

The EU's security and defense policy in the new global context

Ileana Tache¹

Abstract

This paper analyzes the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) launched in the late 1990s and investigates its challenges in the new tense global context. Russia – Ukraine war and the conflicts of the Middle East (more exactly between Israel and Hamas, Israel and Hezbollah and Israel and Iran) are presented in the light of their impact on European security, along with the relationship between EU and NATO. The paper concludes with envisaging some economic perspectives for the near future in the aftermath of all this widespread instability and unprecedented violence.

Keywords: security, defense, Russia-Ukraine war, Middle East conflicts, EU Common Security and Defense Policy

Introduction

This paper tries to examine the EU's security and defense policy as a response to different challenges of the global context, with reference to the present Russia-Ukraine war and the conflict escalation in the Middle East. The aim is to envisage some economic perspectives in the near future in the aftermath of this unprecedented international situation.

For achieving the above-stated goals, the paper is organized as follows: the next section presents the main stages of construction of a Common Security and Defense Policy; then the challenges of this policy are emphasized for the present tense global context, insisting on the war between Russia and Ukraine, and the conflicts between Israel and Hamas, Israel and Hezbollah and Israel and Iran; the last section shows the concluding remarks.

The main stages of construction of a Common Security and Defense Policy

The Common Security and Defense Policy of the European Union, unlike other policies such as development assistance, humanitarian aid, trade, or enlargement, is not yet deeply integrated and shared by all member states.

The beginnings of the European Community were not marked at all by a common security and defense policy. Then military issues evolved and became major concerns, as presented by Box 1 (for the evolution of EU security and defense policy in different stages of the international context, see Tache, 2015).

¹ Transilvania University of Brasov, Department of Marketing, Tourism-Services and International Business

Box 1: Brief chronology of the Common Security and Defense Policy

1948: United Kingdom (UK), France and Benelux sign the Brussels Treaty of mutual defense.

1949: The North Atlantic Treaty is signed by US, Canada and ten West European countries.

1952: The six members of the European Coal and Steel Community (France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Netherland and Luxembourg) sign the European Defense Community Treaty, which would have created an European army. Unfortunately, in 1954, the Treaty is rejected by the French National Assembly.

1954: On the basis of the Brussels Treaty, The Western European Union (WEU) is created, expanding to include Italy and West Germany and including a mutual defense clause. In the same year, West Germany joins NATO.

1986: The Single European Act (SEA) is signed, containing Title III of the European Political Cooperation (EPC). The EPC can discuss the political and economic aspects of security.

February 1992: With the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, the EPC is replaced with Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

June 1992: The end of the Cold War and the subsequent conflicts in the Balkans showed the need for the EU to assume responsibilities in the field of crisis management and conflict prevention. The Petersberg Declaration establishes that the WEU will assume humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping and crisis management tasks (Petersberg tasks). These tasks were integrated in 1999 in the Amsterdam Treaty.

1994: A NATO Summit agrees that the NATO assets can be used by the WEU.

1997: The signing of the Amsterdam Treaty includes reforms of the CFSP.

1999: At Cologne European Council the EU member states reaffirm the EU's willingness to develop capabilities for autonomous action, backed by credible military forces. In the same year, the Helsinki European Council sets the goals for the common security and defense policy (CSDP).

2001: The EU Satellite Centre is created for supporting early warning and crisis monitoring functions of the CSP and CSDP.

March 2002 – June 2003: Convention on the Future of Europe drafts a constitutional Treaty, creating a European external action service (EEAS) and a European armaments, research and military capabilities agency.

2003: The Berlin Plus Agreement contains a package of arrangements between EU and NATO that allows the EU to use NATO assets for EU-led crisis management operations.

2004: The agreements made since 2002 were incorporated in the draft of the constitutional Treaty and many are implemented without Treaty ratification (excepting the foreign minister and the EEAS).

2007: The post of foreign minister is renamed High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

2009: The Treaty of Lisbon comes into force and can be considered a cornerstone in the development of CSDP.

2016: In June, Federica Mogherini, the former High Representative and Vice-President of the European Commission, presents the "Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy." This strategy includes a complex package of measures in the areas of security and defense, stressing the Europeans' ambition to take more responsibility for their security and defense.

2017: The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) is established, with the aim of deepening the defense cooperation between EU countries. In the same year, the European Defense Fund (EDF) is created for supporting the collaboration in defense research.

2021: The European Peace Facility (EPF) is established in order to expand EU's capability to assure security for its citizens and its partners.

2022: A Strategic Compass for Security and Defense is issued, providing a shared assessment of the strategic environment in which EU operates and of the threats EU confronts.

