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DEFENCE POLICIES IN EUROPE: A HISTORICAL APPRAISAL

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Abstract
This paper aims to provide a long-term historical perspective on the development of defence policies in Europe. It first presents the Westphalian system that structured inter-state relations from the end of the Thirty Years' War (1648) to the end of the Second World War (1945). The Cold War period is then presented. This is followed by the post-Cold War period, the turning point in 2007-2008, the war in Ukraine and the American shift. This allows us to present the beginnings of a European response and to draw some conclusions.
Keywords: *European Union; Common Security and Defence Policy; NATO; international system; history*
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1. WESTPHALIAN SYSTEM

The Westphalian system, named after the most important peace treaty to end the Thirty Years' War in 1648, recognises the historic importance of the role of states in Europe. They were the holders of sovereignty, and from then on nothing surpassed them at international level. The Pope and the Emperor were politically relegated and could no longer oppose them. State defence policies are regalian policies par excellence. Indeed, external and internal security, diplomacy, justice, currency and taxation lie at the heart of state sovereignty and are not normally shared.

In the history of the European continent, certain states have made hegemonic claims. These include the Spain of Charles V and Philip II (1516-1598), the France of Louis XIV (1643-1715) and then Napoleon Bonaparte (1799-1815), and the Germany of William II (1888-1918) and then Adolf Hitler (1933-1945). These ambitions have always been thwarted. This shows the historical importance of the balance of power system, where coalitions are

formed to counter a potential hegemon. This system of balance worked best when international politics was a matter for sovereigns and peoples were kept out of the equation. In other words, with professional armies and before the emergence of nation states. In this constellation, past alliances do not prejudge future ones. A key moment, for example, was when Louis XV's France and Maria Theresa's Austria sealed their alliance (1756).

The French Revolution represented an upheaval for the continent. One nation, France, took up arms in 1792. New values – liberty, equality and the rights of peoples – burst onto the international scene. Conflicts between powers became virtually uninterrupted for a generation. The Congress of Vienna, which ended in 1815, turned the page on the Napoleonic era. A system of directories by the great powers (Austria, France, Prussia, Russia and the United Kingdom) and a system of international law could not be established. A system of equilibrium prevailed once again.

The period 1815-1914 proved to be one of the most peaceful in European history, except for the sub-period between 1854 and 1871, which was characterised by five wars involving the great powers. This was the era of nationalities and Italian and German unification. The transition was towards an era of nationalism. It was also a time of rapid industrialisation and major technological developments in armaments. The idea developed that a war could be won by swift, even lightning, action. The German Schlieffen plan, dating back to 1905, was emblematic of this. The debate about the primacy of the sword or the shield is eternal in the history of warfare. Decision-makers then placed themselves in the perspective of a cult of the offensive. Nationalism was exacerbated before the First World War. Two alliances that had become rigid, the Triple Entente of France, the United Kingdom and Russia on the one hand, and the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy on the other, stood face to face. Leadership was also weak and disappointing. The Sarajevo attack, which led to the assassination of the Crown Prince of Austria-Hungary, Franz Ferdinand, and his wife by a Serbian nationalist on 28 June 1914 was just the spark that ignited the fuse. Through the interplay of alliances, a large part of Europe found itself at war within a matter of weeks. Europe and the world entered the era of total war. The societies of the countries at war were fully mobilised. The economy and society had to place themselves at the service of the war effort (Droz, 1973; Lejeune, 1992; Van Evera, 1984).

The major economic interdependencies could not prevent war in Europe in 1914. In the history of human societies, we are forced to note the primacy of the political and military over the economic, except sometimes during historical parentheses that may last a few decades. To move beyond the natural state of war between human beings, a given area – in this case Europe, or indeed the whole world – would have to live under a regime of true democracy. We are therefore talking about democratic states united not only by economic

interdependence, but above all by a community of values and the rule of law. One lesson of history seems to be that true democracies do not go to war with each other. But a democracy may well wage war and be imperialist, whether we look at the history of France, the United Kingdom or the United States.

