

# European Security in Changing. Geopolitical Perspectives

**Mircea Mureșan**

*Retired General, Member of the Academy of Scientists, Romania,  
mirceamuresanul@gmail.com*

**Abstract:** European security is undergoing an accelerated transformation process, driven by changes in the global geopolitical environment, technological developments and the reconfiguration of relations between great powers. In the context of intensifying strategic competition, pressures on the international order and the proliferation of hybrid threats, the European space is faced with the need to redefine its instruments and mechanisms for defense and cooperation. The article analyzes the main trends that are reshaping Europe's security architecture, highlighting the role of regional and global actors, the dynamics of Euro-Atlantic institutions and the implications for medium-term stability. The study offers an integrated perspective on emerging challenges and possible directions for strategic adaptation to strengthen European resilience.

**Keywords:** European Security, Geopolitics, Hybrid Threats, Euro-Atlantic Cooperation, Strategic Resilience, Operational Adaptation

## 1. Strategic premises and recent developments

Europe is currently at a strategic crossroads, in a profoundly reconfigured security environment. The war in Ukraine has revitalized the East-West competitive logic, amplifying tensions between the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) and actors challenging the Euro-Atlantic order. In parallel, global strategic realignment, marked by the growing influence of Russia and China, is generating structural pressures on the European security architecture. These transformations are taking place in an increasingly complex landscape, in which threats are not only conventional, but also hybrid, information and technological. A key vector of this evolution is the proliferation of hybrid campaigns, such that the dissemination of disinformation, cyberattacks and sabotage of critical infrastructures are new tactics used by revisionist actors to undermine the internal stability of European countries and trust in democratic institutions. NATO, as the pillar of Euro-Atlantic security, is called upon to respond not only through traditional military means, but also through integrated strategies of resilience and cooperation with civilian partners. In addition, according to News Global (2025), the inclusion of maritime and underwater space as geopolitical vectors adds a new dimension: the vulnerability of submarine infrastructures (communication cables or energy pipelines) which become preferential targets for hybrid tactics.

NATO, in turn, must also respond to geopolitical challenges in terms of mobility and defensive preparedness. For example, the logistical challenges posed by the rapid transport of forces to the Alliance's flanks have recently been highlighted by European leaders, which reveals gaps in the strategic mobility architecture (Hoorman & Vincent, 2025). In addition, at the 2025 Hague Summit, NATO member states committed to increasing their defense spending, thus strengthening their collective commitment to deterrence and defense.

Moreover, the space dimension of the confrontation is rapidly expanding: potential threats to allied space capabilities (communication systems and satellites) are increasingly relevant, as adversaries develop anti-satellite capabilities and other means of challenging technological superiority in space. This trend underlines the need for a NATO response not only on the ground, but also in the field of innovation and protection of critical infrastructure.

Institutionally, the answers cannot come only at the national level, but cooperation between NATO and the EU is becoming increasingly necessary, given that hybrid threats overlap both the European and transatlantic security agendas. Moreover, according to the European Union Institute for Security Studies (2025), the partnership must include strategic

exchanges, joint threat analysis and the development of response mechanisms that combine military and civilian expertise.

In this context, the article explores the dynamics with which NATO is adapting to new geopolitical realities - from conventional deterrence, to integrated defense, hybrid resilience and inter-institutional cooperation. The objective is to identify the major trends shaping European security today and to highlight possible strategic directions for strengthening Euro-Atlantic resilience in the medium term.

## **2. Intensifying global rivalries**

The international strategic environment is going through a phase of heightened competition between the great powers, with direct implications for European security. The rivalry between the United States, China and Russia is redefining the logic of global interactions, transferring systemic pressures to the Euro-Atlantic space. This competition is not limited to the military dimension, but is simultaneously manifested in the economic, technological, energy and information fields, shaping a multipolar geopolitical landscape, marked by persistent tensions.

