

## EUROPEAN POLICY ANALYSIS

# From Marginal to Central: the Foreign and Security Dimension of EU Enlargement Policy

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### Summary

In the wake of Russia's war against Ukraine, the EU has stressed the geostrategic importance of enlargement to Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. It wants to live up to its new 'strategic responsibility'. The dynamics of enlargement and the evolution of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) could mutually reinforce the EU's emergence as a security provider.

Despite this geopolitical turn in enlargement policy, the main features of previous rounds are being retained: merit-based, criteria-driven negotiation processes, and strategic complementarity between EU and NATO enlargement, which are only loosely coordinated and run on different schedules. Three of the six candidates for EU membership from the Western Balkans have already joined NATO, and for the others it remains an option. With NATO membership not on the immediate horizon for the Eastern European countries, and because of a shift in transatlantic burden-sharing with the US, EU/NATO members and the EU itself will have to take on a greater role as security providers for new and old member states.

Given the salience and urgency of foreign security and defence policy issues, the EU must use the pre-accession and negotiation periods for cooperation and gradual integration in the field of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). In the face of war in Europe, the CFSP is developing dynamically, in particular in terms of industrial defence policy.

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The opinions expressed in the publication are those of the author.

## 1. Introduction

Enlargement is the EU's response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The EU stresses the geostrategic importance of the next enlargement to Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. Enlargement shall become central to the EU's efforts to contain and confront Russia, and it shall provide security for the new members, so goes the predominant line of thought in Brussels. As a consequence of the hostile security environment, this is a significant shift in the EU's rationale for enlargement. For Brussels it was a bold and swift decision to offer membership to Ukraine, a country fighting a long war of defence.<sup>1</sup>

**'[...] the formula of enlargement as the most successful foreign policy was an example of self-deception.'**

While the 2004 eastward enlargement is often referred to as the EU's most successful foreign policy episode, the emphasis is usually on the EU's transformative and normative power. The EU's contribution to the establishment of a new order in Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain has been mainly in the form of projecting a strong regulatory power, impacting on the socio-economic and political system of new and aspirant member states. The EU accepted new members on the condition that they share its normative basis – democracy, rule of law and human rights – and the EU supported the consolidation of the new democracies. NATO, not the EU, provided hard security through taking in new members. This comprehensive, if loosely coordinated, approach to 'dual European enlargement' contributed to an extension of the zone of peace, stability and prosperity from west to east. But it did not transform the EU into a full-fledged security organization. On the contrary, the formula of 'enlargement as the most successful foreign policy' was an example of self-deception. It distracted from the structural and inherent shortcomings of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

What can we learn from the enlargement of the EU following the end of the Cold War for today's enlargement policy? How does the need

to strengthen the EU as a foreign policy actor and provider of security affect the concept and course of EU enlargement policy? In answering these questions, this essay finds that the foreign and security dimension of enlargement has shifted from marginal to central importance. However, the focus of the essay is restricted to CFSP-related issues, including the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP); it does not consider other security-relevant policy areas, such as energy.

## 2. Lessons from past EU and NATO enlargements

Lessons from past enlargements can be learned by looking at the rationale for accession, as well as the EU's strategic and practical management of EU and NATO enlargement and the making of a pan-European security order.

### 2.1 Rationale for accession

The rationale for EU membership has always been multidimensional. Ever since the first enlargement of 1973 all candidates have shared an interest in achieving prosperity through economic and social modernization, as well as political stability within a union of well-governed democracies. While some incoming members wanted to increase their influence in international politics or secure specific foreign policy interests through the EU, no new member relied on the EU to provide hard security for their national defence. For non-aligned EU applicants – from Ireland, Finland, Sweden, Austria to Cyprus and Malta – disclaimers on the binding nature of security provisions in the Treaties were important terms for joining. For NATO members like Poland and the Baltic states assurances that their transatlantic ties and alliances would not be undermined or upset by obligations arising from the CFSP were crucial. The intergovernmental mode of CFSP/CSDP was an essential precondition for most of the new and also for old members.

### 2.2 Three rounds of enlargement

Before 1989 the security context of enlargement was a divided, albeit stable security order in Europe. Subsequently, following the fall of the 'Iron Curtain' all Western institutions including

<sup>1</sup> Roman Petrov, Christophe Hillion, "Accession through war" – Ukraine's road to the EU', *Common Market Law Review* 59:5 (2022), 1289-1300.

NATO and EU had to determine whether and how to expand towards the North and East. Countries joined in three rounds:

1. *The EFTA countries*: EU enlargement to include Sweden, Finland and Austria was swiftly completed in 1995 when the unipolar moment of US supremacy still ensured a stable security environment. The three EFTA countries maintained their status of neutrality or non-alignment. NATO member Norway did not ratify the EU accession treaty and stayed in the European Economic Area (EEA).
2. *Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)*: The EU and NATO were quickly faced with new aspiring members from Central and Eastern Europe after the dissolution of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) and the Warsaw Pact Organisation as well as the break-up of the Soviet Union. Thus, enlargement was linked to questions of how to build a post-wall security order in Europe. The strongest and most persistent pressure for enlargement of both the EU and NATO came from Central and Eastern European countries. Within NATO – after a short period of hesitation – successive US administrations were drivers of enlargement, with a strong focus on Poland.<sup>2</sup> The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were invited to join the alliance in 1997 and joined in 1999. However, the inclusion of three newly sovereign post-Soviet states, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, was particularly controversial and sensitive. Eventually in 2002 NATO invited them, as well as Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia, to join the alliance which they did in 2004. While there was no official consideration of also opening the door to Russia, NATO started a parallel process to engage with Moscow and other post-Soviet countries, namely Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova and Southern Caucasus countries. These countries and Russia became part of the new North Atlantic Cooperation Council (1991/2) and the Partnership for Peace Programme (1994/5). In addition, NATO established privileged bilateral relations with Russia in the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council of 1997, which was

replaced by the NATO-Russia Council in 2002. These were confidence building efforts vis-a-vis Russia while at the same time Western influence on Russia was minimal. The new arrangements were also important in mitigating different perceptions of Russia among NATO/EU countries as a potential security threat.

In terms of EU enlargement (and internal reforms at the same time), Germany and the European Commission were key drivers, again with a particular focus on Poland. Once the political criteria were deemed to have been fulfilled, the EU started negotiations in stages with two sets of five countries in 1998 and 2000. The so-called regatta model emphasized that finishing negotiations was based on merit. In these negotiations, CFSP and hard security aspects were rarely considered because NATO membership was available for all of them.

