

# Historical Perspectives on the European Security and Defence Policy

*Ina Raluca Tomescu<sup>1</sup>*

**Abstract:** The article aims to analyze the historical evolution of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), highlighting the main stages of its development within the broader process of European integration. The study begins with early initiatives for cooperation in the field of defense, such as the European Defence Community, and follows the subsequent transformations shaped by the geopolitical changes of the Cold War and the post-bipolar era. The analysis focuses on the key moments that contributed to the institutionalization of security and defence policy, including the Maastricht Treaty, the development of the European Security and Defence Policy, and, subsequently, the consolidation of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) through the Lisbon Treaty. The study emphasizes that European security and defence policy represents a dynamic process, continuously adapting to changes in the international environment, reflecting the European Union's aspiration to become a relevant global actor in the field of security.

**Keywords:** Security, European Union, common policies, European Security and Defence Policy.

States are placing increasing emphasis on their own defence and security, in the context of an international environment characterized by dynamism, uncertainty, and a growing interdependence among social, economic, political, military, and environmental processes. The complexity of these interactions is further amplified by globalization, a multidimensional phenomenon that generates both opportunities for development and vulnerabilities, particularly by facilitating the proliferation of asymmetric threats such as terrorism, cyberattacks, and disinformation.

In this context, states are compelled to identify appropriate and coordinated responses. On the one hand, the promotion of sustainable development emerges as a key direction for addressing the structural causes of insecurity. On the other hand, regional integration appears as an effective solution for managing contemporary risks and threats, through the pooling of resources and the strengthening of cooperative mechanisms.

The European Union represents a relevant example in this regard, through the development of its own security and defence policy. This framework enables both coherent action at the supranational level and the integration of national policies within a common structure, thereby enhancing responsiveness and effectiveness in addressing current challenges. Consequently, a complementary relationship emerges

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<sup>1</sup> Assoc. Prof. PhD., Faculty of Education Sciences, Law and Public Administration, Constantin Brâncuși University of Târgu Jiu, [ina.tomescu@gmail.com](mailto:ina.tomescu@gmail.com)

between the national and the European dimensions of security, adapted to the requirements of an evolving strategic environment.

The first stage in the construction of a European defence dimension began with the signing of the Brussels Treaty (1948), through which five Western European states established a system of collective defence. This initiative was soon incorporated into the emerging Euro-Atlantic security architecture, shaped by the creation of NATO (1949), which became the primary guarantor of security in Western Europe.

In the context of debates on the rearmament of West Germany, France proposed, in 1950, the Pleven Plan, which aimed at establishing a European Defence Community (EDC), conceived as a military extension of the economic integration achieved through the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Although the EDC Treaty, signed in 1952, provided for the creation of an integrated European army and common political institutions, the project failed in 1954 following the refusal of ratification by the French Parliament, temporarily halting the deepening of political integration<sup>2</sup>.

Following this failure, an intergovernmental solution was adopted: the Paris Agreements (1954) led to the establishment of the Western European Union (WEU), which facilitated the integration of West Germany into the Western security system and strengthened defence cooperation in complementarity with NATO.

In the following decades, initiatives aimed at deepening political and security integration, such as the Fouchet Plan or British proposals for a “European core” within NATO, did not materialize, but they highlighted the need for closer coordination among European states. This necessity led to the institutionalization of European Political Cooperation (EPC) in 1970, as a mechanism for consultation and harmonization of foreign policies<sup>3</sup>.

The process of strengthening the political dimension of European integration was formalized through the Single European Act (1986), which legally recognized cooperation in foreign policy, marking a decisive step toward the development of a European security and defence policy.

The concept of a European Security and Defence Identity was explicitly formulated by extending the idea of European identity - enshrined in the Declaration on European Identity adopted in Copenhagen in 1973 - to the field of security and defence. This initial conceptualization was further developed and systematized in the “WEU Platform on European Security Interests,” adopted on 27 October 1987 at the Ministerial Council meeting of the Western European Union in The Hague.