Source: Tache (2015) and European Union External Action (2022), "The Shaping of a Common Security and Defense Policy", available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/shaping-common-security-and-defence-policy_en

Challenges of the Common Security and Defense Policy in the present tense global context

Russia-Ukraine war and its implications for the European security

The EU supports Ukraine and its people and strongly condemn Russia's brutal military aggression, considering illegal the annexation of the cities Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson.

In response to Russia's invasion, the EU adopted a lot of sanctions, with the aim of weakening Russia's economic base and its ability to finance military actions. Sanctions were also adopted against Belarus, Iran and North Korea as a consequence of their support for Russia. The visa facilitation agreement between EU and Russia was suspended.

The EU took important measures for supporting Ukraine such as:

- Economic and financial assistance
- Civil protection support
- Military support
- Reception of refugees through the EU temporary protection mechanism
- Support in the reconstruction of a democratic Ukraine (European Council, Council of the European Union, 2024).

Joseph Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, argued, in January 2024, that Ukraine prevailing against the Russian aggression is the best security guarantee for Europe and that a paradigm shift is needed from supporting Ukraine for "as long as it takes" to committing to "what it takes" for Ukraine to achieve victory (European Union External Action, 2024).

The conflict between Israel and Hamas, Israel and Hezbollah, and Israel and Iran

The EU policy towards Israel-Palestine conflict had been much discussed in the literature over the years. An interesting contribution was recently added by Akgül-Açıkmeşe and Özel (2024), showing that over the decades the European Union has aimed at solving the conflict between Israel and Palestine through its Foreign and Security Policy, with the "two state solution" as the over-arching principle for conflict resolution. These authors state that this policy has been ineffective due to the contextual interplay of multipolar competition, regional fragmentation and even EU-level internal contestation. The EU has indeed used some mitigation strategies, as for example:

- Delegation as an institutional measure through the Common Security and defense Policy missions, or
- Selective engagement as a functional measure through the trade with both partners
- Policies of humanitarian aid for mitigating the impact of different constraints.

However, none of the EU actions, as the above-mentioned authors show, have adequately alleviated the problems of the region. In the present context, the relations between Israel and Palestine are at a historical low and very worrying for the entire region, leading to an escalation of the conflict in the Middle East.

The situation is equally complex and dangerous as regards the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, an Iran-backed militant group and political party based in Lebanon. Joseph Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union, condemned the Israel attacks in Lebanon, considering that they forced civilians to pay an unacceptable price. This declaration was made after an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers ahead of the United Nations General Assembly in New York (Politico, September 24, 2024).

Iran's recent missile attack was largely thwarted by Israel but led undoubtedly to an uncontrollable regional escalation. The European Union, together with the United States, have already imposed sanctions on Iran for helping Russia with arms in the war with Ukraine, for suspected nuclear weapons program and for human rights violation. At the EU level, the problem is that there is not a common, shared position towards the Middle East issues. Countries like Spain, Ireland or Belgium are more in favor of Palestine, and others, like the Czech Republic and Hungary support the Israel side.

Concluding remarks

The consequences of the present conflicts unfold on multiple areas, involving both the security level and the economic sector.

The war in Ukraine means a huge loss of human capital, destruction of production capacity, damage of agricultural trading infrastructure and a significant reduction of private consumption. The economic sanctions applied by the EU affected the Russian oligarchs and members of the Russian government.

As regards the Middle East, the deteriorating situation in this region will affect mostly the energy markets, as this region has a major influence on the global oil and gas production. The disequilibria could extend then from oil to precious metals, currencies, stocks and even new, renewable energy.

The escalating conflicts determine also an increase of global inflation, bringing uncertainty and challenging the United States Federal Reserve's agenda for interest rate reductions.

In the present globalized environment, military conflicts transcend the borders of individual countries and become international concerns.

References

Akgül-Açıkmeşe, S., & Özel, S. (2024). EU Policy towards the Israel-Palestine Conflict: The Limitations of Mitigation Strategies. *The International Spectator*, 59(1), 59–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2024.2309664>

European Council, Council of the European Union (2024), *EU Response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine*, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/>

European Union External Action (2017), *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/shared-vision-common-action-stronger-europe_en

European Union External Action (2022), *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defense*, available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-0_en

European Union External Action (2024), *The war against Ukraine and European Security*, available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/war-against-ukraine-and-european-security_en

Politico (September 24, 2024), <https://www.politico.eu/article/israel-hezbollah-war-josep-borrell-lebanon-strike-gaza-hamas/>

Tache, I. ed. (2015), *The European Union and the Challenges of the New Global Context*, Chapter One – Challenges of EU'S Foreign and Security Policy in a Rapidly Changing World, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne.