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Canada, the European Union and NATO

Handout B: The EU and European Security

The European Union (EU) possesses several agencies and policies focused on the issue of security, including: the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the External Action Service (EEAS), and the European Defence Agency (EDA). This handout will discuss the CSDP and its new developments like the EU's Strategic Compass, the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC), and the European Defence Fund (EDF).

Most foreign policy decisions in the EU are established on a consensus decision-making basis. The Maastricht Treaty — which was agreed to by member states in 1991 and entered into force in 1993 — established the principle of a common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) for the EU. Five years later, in 1998, leaders of the United Kingdom and France issued the Saint Malo Declaration, which stated the need for the EU to develop the capacity for autonomous action backed by credible military force. Following these two developments, the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) was launched in 1999 and took effect with the Treaty of Nice in 2003; it involved the gradual development of some military force. The Lisbon Treaty (2009) then changed the ESDP to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The CSDP conducts missions for the purpose of preserving peace, preventing conflict, and strengthening international security in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter.

Under the CSDP the EU itself has no standing army. Rather, EU civilian and military missions are established with contributions from the EU member states. In addition, two battle groups of 1500 personnel are on standby to respond rapidly, but these have not been deployed. Former EU battlegroup systems have been replaced by the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC). This military force has been constructed to deploy up to 5,000 troops as of May 2025 for crisis response and evacuation operations.

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Under CSDP, there should be no competition with NATO; rather CSDP works in cooperation with NATO. CSDP works in tandem with NATO, and since 2022 EU-NATO collaboration has amplified in areas focused on hybrid warfare threats, cyber defence, along with critical infrastructure protection.

The Lisbon Treaty brought other changes in the security and foreign policy sphere. The treaty provided for the creation of an EU diplomatic corps, the European External Action Service (EEAS), as well as the position of High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Since December 2019, the latter position has been held by Josep Borrell Fontelles, a former politician and academic from Spain. Borrell has continued in this position throughout 2025, examining the EU's response to Russia's war on Ukraine while managing EU sanctions. Since 2022, the EU has established strong energy-security reforms in order to decrease reliance on Russian gas by broadening energy sources. The EU has provided military support to Ukraine through the European Peace Facility, allowing it to be a major support for offering equipment, training, and financial support.

Another important initiative resulting from the Lisbon Treaty is Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). Implementation began in December 2017. Under PESCO, EU member states participate in joint military and defence projects. Over the past few years, these particular projects have focused on cyber defence, space security, unmanned aerial systems, ammunition production, and improving Europe's defence industrial capacity. Since 2023, the EU launched the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) and the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act (EDIRPA) in response to the European Council's urgent request for ammunition, and missiles as necessary to support Ukraine (ASAP boosting defence).

In 2003 the EU adopted its first security strategy, the European Security Strategy; in 2016 this was updated with The EU Global Strategy (EUGS). This document addresses a wide range of issues under the umbrella of 'security', including threats from terrorism, protection of civilians, energy in security, climate change, and other crisis situations not only in Europe but in neighbouring regions. It also emphasizes the linkages between external threats and internal security and the importance of cooperation among EU member states as well as with external partners in addressing them. By 2022, the EU also began implementing the Strategic Compass, which outlines a plan of action for updated defence priorities like hybrid warfare resilience, rapid deployment, and long-term support to Ukraine.

Underlying all of these initiatives is the assumption, sometimes stated and sometimes not, that the EU will continue to cooperate with NATO in the security realm. In 2002, a comprehensive package of agreements between NATO and the EU, known as the Berlin Plus agreement, was reached. It is comprised of several parts including a NATO-EU Security Agreement, which, among other things, assures access to NATO planning capabilities for EU-led Crisis Management Operations (CMO), as well as the availability of NATO assets and capabilities for such operations. Nonetheless, in spite of this official partnership between NATO and the EU, there have been recurrent discussions about the potential overlap in security mandates between the EU and NATO, as well as over the need for increased European defense capabilities that are not reliant on the United States. Consideration of a more autonomous