The document reflected the willingness of European WEU member states to shape a distinct role in the field of security and defence and to assert themselves more actively in negotiations on European security, which had previously been dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. Its preamble emphasized the fundamental

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<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Bretherton, John Vogler, *The European Union as a Global Actor*, Routledge, London and New York, 1999, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> John Peterson, Helene Sjørusen, “Conclusion: The myth of the CFSP?,” in *A Common Foreign Policy for Europe? Competing Visions of the CFSP*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, pp. 170-171.

idea that the process of European integration would remain incomplete in the absence of a solid security and defence component.

Structured in three sections - addressing the conditions of European security, the objectives of the European approach, and the policies required for its implementation - the Platform highlighted, in particular, the commitment of member states to assume greater responsibilities in the field of common defence. Through its content, the document represented a key milestone in strengthening the European dimension of security, paving the way for the subsequent integration of the WEU as a “defence component” of the European Union, as recognized by the Maastricht Treaty (1992)<sup>4</sup>.

The foundations for the development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) were established by the Treaty on European Union (1992). According to Article J.4 of Title V, “the common foreign and security policy shall include all questions related to the security of the European Union, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy, which might in time lead to a common defence.”

Pursuant to Article J.1 of the same Treaty, the objectives of the CFSP include: safeguarding the common values, fundamental interests, and independence of the Union; strengthening the security of the Union and its Member States in all its forms; preserving peace and enhancing international security, in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act, and the objectives of the Paris Charter; promoting international cooperation; and developing and consolidating democracy and the rule of law, as well as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms<sup>5</sup>.

The CFSP provisions were subsequently revised by the Amsterdam Treaty (1997), with the aim of enhancing the effectiveness, coherence, and visibility of this policy. In this context, the position of High Representative for the CFSP was established (Article J.8), with key responsibilities in shaping, developing, and implementing political decisions, as well as representing Member States in relations with third countries. The position was first held, following the decision of the Cologne European Council (June 1999), by Javier Solana, former Secretary-General of NATO, who simultaneously served as Secretary-General of the Council and of the Western European Union.

Additionally, a declaration annexed to the Amsterdam Treaty provided for the establishment, within the General Secretariat of the Council, of a Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit, under the authority of the High Representative. This body was designed to provide expertise and facilitate rapid decision-making. At the same time, the CFSP was strengthened through the introduction of new legal instruments, such as common strategies, aimed at implementing joint actions and positions.

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<sup>4</sup> Liviu Mureșan, Adrian Pop, Florin Bonciu, *Politica europeană de securitate și apărare - element de influențare a acțiunilor României în domeniul politicii de securitate și apărare*, Institutul European din România, București, 2004, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> *Documente de bază ale Comunităților și Uniunii Europene*, ed. Polirom, Iași, 1999, pp. 180-182.

The “Petersberg tasks,” initially adopted within the Western European Union (WEU) for managing potential destabilization in Europe, include humanitarian and rescue missions, peacekeeping operations, and combat forces in crisis management, including peace enforcement<sup>6</sup>. Their deliberately flexible formulation allowed for a broad interpretation, enabling the European Union to adapt its interventions to a wide range of situations. Over time, these tasks were further clarified and consolidated within the framework of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).

In September 2001, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the development of a common European policy in the field of security and defence, explicitly incorporating the “Petersberg tasks.” At the same time, a tendency emerged to blur the conceptual distinction between security and defence, through the reaffirmation of defence in its traditional sense of territorial protection. This evolution helped dispel concerns regarding potential competition with NATO, which continues to represent the cornerstone of collective defence. In this context, the need to strengthen a functional ESDP became evident, enabling the European Union to assert itself as a relevant actor on the international stage.

To achieve this objective, several Member States initiated processes of restructuring their armed forces and modernizing equipment, including the development of common capabilities. These efforts were aligned with the objective of establishing a European Rapid Reaction Force, as decided at the Cologne and Helsinki European Councils<sup>7</sup>.

