

15 JANUARY 2025



# The European pillar of NATO

What French leadership?

Thierry Tardy,  
Associate Research Fellow,  
European Security and Defence

This policy paper was prepared for the General-Directorate for International and Strategic Relations (DGRIS) of the Ministry for the Armed Forces.



## • Table of contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Summary .....   | 3         |
| <b>I. Introduction .....</b>  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>II. The European pillar of NATO: Key defining features .....</b> | <b>5</b>  |
| The virtues of NATO's European pillar .....                         | 5         |
| Semantic, political and operational limits .....                    | 6         |
| Box: The European pillar of the Alliance in official texts .....    | 7         |
| <b>III. Issues and challenges for France .....</b>                  | <b>8</b>  |
| "Strategic awakening" and the European pillar of NATO .....         | 8         |
| What French leadership? .....                                       | 9         |
| Compatibility between three levels of European defence .....        | 9         |
| No European pillar without consensus with France's partners .....   | 9         |
| French ambivalence about European defence .....                     | 10        |
| <b>IV. Recommendations .....</b>                                    | <b>10</b> |
| New leadership on NATO's European pillar .....                      | 10        |
| Figure: The three components of the European pillar of NATO .....   | 11        |
| Essential agreements on objectives and methods .....                | 12        |
| Operationalizing the European pillar .....                          | 13        |

## • Summary

The notion of “European pillar of NATO” has resurfaced in the French strategic narrative with the war in Ukraine and it takes a renewed significance with Donald Trump’s return to the White House in January 2025.

Despite its frequent use, the concept remains loosely defined. Broadly speaking, it reflects the idea of a European defence effort that complements NATO—meaning that European states are expected to assume greater responsibility for the defence of Europe, in coordination with the Atlantic Alliance.

France, however, remains relatively isolated in its support for this idea and has struggled to establish the necessary elements of its operationalisation.

In the context of the war in Ukraine, Donald Trump’s return in Washington, and leadership changes within NATO (Secretary General) and the EU (High Representative/Vice-President, Defence and Space Commissioner, European Parliament), the European pillar of NATO would benefit from initiatives aiming at:

- Broadening its definitional scope—currently centered on European action within NATO—to encompass two other levels of action that are the EU level (Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), European Defence Fund (EDF), and European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB)) and the ad hoc multilateral level;
- Reframing France’s leadership role so as to overcome prevailing mistrust, and enabling France—as Germany and the UK have already done—to take the lead on ambitious initiatives that would give substance to the European pillar;
- Building consensus around the concept with key partners—particularly Germany, the UK, and the US—and revitalizing the NATO-EU relationship to clarify the respective roles of both institutions in European defence;
- Operationalizing European pillar of NATO by:
  - Enhancing European coordination within NATO;
  - Increasing EU visibility within NATO;
  - Strengthening the European contribution to NATO operations (eFP, New Force Model, etc.);
  - Collectively developing critical capabilities;
  - Advocating for greater European representation in NATO leadership positions (logic of ‘burden sharing’ and ‘responsibility sharing’).

## I • Introduction

The idea that **Europeans – both individually and collectively – must do more for their own security and defence, is now widely accepted**. This consensus is driven by two developments: a deteriorating security environment and growing uncertainty over the reliability of American protection. Put simply, **the combined effect of Putin and Trump has made the case for European defence increasingly difficult to ignore**.

That said, **significant dissensus persists among Europeans regarding how best to structure** this European defence effort. France tends to favour European-led formats to give substance to the idea of European defence whereas others – including Germany and many frontline states facing the Russian threat – view European defence primarily through the prism of transatlantic relations and NATO's role.

Third, semantics matters. Expressions such as *European defence*, *'l'Europe de la Défense'*, *EU defence policy*, *European strategic autonomy*, or the *European pillar in/of NATO* may appear interchangeable, but they each carry distinct meanings or methods and political implications. The choice of words is far from neutral and often reflects deeper strategic preferences.

Fourth, while **France** is among the few European countries with a relatively well-defined vision of what “European defence” means – and has moved closer to NATO in the context of the war in Ukraine – it continues to **suffer from a leadership deficit**. Few of its partners share France's European-centric vision by which defence autonomy is a necessary substitute for an inevitably retreating or unreliable U.S. ally. Such lack of shared vision has significantly hampered France's ability to lead on European defence.