European security capacity largely stems from questions raised about the depth of the American commitment to NATO's collective defense system, based on comments made by U.S. President Donald Trump. Recent debates focusing on European strategic autonomy have discussed whether or not the U.S. could be considered a reliable long-term ally in the wake of the instability caused by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. These questions have contributed to a renewed interest among some European leaders in fostering Europe's own defence capabilities. For example, French President Emmanuel Macron has suggested that Europe should develop its own army, and German Chancellor indicated that, "The days when we can unconditionally rely on others are gone," also expressing support for eventual creation of a "real European army."^{3 2}

Questions to Explore with Students

Given the existence of the CSDP, is NATO still vital for European security? Moreover, what does the development of the CSDP mean for Canadian involvement in European security? Since NATO has been a primary means to link Canada to European Allies in the security sphere, how might evolving EU-NATO cooperation and a stronger EU security role influence Canada's position in transatlantic security in the future?

Interactive Role-play

Topic: Should the EU develop its own army to make European countries less dependent on NATO for its defence and security?

Distribute roles (countries) to students: Students will take on their assigned role as ambassador of a particular country and represent their country's interests during the discussion (from the list below), while the teacher will chair the meeting and make sure debate rules are followed.

Following are potential country options for the students (it is recommended that countries marked with an asterisk* are represented if there are less than 30 students):

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------|---------------------|
| 1. ALBANIA | 12. GREECE | 23. POLAND* |
| 2. BELGIUM | 13. HUNGARY | 24. PORTUGAL |
| 3. BULGARIA | 14. ICELAND+ | 25. ROMANIA |
| 4. CANADA* | 15. ITALY* | 26. SLOVAK REPUBLIC |

² See for example, Eileen Sullivan, "Trump Questions the Core of NATO: Mutual Defense, including Montenegro," New York Times, July 18, 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm; and Julian E. Barnes, and Helene Cooper, "Trump Discussed Pulling U.S. From NATO, Aides Say Amid New Concerns Over Russia," New York Times, Jan. 14, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm

³ Katrin Bennhold and Steven Erlanger, "Merkel Joins Macron in Calling for a European Army 'One Day'", New York Times, Nov. 13, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/13/world/europe/merkel-macron-european-army.html>

- | | | |
|--------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 5. CROATIA | 16. LATVIA* | 27. SLOVENIA |
| 6. CZECHIA | 17. LITHUANIA* | 28. SPAIN |
| 7. DENMARK | 18. LUXEMBOURG | 29. SWEDEN |
| 8. ESTONIA* | 19. MONTENEGRO | 30. TÜRKIYE* |
| 9. FINLAND | 20. NETHERLANDS* | 31. THE UNITED KINGDOM* |
| 10. FRANCE* | 21. NORTH MACEDONIA | 32. THE UNITED STATES* |
| 11. GERMANY* | 22. NORWAY* | |

The process: The representatives will have an option of preparing a declaration or responding to a declaration. The declaration is proposed during the NATO meeting, and it is then debated and/or revised. Representatives may disagree with the declaration altogether; representatives may wish to disagree on certain points or words used and offer a revision; representatives may support the declaration and respond to criticism. After debate and revisions, the final proposed declaration is presented and the NATO members vote on the declaration (yes, no, or abstain (not voting)). Since the vote must be unanimous to accept the declaration, all NATO members must either vote “yes” or “abstain” and there shall not be any “no” votes.

The declaration: The students, as representatives of their country, will have a chance to develop is NATO still vital for European security or should the EU develop its own military force?). The declaration can be as long as required — anywhere from one sentence to a few paragraphs — focusing on a political statement with reasoning. Representatives should remember that they are representing their country’s interests first and are trying to encourage their agenda during the declaration and meeting. Declaration examples:

- 1. Europe should continue to rely primarily on NATO for its military security needs, and should not try to develop its a specific EU military force; OR*
- 2. Given uncertainly about US commitments to meet European security needs, the EU should proceed to develop a unified European military force that can operate autonomously to meet European security needs.*