China's rise as a global actor, with ambitions to reshape the international order, is leading to a strategic reorientation of the US and an intensification of competition for influence in critical regions, from the Indo-Pacific to Europe. Beijing's economic and technological involvement in European states, including through initiatives such as the Belt and Road or investments in sensitive infrastructure, is raising concerns about the strategic vulnerability and decision-making autonomy of Euro-Atlantic partners.

In parallel, Russia remains a disruptive actor in the European security environment, challenging the security architecture through military actions, hybrid strategies and instruments of political influence. Although its economic capacity is limited, Russia compensates with strategic flexibility and the use of asymmetric instruments, which amplifies regional instability. The war in Ukraine represents an inflection point, accelerating the consolidation of the eastern flank, the reassessment of deterrence positions and the return of conventional military competition in Europe.

The intensification of global rivalries also amplifies the fragmentation of the international system. Multilateral norms are eroding, and the logic of cooperation is gradually replaced by a competition for access to critical resources, secure supply chains, emerging technologies and strategic spaces such as the Arctic or cyberspace. In this context, Europe is becoming a space of intersection between the interests of great powers, which increases the pressure on Euro-Atlantic institutions to develop instruments adapted to the new realities. For NATO, this evolution means the need for a continuous effort of adjustment: integrating the global dimension into strategic planning, strengthening relations with partners in the Indo-Pacific, protecting critical supply chains and maintaining technological superiority over systemic competitors. Global rivalries are thus becoming not just a phenomenon external to Europe, but a structural factor redefining the Alliance's security priorities.

In this global context, the European security environment is no longer defined exclusively by conventional risks, but is characterised by a broad and interdependent spectrum of threats. These can be classified into three main categories: conventional military (the resurgence of conventional conflicts in Europe), hybrid (combining military and non-military instruments) and cyber/technological (against critical infrastructures, communication systems and industrial platforms), each of which has direct implications for the strategic posture of NATO and its member states. These categories of threats are often interconnected, amplifying their impact on regional stability. For example, a cyber attack can support a disinformation campaign or disrupt military logistics, demonstrating the need for a holistic approach. In this context, European security can no longer be conceived simply as a set of traditional defensive measures, but as an integrated system, in which NATO plays the leading role in coordinating responses and developing adaptive capabilities.

### **3. NATO - Central actor of European security**

In the face of new geopolitical challenges, NATO is constantly redefining its doctrine and strategic posture, strengthening its central role in Euro-Atlantic security. Adaptation is aimed not only at conventional deterrence, but also at the Alliance's ability to respond rapidly to hybrid, cyber or space threats, by combining conventional forces with technological and non-conventional means. A key concept in this transformation is "*adaptive deterrence*", representing a flexible and dynamic a flexible and dynamic deterrence factor that allows NATO to anticipate and react to diverse and evolving threats.

According to NATO's Capstone Plan (NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept, 2021), this type of deterrence integrates defense in multiple domains, not only land, but also cyber, space and information. To ensure the credibility of this deterrence, NATO is intensifying its presence on the eastern flanks through multinational units, rapid reaction forces and integrated exercises, measures that are not just symbolic - they test the interoperability, logistical capacity and speed of reaction of those involved, demonstrating the determination and cohesion of the Alliance. Moreover, NATO is investing heavily in emerging technologies: autonomous drones, advanced surveillance systems, anti-satellite capabilities and cyber defence. This integrated approach reflects the view that modern deterrence is not only about military force, but also about resilience and prevention. Last but not least, operational adaptation requires close coordination with member states, as well as with organisations such as the EU. The aim is to build an integrated security architecture, capable of combining military and civilian assets, so that NATO remains a credible and effective pillar in the face of a changing strategic environment.

Strengthening European security depends largely on NATO's ability to maintain a credible balance between strategic expansion, effective deterrence and collective defence. In the context of global rivalries and hybrid threats, these elements represent the main pillars of the alliance's posture. Strategic expansion involves not only the accession of new members, but also the development of solid partnerships with third states, an approach that contributes to strengthening regional stability and preventing strategic gaps that could be exploited by revisionist actors, deterrence remains a central instrument, materialized by the permanent presence of forces on the eastern flank, the deployment of multinational units and integrated training exercises, and collective defence, based on Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, remains the anchor of Euro-Atlantic stability.