At the same time, it was emphasized that a common European security and defence policy is not an end in itself, but rather an instrument of the Union’s external action. Crisis management should primarily rely on civilian and diplomatic means, while the use of military force is considered a last resort. Any recourse to military instruments must comply with the fundamental values and principles of the European Union, the constitutional provisions of the Member States, and international law, particularly the principles of the UN Charter and the OSCE. In this regard, military intervention generally requires an explicit mandate from the United Nations Security Council. In the absence of such a mandate, for instance due to a decision-making deadlock, the European Union cannot undertake military action, except in exceptional emergency situations at the express request of the UN Secretary-General.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 led to a significant reassessment of the European Union’s response to emerging threats. In this context, the Seville European Council (June 2002) decided to expand the scope of the “Petersberg tasks” to include counter-terrorism. At the same time, EU–NATO relations were strengthened and institutionalized through the adoption, in December 2002 in

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<sup>6</sup> Articolul 17 al Tratatului Uniunii Europene, <http://europa.eu.int/eurlex/en/treaties/selected/livre106.html>

<sup>7</sup> Mihai Ștefan Dinu, Cristian Băhnăreanu, *Actualități și perspective în Politica Europeană de Securitate și Apărare*, Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, București, 2006, pp. 12-14.

Copenhagen, of agreements granting the EU access to NATO assets and capabilities, other than national ones, for EU-led operations<sup>8</sup>.

Known as the “Berlin Plus” arrangements, these agreements provide for guaranteed EU access to NATO planning capabilities, the presumed availability of NATO collective assets and capabilities - including command and control structures and the AWACS system - and the identification of European command options, including the role of the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR) in EU-led operations using NATO resources.

The European Security Strategy<sup>9</sup> represented a landmark in the evolution of the EU’s foreign and security policy, providing a coherent conceptual framework for defining its global role. The document established clear security objectives and identified key areas of action for Member States, aimed at enabling proactive and effective responses to emerging threats, including terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, organized crime, and the need to develop a comprehensive approach to security<sup>10</sup>.

According to Fraser Cameron, the European Union is becoming an increasingly influential actor on the international stage, called upon to assume greater responsibilities in both regional and global security. In this context, the Union’s strategic interests are primarily oriented toward stabilizing its immediate neighbourhood<sup>11</sup>.

A central element of the strategy is the balance between civilian instruments and the use of military force. Although the EU prioritizes negotiation, dialogue, and diplomatic means, it acknowledges that the use of force may, in certain circumstances, be necessary to defend its core values and interests. This approach has generated debates both internally and with external partners, aimed at defining consensus criteria for the use of force in the evolving security environment.

The strategy identifies key strategic partners of the European Union, including NATO, the United Nations, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). NATO is regarded as an essential partner, particularly in crisis management and military capability development. At the same time, the OSCE plays an important role in the European security architecture, although the increasing involvement of the EU in its neighbourhood has led to a partial overlap in their areas of activity.

Another major objective of the strategy is the construction of security in the EU’s immediate neighbourhood. This process is conceived as an ambitious undertaking, which, alongside promoting good governance, aims to provide political

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<sup>8</sup> Ina Raluca Tomescu, *Politica europeană de securitate și apărare*, în volumul „Securitate și apărare în Uniunea Europeană”, Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare “Carol I”, București, 2008, pp. 781-787.

<sup>9</sup> Adoptată în cadrul Consiliului European de la Bruxelles, pe 12 decembrie 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Federico Santopinto, *La politique européenne de sécurité et de défense: enjeux et réalités*, în <http://www.grip.org/bdg/g4592.html>, p.2.

<sup>11</sup> Cameron Fraser, *Towards an EU strategic concept*, Romanian Journal of European Affairs, vol. 3, no. 3, Institutul European din România, București, 2003, pp. 20-34.

and economic support to neighbouring states in order to facilitate their European integration. Relevant examples include the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, whose closer ties with the European Union are closely linked to the consolidation of regional stability and security<sup>12</sup>.

The establishment of the ESDP required the identification of both civilian and military means that the European Union can deploy when launching crisis management and conflict resolution missions. The achievement of ESDP objectives relies on the military and civilian capabilities available to the Union<sup>13</sup>.

The Common Foreign and Security Policy, established as a fundamental objective of the European Union by the Treaty on European Union, has gained increased relevance and complexity following the reforms introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. This evolution is reflected both in the expansion and diversification of its scope and in the refinement of its implementation mechanisms. In this sense, the European Union can be seen as undergoing a phase of consolidation and deepening of integration, marking a qualitative transformation of its institutional and functional structure.

