

THE EU AND NATO FOLLOWING RUSSIA'S FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE: THE TRANSFORMATION OF COMPLEMENTARITY IN THE EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

ЄС-НАТО ПІСЛЯ ПОВНОМАСШТАБНОГО ВТОРГНЕННЯ РОСІЇ В УКРАЇНУ: ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ КОМПЛЕМЕНТАРНОСТІ В АРХІТЕКТУРІ ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКОЇ БЕЗПЕКИ

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The article examines how the Russia-Ukraine war changed the European Union's role in the transatlantic security system and the meaning of European strategic autonomy. Stronger cooperation between the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is not treated as a sufficient result in itself. The study explains how autonomous EU instruments became connected with NATO-centred collective defence after 2022. It applies comparative document analysis, qualitative content analysis and process tracing to strategic documents, legal acts, implementation reports and academic studies published between 2016 and 2026. Particular attention is given to defence-industrial policy, military mobility and support for Ukraine. The article argues that the full-scale invasion did not end the Union's search for strategic autonomy. Instead, it changed its function. Autonomy now refers less to separation from the United States or NATO and more to the capacity to create European financial, industrial, regulatory and logistical resources for defence within a wider transatlantic framework. The article introduces the concept of "embedded complementarity" to describe this model. It combines autonomous EU decision-making and instruments with their practical contribution to the European component of NATO-centred defence. The model is visible in strategic documents, industrial programmes, capability coordination, military mobility, training and long-term support for Ukraine. However, it remains incomplete because of separate planning systems, different memberships, political vetoes, fragmented defence markets and dependence on United States capabilities. The study concludes that the war became a catalyst for a substantial revision of EU security policy but did not create an integrated European defence order. Further research should assess the practical results of the new programmes after a longer implementation period.

Key words: European Union; NATO; strategic autonomy; embedded complementarity; Russia-Ukraine war; European security; defence policy; Ukraine.

У статті досліджено, як російсько-українська війна змінила роль Європейського Союзу в трансатлантичній системі безпеки та зміст європейської стратегічної автономії. Посилення співпраці між Європейським Союзом і Організацією Північноатлантичного договору не розглядається як достатній науковий висновок. Метою дослідження є пояснення того, як після 2022 року автономні інструменти ЄС стали пов'язуватися з НАТО-центричною колективною обороною. Застосовано порівняльний аналіз документів, якісний контент-аналіз і відстеження причинного механізму. Проаналізовано стратегічні документи, правові акти, звіти про виконання рішень і наукові праці за період від 2016 року до 2026 року. Особливу увагу приділено оборонно-промисловій політиці, військовій мобільності та підтримці України. Обґрунтовано, що повномасштабне вторгнення не припинило прагнення ЄС до стратегічної автономії, а змінило її функціональне призначення. Автономія дедалі менше означає відокремлення від Сполучених Штатів або НАТО і дедалі більше – здатність створювати європейські фінансові, промислові, регуляторні та логістичні ресурси для оборони в межах ширшої трансатлантичної системи. Для пояснення цієї моделі запропоновано поняття "вбудованої комплементарності". Воно поєднує автономні процедури ухвалення рішень та інструменти ЄС з їх практичним внеском у зміцнення європейського компонента НАТО-центричної оборони. Модель простежується у стратегічних документах, промислових програмах, координації розвитку спроможностей, військовій мобільності, підготовці та довгостроковій підтримці України. Водночас вона залишається незавершеною через окремі системи планування, різний склад членів, політичні вето, фрагментацію оборонного ринку та залежність від американських спроможностей. Зроблено висновок, що війна стала каталізатором істотного перегляду політики безпеки ЄС, але не сформувала інтегрованого європейського оборонного порядку. Подальші дослідження мають оцінити практичні результати нових програм після тривалого періоду їх виконання.

Ключові слова: Європейський Союз; НАТО; стратегічна автономія; вбудована комплементарність; російсько-українська війна; європейська безпека; оборонна політика; Україна.