Finally, Donald Trump's return to the White House could prove decisive. U.S. disengagement from Europe was already underway with the strategic pivot to the Indo-Pacific. However, Trump's approach to European security – and, by extension to NATO – could compel European states to significantly revisit their defence policies. **While the withdrawal of the U.S. support** would undoubtedly pose serious risks given America's vital role in European security, **it could also represent a unique opportunity to advance a truly European defence agenda**. With the notable exception of industrial matters, French and American objectives (under Trump) may therefore even converge on several key aspects of European defence.

## II • The European pillar of NATO: Key defining features

The notion of “European pillar of NATO” has returned to the French narrative in the context of the war in Ukraine<sup>1</sup>, and takes on particular significance in that of Donald Trump’s return to the White House in January 2025.

**The European pillar of NATO remains ill-defined**, and unapproved within NATO. Schematically, it **reflects the idea of a European defence complementing NATO**. In other words, European states are to make a greater contribution to the defence of Europe, this in conjunction with NATO. The transatlantic link would therefore be based on two pillars:

- a North American pillar, consisting of the United States and Canada; and
- a European pillar, made up of European NATO member states (therefore also including the United Kingdom).

Despite the vagueness of the definition and the taboo surrounding the idea of thinking about the Atlantic Alliance in terms of two distinct pillars, the European pillar of NATO can be assimilated to the idea of European defence, provided the latter is part of the transatlantic relationship.

### I THE VIRTUES OF NATO’S EUROPEAN PILLAR

The “European pillar of NATO” has semantic and political advantages in that it addresses **four types of needs or concerns**.

Firstly, **the European pillar of NATO acknowledges NATO’s centrality** in the context of the war in Ukraine. Faced with the resurgence of an aggressive Russia threatening the security of Europe as a geographical and political space, NATO has emerged as an essential tool for protecting this space. The European pillar thus places European defence within the broader framework of the Transatlantic Alliance. The term “European pillar *in* NATO” is sometimes used, suggesting that the former is included in the latter. Such thinking has its advantages, as the inclusion of European defence in NATO is seen as imperative by many European countries, as well as by the Americans (at least until Trump comes to power in 2025). Hence the recurrent idea of “complementarity with NATO”, also inscribed in all EU treaties.

Secondly, **the European pillar of NATO can be seen as a move away from the idea of “European strategic autonomy”** (although this term continues to be used by France and, unlike the European pillar, is agreed within the EU). While the European pillar is criticized for “dividing the allies” by creating several categories of members, there is also the idea of inclusivity in the pillar and its reference to NATO, where European strategic autonomy was perceived by many as too exclusive of NATO and of the United States.

Thirdly, the notion of a European pillar of the Alliance may **reconcile the idea of European defence with that of transatlantic ties**. It should make the defence of Europe by Europeans and the defence of Europe by Americans compatible. This is why the formula is so inclusive. In principle, all those involved in the defence of the Euro-Atlantic area, including the European Union, can find their place in this formula. It will be recommended later to push this inclusiveness as far as possible, so that not only Europeans but also the European Union can play their full part in this European pillar.

---

<sup>1</sup> See the Declarations by the President of the French Republic, Bratislava (May 31, 2023), Sorbonne (April 24, 2024), Budapest (November 7, 2024), Ambassadors’ Conference (January 6, 2025).

Finally, after having been largely rejected by the Americans, the concept of a “European pillar of NATO”, mentioned in the Franco-American Roadmap of June 2024, is **a recognition by the Americans of the added value of European defence** and its contribution to efforts within NATO.<sup>2</sup>

#### I SEMANTIC, POLITICAL AND OPERATIONAL LIMITS

Despite its virtues, **the idea of a European pillar of NATO is problematic**, in terms of its semantic and operational narrowness, what it says about NATO’s primacy, and the divide it implies between European and American allies.

Firstly, the European pillar can be understood as what Europeans can do within NATO itself. The European pillar of NATO is thus strengthened if Europeans:

- spend more on defence as NATO allies;
- coordinate their positions more closely within NATO;
- further develop their military capabilities in service of NATO;
- contribute more to the Enhanced Forward Presence and the New Force Model; and
- assume more key positions within NATO institutions.