The growing importance of the foreign policy, security, and defence dimension fits naturally within the broader process of deepening European integration and entails the continued transfer of certain sovereign competences from the Member States to the Union level. At the same time, this field is characterized by a distinct legal regime, different from that governing other EU policies, which confers upon it a specific status within the overall framework of the Union's external action<sup>14</sup>.

The provisions relating to the CFSP were significantly developed and refined by the Lisbon Treaty, both through the introduction of new rules and the reformulation and consolidation of existing ones. According to Article 11, the Union's competence in the field of CFSP covers all areas of foreign policy, as well as all matters relating to the Union's security, including the progressive definition of a common defence policy. As regards implementation, this domain is governed by specific rules and procedures characterized by the predominance of the intergovernmental method: decisions are adopted by the European Council and the Council, generally acting unanimously, which confirms that this field does not fall within the supranational logic.

The implementation of the CFSP is ensured by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in cooperation with the Member

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<sup>12</sup> Valentin Beniuc, Liliana Beniuc, *Politica de Securitate și Apărare a Uniunii Europene în contextul crizelor regionale din vecinătatea estică (cazul conflictului transnistrean)*, în volumul conferinței Managementul politicilor de securitate al Uniunii Europene în Europa de Sud-Est, Chișinău, 2017, pp. 8-22.

<sup>13</sup> Petre Duțu, Mihai Ștefan Dinu, *Politica Europeană de Securitate și Apărare – cadrul de manifestare și dezvoltare a intereselor de securitate națională*, Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, București, 2007, pp. 21-25.

<sup>14</sup> I.M. Anghel, *Personalitatea juridică și competențele Comunităților Europene/Uniunii Europene*, Ed. Lumina Lex, București, 2007, p. 65 și 79; Z. Horvath, *Handbook on European Union*, Reference Press, Budapesta, 2002, p. 63.

States, in accordance with the Treaties. With regard to the binding nature of EU external action, Member States are required to actively and unconditionally support the Union's foreign and security policy, in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity. They must cooperate closely and refrain from any action that could undermine the Union's interests or affect the coherence and effectiveness of its international action<sup>15</sup>.

The Union conducts its CFSP by defining general guidelines and adopting decisions, expressed through joint actions and common positions, as well as by strengthening systematic cooperation among Member States in shaping and implementing national policies (Article 12). This provision, reformulated in comparison with earlier treaty versions, reflects an increased emphasis on cohesion and unity of action at Union level, while also underlining the Union's role as the holder of the CFSP<sup>16</sup>.

The European External Action Service (EEAS), initially envisaged in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, remained a key institutional innovation despite the failure of the constitutional project. It is composed of officials from the European Commission, the General Secretariat of the Council, and the diplomatic services of the Member States. Its organization and functioning are determined by the Council, on the basis of a proposal from the High Representative, following consultation with the European Parliament and with the approval of the European Commission<sup>17</sup>.

With regard to the means of implementing the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), the transfer of the operational functions of the Western European Union to the European Union in 1999 represented a decisive step, leading to the creation of institutional and operational structures capable of supporting the Union's new ambitions. The EU thus benefits from both institutional mechanisms - such as the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management, the Political and Security Committee (PSC), and the Military Committee (EUMC) - and operational tools, including rapid reaction forces, in complementarity with the essential role of NATO.

The Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management, established by Council Decision 2000/354/CFSP<sup>18</sup>, plays a key role in developing the civilian dimension of crisis management. Its responsibilities include the establishment of a European police capability, based on Member States' commitment to make available at least 1,400 police officers within 30 days. It also contributes to ensuring compliance with legal standards, conducting civilian administration missions in

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<sup>15</sup> Javier Solana, *The Lisbon Treaty: Giving the EU more coherence and weight on the international stage*, articol publicat în cotidianul FAKT (Polonia) pe 10 decembrie 2007

<sup>16</sup> I. M. Anghel, *Politica Europeană de Securitate și Apărare Comună a Uniunii Europene în Tratatul de la Lisabona*, în *Revista Română de Drept Comunitar*, nr. 4/2009, pp. 15-32.