The debate: The teacher will work as the chair of the meeting, administering rules of debate. If more than one declaration is prepared, the chair will present each one at the start of the debate and they shall be voted on. The vote will determine which declarations will be debated and voted on first. After the order of debate is established, the chair will invite the sponsoring representative (one who wrote the declaration) to read the declaration. The chair will then invite the debate to begin, where representatives will have a chance to support, disagree with, and propose to revise the declaration. With regards to revisions, any representative may propose a specific revision, and it could be brought to a vote with the chair counting the votes (yes, no, abstain), where a unanimous vote is needed for the revision to be applied. If there is continued engagement from the representatives, the chair may continue the debate as needed, or continue to the next declaration.

The final vote: The chair will bring the declaration(s) to a final vote, where NATO representatives will vote (yes, no, abstain) on carrying the declaration. If the declaration passes, congratulations — the NATO alliance worked together to create a particular stance. If the declaration fails, that is also great — it is not always easy to create unanimous consensus and now you learned why!

Resources:

Council of the European Union and European Council. “Think Tank reports on Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine.” Think tank review, 8 July 2025. Available at:

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/library/library-blog/posts/think-tank-reports-on-russia-s-war-of-aggression-against-ukraine-6/>

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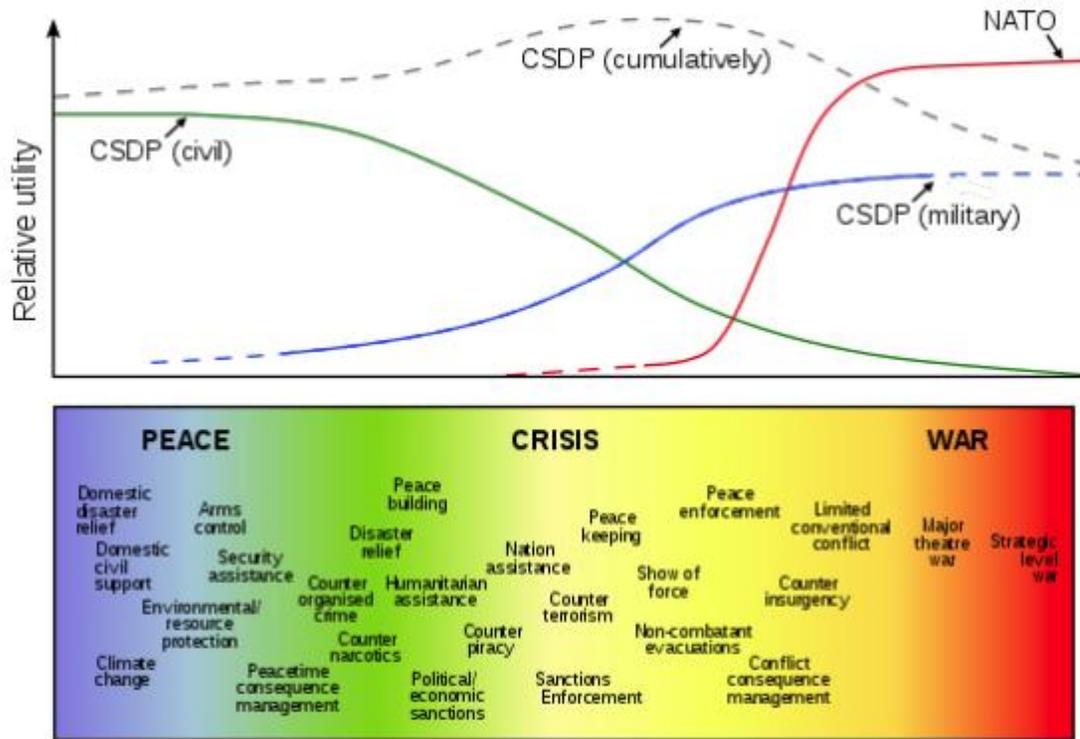
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<https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2025.2562978>

Appendix A

Figure 2: CSDP vs. NATO



Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Note: Chart presented in 2012 by then Director General of the Military Staff Lt. gen. Ton van Osch.