3. *Western Balkans*: In the 1990s the wars following the dissolution of Yugoslavia de-coupled countries of the so-called Western Balkans, including Albania, for some time from other Central and Eastern European countries' road to membership of the EU and NATO. A decade later, NATO and the EU repeated the pattern of the Eastern enlargement when Croatia joined NATO first (in 2009) and the EU thereafter (in 2013). Albania also joined NATO in 2009, but it took until 2022 to open negotiations on EU membership. Montenegro and North Macedonia joined NATO in 2017 and 2020 and opened EU negotiations with the EU in 2012 and 2022 respectively. Bilateral disputes between EU members and candidates were blocking negotiations for some time. The EU flanked its enlargement policy with the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe of 1999 and the stabilisation and association processes as well as the EU mission EUFOR with Operation Althea for Bosnia and Herzegovina, active since 2004. Cooperation with the US was essential in stopping the military and violent conflicts and remains essential in terms of providing permanent security reassurance. The stabilisation missions IFOR/SFOR (from 1995/96) and the NATO mission 'Essential Harvest' (which

<sup>2</sup> cf. John Leech (ed.), *Whole and Free: NATO, EU Enlargement and Transatlantic Relations* (London, 2002).

in 2001 collected weapons from the UCK or National Liberation Army to support Macedonia) and the KFOR mission in Kosovo (1999 to the present day) stand for this. Despite its ‘Thessaloniki pledge’ to the six Western Balkan countries (2003) the EU has not so far succeeded in driving enlargement home.

### 2.3 Management of NATO and EU enlargement

In fact, the processes of EU and NATO enlargement to CEE proceeded autonomously, according to internal dynamics and decision-making rules. They were considered to be ‘mutually supportive and parallel processes’, and it was noted that ‘while no rigid parallelism is foreseen, each organization will need to consider developments in the other.’<sup>3</sup> From the perspective of NATO and the EU, given their fundamental complementarity, the sequencing of the enlargement processes was not a strategic choice. The candidates aimed to join NATO as the core security guarantee against Russia and exerted pressure on Washington, London, and Berlin to complete accession swiftly. NATO considered a ‘broad congruence of European membership in NATO, EU and Western European Union would have positive effects on European security.’<sup>4</sup>

Joining NATO (via Article 10 of the Washington Treaty) is technically and politically easier to achieve and therefore much quicker than joining the EU (via Article 49 TEU). The latter is extremely complex because new members must accept and implement the entire legal and political *acquis* of the EU, with only limited transitional

arrangements. In both cases the decision to apply for membership lies with the respective country that wishes to join. After a country has filed its application NATO invites the applicant to begin accession talks. Compared to the EU’s ‘on application’ mode NATO’s ‘on invitation’ approach is more pro-active and gives a reassuring political signal in line with its ‘open door policy’<sup>5</sup> to the applicant. However, both processes are open to political interventions by EU/NATO members to obtain goals in their relations with an applicant or obtain concessions on other issues. North Macedonia was an extreme case.<sup>6</sup> Similarly to the EU’s Copenhagen criteria of 1993, NATO elaborated on its criteria and published a ‘report on enlargement’ in 1995 which it likewise refers to today. However, NATO decides on a case-by-case basis without a ‘fixed or rigid list of criteria.’<sup>7</sup> In the wake of its Eastern expansion NATO stressed that ‘ethnic disputes or external territorial disputes, including irredentist claims’ must be settled ‘by peaceful means’ and that this counts as a ‘factor in determining whether to invite a state to join the Alliance.’<sup>8</sup> Other criteria included democratic and civilian accountability of armed forces,<sup>9</sup> and full access to the territory of new members for reinforcement, crisis management and the stationing of troops.<sup>10</sup> This sets the bar high for future members.

Overall, it can be said that the enlargements of the EU and NATO in the 1990s and 2004/07 were not guided by an overarching concept, but rather loosely coordinated without a strict timetable or target dates. The US played a determining role in

<sup>3</sup> NATO, *Study on NATO Enlargement*, 2008, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_24733.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm). Chap.1B, point 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Study on NATO Enlargement*, 2B, point 10. ‘All full members of the WEU [France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Luxembourg, Belgium; Spain and Portugal 1990, Greece 1995 – B.L.] are also members of NATO. Because of the cumulative effect of the security safeguards of Article V of the modified Brussels Treaty and of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, the maintenance of this linkage is essential.’

<sup>5</sup> Article 10 Washington Treaty says that membership is open to any ‘European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area’.

<sup>6</sup> North Macedonia’s accession to NATO was blocked by Greece and took 21 years. Likewise, the opening of EU negotiations took 11 years after the first positive recommendation of the Commission in 2009. Recently Turkey and Hungary delayed ratification of Sweden’s NATO accession to obtain concessions from Sweden or the EU Commission on bilateral issues not related to membership.

<sup>7</sup> *Study on NATO Enlargement*, 1B, point 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Study on NATO Enlargement*, 1B, point 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Study on NATO Enlargement*, 5, point 72.

<sup>10</sup> *Study on NATO Enlargement*, 4A, point 44.

the enlargement of NATO, while expecting the EU to swiftly integrate these countries for political and economic reasons. The guiding idea of the US and NATO remained throughout the complementarity of the two enlargement processes with a de facto sequencing that put NATO first. Both the EU and NATO applied the principle of differentiation, with NATO taking the lead and completing two waves of expansion (split into 3 and 7 countries) within two years of invitation to formal accession. The EU followed suit in 2004, taking in 8 Central and Eastern European countries, and, in 2007, two more, with Bulgaria and Romania.

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EU members Sweden and Finland are a special case because they applied for NATO membership after joining the EU, triggered by Russia’s war against Ukraine. NATO invited both countries in June 2022 to join on a fast-track basis, and Finland’s membership was completed in less than a year, followed by Sweden’s in March 2024. The EU has warmly welcomed NATO’s northern enlargement. In view of the security threat from Russia, Commission President von der Leyen and other EU actors referred to Article 42(7) TEU.<sup>11</sup> This was intended to reassure Finland and Sweden of the EU’s solidarity in the interim period until ratification of accession to NATO is completed, which was quite a bold interpretation of EU’s mutual assistance clause.