However, this vision is restrictive and cannot in itself reflect the wide range of activities or initiatives that fall within the scope of European defence. In particular, **the European pillar of NATO is *a priori* silent on the role that the European Union, or European states acting outside NATO, can play within it.**

Secondly, the idea of a European pillar of NATO **suggests a degree of subordination to NATO for any initiative taken at European level, in possible contradiction with France’s level of ambition on European autonomy.**

Similarly, the European pillar of NATO is relevant as long as the United States ensures the centrality of the Atlantic Alliance, but it **does not answer the question of European defence in the event of a partial or total American withdrawal.** Its general pertinence is therefore likely to be called into question during Donald Trump’s second term in office, or in the longer term, whatever the political color of the American administration. In other words, if the notion of “European strategic autonomy” was too Europe-centric, that of the “European pillar of NATO” is flawed by its excessive focus on NATO.

This raises the **central question** of the ultimate objective of the European pillar of NATO: **is it to strengthen European defence (because the security environment demands it) to ultimately compensate for a possible withdrawal of the United States (French approach)? or is it to strengthen NATO and the transatlantic link through greater European involvement (German approach<sup>3</sup>)?**

---

2 The Franco-American Roadmap (June 2024) states that the Presidents “reaffirmed the importance of strengthening the NATO-EU strategic partnership and promoting a stronger and more capable European defence **underpinning the European pillar of transatlantic security** that contributes positively to collective security. The United States supports European Allies’ and partners’ growing investments in military capabilities that enable our shared defence, in complementarity with NATO.”

3 The German National Security Strategy (2023) states that “The Federal Government wants to further strengthen the European pillar of the transatlantic defence community”, because “the more our European allies contribute militarily and politically to NATO, the more solid the transatlantic Alliance will be” (p.31).

**The challenge for the European pillar lies in its ability to make these two approaches compatible, e.g. to reconcile the French and German conceptions of European defence.**

Finally, the European pillar of NATO suggests that two categories of allies exist, which is problematic for many of them. And while the expression “European pillar of NATO” was taken up by the United States in the June 2024 Franco-American Roadmap, it has not been formally adopted by the Alliance itself. The term appeared in NATO’s 1991 Strategic Concept (see box *below*), but nothing since, and was not part of former Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg’s (official) vocabulary. Recent texts confine themselves to NATO’s recognition of “the value of a stronger and more capable European defence that contributes positively to transatlantic and global security and is complementary to, and interoperable with NATO”.<sup>4</sup> France’s concession to speak of a “European pillar of NATO” has not, for the time being, resulted in NATO accepting the term. Nor does the European Union use the term, although it did so in the early 90s when it referred to the Western European Union (WEU) (see box *below*).<sup>5</sup>

**BOX: The European pillar of the Alliance in official texts<sup>6</sup>**

**NATO’s 1991 Strategic Concept** (the only one to mention the European pillar)

“The development of a European security identity and defence role, reflected in the strengthening of the **European pillar within the Alliance**, will not only serve the interests of the European states but also reinforce the integrity and effectiveness of the Alliance as a whole. (§3)

[...] As the process of developing a European security identity and defence role progresses, and is reflected in the strengthening of the **European pillar within the Alliance**, the European members of the Alliance will assume a greater degree of the responsibility for the defence of Europe (§36).

[...] For the Allies concerned, collective defence arrangements will rely increasingly on multinational forces, complementing national commitments to NATO. Multinational forces demonstrate the Alliance’s resolve to maintain a credible collective defence; enhance Alliance cohesion; reinforce the transatlantic partnership and strengthen the **European pillar**”. (§53)

**Declaration on the Western European Union** of February 7, 1992 (adopted on the sidelines of the Maastricht Summit establishing the European Union)

“WEU will be developed as the defence component of the European Union and as a means to strengthen the **European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance**. To this end, it will formulate common European defence policy and carry forward its concrete implementation through the further development of its own operational role.” (§2)

4 Cf. NATO Strategic Concept 2022, §43.

5 Neither the European Council nor the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 mentions the term. Former Council President C. Michel and European Commission President U. Von der Leyen have nevertheless both mentioned it.

6 For a history of the European pillar of NATO, see T. Tardy, “Unpacking the European Pillar in NATO”, *Future Europe Journal*, Issue 5, 2024.