Problem statement. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine changed the basic conditions of European security. It returned territorial defence, deterrence, defence production and preparation for a prolonged conflict to the centre of political debate. The EU Strategic Compass called the war "a tectonic shift in European history" [1, p. 4], while NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept identified the Russian Federation as "the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security" [2, p. 4]. This common threat assessment did not remove the organisations' different legal powers and political purposes. The EU controls financial, market, regulatory and industrial instruments; NATO provides collective defence commitments, military planning and command structures. The central problem is therefore not whether cooperation increased, but how these different resources are connected and whether that connection changes the EU's security role without turning it into a collective defence alliance.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Academic literature offers competing interpretations. Niklas Helwig understands strategic autonomy as the capacity to act within conditions of interdependence and asks whether the EU can demonstrate agency within its alliance with the United States [3, pp. 58-64]. Eva Michaels and Monika Sus distinguish political, material and institutional dimensions of autonomy and show that they develop at different speeds [4, pp. 383-405]. Nele Marianne Ewers-Peters argues that stronger European capacity can support more balanced EU-NATO cooperation [5, pp. 864-883]. More sceptical studies stress continuity. John Helfferich finds that the structural parameters of NATO-CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy) relations changed less than the political rhetoric suggests [6, pp. 1070-1083]. Armağan Gözkaman explains closer relations through collective securitisation [7, pp. 469-495], whereas Luca Ratti emphasises NATO's renewed primacy and Europe's dependence on the United States [8, pp. 73-89]. Tuomas Iso-Markku identifies substantial functional complementarity but limited strategic cooperation [9, pp. 4-8].

Unresolved aspects of the general problem. Existing research usually treats complementarity either as a division of labour or as a balance between autonomy and Atlantic dependence. This approach is too rigid for the post-2022 period because both organisations now work on resilience, military mobility, innovation, capability development and support for Ukraine. The unresolved issue is the place of autonomous EU instruments inside a NATO-centred security order. It is necessary to distinguish simple parallel adaptation from a model in which separate institutions deliberately connect their resources while retaining autonomous decision-making.

Research objectives. The article aims to identify the main changes in the EU approach to strategic

autonomy and complementarity with NATO after 2022 and to explain them through the concept of embedded complementarity. The research question is how the war changed the Union's role through political, institutional, industrial and military-logistical mechanisms. The working hypothesis is that strategic autonomy increasingly means the capacity to create European resources inside a NATO-centred defence system. Such a development expands the EU's security role but does not transform it into a collective defence organisation.

Research methodology. The study covers the period from 2016 to 2026. Comparative document analysis identifies changes in official language and priorities. Qualitative content analysis focuses on autonomy, responsibility, collective defence, capability development, industry, mobility, resilience and Ukraine. Process tracing reconstructs the link between the invasion, revised threat assessments, political decisions and new instruments. The analytical framework distinguishes decision autonomy, resource autonomy and operational autonomy. These levels are not equal: the Union may gain greater control over finance, production and logistics while continuing to depend on NATO for command, deterrence and collective defence. Three empirical fields are examined in detail: defence-industrial policy, military mobility and support for Ukraine.

Main research material. The 2016 EU Global Strategy established the conceptual starting point. It linked a higher level of strategic autonomy with the Union's capacity to protect its citizens, while recognising NATO as the primary collective defence framework for most Member States [10, pp. 19-20]. The Implementation Plan on Security and Defence translated this position into three priorities: responding to external conflicts and crises, building partners' capacities and protecting the Union and its citizens [11, pp. 2-6]. The Warsaw Joint Declaration of July 2016 and the subsequent common proposals created practical cooperation in hybrid threats, cyber security, exercises, capability development, defence industry and partner support [12, pp. 1-2; 13, pp. 1-5]. The 2018 Joint Declaration confirmed mutual reinforcement and protected the decision-making autonomy of both organisations [14, pp. 1-2].

This framework remained politically ambiguous. Member States held different positions shaped by strategic culture, threat perception and attitudes towards the United States [15, pp. 22-41]. France promoted greater European freedom of action, eastern and northern members gave priority to NATO, and Germany generally supported both objectives without resolving their institutional tension. Jolyon Howorth argued that strategic autonomy and EU-NATO cooperation could be mutually reinforcing [16, pp. 85-103], but the political debate often presented them as competing projects. PESCO, the European Defence

Fund, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence and military mobility created limited material foundations for a larger EU role. National procurement and NATO planning nevertheless remained dominant. The pre-2022 model can therefore be described as parallel institutional development under political ambiguity.