## 2.4 Grey zones and leftovers

The complementary enlargements by NATO and the EU to the East and North over the last 30 years have significantly altered the security order in Europe. Nevertheless, grey zones remained in the immediate neighbourhood in between Russia and the EU/NATO. Under the European Neighbourhood Policy (2004) the EU pursued a sort of ‘enlargement-light’

status, somewhat below membership, for Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Georgian-Russian war (2008), the Kremlin’s intervention in 2013/14, when Ukraine sought to sign the Association Agreement (AA/DCFTA) with the EU, and Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea, demonstrated that this security order was unsettled and even confrontational. Additionally, Turkey’s place and role in that order remained uncertain, despite its decades-long (1952) membership of NATO. Ankara applied for EU membership in 1987 but was overtaken by the EFTA countries and all other applicants including Cyprus and Malta. Negotiations were opened only in 2005 and they stalled in 2018 for political reasons. Today Turkey diverges significantly from the EU’s *acquis* in CFSP and hinders progress in NATO-EU cooperation.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the dual enlargement rounds after 1989 did not resolve long-standing issues such as the asymmetries in transatlantic burden sharing, European dependence on US forces for deterrence, or how to collectively organize European defence within the EU and/or a European Pillar in NATO.

## 3. Future enlargements: EU37 and security issues

24 February 2022 was a turning point in enlargement policy. Open questions and leftovers from previous enlargement processes immediately surfaced, and in the most precarious context; war in Europe. The war created a strong sense of urgency within the EU to respond swiftly and boldly to Russia’s aggression. At the centre of all considerations were and are the security interests of Ukraine – now interconnected with those of Europe as a whole. Enlargement of the EU and/or NATO was soon discussed as a short- or medium-term option for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. As in the 1990s, the strongest pressure for speedy enlargement comes from the (potential) candidates themselves.

After February 2022 the EU quickly committed itself to integrate the so-called ‘trio’ countries when it offered Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia a European ‘perspective’ and (potential) candidate status in June 2022. In December 2023 the 27

<sup>11</sup> European Commission, ‘[Statement by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with Finnish Prime Minister Marin](#)’, 03.02.2022, from minute 6:13.

<sup>12</sup> European Commission, ‘[Joint Communication to the European Council. State of play of EU-Türkiye political, economic and trade relations](#)’ JOIN(2023) 50 final, 29.11.2023, p. 3-4.

decided to open negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova; the first Intergovernmental Conferences were held in June 2024, marking the official start of negotiations. For Bosnia and Herzegovina, the final decision to open negotiations was eventually taken in March 2024. This was a political signal that Western Balkan countries are still on track. In fact, the EU has redoubled its efforts – for example through the Western Balkans Growth Plan and the Berlin Process – for gradual integration and accelerated membership negotiations.

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It is likely that the next enlargements of the EU and of NATO will take many years and might even fail in the end. It is therefore important to take a broader view and look at policies and instruments that already complement or change traditional enlargement policy.

Table 1 shows that, in response to Russia’s full-scale invasion, both the EU and NATO quickly launched or intensified activities aimed at improving security and promoting foreign policy convergence with the countries of the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, as well as with Turkey, the three geographical areas of EU enlargement. Furthermore, on France’s initiative a new pan-European format for dialogue on European security – the European Political Community (EPC) – was established in October 2022 as a united front against Russia and Belarus.<sup>13</sup>

The security situation in Ukraine and beyond may remain precarious for some time to come in view of the contested territories occupied or already illegally annexed by Russia. Georgia, with the breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Moldova, with Transnistria, do not exercise control

over their entire national territory with which they wish to join the EU. Currently two EU missions are active: One in Moldova (EUPM) to enhance resilience of the security sector countering hybrid threats and a Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM). In South-Eastern Europe, too, there are many conflicts over external borders, territories and ethnic affiliations in and between (potential) candidate countries which have not yet been resolved. In view of such frictions, which have clear potential for violent escalations and incidents, the Western Balkans is still a region of instability and fragile peace. The EU, along with NATO, the US and the United Nations, is continually called upon to ensure that the situation remains controllable (see for example the KFOR troops on the border between Kosovo and Serbia and EUFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina). Serbia and Kosovo do not yet see the negotiations with Brussels or the prospect of accession as a sufficiently strong incentive to consistently normalise their relations.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4. Association agreements and CFSP alignment

The countries wishing to join the EU have diverse security and foreign policy needs and challenges. In each case the EU builds bilateral relations on different types of association agreements. While all contain CFSP provisions, little attention was paid to these provisions before 2022. In the following summary the focus is on candidate countries Ukraine and Moldova, and in the Western Balkans on the two frontrunners, Serbia and Montenegro.

Title II of the 2017 Association Agreement with **Ukraine** focuses on political dialogue, cooperation, and gradual convergence in the field of foreign and security policy. The agreement aims to promote joint policy planning and cooperation, with a focus on regional stability in the common neighbourhood, military-technical cooperation for conflict prevention and crisis management, as well as arms control and arms export control. Ukraine should participate actively in the organization of EU-led civilian and military crisis management operations or exercises. Cooperation will be based on shared values and mutual interests.

<sup>13</sup> For commentary and coverage of the EPC see the EPC observatory, <https://epc-observatory.info/about-the-observatory/>.

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Mirel, ‘The European Union enlarged from 27 to 36 members? Towards an “Agenda 2030”’, Schuman Paper n° 744, Fondation Robert Schuman, April 2024.