Inter-state relations therefore need to be civilised by bringing in supranational law and institutions, in other words federal elements. Simple intergovernmental cooperation is obviously better than no cooperation, but it is not powerful enough to tame states at certain crucial moments. Europe has seen and experienced so much violence and misfortune in the course of its history. The first part of the twentieth century was particularly bloody. The historic low point was reached in 1945 at the end of the Second World War, with a battered and divided Europe (Davies, 1997; Duroselle, 1993b; Grin, 2022; Judt, 2007; Merriman, 1996; Rich, 1992).

2. COLD WAR PERIOD

The post-Second World War international order was characterised by the emergence of two antagonistic blocs: East and West. Their antagonism was ideological, as well as political, economic and social. Europe was torn apart by the Iron Curtain and the Cold War. The presence of nuclear weapons in both blocs from 1949 onwards changed the global strategic landscape forever. Two antagonistic military alliances structured the continent: the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact. Only a few European countries remained neutral or non-aligned. During this period, the defence policies of European countries were supranationalised as soon as they joined one of the two alliances. This was because two states exercised domination within their respective alliances: the United States and the Soviet Union. But their domination was of a different nature: consented and enlightened in the West, imposed and brutal in the East (Rothschild, 1993; Schöpflin, 1993; Wandycz, 1992).

In the West, a crucial question of this historic period was whether Europeans should form the European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance in a dispersed fashion, state by state, or in a coordinated way. The European Defence Community (EDC) project, proposed by France in 1950 based on an idea by Jean Monnet and torpedoed by that same country in 1954, represented an attempt at European coordination based on supranational principles. However, the EDC was not conceived outside the transatlantic framework. During the rest of the Cold War, nothing could replace the stillborn EDC. This was despite the very in-depth reflections and proposals to begin Europeanising defence issues put forward by Jean Monnet and his Action Committee for the United States of Europe in the 1960s. In fact, the national, even nationalistic, visions of the United States, the United Kingdom and France prevented this from happening. In this context, a country like the Federal Republic of Germany valued above all the American guarantee of security (Grin, 2011). Apart from France, which developed a defence

policy independent of the United States and acquired nuclear weapons in 1964, the other Western countries fell into a kind of indolence. They accepted the American protectorate but were reluctant to invest as much as the US in their defence. There were already American complaints in the 1960s that Europeans were not shouldering their share of the transatlantic defence burden (Dunbabin, 1994; Duroselle, 1993a; Trachtenberg, 1999; Young, 1996).

3. AFTER THE COLD WAR

The end of the Cold War and the historic division of the European continent between 1989 and 1991 seems to have opened a new era of possibilities. With the notable exception of France, however, European countries did not want to risk American disinvestment in European security. They like this historically benevolent and generous protector, far enough away not to give the impression that it controls the destiny of Europeans and close enough not to run the risk of seeing it replaced by another hegemon, this time a European one. The United States at the time, under the administration of President George H.W. Bush and still scalded by the historical experiences of the twentieth century, did not want to withdraw from Europe for fear of having to return in the event of another catastrophe (Grin, 2024a).

The defunct Soviet Union had been sufficiently harsh, domineering and exploitative for the former Warsaw Pact countries to dream only of joining the benchmark Western institutions of NATO and the European Community, which became the European Union in 1993. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe joined NATO in waves, as a guarantee of their future security, and the EU, as a guarantee of their future prosperity and their return to the great European family. As during the Cold War, the defence of Europe remained both transatlantic and national. The Russian bear was now dormant and no longer frightening in the short term, but the transatlantic security guarantee was seen as the best possible life insurance policy.

The French vision promoting the development of an autonomous European defence was not being heard. The Maastricht Treaty, which came into force in 1993, admittedly launched a Common Foreign and Security Policy, the CFSP. But it did so without appropriate institutions and without a hint of supranationality. Following the Maastricht Treaty and the subsequent ones (Amsterdam, Nice, Lisbon), the European Union developed its CFSP. Institutions and agencies were set up around the High Representative (a post created in 1999), in particular committees within the Council (Political and Security Committee, Military Committee), the European Defence Agency and the European External Action Service, inaugurated in 2011 and reporting neither strictly to the Council nor to the Commission. The successive High Representatives are Javier Solana (1999-2009), Catherine Ashton (2009-2014),

Federica Mogherini (2014-2019), Josep Borrell (2019-2024) and Kaja Kallas since 2024 (Grin, 2025).