### III • Issues and challenges for France

#### I “STRATEGIC AWAKENING” AND THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF NATO

Our starting point is that the idea of a European pillar of NATO is not, for France, simply a matter of “national consumption”, and that it is intended to produce an effect at European and transatlantic level.

This said, France occupies a unique position in the debate on the European pillar, as it supports a project of autonomization of European defence while maintaining an ambivalent stance towards NATO. The challenge is to reconcile these two positions. This is to be achieved by taking the two following paths simultaneously:

- a more assertive (more sincere?) recognition of NATO’s now irreplaceable role in European defence, even in the context of Donald Trump’s return to the White House;
- closer ties with France’s partners (primarily Germany) on the articulation between national policies, the role of NATO and the role of the European Union.

The idea that France could, due to its relative military superiority and the current strategic context, impose its vision of European defence on its European partners will not have the desired effect. This is borne out by the 26 years that have elapsed since the launch of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in 1998.

Against this backdrop, Donald Trump’s rise to power may provide fertile ground for French ideas, as it could mean an increased need for Europeans to shoulder a greater share of their own defence. This is particularly true if Europeans are to contribute to the implementation of a possible ceasefire in Ukraine. However, several elements need to be pointed out:

- the “strategic awakening” that France is calling for<sup>7</sup> will continue to depend on Europeans’ assessment of the combination between the nature of the threat (Putin’s Russia) and the posture of the United States. If one or the other becomes less worrying (for example, in the event of a ceasefire in Ukraine), many European states will be tempted to return to their previous posture;
- the fact that a possible strategic awakening means a rapprochement of Europeans around their necessary autonomy, particularly towards the United States, is not the most likely development. For many European states, the transatlantic link, and therefore NATO, will remain two essential beacons of their defence policy;
- in the defence industry, the Trump administration is likely to prove hostile to the development of the EDTIB, since it could have a negative impact on European purchases of American armaments (the pressure exerted by the Biden administration in the context of the European Defence Industrial Program (EDIP) will only increase under the Trump administration).

---

<sup>7</sup> As one French official put it; interview, 9 January 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Speech by the President of the French Republic at the European Political Community (EPC) Summit, Nov. 7, 2024.



## I WHAT FRENCH LEADERSHIP?

The weak French leadership described above is reflected in France's relative absence from any European projects it might lead. While the UK has set up the *Joint Expeditionary Force* (JEF, 2014) and Germany has created coalitions through the *Framework Nation Concept* (FNC, 2013) and, more recently, the *European Sky Shield Initiative* (ESSI, 2024), France has failed to bring such projects to fruition.

The European Intervention Initiative (EII) launched by France in 2017 contained this idea of leadership for a project bringing together European states, including the UK, for operational purposes. But the paradigm shift of recent years (the situation in Russia/Ukraine and France's withdrawal from Africa) has relegated the EII to the background. The ELSA (*European Long-Range Strike Approach*) project provides another example of possible French leadership, albeit relatively narrow in scope. However, the emergence of a European defence would be facilitated by the implementation of projects under French leadership, as laboratories for a more ambitious project. This would enable France to move from a logic of "saying" to a logic of "doing", i.e. operationalizing the European pillar of NATO.

## I COMPATIBILITY BETWEEN THREE LEVELS OF EUROPEAN DEFENCE

In Europe, more so than on other continents, defence policies combine national and institutional frameworks, in this case NATO and the European Union. These frameworks are supplemented by *ad hoc* arrangements between states, such as the EII. **These three levels - national, institutional and ad hoc - are of equal importance and represent, separately and in coordination, the building blocks of the European pillar of NATO** (see diagram *below*).

The challenge for France is to ensure the compatibility of these three levels, and to be pragmatic about how they can be articulated. In particular, the comparative advantages of NATO in the field of defence, of the European Union in the broader field of security, and of *ad hoc* multilateralism in terms of flexibility, must be taken into account in the definition and operationalization of the European pillar of NATO.

## I NO EUROPEAN PILLAR WITHOUT CONSENSUS WITH FRANCE'S PARTNERS

The European pillar of NATO is just one element in a strategic debate involving many players. Its emergence depends on at least three levels of agreement:

- between France and Germany on the one hand, and France and the UK on the other;
- between Europeans and Americans, on the very idea of a European pillar, and on what it means in terms of European empowerment, particularly in the industrial field;
- between NATO and the EU, notably around the EU's role in an European pillar of NATO.