Table 1: CFSP/CSDP and applicants before and [after February 2022](#)

Geographic area	Bilateral relations with the EU	EU instruments	Participant in the EPC	Cooperation with / Membership in NATO
<b>Western Balkans</b>	Stability and Association Agreement (SAA)			
Albania	SAA <a href="#">Accession negotiations (since 2022)</a>	<a href="#">EPF (2024)</a>	<a href="#">Yes</a>	Member (since 2009)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	SAA <a href="#">Accession negotiations (decision in 2023)</a>	EUFOR ALTHEA (military mission since 2004) European Peace Facility (2021, <a href="#">2022</a> )	<a href="#">Yes</a>	Partnership for Peace (since 2006) MAP (since 2010)
Kosovo	SAA Potential candidate (since 2008)	EULEX Kosovo (civilian mission since 2008)	<a href="#">Yes</a>	Kosovo force (since 1999)
North Macedonia	SAA <a href="#">Accession negotiations (since 2022)</a>	<a href="#">EPF (2023)</a>	<a href="#">Yes</a>	Member (since 2020)
Montenegro	SAA Accession negotiations (since 2012)		<a href="#">Yes</a>	Member (since 2017)
Serbia	SAA Accession negotiations (since 2014)		<a href="#">Yes</a>	Partnership for Peace (since 2006)
<b>Eastern Europe</b>	Association Agreement/ Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA)			
Georgia	AA/DCFTA <a href="#">Candidate country (since 2023)</a>	EUMM Georgia (since 2008) EPF (2021, <a href="#">since 2022</a> )	<a href="#">Yes</a>	Partnership for Peace (since 1994) NATO-Georgia Commission (since 2008)
Moldova	AA/DCFTA <a href="#">Accession negotiations (since 2024)</a>	EUBAM (since 2005) EPF (2021, <a href="#">since 2022</a> ) <a href="#">EUPM Moldova (since 2023)</a>	<a href="#">Yes</a>	Partnership for Peace (since 1994)
Ukraine	AA/DCFTA <a href="#">Accession negotiations (since 2023)</a>	EUBAM (since 2005) EPF (2021, <a href="#">since 2022</a> ) EUAM Ukraine (since 2014)/ EUAM Ukraine ( <a href="#">adjustment in 2023</a> ) EUMAM Ukraine ( <a href="#">since 2022</a> )	<a href="#">Yes</a>	Partnership for Peace (since 1994) NATO-Ukraine Commission (1997-2023) <a href="#">NATO-Ukraine Council (since 2023)</a>
Turkey	Association Agreement (1963) / Customs Unions (1995) Accession negotiations (since 2005, standstill since 2018)	*	<a href="#">Yes</a>	Member (since 1952)

\* The EU puts special emphasis on the cooperation within CFSP/CSDP, in particular Turkey's contribution to CSDP missions, for further details also beyond accession negotiations see: European Commission: 'Joint Communication to the European Council. State of play of EU-Türkiye political, economic and trade relations' JOIN(2023) 50 final, 29.11.2023.

[Green and underlined](#) = after February 2022

Abbreviations: **AA**: Association Agreement, **DCFTA**: Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, **EPC**: European Political Community, **EPF**: European Peace Facility, **EUAM Ukraine**: European Union Advisory Mission Ukraine (civilian mission), **EUBAM**: European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine, **EUMAM Ukraine**: EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (military mission), **EUPM Moldova**: EU Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova (civilian mission), **MAP**: Membership Action Plan, **SAA**: Stability and Association Agreement.

The Association Agreement with **the Republic of Moldova** establishes largely the same CFSP/CSDP priorities as the Agreement with Ukraine. Political dialogue is regularly held at the levels of foreign ministers as well as summits with heads of state and government. Since March 2022 the war against Ukraine and its implications are permanently on the agenda of meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council and the European Council. Very frequently the foreign (and also defence) minister and the president of Ukraine are invited to speak on these issues during the session.

The provisions on political dialogue in the Stabilisation and Association Agreements with **Serbia** and **Montenegro** aim to increase convergence of positions on international issues, including CFSP issues. However, they are less elaborate on specific issues and show a lower level of ambition in practical cooperation. This is because the focus is on regional issues and conflicts within or between post-Yugoslav countries.

Today the EU finds that major common interests are at stake, and cooperation and convergence in CFSP has thus gained enormously in relevance. In 2023 the European Council asserted ‘the crucial importance of further deepening the cooperation on foreign policy issues and the Union’s expectations on partners to fully align with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), including restrictive measures, a key aspect of the EU integration process and a strong expression of partner’s strategic choice and place in a community of values.’<sup>15</sup> The main indicator for this is whether the applicants support the relevant positions from Brussels – i.e. the statements of the High Representative (HR/VP) on behalf of the Union and the decisions of the Council, not least with regard to sanctions against Russia.

According to the latest Commission reports, Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia and Kosovo are model pupils in this regard, having aligned themselves 100 per cent with the CFSP in 2022/23. Ukraine did so at 89 per cent, Bosnia

and Herzegovina at 98 per cent and Moldova at 78 per cent (while showing an upward trend). In contrast, Serbia and Georgia were only partially aligned with European positions (51 and 43 per cent respectively), and Turkey was only marginally aligned (10 per cent). Ankara is consistently reinforcing the long-standing trend of alienation and political detachment from the EU. Georgia’s alignment rate reflects its balancing policy towards Russia. And Serbia has been cultivating intensive relations with Russia and China for years, sometimes in a provocative manner, parallel to the accession negotiations. Serbia is the only country in the Western Balkans that has not mirrored Brussels’ sanctions against Russia. In future the EU could grant an observer status in the Foreign Affairs Council to candidates that have proven high convergence or have already provisionally closed the external relations cluster (chapters 30 and 31) in accession negotiations.<sup>16</sup>

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From the EU’s point of view, the emerging bipolar bloc formation in Europe also requires new members to help shape and support the CSDP, as well as the foreseen expansion and deepening of cooperation between the EU and NATO. As the case of Turkey shows, NATO members can adopt positions on strategic issues and crisis reactions that deviate from or even run counter to those of the EU. But the congruence of EU and NATO membership would be, now more than ever, a contribution to the security and defence capability of member states and the external borders of the Union, which the Union

<sup>15</sup> European Council, ‘[Council conclusions on enlargement](#)’, 16707/23, 12.12.2023, point 9. See also: European Commission, ‘[2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy](#)’, COM(2023) 690 final, Brussels, 08.11.2023, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> cf. ‘[European Parliament resolution of 29 February 2024 on deepening EU integration in view of future enlargement](#)’, 29.02.2024, point 24.



alone cannot provide.<sup>17</sup> The Commission now addresses forms of cooperation with NATO more systematically in its country reports. In the case of the three Eastern European countries, among which Ukraine and Georgia have declared their desire to join NATO, the hesitation is on the part of the Alliance and many of its European members.