A common strategic vision was sought through successive documents, from the 2003 European Security Strategy to the 2022 Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (Council of the European Union, 2009b; European Union, 2016; European Union, 2022). Low-intensity external operations were launched in 2003. There have been almost 40 to date. A permanent structured cooperation was set up in 2017 to promote cooperation leading to the development of military capabilities (Verdes, 2025). The European Union's security action has provided added value for its Member States and for the security of Europe and the world in areas that are admittedly concrete but nonetheless limited. The Union has acted as an intergovernmental forum for cooperation, the mutual taming of military forces, the beginnings of greater convergence in strategic matters, limited industrial policy actions and low-intensity peacekeeping operations in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. However, NATO has stayed the ultimate insurance policy for Europeans. Genuine defence remains both national and transatlantic. The European level cannot really emerge, as if smothered between the two dimensions that frame it.

4. 2007-2008 INFLECTION POINT AND WAR IN UKRAINE

The inflection points in the European security order, which was highly significant but underestimated at the time, came in 2007-2008 with Russian President Vladimir Putin's vindictive and revisionist speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007 and, the following year, the war in Georgia (Fried and Volker, 2022). Russian imperialism was back, based on historical revanchism. From 2008 onwards, Europe's security began to crumble crisis by crisis. The beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, sensing that it was tipping over to the West, began in earnest in 2014 with the seizure of Crimea and the start of unrecognised military operations in eastern Ukraine. From then on, European states began to spend more on their defence, albeit modestly at first. At the same time, Russia was only moderately sanctioned by the Europeans and the Americans. The Minsk I and II agreements, signed in 2014 and 2015, proved futile in the face of Russia's bad faith (Kim, 2024).

The Russian escalation against Ukraine in 2022, with the all-out aggression launched on 24 February to bring about regime change in Kyiv, was a shock for Europeans. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called it a "change of era". The first high-intensity inter-state war has hit the European continent since 1945. This is against international law, against the free will of a sovereign state on the continent and its people, namely Ukraine, but also against humanity and against the rationale that all human beings on this planet should be united against possible existential threats, whether we think of global warming, the accelerating

loss of biodiversity, new pandemics, the nuclear risk or the threats of an artificial intelligence that could get out of control (Grin, 2023; Grin, 2024b).

5. AMERICAN TILT

In 2022, Europe was taking a great leap backwards by almost 80 years. But the new factor that calls into question many things that Europeans took for granted is the change in international politics initiated in the United States by the Trump II administration coming to power on 20 January 2025. Since then, presidential decrees and shock statements have been flying thick and fast. Behind a fog of communication, no doubt intended to provoke a stupefaction effect, it is hard to discern what exactly American policy towards Europe will be.

We have known since the Obama administration that the USA is more aware of the risk of global overstretch and wants to pivot towards Asia, with China seen as the main source of future challenges and threats. It is always dangerous for the world to experience a shift towards a potential new hegemon, and, in any case, the United States does not seem ready to see itself supplanted by China. Like tectonic plates colliding, these historic turning points are often sources of conflict. The last tipping point, between the British Empire and the United States, was peaceful because of the cultural and political affinities between the two Anglo-Saxon entities. But things look set to be different this time.

The Trump administration has reinforced the imperialist, mercantilist and transactional features of American policy and its vision of the world. Yesterday's allies often seem to be treated less well than their declared enemies. Europeans are being urged to take matters into their own hands and spend more on their own defence. But it is not yet clear whether the United States intends to draw a definitive line under the Atlantic Alliance. The next steps could be the abandonment of Ukraine and the disengagement of military forces from the European continent. In any case, the damage has been done in the sense that the American guarantee of security for the continental countries belonging to NATO, based on the famous Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, is no longer guaranteed. For the record, here is what this key article says (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 1949):

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.