The full-scale invasion exposed the limits of that model. Russia's war of aggression had begun in 2014, but many European governments still separated crisis management from territorial defence. In 2022, sanctions, industrial capacity, transport networks, energy security and military readiness became parts of the same security problem. The Versailles Declaration connected the invasion with higher defence investment, reduced strategic dependencies and a stronger industrial base [17, pp. 3-4]. The Strategic Compass, approved in March 2022 after preparations that had started in 2020, became a transition document. It retained the capacity to act with partners whenever possible and alone when necessary, but linked a stronger EU directly with transatlantic security and NATO's collective defence role [1, p. 12]. NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept made the alignment reciprocal by defining the EU as a unique and essential partner and identifying military mobility, resilience and technology as priorities for cooperation [2, p. 10].

The first months of the war also changed European decision-making. Maurer, Whitman and Wright describe the response as a new collective responsibility to act [18, pp. 219-238]. Genschel, Leek and Weyns identify selective institutional development rather than a federal transformation [19, pp. 343-360]. Håkansson links the crisis with a stronger geopolitical role for the European Commission [20, pp. 25-45]. These explanations are compatible because integration advanced mainly in fields where existing EU competences could be used. The European Peace Facility, created in 2021, became the financial framework for military assistance to Ukraine [21, p. 1; 22, p. 1]. In October 2022, the Council established EUMAM Ukraine to connect Ukrainian training needs, national armed forces and EU planning structures [23, p. 1]. Iulian Romanyshyn and Julian Bergmann explain the mission through preference convergence, functional pressure and supranational entrepreneurship [24, pp. 148-168]. These measures did not create an EU army. They demonstrated the Union's ability to finance, coordinate and organise defence-related action through autonomous legal instruments.

Military mobility is a clear case of this emerging model. The Action Plan on Military Mobility 2.0 linked transport infrastructure, administrative procedures, corridors and partner cooperation [25, pp. 1-5]. NATO can define military requirements, but it cannot use the EU's regulatory powers, trans-European transport policy or budget. Håkansson therefore

presents mobility as evidence of a stronger EU role in defence [26, pp. 436-456]. National authorities control roads, railways, ports and border procedures; EU institutions can finance dual-use infrastructure and promote standards; NATO assesses operational requirements. The 2023 Joint Declaration expanded cooperation to resilience, critical infrastructure, emerging technologies, space and foreign interference [27, pp. 1-2]. A joint task force then examined energy, transport, digital infrastructure and space, confirming that civilian systems had become central to defence readiness [28, pp. 3-9].

Defence-industrial policy produced the most visible material change. The Act in Support of Ammunition Production supported the expansion of selected production capacity [29, p. 1], while EDIRPA created incentives for common procurement [30, p. 1]. The 2024 European Defence Industrial Strategy connected emergency support with longer-term security of supply, industrial readiness, common procurement and closer links with Ukraine [31, pp. 2-12]. Andersson and Britz show that EU action expanded because fragmented national markets could not solve common supply and scale problems efficiently [32, pp. 322-341]. This industrial turn changed the practical meaning of autonomy. The central issues became production capacity, critical components, common standards, sustained demand and the ability to maintain support over time. These resources are European in organisation but transatlantic in use because most participating states plan collective defence through NATO.

Planning remains more difficult than political language. The 2024 Coordinated Annual Review on Defence identified capability gaps and opportunities for cooperation [33, pp. 8-25], while NATO's Defence Planning Process continued to set requirements and national targets. The systems exchange information but are not integrated. This separation protects institutional autonomy, yet it also permits projects to follow short-term political funding rather than a coherent capability plan. Real complementarity requires links between identified gaps, national programmes, EU financing and NATO requirements. It does not require identical planning systems, but it does require separate processes to produce interoperable resources.

Ukraine became the main testing ground. The NATO-Ukraine Council supported long-term assistance, interoperability and the establishment of the NATO-Ukraine Joint Analysis, Training and Education Centre [34]. JATEC was activated in December 2024 and inaugurated in February 2025 to connect lessons from the war with analysis, education, training and institutional adaptation [35]. Ukraine has three analytical functions in the transformation. First, the invasion created the political pressure for EU decisions. Second, assistance brought together

financial, industrial, logistical, training and military instruments. Third, Ukrainian experience created a channel for institutional learning. The last function remains less documented than the first two, so claims about completed doctrinal transformation should remain cautious.

By 2025, the Union moved from temporary measures towards a wider readiness agenda. The White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030 linked investment, capability gaps, production and support for Ukraine. It stated that EU support for collaborative capability development would help EU Member States meet NATO capability targets [36, p. 3]. This is direct evidence of embedded complementarity: autonomous European financing and industrial measures are designed to satisfy needs partly defined through the Alliance. SAFE created a loan-based framework for common defence procurement [37, p. 1]. The European Defence Industry Programme placed industrial measures on a longer legal basis [38, p. 1], and the Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030 converted the White Paper into milestones and priority areas [39, pp. 1-10]. These instruments indicate structural change, but their operational results cannot yet be assessed with confidence.