## 5. The EU's Strategic Compass and the candidate states

The war changed the security environment for standard EU enlargement policy. The EU has started adapting to the new security challenges from Russia, which is now perceived as the main threat. Many EU member states also expect a far more restrained US commitment to European security and a probable burden shifting which would demand that Europe massively invests in its military capacities. The Versailles declaration of March 2022 reflects the new level of ambition and entails a list of measures and projects for a new period in which, however, 'NATO [...] remains the foundation of collective defence for its members'.<sup>18</sup> The Strategic Compass for Security and Defence sets the path for the EU to strengthen CSDP by 2030 and to become a security provider that can act 'rapidly and robustly'.<sup>19</sup> In parallel to strengthening CSDP, the EU also started to give military support to Ukraine and broaden cooperation in this field. In view of future membership and European security, the EU is considering ways to gradually integrate candidates in existing and new CSDP programmes and measures ahead of enlargement.<sup>20</sup>

## 5.1 Strengthening CSDP and gradual integration of candidate countries: recent measures

To improve the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (**EDTIB**) and the EU's defence readiness, as outlined in the Strategic Compass, several initiatives were launched over the last two years. These industrial cooperation and industrial policy tools play a major role in the 'EU's nascent role in the field of collective defence'.<sup>21</sup> An important instrument in this respect is the European Defence Industry Reinforcement Through Common Procurement Act (**EDIRPA**), which was set up to strengthen capacities and incentivise cooperation in defence procurement at EU level.<sup>22</sup> EDIRPA allows Ukraine and Moldova to be recipients of defence equipment procured jointly by the EU Member States, because of 'the particular security situation of those two Union candidate countries'.<sup>23</sup> The Commission proposal for a European Defence Industrial Strategy (**EDIS**) goes in a similar direction and aims to 'invest more, better, together, and European'. The focus is on increasing the value of intra-EU defence trade, defence procurement from the EDTIB, and on fostering more collaborative procurement of defence equipment by member states. The proposal also includes aspects for the integration of Ukraine in the strategy, e.g., through the EU-Ukraine Defence Industry Forum.<sup>24</sup> Commission President von der Leyen made a clear statement in favour of integrating the country in some of the defence programmes in order to 'encourage convergence and joint planning between militaries

<sup>17</sup> European Council, '[A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence – For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security](#)', 7371/22, Brussels 21.03.2022.

<sup>18</sup> European Council, '[Versailles Declaration](#)', made at the informal meeting of heads of state and government, 11 and 12 March 2022, point 8.

<sup>19</sup> European Council, '[A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence](#)', executive summary, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> cf., on these measures, Markus Kaim, Ronja Kempin, *Die Neuvermessung der amerikanisch-europäischen Sicherheitsbeziehungen. Von Zeitenwende zu Zeitenwende*, Studie 15/2024, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, May 2024.

<sup>21</sup> Elie Perot, 'The European Union's nascent role in the field of collective defense: between deliberate and emergent strategy', *Journal of European Integration*, 46:1 (2024), 1-23.

<sup>22</sup> 'Regulation (EU) 2023/2418 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 October 2023 on establishing an instrument for the reinforcement of the European defence industry through common procurement (EDIRPA)' (the EDIRPA regulation), *Official Journal of the EU L*, 2023/2418, 26.10.2023. EP Briefing: '[European defence industry reinforcement through common procurement act](#)', 21.11.2023.

<sup>23</sup> The EDIRPA regulation.

<sup>24</sup> The first EU-Ukraine Defence Industry Forum took place on 6 May 2024. See: '[Joint press release: EU-Ukraine Defence Industries Forum bolsters cooperation between Ukrainian and European defence industries](#)', 06.05.2024.

and defence industries'.<sup>25</sup> The European Defence Investment Program (**EDIP**) underpins EDIS as an operational measure. It provides a specific budget line for the development of the Ukrainian Defence Technological and Industrial Base with the possibility for Ukraine to participate in joint procurement with EU member states. While EDIS and EDIP are primarily about the 'industrial readiness'<sup>26</sup> of the EU, the proposals also contain elements which reflect Ukraine's gradual integration into CSDP.

Further EU measures are directly linked to support for Ukraine in defending its territory and sovereignty against Russia. At the same time, these measures also work towards strengthened cooperation with or gradual integration of candidate countries, in particular Ukraine, into CSDP.

The European Peace Facility (**EPF**) is an instrument to strengthen cooperation in security and defence between the EU and the respective candidate countries, as well as interoperability between the armed forces. More than half of its current financial ceiling (€11.1 billion) is spent on lethal and non-lethal equipment for Ukraine. Moldova, Georgia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania also receive various forms of non-lethal equipment, albeit on a much smaller scale. In addition, the EU has established the Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine.<sup>27</sup> **EUMAM Ukraine** provides training on EU soil exclusively for Ukrainian soldiers on Western weapon systems and combined arms combat. Although the mission is not directly linked to Ukraine's pre-accession status, it may have positive side-effects in terms of maintaining this type of cooperation. The armies of EU/NATO countries stand to benefit from Ukraine's experience in fighting a high-intensity war. Furthermore, the Act

in Support of Ammunition Production (**ASAP**), as part of the three-track ammunition plan, was intended to increase production capacities of arms industries in EU member states and accelerate production of ammunition and missiles. Despite shortcomings, ASAP can be seen as an emblematic project to respond to Ukraine's imminent demand and, at the same time, to strengthen the defence industries in EU member states through financial commitments. In May 2024, the EU and Moldova signed a **Security and Defence Partnership**, making Moldova the first country to sign such a partnership with the EU. While the focus is on broadening and deepening already existing frameworks for cooperation, the partnership also identifies opportunities for Moldova to participate in EU programmes, such as PESCO projects. The underlying logic is that Ukraine (and Moldova) and the other candidates form a common security area with the EU (and NATO), and that they should thus gradually become part of a collective defence system.

**'Russia's invasion of Ukraine has not only strengthened defence cooperation among EU member states but has also concretised approaches to gradual integration of candidate countries into CSDP prior to their accession.'**

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has not only strengthened defence cooperation among EU member states but has also concretised approaches to gradual integration of candidate countries into CSDP prior to their accession. All these recent practical measures are aimed at bringing Ukraine 'closer to us and much faster',<sup>28</sup> which also applies

<sup>25</sup> Ursula von der Leyen, '[Speech by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary on the need for unwavering EU support for Ukraine, after two years of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine](#)', 06.02.2024.

<sup>26</sup> European Commission, '[Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Defence Industry Programme and a framework of measures to ensure the timely availability and supply of defence products \('EDIP'\)](#)', COM(2024) 150 final, 2024/0061 (COD), 05.03.2024.