<sup>17</sup> Ina Raluca Tomescu, *Consolidarea politicii de securitate a Uniunii Europene prin Tratatul de la Lisabona - Serviciul European de Acțiune Externă*, în volumul „Securitatea aeriană și maritimă la granița de est a Uniunii Europene”, Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare "Carol I", București, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> JOCE L 127, 2 mai 2000.

crisis situations, civil protection, and monitoring crisis management operations in the field of security and defence.

The Political and Security Committee (PSC), provided for in Article 25 of the Treaty on European Union, operates under the authority of the High Representative and exercises political control and strategic direction over crisis management operations. In cooperation with the European Union Military Committee, the PSC ensures the coordination of both civilian and military missions, in times of stability as well as in crisis situations, thereby contributing to the coherence of the Union's external action.

Regarding operational capabilities, the European Union does not aim to establish a fully-fledged European army. However, the objective has been to ensure the ability to deploy, if necessary, forces of approximately 50,000-60,000 troops within a maximum of 60 days, sustainable for at least one year. In addition, EU battlegroups have been created, typically composed of around 1,500 personnel, designed for rapid deployment in the early stages of a conflict. The coordination of these groups is ensured by Member States such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Greece, and Italy<sup>19</sup>.

The Lisbon Treaty adds to the traditional form of enhanced cooperation a new mechanism known as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which essentially represents enhanced cooperation in the field of defence - an idea that, prior to 2002, would have seemed almost inconceivable to the European political class<sup>20</sup>.

Permanent Structured Cooperation in the field of security and defence provides the possibility for a group of EU Member States to cooperate more closely in these areas. This permanent framework allows those Member States that are willing and capable to jointly develop defence capabilities, invest in common projects, and enhance the contribution and operational readiness of their armed forces<sup>21</sup>.

Thus, the European Union seeks to adopt flexible and context-specific approaches to crisis management, to engage actively in stabilization processes through conditional assistance measures, and to develop policies complementary to NATO, particularly in the field of bilateral support. Furthermore, maintaining the prospect of European integration for the Western Balkan states remains a major strategic objective, reflecting the Union's commitment to expanding the area of stability, security, and democratic values.

With regard to recent developments and future prospects in the field of EU security and defence - especially within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy - the strategic directions have significantly adapted to new

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<sup>19</sup> Ion M. Anghel, Grigore Silași, Adrian Dumitru Crăciunescu, *Diplomația Uniunii Europene (și regulile acesteia)*, ed. Universul Juridic, București, 2015, pp. 384-385.

<sup>20</sup> Jordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu, *Noua Europă. Identitate și model european*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2015, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Maria-Beatrice Berna, *Drept și politici ale Uniunii Europene*, ed. Universul Juridic, București, 2019, p. 183.

geopolitical realities. In this context, strengthening European cooperation in combating organized crime remains a priority, closely linked to efforts to protect democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights.

At the same time, the European Union aims to deepen a “common vision of the neighbourhood”<sup>22</sup> by supporting states in its proximity, particularly those facing political pressure or instability, such as Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. In the context of the war in Ukraine, the Black Sea region has gained increased strategic importance, being perceived as a key security space marked by multiple risks and challenges.

Moreover, the Union promotes stability and democratic values beyond its borders through an integrated approach that combines diplomatic and economic instruments with, where necessary, tools specific to security and defence policy. Conflict management is carried out in a flexible manner, tailored to the specific characteristics of each situation, while the Union’s involvement in stabilization efforts is supported by mechanisms of conditional assistance as well as by civilian and military missions.

A central element of the European security architecture is the complementarity between the European Union and NATO, with emphasis placed on the development of coordinated policies and the avoidance of duplication of capabilities. In this regard, EU-NATO cooperation has been strengthened in areas such as cybersecurity, military mobility, and strategic resilience.

Finally, maintaining the prospect of European integration for the Western Balkan states remains a major strategic objective of the Union, alongside the deepening of cooperation with eastern partners. In this context, initiatives such as the EU Strategic Compass reflect the Union’s ambition to become a more coherent, capable, and autonomous security actor, able to respond effectively to current and future challenges.

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<sup>22</sup> Ioana Elena Secu, *Parteneriatul Estic în contextul agresiunii militare ruse împotriva Ucrainei. Perspective asupra noii geopolitici a Uniunii Europene*, Institutul European, colecția de studii nr. 47/2023, p. 4.

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