None of France's partners is *a priori* well disposed towards the European pillar (Germany nevertheless uses the term), but **many of them now recognize that Europeans must play a greater role in the defence of the European continent, including among themselves** (like Poland, for example). This suggests that progress is possible, and that the European pillar as a concept (theological debate) should not be an obstacle to such progress.

## I FRENCH AMBIVALENCE ABOUT EUROPEAN DEFENCE

France's position towards NATO is ambivalent, while its position towards the European Union is a mixture of ambition and skepticism. The idea of a full conversion of France to NATO or the EU (in the field of defence) does not correspond to the situation of a country that **continues to think in largely national terms**. Added to this is a French culture that is not one of inclusiveness vis-à-vis France's partners and may even reflect a superiority complex.

This posture creates **mistrust among France's partners and partly explains France's relative isolation**. For any initiative on European defence, including the European pillar of NATO, is viewed with suspicion by France's allies. As a token is the debate on the EDTIB, in which France is pushing for greater European integration, but is widely perceived as serving the interests of its national defence industry alone. The trust deficit would also play against France in any debate on a hypothetical nuclear deterrence debate at the European level.

## IV • Recommendations

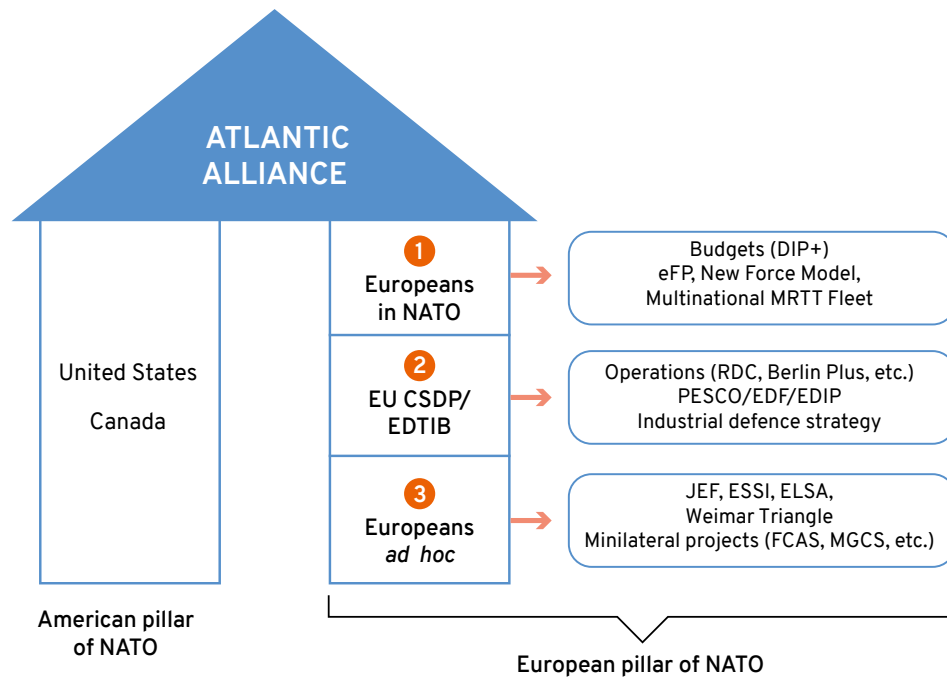
Three levels of recommendations are presented below.

### I NEW LEADERSHIP ON NATO'S EUROPEAN PILLAR

- **Recommendation #1.** The notion of a European pillar of NATO must be **presented as as inclusive and broad as possible** (cf. diagram *below*), so that all three levels of defence (national, institutionalized multilateral (EU and NATO) and *ad hoc* multilateral) can be integrated into it. Neither the exclusionary version of “strategic autonomy”, nor the restrictive one of a pillar centered on NATO alone, will lead to the emergence of a European defence that meets the approval of the greatest number of European states. For France, this means presenting the European pillar of NATO as articulated on three levels:
  - What Europeans are doing within NATO
  - What Europeans do within the European Union
  - What Europeans do on an *ad hoc* basis

The narrative of CSDP and EDTIB strengthening rather than weakening the transatlantic link is consistent with this multi-level approach. The broad approach also echoes the idea expressed in the **1991 NATO Strategic Concept** that “**The development of a European security identity and defence role, reflected in the strengthening of the European pillar within the Alliance, will not only serve the interests of the European states but also reinforce the integrity and effectiveness of the Alliance as a whole.**” (§2)