<sup>27</sup> Foreign Affairs Council, '[Ukraine: EU sets up a military assistance mission to further support the Ukrainian Armed Forces](#)', 17.10.2023. Sascha Ostanina, '[The EU Military Assistance Mission for Ukraine. A peace actor who teaches to fight](#)', Jacques Delors Centre, 01.11.2023 (Policy brief). See also the German military's [EUMAM website](#).

<sup>28</sup> Ursula von der Leyen, '[Keynote speech by President von der Leyen at the EDA Annual Conference 2023: Powering up European Defence](#)', 30.11.2023.

to other candidates. The EU and in particular the Commission are well placed to offer economies of scale, financial incentives, and a framework to coordinate plurilateral planning and procurement. In the future, member states will probably also make better use of the European Defence Agency (EDA) for cooperation and coordination. Among candidate countries Serbia (2013) and Ukraine (2015) have already concluded bilateral administrative agreements with the EDA. For the time being, however, practical cooperation remains at a very low level.

## 5.2 Perspectives for the EU as a Defence Union

Thus, the war and its implications give a boost to adapting CSDP as part of CFSP. Talk is of a 'genuine European Defence Union',<sup>29</sup> which means to add substance to the treaty provisions for a common defence policy and common defence (Article 42(2) TEU). In the next institutional cycle concrete steps will be taken to strengthen CSDP. President von der Leyen has already announced a White Paper on the Future of European Defense.<sup>30</sup> This coincides with the gradual integration of candidates into these policy domains. Already in the current period of pre-accession, the *acquis* on CFSP and CSDP and its linkages with the economic and internal market policies of the EU will become part of preparing and negotiating membership. The EU is a security provider in the making. For candidates it is particularly interesting to be integrated into the EDTIB early on, and this is already taking place between EU member states (firms) and candidates, e.g., Ukraine.<sup>31</sup> Such cooperation will also foster candidates' resilience against the malign activities of hybrid warfare.

**'The EU is a security provider in the making.'**

President von der Leyen is about to appoint for the first time a commissioner for defence. It would make sense for him/her to cover the defence industry, including space and the current scope of

the DEFIS (Defence Industry and Space) general directorate, which currently works under the Commissioner for the Internal Market. Should member states establish a regular Council format for defence they would need to determine whether it ought to be chaired by the HR/VP (the existing informal defence Council is chaired by the HR/VP and hosted by the rotating council presidency). Additionally, it will be necessary to reconsider the competencies of the HR/VP, who is currently responsible for both military and civilian security operations and serves as head of EDA. Any restructuring will raise fundamental questions about the responsibilities and competences of the HR/VP in CSDP as part of CFSP including the European External Action Service (EEAS) and thus his/her role within the broader institutional architecture and in accordance with the Treaty. The trade-off between efficiency and legitimacy in CFSP decision-making is a complex issue that extends beyond the question of unanimity and constructive abstention.

## 6. (Non-)Availability of NATO membership and what it means for the EU

The common understanding of EU governments is that NATO 'remains the foundation of collective defence for its members.'<sup>32</sup> Here, the Versailles Declaration stated the obvious, that the EU cannot – and for the foreseeable future will not – provide this kind of security guarantee. This is also an important assessment for future members of the EU, including Ukraine. While some candidates (Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania) are already members of NATO, membership is not yet available for the Eastern European countries. While Moldova's constitutionally established neutrality limits its cooperation with NATO, NATO gave Georgia and Ukraine a perspective on joining in 2008 (Bucharest Summit) and intensified dialogue and cooperation in line with the Annual National Programmes. At the Vilnius summit in 2023 the bilateral Commission with Ukraine was replaced by the NATO-Ukraine Council (NUC) with the aim of deepening cooperation across the board and

<sup>29</sup> European Parliament, ['Implementation of the common foreign and security policy – annual report 2023'](#), 28.02.2024, point 13.

<sup>30</sup> Ursula von der Leyen, ['Europe's Choice. Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029'](#), 18.07.2024, p.13.

<sup>31</sup> See for example: Ministère des Armées (2023), ['Soutien à l'Ukraine: 16 accords industriels pour une aide directe et durable'](#), 02.10.2023.

<sup>32</sup> Versailles Declaration, point 8.

for crisis consultation in particular. In Vilnius and Washington, NATO confirmed that Ukraine will be invited to join ‘when Allies agree and conditions are met’<sup>33</sup>. While NATO took a dilatory approach, first steps are being taken and ideas are being developed for alternate or temporary security arrangements.

### 6.1 Bilateral agreements on security cooperation

In January and February 2024, the four European members of the G7 – the UK, France, Germany and Italy – signed bilateral agreements with Ukraine on security cooperation, and more agreements of this type have already been concluded or are underway. The agreements are not legally binding but are rather political documents. They have strong commonalities as far as scope and substance are concerned. They take up the main items in the declaration of the G7 from July 2023:

We will each work with Ukraine [...] towards [...] ensuring a sustainable force capable of defending Ukraine now and deterring Russian aggression in the future, through the continued provision of:

- security assistance and modern military equipment, across land, air, and sea domains – prioritizing air defence, artillery and long-range fires, armored vehicles, and other key capabilities, such as combat air, and by promoting increased interoperability with Euro-Atlantic partners;
- support to further develop Ukraine’s defence industrial base;

- training and training exercises for Ukrainian forces;
- intelligence sharing and cooperation;
- support for cyber defence, security, and resilience initiatives, including to address hybrid threats.<sup>34</sup>

The emphasis is on the compatibility and interoperability of Ukrainian and NATO forces (which is also severely lacking among NATO armies), alignment of standards with Euro-Atlantic partners and ‘[...] transition to NATO equipment and standards.’<sup>35</sup> Cooperation and support is also envisaged, with a view to the ‘development of a modern defence sector in Ukraine’<sup>36</sup> and efforts to ‘[...] integrate its defence industry into NATO and EU defence and security frameworks’.<sup>37</sup>

On the EU/NATO enlargement perspective the four agreements are more nuanced. The British, French and Italian agreements refer explicitly to Ukraine’s future NATO and EU membership without any indication of sequencing or linkages.<sup>38</sup> France and Ukraine commit that they will ‘coordinate and strengthen joint efforts to support Ukraine’s accession to NATO’.<sup>39</sup> Each of the four parties reaffirms the objective of Ukrainian accession to the European Union. The non-EU member UK and Ukraine agree to ‘support reforms [...] which are aimed at realising [Ukraine’s] European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations, including towards European Union and NATO membership.’<sup>40</sup> The wording on NATO

<sup>33</sup> Vilnius Summit Communiqué, point 11, 11.07.2023; Washington Summit Declaration, point 16, 10.7.2024.

