

Developed by Jean Monnet Project *Studying EU in Canadian High Schools*¹
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Canada, the European Union and NATO



Credit: NATO flag.

DESCRIPTION: This lesson plan explores the continued role of NATO and raises the question of how important NATO is to Canada in current circumstances. It seeks to engage students in discussion of these issues by focusing on a few key issues – Canada’s financial contribution to NATO, whether the EU can take over the responsibility for security in Europe, and what contribution Members States should be expected to make to NATO.

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was founded in 1949 in response to security challenges that arose after World War II. Prominent among these was a concern about the expansion of Soviet influence in Europe; NATO was intended to prevent “the revival of nationalist militarism in Europe through a strong North American presence on the continent and encouraging European political integration.”² NATO originally brought together twelve countries from Europe and North America, including Canada in a peacetime defensive military alliance.

Canada has played a prominent role in NATO since its inception, and Canadian involvement in European security has an even longer history with Canadian support for the Allied forces in World Wars I and II. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, bringing the Cold War between the USSR and the West to an end, NATO’s continued usefulness was called into question. Yet, over the past decade, security concerns regarding Russia’s annexation of Crimea, its escalation of hybrid warfare, and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 have reoriented NATO’s focus towards European security. The 2022 Strategic Concept action plan, recognizes Russia as “the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security.” NATO’s recent expansion to Finland in 2023 and Sweden in 2024, has further strengthened the alliance, with both states contributing significant effort towards maintaining NATO’s political commitment to collective defense and a strengthened security program in Europe. Additionally, Canada has reinforced their role within NATO by maintaining their position of leadership to the multinational battlegroup in Latvia, contributing to the credibility of NATO’s Forward Presence.

TIME REQUIREMENTS: 75 or 150 minutes (approximate times)

If the students have already done a lesson plan on the European Union, you may wish to tailor the presentation to leave some sections out. Feel free to pick and choose topics from the handouts to fit your class.

OBJECTIVES: The primary objectives of this lesson plan are:

- to provide information about NATO,
- to allow students to consider Canada’s role in NATO, and
- to examine the Canadian-EU partnership in modern security policy, cyber threats, hybrid warfare, and disinformation.

The following themes will be covered:

- the historical, economic, and political ties between Canada and the EU;
- the purpose and functions of NATO, including comparisons with EU competencies;
- EU and European security issues; and
- Canada’s role in the transatlantic and European security.

² NATO, “A short history of NATO”, available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_139339.htm

MATERIALS: (4 documents total)

- Teacher's Guide (below)
- Student handouts
 - Handout A: Historical background on Canada, the EU, and NATO
 - Handout B: The EU and European security
 - Handout C: The 5% Debate

Note: feel free to pick and choose which material from the handouts you would like to use, and which material would be for your reference only.

TEACHER'S GUIDE:

The following guidelines are to assist in delivering the material in this lesson plan. They are meant to have a certain amount of flexibility, to account for the amount of time available in the class, as well as to offer the option of a more classroom or homework focused approach. The lesson plan can be adapted.

Procedure for Recommended Lesson Plan: (150 minutes)

1) **Teacher leads students in an opening discussion on the history of Canada's involvement in European security, the EU's role therein, and the evolution of NATO.** This will provide students with essential historical background for Canada-EU relations. Main sections to be covered include World Wars I and II, the formation of NATO and the Cold War, and the post-Cold War period. Mention the benefits and drawbacks of Canadian involvement in European security issues. This content can further discuss Russia's annexation of Crimea and how it ultimately led to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It can also address NATO's renewed deterrence and defence capabilities, along with Canada's leadership position under Operation Reassurance in Latvia. *(15 minutes) Recommended Handout:* Handout A.

2) **Steer the discussion towards Canadian interests and European security.** Discuss cultural and historical ties, the theme of a community of values, transatlantic linkages, and concrete security interests. Include contemporary challenges such as sanction coordination with the EU, Canada's support for Ukraine, counter-disinformation efforts, and cyber defence. *(10 minutes) Recommended Handout:* Handout A.

3) **Introduce NATO as an international actor.** Discuss whether NATO was needed and why, the redefinition of NATO's goals post-Cold War, NATO enlargement, and key NATO tasks and involvements. Updated information can mention NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept, the ascension of Finland and Sweden, the focus on hybrid and cyber defence, and NATO's identification of China as a "systematic challenge." *(15 minutes) Recommended Handout:* Handout A.

4) **Introduce the EU and European security.** Provide important context for the European side of this relationship, including: the evolution of Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) and the EU's relationship with NATO. Additional discussions can address the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC), the increase in defence expenditure for EU member states, and the expansion of NATO to other states within the EU since 2022. (15 minutes) *Recommended Handout:* Handout B.

5) **Introduce the issue of contributions of NATO member states to the security mission of NATO.** In 2025, more than 20 NATO states agreed at the Hague Summit to invest 5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to meet defence requirements by 2035. (10 minutes) *Recommended Handout:* Handout C

6) **Discussion of issues for Canada and opportunity for debate.** This section will get students to interact and challenge their knowledge of current issues regarding Canada-EU-NATO relations. Please select one topic, refer to the specific handout for debate rules, procedures, and information. (10 minutes) *Recommended Handouts:* Handouts B and C

Topics of debate include:

- a) Can or should the EU replace NATO with its own foreign and defence policy and military force?
- b) How should NATO approach the 5% debate (i.e. what should be part of the contribution)?

Both these topics should address recent security realities connected to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, as well as the strengthened cooperation between NATO and EU member states.

7) **Assign roles.** Teacher assigns prepared roles for each student (each student receives a country to represent). The teacher should guide the students to read Handout A and chosen Handout material, ask questions about their assignment, how to research their role and further explain the rules of the role play that will happen next class (provided in each Handout). The teacher should explain to the students that they ought to research their roles and figure out the best strategy to represent their country. Let the students take one or a few days to research and pick a day to debate.

8) **Debate.** The interactive activity or debate structure is available on each handout.

Procedure for Alternative Lesson Plan: (75 minutes)

1) **What is NATO?** Teacher introduces the topic of Canada's role in international relations and defence, especially through its engagement with security alliances like NATO. (15 minutes)

• *Recommended:* Note Canada is part of NATO and play the 3-minute video, "What is NATO? CNBC Explains," to introduce NATO (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGc3v56_ZZY)

• *Recommended:* Handout A— allow for reading time and follow up or reshape the Handout for personalized teaching preference.

- 2) **Teachers should briefly introduce the following concepts (enough for the students to be able to lead a short roleplaying debate):** Teacher lead students in an opening discussion on the history of Canada's involvement in European security, the EU's role therein, and the evolution of NATO; steer the discussion towards Canadian interests and European security; introduce NATO as an international actor and its mission; introduce the EU and European security; introduce the issues of member country contributions to NATO. *(20 minutes)*
- 3) **Choose either Handout B or C for interactive debates for students. Assign country roles to students.** *(5 minutes)*
- 4) **Structuring the debate.** Teacher should guide the students to read the chosen Handout material, ask questions about the topic and debate, and further explain the rules of the debate that will happen during the same class *(15 minutes)*.
- 5) **Execute the debate based on the guide from Handout B or C.** *(20 minutes)*

Resources:

Government of Canada. (2025). Operation REASSURANCE. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-reassurance.html>

NATO. (2025). Defence expenditures and NATO's 5% commitment. Available at: <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/defence-expenditures-and-natos-5-commitment>