In conclusion, enlargement, deterrence and collective defence are not independent objectives, but interdependent components of a coherent strategy. They enable NATO to manage current and emerging challenges, maintain alliance cohesion and protect European security in a geopolitical environment marked by uncertainty and systemic competition.

### **4. Geopolitical perspectives and directions of evolution**

Strengthening the European dimension within NATO is a strategic objective essential for the stability and cohesion of the alliance. This requires the European member states to assume a more active and balanced role in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture, both militarily and politically. The increase in Europe's capacity for military contribution is achieved through joint investments in defence, the development of interoperable forces and active participation in NATO command and planning structures. Initiatives such as the European Deterrence Initiative and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects highlight the tendency of European states to assume significant responsibilities in conventional deterrence and regional crisis management. This strengthening does not aim to replace NATO, but to complement and strengthen the collective capacity of the Alliance.

Active European participation contributes to a more equitable burden-sharing and increases strategic credibility, demonstrating that Euro-Atlantic security does not depend exclusively on the United States. In addition, the emphasis on the European dimension

supports the Alliance's internal political cohesion, facilitating strategic dialogue and the development of common security policies. Through more active involvement, European states contribute to anticipating threats, coordinating crisis responses and strengthening collective resilience, thus strengthening a more balanced and effective NATO in the face of global and regional challenges. We believe that to remain relevant in a geopolitical context marked by global rivalries and emerging technologies, NATO must adopt strategic changes aimed at maintaining its competitiveness. This involves not only modernizing conventional military capabilities, but also developing innovative tools for deterrence and rapid response.

Investments in emerging technologies - autonomous systems, artificial intelligence applied to defense, anti-satellite capabilities, and cyber defense - are essential for maintaining strategic superiority. Adapting doctrine and operational posture to these developments allows NATO to effectively manage hybrid threats and integrate new tools into a coherent defense architecture. Strategic competitiveness also involves strengthening interoperability among members and rapidly developing collective response capabilities. Joint exercises, standardization of equipment, and information exchanges increase the effectiveness of the alliance and reduce vulnerabilities to rapid or unconventional aggression.

Ultimately, the adaptations necessary for strategic competitiveness are not only aimed at responding to threats, but also at preventing them. NATO should anticipate geopolitical and technological developments, thus strengthening its collective deterrence and protection capacity, ensuring European security and its relevance in the medium and long term.

#### ***4.1. Medium-term projections for European security***

In the medium term, European security will continue to be shaped by the interplay between global geopolitical rivalries and the internal dynamics of the North Atlantic Alliance. Pressures from the eastern flanks, rapid technological developments and hybrid threats are expected to remain determinants of NATO's cohesion and relevance. We believe that one of the essential pillars of this evolution will be the strengthening of European autonomy, strategically integrated within NATO. European states will continue to increase their defence spending, and initiatives such as multinational cooperation (e.g. within CARD/PESCO) will enhance collective response and deterrence. According to the recent report of the EU-NATO Council, cooperation on capability development and military mobility remains a priority, within a framework that avoids duplication but maximises interoperability. Financially and logistically, NATO will support its transformation through joint strategic investment funds. For example, the NATO Security Investment Programme is focused on critical infrastructure such as communications, space systems and command centers, which will strengthen the material basis of collective deterrence.

From a doctrinal and military perspective, the implementation of the concept of "adaptive deterrence" will continue to guide NATO's evolution. Thus, the long-term strategy contained in the NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC, 2021) defines a multi-domain mode of action (land, maritime, cyber, space) and the principles on which the Alliance will adapt its power instruments until 2040. Another key factor will be increasingly integrated EU-NATO cooperation. Recent reports indicate a renewed commitment to standardization, military mobility and interoperability of capabilities, amid common challenges from external rivals.