Implementation evidence remains mixed. The European Court of Auditors found weaknesses in military mobility governance, project selection, funding predictability and cross-border coordination [40, pp. 7-12]. The 2026 EU-NATO progress report still relied on the seventy-four proposals endorsed in 2016 and 2017, although practical cooperation had expanded to capability shortfalls, industrial production, resilience, technology and support for Ukraine [41, pp. 2-4]. The fourth annual Strategic Compass report similarly recorded broader EU activity while recognising persistent gaps in readiness, capabilities and implementation [42, pp. 4-34]. The content of cooperation has therefore changed faster than its formal architecture.

Embedded complementarity describes this combination through six elements. First, the EU retains autonomous legal procedures and political decisions. Second, NATO remains the principal collective defence organisation for most EU members. Third, EU programmes create resources relevant to Alliance requirements. Fourth, regular dialogue connects planning and implementation. Fifth, each organisation depends on competences held by the other. Sixth, institutional boundaries remain clear. Three types of evidence are required to identify the model: legal evidence that the EU can create and manage its own instrument; functional evidence that the instrument serves needs relevant to collective defence; and coordination evidence that it is linked to NATO standards, requirements or structures. A measure that meets only one or two conditions is better described as parallel adaptation.

This model is neither a strict division of labour nor institutional integration. Defence industry, resilience and mobility cannot be assigned exclusively to one organisation, yet there is no joint command, unified budget or common decision-making system. The EU contributes regulation, finance, market power and industrial policy; NATO supplies defence planning, standards, command and deterrence; Member States connect both levels through national decisions. Strategic autonomy in this setting means greater capacity to shape choices and resources under conditions of interdependence, not the removal of every dependency. Helwig's approach is useful because it treats autonomy as agency within structural constraints [3, pp. 58-64].

The limits remain substantial. Meijer and Brooks demonstrate Europe's dependence on American intelligence, logistics, deterrence and high-end military capabilities [43, pp. 7-43]. National governments also differ over the political purpose of autonomy, procurement rules and the appropriate role of EU institutions. Unanimity in the Common Foreign and Security Policy protects national sovereignty but can delay action, while industrial measures based on market competences give the Commission and the European Parliament a larger role. Material data confirm both progress and fragmentation. European Defence Agency figures show rapid growth in defence expenditure and investment after 2022, but collaborative procurement remains below earlier political targets [44, pp. 3-17]. Higher spending therefore does not automatically create common capability.

Alternative explanations clarify the limits of the concept. The first holds that NATO simply restored its primacy and that EU initiatives are secondary support. This view correctly identifies military dependence but does not explain the Commission's new industrial role, common financing or the use of EU law in defence production. The second describes only parallel adaptation. It captures separate institutions but underestimates explicit links between EU programmes and NATO capability targets. The third treats the measures as temporary crisis mobilisation. Some instruments were temporary, but later programmes introduced longer time horizons, common milestones and stable administrative responsibilities. Embedded complementarity should therefore be understood as an emerging and uneven policy model, not a completed European defence order.

Conclusions and prospects for further research.

The full-scale invasion became a catalyst for a substantial revision of EU security policy because it changed threat perceptions and increased the cost of fragmented action. It did not remove strategic autonomy from the European debate. Instead, it changed its function from a broad claim to independent action into a practical effort to build European

financial, industrial, regulatory and logistical resources. These resources increasingly support a NATO-centred defence system. The transformation is visible at three levels: doctrinally, stronger European capacity and NATO complementarity are presented as mutually reinforcing; institutionally, EU bodies have gained more stable defence-related instruments; functionally, common resources are applied to capability development, mobility, training and support for Ukraine. The proposed hypothesis is therefore supported with qualifications. Embedded complementarity is forming, but its effectiveness is limited by separate planning systems, fragmented

procurement, national vetoes, different memberships and dependence on United States capabilities. The model is more advanced as a legal and policy framework than as a tested defence structure. Further research should compare SAFE and EDIP projects with NATO capability targets and national procurement plans, assess the influence of JATEC and Ukrainian wartime experience on doctrine and training, and examine how future United States policy affects European burden-sharing. Interviews with officials and industry representatives would also help identify coordination problems that public documents do not disclose.

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