<sup>34</sup> [G7 Joint declaration of support for Ukraine](#), 12.07.2023. By now all G7 countries have concluded bilateral agreements with Ukraine on security cooperation.

<sup>35</sup> [Agreement on Security Co-operation Between the United Kingdom of Great Britain & Northern Ireland and Ukraine](#) (Security Agreement UK-Ukraine), 12.01.2024, part II, Defence and Military Cooperation, point 3.

<sup>36</sup> Security Agreement UK-Ukraine, 12.01.2024, part II, Defence and Military Cooperation, point 5; [Agreement on security cooperation between Ukraine and France](#) (Security Agreement Ukraine-France), 16.02.2024, IV. Cooperation in the military and defence industry, point 7.

<sup>37</sup> This formulation can be found in the agreement with France as well as with Italy. Security Agreement Ukraine-France, IV. Cooperation in the military and defence industry, point 8. [Agreement on security cooperation between Ukraine and Italy](#) (Security Agreement Ukraine-Italy), 24.02.2024, part I, Article 3.

<sup>38</sup> Security Agreement UK-Ukraine, 12.01.2024; Security Agreement Ukraine-France, 16.02.2024; Security Agreement Ukraine-Italy, 24.02.2024.

<sup>39</sup> Security Agreement Ukraine-France, 16.02.2024, I. Introduction.

<sup>40</sup> Security Agreement UK-Ukraine, 12.01.2024, preamble.

membership is more cautious ('European and NATO aspirations' of Ukraine) in the agreement between Germany and Ukraine,<sup>41</sup> while Germany supports Ukraine's path towards EU membership without reservations.

**'These assurances are meant as a temporary substitute for NATO membership, which is unlikely to come anytime soon.'**

Security assurances are below the collective defence threshold which would imply readiness to send troops to Ukraine in the event of a future armed attack by Russia on the country. In three of the agreements, the possibility of future aggression is exclusively linked to Russia; Italy mentions also 'any other aggressor'.<sup>42</sup> Berlin, Paris, London and Rome each commit themselves to consult with Ukraine within 24 hours to determine appropriate steps and to provide Ukraine with 'swift and sustained security assistance [and] modern military equipment across all domains as necessary'.<sup>43</sup> These assurances are meant as a temporary substitute for NATO membership, which is unlikely to come anytime soon. Therefore, an amendment of these provisions is foreseen by aligning with 'any mechanism that Ukraine may subsequently agree with its other international partners',<sup>44</sup> including the G7.

The assurances of the US, UK and Russia in the Budapest declaration from 1994 were far stronger because the three committed themselves 'to seek immediate United Nations Security Council action to provide assistance to Ukraine, as a non-nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty on the

Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, if Ukraine should become a victim of an act of aggression or an object of a threat of aggression in which nuclear weapons are used'.<sup>45</sup> These, like any other security mechanisms, are worthless if not credible and used effectively.

## **6.2 EU contributions to security commitments**

The EU echoes and builds on the bilateral assurances of EU countries in 2024: 'The EU and its Member States remain committed to contributing, for the long-term and together with partners, to security commitments to Ukraine, which will help Ukraine to defend itself, resist destabilization efforts and deter acts of aggression in the future.' This is followed by the usual disclaimer: 'Military support and security commitments will be provided in full respect of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and taking into account the security and defence interests of all Member States'.<sup>46</sup> Making such comprehensive commitments even to a non-EU member will of course have direct implications for strategic planning and capacity building at member-state level complemented or coordinated at EU level. President von der Leyen claims that in traditional or hybrid scenarios as well as threats to security in Eastern European and Western Balkan countries, ('where long-standing grievances are now being manipulated by external action') the EU has a 'strategic responsibility'. This 'requires adequate defence spending, [...] military readiness and industrial readiness'.<sup>47</sup> The 'Joint security commitments between the European Union and Ukraine'<sup>48</sup> of June 2024 take up most of what the EU of today can contribute in the realm of security. This means that, compared to

<sup>41</sup> [Agreement on security cooperation and long-term support between the Federal Republic of Germany and Ukraine](#), 16.02.2024.

<sup>42</sup> Security Agreement Ukraine-Italy, 24.02.2024, part IV, article 11, point 2.

<sup>43</sup> cf. for example: Security Agreement Ukraine-France, 16.02.2024, III. Cooperation in the event of future armed attack. The wording in the agreement with Italy is slightly different as it does not mention the supply of modern military equipment. All four agreements include the imposition of sanctions (economic and other costs on Russia), only Germany and Italy refer to seeking agreement in the EU on these.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> UN, [Memorandum on security assurances in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons](#). Budapest, 5 December 1994, point 4.

<sup>46</sup> Council conclusions, EUCO 20/23, 15.12.2023, point 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ursula von der Leyen, 'Speech at the EDA Annual Conference'.

<sup>48</sup> [Joint security commitments between the European Union and Ukraine](#), 27.06.2024.

its member states, it neither disposes of military capacities of its own nor of a single military command structure like NATO. There is also no reference to the mutual assistance clause of Article 42(7) TEU.

**‘A credible assistance pledge could strengthen the deterrence of enemies. For this, the EU would need to specify the mechanism of Article 42(7) in the direction of collective defence to be applied in the event of an attack.’**

EU member states must live up to the assurances of the mutual assistance clause of the Treaty on European Union (42(7)), which asserts that, ‘if a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States [...] 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.’ The clause has only been invoked once, in 2015 by France.<sup>49</sup> Therefore it is not possible to draw any conclusions about its effectiveness. The procedure within the assistance clause is undefined, and EU institutions are not mentioned. It is up to members to react, and they may not do so together or in a united manner. This allows EU countries to coordinate their response with third countries or other organisations. Interestingly, the dissolved Western European Union had stronger provisions for its members, who were obliged to ‘afford the Party so attacked all the military and other aid and assistance in their power.’<sup>50</sup> A credible assistance pledge could strengthen the deterrence of enemies. For this, the EU would need to specify the mechanism of Article 42(7) in

the direction of collective defence to be applied in the event of an attack. This may involve extending the mechanism to important partners or candidate countries. The EU could make a political commitment in a separate declaration or within the framework of its association with Ukraine and possibly Moldova and Georgia. A potential European Quad, comprising France, Germany, Poland (the Weimar triangle) and the UK could take on more responsibility as suggested by their bilateral security agreements.<sup>51</sup>