The countries of the Eastern Front, on the front line of the Russian imperialist threat, are cruelly aware of the American mortgage. Germany, too, is seriously shaken. Europeans have been dumbfounded since 20 January 2025. The prevailing desire on the continent to continue to support Ukraine, a candidate country for membership of the European Union since June 2022, remains strong despite growing opposition. But will the Europeans really be able to make up for America's withdrawal? And we know the vigour of Russian destabilisation operations, including interference in the democratic processes of European states and hybrid warfare cyber operations.

6. THE START OF A EUROPEAN RESPONSE

National commitments to increase defence spending are accelerating, particularly in the Baltic States, Poland and Germany. Using data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), our calculations show that the evolution of military spending in the 27 current Member States of the European Union between 2007 and 2024 is as follows in Table 1(Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2025a):

Table 1. The evolution of military spending in the 27 current EU Member States

Year	Military expenditure (in billions of US dollars at current prices and exchange rates)	Military spending (in billions of constant 2023 US dollars)	Index based on constant dollars (2024 = 100)
2007	212	228	64
2008	237	230	64
2009	226	232	65
2010	214	225	63
2011	222	217	61
2012	206	213	59
2013	207	206	58
2014	207	205	57
2015	178	211	59
2016	183	218	61
2017	194	225	63
2018	215	234	65
2019	217	247	69
2020	238	264	74
2021	262	274	77
2022	260	283	79
2023	307	307	86
2024	370	358	100

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2025a

It is best to use the constant dollar figures in the third column. It should be noted that the trough in military spending was reached in 2014, and that an upward break occurred in 2019. According to the announced intentions of the Member States, military spending is set to rise sharply over the next ten years (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 2025). To date, the 27 national armies of the EU Member States total 1.5 million men (Da Silva and Verdes, 2025).

SIPRI estimates global military spending for 2024 at 2,718 billion dollars, an increase in real terms of 9.4% compared with 2023. This represents 2.5% of world GDP. The upward trend in spending has been uninterrupted since 2015. Russia is spending $149 billion on defence, 38% more than in 2023 and twice as much as in 2015. This figure represents 7.1% of Russian GDP and 19% of all public spending. Ukraine, a sovereign state under attack from Russia, has military spending of $65 billion, 34% of its gross domestic product and the highest military burden in the world. Military spending by NATO countries totals 1,506 billion dollars, or 55% of global military spending. That is ten times more than Russia. 18 out of 32 countries have reached the target of 2% of GDP set in 2004. The United States has military spending of 997 billion dollars, i.e. 66% of total NATO spending and 37% of world military spending. The 30 European members of NATO spend 454 billion dollars. As we saw above, the EU Member States spend 370 billion dollars, i.e. 14% of world spending, two and a half times more than Russia and more than China. China's spending reaches 314 billion dollars after three decades of consecutive increases (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2025b).

With the "Readiness 2030" programme announced in 2025, flanking measures are being taken at EU level, including in particular the SAFE initiative to the tune of 150 billion euros in joint borrowing, but in the form of loans rather than individual grants, as well as a relaxation of the budgetary rules to which the Member States are subject and the mobilisation of the European Investment Bank. In all, we are talking about a package worth 800 billion euros. Instruments are being created to strengthen the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) and procure critical weapons in short supply, such as missiles, drones, artillery systems, cyber protection instruments and space tools (European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2025).

Since 1 December 2024, the new post of Commissioner for Defence and Space has been filled within the European Commission by the Lithuanian Andrius Kubilius. The EU institutions base their analysis on the fact that the European states have five years, until 2030, to massively rearm and eliminate their security shortcomings, because it is at this point that the Russian threat of aggression of a new country is considered realistic (European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2025). In the meantime, however, the Europeans must not allow Ukraine to collapse or be

nibbled away at an accelerated pace. This has not been the case so far, but American aid is still available. This was lacking for six months in 2023-2024, which had serious consequences on the ground. Ukraine has become a leading producer of certain weapons, including drones, and has acquired first-rate industrial and military experience; it has much to offer the rest of Europe if the latter remains loyal to it (Grin, 2023; Grin, 2024b).