In conclusion, European security in the medium term will depend on the balance between European autonomy and transatlantic solidarity. NATO's ability to adapt to emerging threats and to channel strategic resources towards capability development will be decisive. If European states take a more proactive role and cooperation with the EU is strengthened, the Alliance can become more resilient and effective in maintaining Euro-Atlantic peace and stability.

## 5. Research methods and tools

The analysis of European security and NATO's role was carried out through a combined approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to capture the complexity of the current geopolitical context. First of all, *documentary analysis* constitutes the foundation of the research. NATO and EU strategic documents, doctrinal plans, official reports and studies by specialized institutions such as the RAND Corporation or the European Council on Foreign Relations were examined. This stage allows the identification of trends, military capabilities and deterrence instruments, providing a robust conceptual framework.

The *comparative method* was used to assess the contributions of member states to the European dimension of the Alliance, highlighting the strategic convergences and differences between them. In parallel, case studies—such as NATO's response to the crisis in Ukraine or multinational exercises on the eastern flank—provide concrete examples of the application of doctrine and operational efficiency.

*Quantitative and geo-strategic data analysis* complements the qualitative perspective, examining military spending, rapid reaction capabilities and interoperability. Thematic maps and digital tools allow visualization of the distribution of forces and critical infrastructure, providing a clear understanding of vulnerabilities and defensive potential.

This methodological combination ensures an integrated approach, through which the assessment of doctrines, operational analysis and the interpretation of empirical data generate a coherent picture of European security and NATO's role in maintaining Euro-Atlantic stability.

## Conclusions

The geopolitical analysis of European security highlights a profound transformation of the strategic environment, marked by global rivalries, hybrid threats and rapid technological developments. NATO remains the main pillar of Euro-Atlantic security, but its effectiveness depends on strengthening the European dimension and continuously adapting to emerging challenges. European Member States must step up their contribution to collective deterrence, by investing in interoperable capabilities, military mobility and cutting-edge technology. NATO–EU cooperation and international partnerships are essential tools for crisis prevention and for the effective management of transnational conflicts.

In the medium term, European security will be determined by the Alliance's ability to integrate European autonomy and transatlantic solidarity, while maintaining strategic flexibility and collective resilience. It is recommended to:

- Continue to strengthen the European dimension in NATO, through multinational forces and operational standardisation;
- Sustained investment in emerging technologies and cyber defence;
- Strengthen cooperation with the EU and external partners for a coordinated response to hybrid threats and regional crises;
- Continue to develop the concept of “adaptive deterrence”, to anticipate and effectively counter emerging challenges.

In conclusion, maintaining Euro-Atlantic stability depends on the balance between European commitments and NATO's collective capacity to respond rapidly and effectively in a dynamic strategic environment. Continuous adaptation, cooperation and innovation remain essential pillars for European security in the future.

## References

- Allied Command Transformation (NATO ACT). (2023). <https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NWCC-Glossy-18-MAY.pdf>
- Consiliul European Consiliul Uniunii Europene. (2025). *Coreper I*. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/council-eu/preparatory-bodies/coreper-i/>

- Hoorman, C., & Vincent, E. (2025). *NATO faces logistics challenge over moving tanks across EU in face of Russian threat*. Le Monde. [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/11/16/nato-faces-logistics-challenge-over-moving-tanks-across-eu-in-face-of-russian-threat\\_6747508\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/11/16/nato-faces-logistics-challenge-over-moving-tanks-across-eu-in-face-of-russian-threat_6747508_4.html)
- NATO Allied Command Transformation. (2021). *NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept*. <https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NWCC-Glossy-18-MAY.pdf>
- News Global. (2025, August 26). *Strategic Vulnerabilities: Hybrid Warfare Threats from Russia and China on Europe's Critical Infrastructures*, Political Analysis. europe.hss.de
- The European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS). (2025). *Hybrid threats' nexuses: taking EU-NATO cooperation to the next level*. <https://www.iss.europa.eu/activities/events/hybrid-threats-nexuses-taking-eu-nato-cooperation-next-level>