## 7. Conclusions: enlargement and ramping up CFSP/CSDP

Compared to previous enlargements of the EU, security-related concerns today play a crucial role. This is due to the end of a cooperative European security order and the ongoing war. The current aspirants and candidates are from the Western Balkans, a region that lacks self-sustaining stability, and from Eastern Europe, which will be in a tense security situation with contested borders even after Russia’s war against Ukraine ends. Against this background, the following conclusions can be drawn:

*The security situation has provided a new rationale for enlargement.* In the draft ‘Strategic Agenda 2024-2029’ enlargement is listed under ‘A strong and secure Europe’. Alongside the accession negotiations, the EU is strengthening its CSDP to ensure the defence readiness of the EU-27. Talk is now of a ‘strategic enlargement’<sup>52</sup> as a superseding rationale for enlargement that will interplay with efforts to strengthen the capabilities of the EU as provider of security in and for the wider Europe. At the same time the EU confirms its traditional policy of conditionality as defined by the Copenhagen criteria for membership. The EU is thus seeking a new balance between the geostrategic

<sup>49</sup> Elie Perot, ‘France and Article 42(7) TEU: great expectations’ in Bob Deen, Dick Zandee, Adája Stoetman (eds.), [Uncharted and uncomfortable in European defence. The EU’s mutual assistance clause of Article 42\(7\)](#), 27.01.2022.

<sup>50</sup> Article V of the Modified Brussels Treaty: ‘If any of the High Contracting Parties should be the object of an armed attack in Europe, the Other High Contracting Parties will, in accordance with the provisions of Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, afford the Party so attacked all the military and other aid and assistance in their power’.

<sup>51</sup> [A Weimar Agenda for a strong, geopolitical EU](#), 22.05.2024.

<sup>52</sup> Sören Keil, Bernhard Stahl, ‘EU enlargement in times of crisis: Strategic enlargement, the conditionality principle and the future of the “Ever-closer Union”’, in Mechthild Roos, Daniel Schade (eds), *The EU under Strain? Current Crises Shaping European Union Politics*, 2023, pp. 155-72.

considerations and the strict conditionality that is needed to ensure legitimate and effective governance of the EU.

**The EU is thus seeking a new balance between the geostrategic considerations and the strict conditionality that is needed to ensure legitimate and effective governance of the EU.'**

*The new CFSP-focus in accession negotiations should be matched with practical measures.* As a result of the geopolitical momentum in enlargement policy and combined with the evolving *acquis* in security policy, the cluster on external relations is now considered to contain important chapters in the accession negotiations. Prior to accession, the EU should rapidly intensify practical cooperation and integration of the candidates with the CFSP/CSDP in order to enhance the security of candidates as well as of the EU itself.

*Political cooperation is deepening.* In order to promote the CFSP logic of enlargement process, the EU could consider inviting candidates to participate more regularly in Council meetings and granting observer status to those who have provisionally closed external relations cluster. It is important for the candidate countries to maintain a high level of alignment. However, even before becoming members, candidates can use political dialogue and joint association institutions to contribute to the EU's policy formulation in CFSP/CSDP matters. The EU is expanding and accelerating practical cooperation and gradual integration with most of the candidates in the field of CSDP and the EDTIB, again driven by the war in Ukraine. At the same time the complementarity of NATO and EU capabilities planning is to be more systematically anchored. Table 1 shows that Russia's aggression has immediately triggered a plethora of measures and adaptations in the EU's security policy.

*Institutional set-up and political leadership is essential.* To improve the steering of the relevant processes, the EU would need to streamline its institutions, including substructures such as the

EEAS and EDA. It is essential to have a high profile commissioner for enlargement with significant authority and a HR/VP who enjoys strong support from key EU governments to oversee enlargement. A commissioner for the defence industry could oversee the many regulatory and financial instruments that the EU already has or is about to launch. Although enlargement policy is now considered high politics, a geopolitical framing is not yet a new policy. The EU must prove its seriousness regarding enlargement and its 'strategic responsibility' in the decision on the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

*A more comprehensive approach is called for.* Accession negotiations cannot be concluded soon and are thus not in line with the sense of urgency in security matters with regard to Eastern Europe. As part of a comprehensive approach that goes beyond the accession negotiations, the EU has to cooperate with other security organisations, namely with NATO. In quality, intensity and scope these efforts must go well beyond what the EU has been and is still doing in the Western Balkans.

*EU and NATO processes should be complementary, but not linked.* As in the past, EU and NATO enlargement follow their own institutional logics and timetables. These should complement each other, but they will not be rigidly linked. Each organisation will deal with candidate countries individually rather than as a group. This differentiation is also a consequence of the very different security needs and circumstances of the candidates. The established pattern for the Western Balkans remains 'NATO enlargement first'. Relations with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia are of a new nature. For some time to come these countries will live in a period of uncertainty. Although NATO and the EU no longer treat them as buffer states, they do not yet enjoy the security guarantees of a NATO member. The bilateral security cooperation agreements between Ukraine and France, Germany, Italy and the UK highlight the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach of interlocking policies and approaches by NATO, notably the US, and the EU in the pre-accession period.

*EU security commitments can precede enlargement.* For Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, the EU must take a leading role in contributing to the

security of new members. To build a bridge to candidate countries before they join, the EU could unilaterally declare the extension of the mutual assistance clause (Article 42(7)). This would complement the ongoing integration of candidates into CFSP policies and programmes and demonstrate the EU's commitment to negotiating with them in good faith. To deter Russia from threatening and provoking its neighbours, it is crucial to underpin this commitment with credible military capabilities and political will to provide assistance if necessary. Therefore, it is essential to implicitly combine these EU commitments – also

beyond the already concluded joint commitments from June 2024 – with the bilateral security assurances of EU/NATO members. Achieving this demands intense dialogue and overall coordination with the US.

*This time, the aim will be to contain Russia.* The EU will carry out the next enlargement with the aim of containing Russia and against Russia's stated interests and claims. This is in stark contrast to the beginning of the big-bang enlargement, when the EU and also NATO sought confidence-building measures and gestures vis-a-vis Moscow.