We are also witnessing the emergence of a coalition of the willing towards Ukraine, made up of 31 States and led by major European countries that want to continue to support Ukraine: France, the United Kingdom, Germany and Poland. The Weimar+ group, also created in 2025, represents a European diplomatic and geopolitical alliance aimed at promoting support for Ukraine and European sovereignty in the face of the Russian threat and the risk of American disengagement. In terms of members, the European Commission joins France, the UK, Germany, Poland, Italy and Spain. In other words, the UK joins the five main EU Member States and the European Commission.

Despite the very high level of popular support for the Union's Common Security and Defence Policy, reaching a record 81% in 2025 (European Union, 2025b), the EU still appears too weak in several respects to take over the place partly vacated by the United States: it does not include the United Kingdom, which is a first-rate military power and indispensable in this area, or Turkey for that matter. Its action extends to the broad economic spheres of the internal market and industrial policy applied to the EDTIB. When it comes to defence, it remains intergovernmental (Grin, 2025). Hungary does not pull the same strings as its partners, and they constantly have to negotiate with it, as when renewing sanctions against Russia, which have to be unanimously adopted every six months. Other countries, such as Slovakia, are critical of the support for Ukraine. Many national elections have become tests of European resolve, which can stumble at any moment. It must be said: the European Union remains structurally too sensitive to policy changes in national capitals. Because of its largely intergovernmental nature in matters of sovereignty, it is not sufficiently immune to political changes at national level. This is why it seems to be partly bypassed by new *ad hoc* cooperation structures as mentioned above.

Despite the absorption of the Western European Union (WEU) in 2011, which was in the shadow of NATO the sleeping beauty of European defence during the Cold War, the EU cannot, or at least not yet, aspire to the establishment of a true European defence. European defence has made progress, as mentioned earlier. But the defence of Europe, in other words the ultimate guarantee of the security of the territory, the population and vital interests, is something much more demanding. That is why the discussions that are likely to follow on the European dimension of France's nuclear deterrent will be so important.

Article 42(2) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, has read as follows (European Union, 2025a):

The common security and defence policy shall include the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy. This will lead to a common defence, when the European Council, acting unanimously, so decides. It shall in that case recommend to the Member States the adoption of such a decision in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements.

The policy of the Union in accordance with this Section shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and shall respect the obligations of certain Member States, which see their common defence realised in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), under the North Atlantic Treaty and be compatible with the common security and defence policy established within that framework.

We are struck by the apparent voluntarism of the legal text, even though it recalls that some Member States of the Union are neutral or non-aligned (currently Austria, Cyprus, Ireland and Malta) and that the others belong to NATO (currently 23 of the 27 EU Member States).

Mutual assistance and solidarity clauses have also been in place since 2009. The first is found in Article 42(7) of the TEU and reads as follows (European Union, 2025a):

If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States.

Commitments and cooperation in this area shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation.

The solidarity clause is set out in Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and reads as follows (European Union, 2012):

The Union and its Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster. The Union shall mobilise all the instruments at its disposal, including the military resources made available by the Member States […].

At its meeting on 18 and 19 June 2009, the European Council gave Ireland guarantees to help ratify the Treaty of Lisbon in a second popular vote - which was won. It states in particular (Council of the European Union, 2009a):

It will be for Member States - including Ireland, acting in a spirit of solidarity and without prejudice to its traditional policy of military neutrality - to determine the nature of aid or assistance to be provided to a Member State which is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of armed aggression on its territory.

The Treaty of Lisbon does not provide for the creation of a European army or for conscription to any military formation.

Despite popular support for the Common Security and Defence Policy, the European Union does not have, or at least not yet has, the political structure and associated popular legitimacy to become a fully-fledged political union that would take decisions of an existential nature with sufficient legitimacy, affecting matters of life and death through armed conflict.

