all mankind are values the United States continues to endorse, it should do so on an international level as well, by supporting the establishment of this court.


U.S. foreign policy—conceived on the basis of its new National Security Strategy document, which emphasizes the use of preemptive action where U.S.

national interests are threatened, and carried out under the arrogant motto “you are either for or against us”—has in fact drifted far away from what was once a common basis of values shared by Europeans and Americans alike. The increasingly unilateralist stance taken by the Bush administration has therefore added yet another degree of urgency to the need for a unified foreign and security policy in Europe and the means to implement it. The European Union has always seen its own foreign policy as a complement and a reinforcement of the work of the United Nations. Thus, by strengthening CFSP and creating the

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capabilities for an effective ESDP, Europe will be able to contribute to the reform and strengthening of this international organization, which, to date, holds the only legitimate authority to decide upon the use of force to restore peace in

international relations. If we give up the belief in the legitimacy and effectiveness of the United Nations, we will also give up those values that the United States and its European allies fought for during, and in the years following, the Second World War.

As its foreign policy shows, the United States is clearly distancing itself from the common set of values defined after the tragic experiences of World Wars I and II and shared by Europeans and Americans in the framework of the transatlantic partnership since then. The European Union continues to hold fast to these values. By demonstrating its will to build the capacities to fight for them, the European Union will do its part to contribute to the safeguarding of multilateralism and the respect for democracy and international law in interstate relations for the years to come. 

Notes

1. A position paper, entitled “New Dimensions of Security. The Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union,” was adopted by the Group of the Party of European Socialists in the European Parliament in March 2001 and can be downloaded at <http://www.socialistgroup.org/gpes/htm/en/default.htm>.

2. Treaty on European Union, <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/treaties/index.html>.

3. Ibid.

4. Cologne presidency conclusions, <http://ue.eu.int/newsroom/LoadDoc.asp?BID=76&DID=57886&from=&LANG=1>.

5. Helsinki presidency conclusions, <http://ue.eu.int/presid/conclusions.htm>.

6. Ibid.

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7. The texts of all presidency conclusions can be found at <http://ue.eu.int/presid/conclusions.htm>.

8. See annex 1 to annex IV of the Helsinki presidency conclusions. Presidency progress report to the Helsinki European Council on strengthening the Common European Policy on Security and Defence, <http://ue.eu.int/en/Info/eurocouncil/index.htm>.

9. Annex II to the Laeken presidency conclusions, <http://ue.eu.int/Newsroom/related.asp?BID=76&GRP=4061&LANG=2.a>

10. The text can be downloaded at <http://ue.eu.int/eur-lex/en/treaties/index.html>.

11. European Parliament resolution no. A5-0339/2000, 20 November 2000, to be found at www.europarl.eu.int.

12. This conference, at which Jannis Sakellariou was present, took place on 1-3 February 2002.