**FIGURE:** The three components of the European pillar of NATO



- **Recommendation #2.** The narrative on the European pillar will be all the stronger and more convincing as it draws on elements that bring Europeans closer together, such as the existence of common threats and the structural weakness of Europeans. The prospect of a complete American withdrawal is not one of the elements that bring Europeans together, as many of them are likely to continue, even during Donald Trump’s term, to make their relationship with the United States a central axis of their defence policy. Focus therefore needs to be placed on the nature of the threats and a number of shared interests, rather than on the nature of power in Washington.
- **Recommendation #3.** In a context of chronic suspicion of France on the part of its partners, a special effort must be made to build trust. This requires a less ambivalent narrative with regard to NATO (the idea of “brain death” is counterproductive) and a more assertive view of the complementarity between European defence and transatlantic ties. In the industrial sphere, France needs to work to defuse the mistrust of its partners, by avoiding, for example, to present the EDTIB as an “extraordinary opportunity” for France, for its standards, and for its Rafales.<sup>9</sup>
- **Recommendation #4.** In the context of European support for Ukraine and a possible American withdrawal from Europe, France should identify one or more large-scale projects for which it would become the leader, along the lines of the British JEF or the German FNC. Such a project must be sufficiently inclusive (with regard to the British, for example) to give substance to the idea of a European

<sup>9</sup> The French President’s speech on Europe (Sorbonne, April 24, 2024), for example, stated that “The aim of a European defence industrial strategy is to produce more quickly, in greater quantities, in Europe. Also, for those of us who have a strong defence industry, this is an extraordinary opportunity because we can also, if we successfully organize our efforts, push our standards. And this is what we have done in recent years with the Rafale aircraft”.

pillar of NATO. Could a European Intervention Initiative 2.0 be one such project?

- **Recommendation #5.** To reduce French skepticism about NATO and the EU, **French officers should be made more aware of the two organizations.** This can be achieved through training courses on European defence, NATO and CSDP in the appropriate training institutions (Military academies, War College, Senior-level courses (CHEM/IHEDN), etc.), and by raising the profile of positions filled by French officials within both organizations. Institutions such as the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) and the NATO Defence College can also be targeted to raise awareness of the idea of European defence *by Europeans*.

## I ESSENTIAL AGREEMENTS ON OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

- **Recommendation #6.** The idea of a European pillar of NATO must be the subject of an **agreement between France and Germany** on what it covers. Short of such an agreement, no tangible progress can emerge. **The inclusion of Poland** (which presides over the EU Council in the first half of 2025), notably through the Weimar Triangle, must be encouraged. In this process, the focus should be on the nature of the security context, rather than on the need to think about an alternative to NATO, which is unacceptable to the Germans.
- **Recommendation #7.** Similarly, the **British must be included** in discussions, within NATO of course, but also outside. The idea of projects under French leadership, possibly outside the EU, should allow for such inclusion (as the EII did). The process of relaunching the Lancaster House Agreement and negotiating an EU-UK security agreement offers an opportunity, and one can also work on the fact that **all the efforts made during the Cold War on the idea of Eurogroup** (and *Euro-dinners, Euro-teas, and European Caucus*) within NATO were **British-inspired** (and excluded the French!).
- **Recommendation #8.** A third level of partnership concerns the United States. The aim here is to **capitalize on American recognition of the “European pillar of NATO” in the June 2024 Franco-American Roadmap**, by emphasizing to the Trump administration the French willingness to push for greater European accountability, and the fact that the **European pillar of NATO represents a form of burden-sharing**. Furthermore, given US interests in the defence industry and the multi-sector nature of transatlantic relations, any agreement with the United States must reflect this multi-sector nature (cf. Draghi Report on Competitiveness). This means that an agreement on the defence industry cannot be reached independently from the discussions on trade, for example. The **security dialogue between the EU and the U.S.** will thus have to be strengthened and institutionalized.
- **Recommendation #9.** The fourth level of partnership concerns the relationship between the EU and NATO, the coherence of which is a prerequisite for the advent of a European pillar of NATO. In the complicated context of Turkey’s recurrent opposition to a formalized EU-NATO relationship, lessons of the two institutions’ involvement in the war in Ukraine should be drawn to:
  - **Clarify the division of tasks between the two organizations on the basis of their comparative advantages**, and thus affirm the complementary nature of European security and the transatlantic link.
  - Develop coordination between the *NATO Defence Planning Process* and the EU Capability Development Plan to give credibility to the idea of compatibility between European defence and NATO.
  - Give Turkey guarantees (or at least not pretending it’s out of the game) to

get political cooperation going again (currently stalled); could the Berlin Plus Agreement 2.0 offer a framework for cooperation?