However, the Union has progressed through crises. In particular, there was the health crisis of 2020-2022 linked to Covid-19, a crisis without historical precedent for a century. In this context, its action usefully complemented that of the Member States. The latter can no longer act alone in the event of a systemic threat, as we saw with the coronavirus, and as we see today with the great fear linked to the joint Russian American double challenge (Grin, 2020). But this does not mean that the EU has acquired competence, even shared with the Member States, in matters of public health or defence. From the point of view of the reality of the challenges, Europe is undoubtedly a community with a shared destiny, but some national decision-makers are slow to fully recognise this fact.

Europe will undoubtedly be investing ever more in its defence in the future, which raises a number of difficulties. Firstly, there is the butter-and-cannon dilemma. Unless taxes can be increased, more money for defence means less for social and cohesion policies. There is a risk of undermining the hard-won social balance in some countries. Additional debt might appear to be a way out. But some countries, including Italy, France and Spain, with debt-to-GDP ratios of 135%, 113% and 102% respectively, are already in a difficult financial situation and risk finding themselves at the mercy of negative assessments by the financial markets (Bachler, 2025).

The "bang for the buck" effect, i.e. the return on investment from military spending, represents a second difficulty. If the European states do not coordinate their production and procurement of military equipment, or its deployment, they will miss out on economies of scale and the best technological acquisitions (Burilkov and Wolff, 2025). If they buy American, as they still do for more than 60% of their military purchases, they will maintain a toxic dependence on the USA (Draghi, 2024). Moreover, it is not clear whether Donald Trump's United States is really prepared to accept that a military disconnection with Europe means the end of major military purchases by the old continent. The capacity of the US administration to cause harm and threaten individual European countries is undoubtedly considerable.

Thirdly, Vladimir Putin will of course not be in power in Russia forever. But there is nothing to suggest that his successors will not continue his aggressive and imperialist policy, with substantial human and financial resources. A fundamental question is: what is the true state of the Russian economy? Russia, which has switched to a war economy, certainly does not have unlimited resources to devote to extending its territory and influence. Moreover, it recently suffered a heavy setback in the Middle East and there is

nothing to suggest that the future of its Iranian and North Korean allies will be bright. The fundamental question is to what extent China will support Russia, and with what ambitions to take effective control of the latter.

7. THE FUTURE IN QUESTION

Clearly, European countries cannot accept Russian imperialism, and they must counter it. At the same time, as long as there is a schism between Russia and its affiliates on the one hand, and the rest of the continent on the other, any European peace will ultimately be no more than a peace of equilibrium, which may well last, but is inherently fragile, especially as hybrid warfare operations are deployed.

Genuine and lasting peace in Europe would require three conditions: a change of regime in Moscow, the maintenance or even strengthening of the European unity embodied today by the EU, and finally a genuine outstretched hand from the EU to the new Russia when the time comes. But we seem to be a long way from that, and every day that the war in Ukraine drags on, the future historic reconciliation of the continent becomes more difficult to achieve. Tomorrow, just as in the aftermath of the Second World War, Europe will need its future Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman and Konrad Adenauer. One might even go so far as to say that this European anchorage would be the best chance for the Russia of tomorrow to exist in the service of its people.

Will Europe in the years ahead be able to develop a truly integrated defence policy that goes beyond the coalitions of the willing that are typical of intergovernmentalism? It seems clear that the EU can offer its Member States a strengthened defence industrial and technological base and a reduction in the financial constraints they face. But, in the context of the United States' disengagement from and even hostility towards Europe, will this be enough without tackling head-on the issue of the Union's full political federalisation? If this accelerated federalisation were to take place, it is hard to imagine that it would involve all the current EU Member States. More differentiation between them would be likely. The Westphalian system seems to have run out of steam in Europe, but it is hard to see its successor in the form of a fully-fledged European federation. The quote by the Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci seems to apply perfectly: "*The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters*" (Boniface, 2025). There is no doubt that Europe's interstate structures will continue to undergo profound changes in the years and decades to come. May peace prevails, respecting the rights of peoples and safeguarding the common interests of humanity.

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