- Work towards NATO’s recognition of EU’s contribution in terms of
  - capability development (via Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), for example);
  - **contribution to European security** in the broadest sense (internal security, the fight against terrorism, energy security, sanctions against Russia, reconstruction of Ukraine, financial instruments, etc.).

The new NATO Secretary General Marc Rutte may be more open to the idea of a European pillar of NATO, and the use of the term (perhaps in reference to the 1991 NATO Strategic Concept) would help raise its profile.

## I OPERATIONALIZING THE EUROPEAN PILLAR

The European pillar of NATO needs to be given substance and credibility through concrete action, enabling Europeans to move from *burden-sharing* to *responsibility-sharing*.

- **Recommendation #10. Coordination of Europeans within NATO** around a “European Quint” or “Eurogroup” made up of (at least) France, the UK, Germany, Italy and Poland, and **greater EU visibility at NATO** (role of rotating presidencies, HR/VP and Defence Commissioner presentations to the North Atlantic Council, non-paper presentations by EU members, etc.). Burden-sharing efforts must also lead to greater demands for shared responsibility for Europeans within NATO institutions (senior civilian and military posts, SACEUR?).
- **Recommendation #11.** Revise the PESCO binding commitments to make them more visible and more binding (in order to create “peer pressure”), particularly in terms of:
  - **defence spending** (consideration of a *defence pledge* similar to that of NATO; the PESCO binding commitments and the EDA *benchmarks* speak only of collective objectives; the definition of collective investment objectives by the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) could be an opportunity for the EU and its member states to formalize broader (and more qualitative) objectives<sup>10</sup>)
  - **contributions** by EU states that are members of NATO **to operations such as the Enhanced Forward Presence and the New Force Model** (up to a certain percentage → three-quarters?)
- **Recommendation #12.** A special effort must be made by Europeans (at all three levels of European defence, and therefore also by the European Union) **to develop capabilities where gaps have been identified**, i.e. where dependence on the United States is the strongest.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, this is the best way to strengthen the European pillar.

---

<sup>10</sup> An article published in *Foreign Affairs* (M. Droin, S. Monaghan, J. Townsend, ‘NATO’s Missing Pillar’, June 2024) proposes the introduction of a country rating system similar to that used in the financial sector.

<sup>11</sup> In a *Defence News* article (“How Europe can build its defence while maintaining US support”, February 2024) H. Binnendijk, D.S. Hamilton and A. Vershbow suggest that Europeans produce at least 50% of strategic enablers (quoted in C. Grand, “Defending Europe with less America”, ECFR, July 2024).

- **Recommendation #13.** In the context of the appointment of a Commissioner for Defence and Space (Andrius Kubilius), and the transition of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Defence (SEDE) to the status of a fully-fledged Committee, **efforts must be pursued to assert the EU as a player in European defence**, notably by **strengthening its financial capacities** (via a loan, the issue of Eurobonds, the revision of EIB financing rules, etc.) and **implementing of the Industrial Defence Strategy**, in line with the requirements of support for Ukraine.

Managing Editor: Sylvie Matelly • The document may be reproduced in part or in full on the dual condition that its meaning is not distorted and that the source is mentioned • The views expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher • The Jacques Delors Institute cannot be held responsible for the use which any third party may make of the document • Original version • Edited by Marjolaine Bergonnier • © Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute

#### Institut Jacques Delors

Penser l'Europe • Thinking Europe • Europa Denken  
18 rue de Londres 75009 Paris, France • [www.delorsinstitute.eu](http://www.delorsinstitute.eu)  
T +33 (0)1 44 58 97 97 • [info@delorsinstitute.eu](mailto:info@delorsinstitute.eu)



This project is funded by the European Commission's Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) under project number 101104850 - IJD 2025.