

## EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE THIRTY YEARS AFTER THE END OF THE COLD WAR - EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

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*Abstract:* The European security architecture has undergone significant changes during the period after the end of the Cold War. It has been marked by various important characteristics that advanced it as a part of the European integration process. The enlargement processes of the EU and NATO have contributed most significantly to European stability. Its trans-Atlantic and trans-Asian dimensions guaranteed its conceptual and structural parameters. There have been various ups and downs in relations within the triangle of the United States, Europe, and Russia, which should be balanced and policy arranged in order to successfully address global priorities (climate crisis, migration, pandemic). Historical lessons show that the US and Russia have to be included in producing security on the broader European continent as well as that the OSCE, the EU, and NATO are the core multilateral pillars of this process. With structural changes after the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has all the necessary instruments and capabilities to be an equal part of the global policy arrangement. During this period, Slovenia has been an active part of the discussed processes.

*Keywords:* European security architecture, OSCE, EU, NATO, European integration process, the end of the Cold War, Slovenia.

### INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War brought outstanding structural changes in international relations, with a strong, perhaps decisive impact on its

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security architecture in Europe. For nearly a half-century, Europe was the epicenter of the Cold War divide, with all of its consequences. The demise of the Berlin Wall in the autumn of 1989, two hundred years after the French Revolution, marked this immense structural turnover. However, while the former was a typical revolution, brutal, consequential, and far-reaching, the latter was its most polar opposite: it was revolution without revolution, peaceful, without the use of basic force, and with a consequent absence of major atrocities, though even more far-reaching in terms of scope of change:<sup>1</sup> “The processes of change in the ‘revolutionary year of 1989’ in Eastern Europe” which were at the epicenter of revolutionary world changes, caused massive political shifts in the Eastern part of the European continent and unleashed “revolutionary events”, the consequence of which was a thorough change in the political map of the old continent, so “that simple post-war Europe disappeared” (Höll, 1989, p. 72; Dimitrov & Hofkirchner, 1995, p.76; Gyarfashova, 1995, p. 338; Kindley, 1995, p. 338; Jazbec, 2001, p. 18). The structural change of the Annus Mirabilis, as the year 1989 has been termed afterwards, was almost beyond parallel, having in mind “the territory involved (the whole of Central and Eastern Europe, the European part of the former Soviet Union, and Transcaucasia), the population (150-200 million), the time needed (three years), the number of countries involved (25-30), the social energy needed and the resulting political shifts (...), the intensity, the dynamics, and the extent of the changes” (Jazbec, 2001, p. 19). Briefly, the presented picture formed the theatre for creating a new European security architecture. The stream of change with its consequences that followed during the later period could be divided into three periods, namely: first, the revolution and its aftermath; second, the period of enlargements and their fixing; and third, the period of crises (financial, migration, pandemic, and global tensions, followed by the war in Ukraine).<sup>2</sup> Chronologically, they practically overlap with the previous three decades within the research period as a whole. The European security architecture has been a product of these processes. Its primary demonstration could be seen in the

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<sup>1</sup>The wars that followed the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia were the consequence of the end of the Cold War and not its cause.

<sup>2</sup>This paper was conceptualized before the war in Ukraine started. Therefore, we touch upon it only in the latter stages of the text. Additionally, we could understand it as a result of unsolved issues and controversies from the observed period rather than its primary characteristic.

enlargements of NATO and the EU, with the overlapping effect of the OSCE. Together with the Council of Europe (CoE) and the UN as a global frame, they present the European integration process. This is our point of departure in this paper. We then discuss the significance of NATO and EU enlargements in addressing the newly forged relations between the EU and the Indo-Pacific region as the way forward for the EU to deal with global trends. We wrap up with an overview and a comment on challenges for the European integration process. Throughout the text, we keep in mind – directly and indirectly – the issue of the Western Balkans and the necessity of its definite, formal, and complete inclusion in this process.

### EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS

Centuries of turbulent European history, from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 until the end of World War II (WWII), laid down the foundations for the emergence of structures that transformed the political outfit of the continent. Within the following decade and a half, basic integration seeds were firmly planted with the establishment of NATO and the CoE, as well as of the predecessors of the EU. Twenty years later, with the Helsinki Final Act, the integration process received the strongest push so far. However, it was the end of the Cold War that enabled the European integration process to reach its current structural stage. This epoch could be divided into three significant and topical periods: political history (from the Peace of Westphalia to the end of WWII); integration history (from WWII till the end of the Cold War); and structural history (three decades after 1989).

Basically speaking, and for the narrow purpose of this paper, the European integration process is a continual and structural output of complementary activities of major international governmental organizations on the broader European territory, pursued in the spirit of Article VII of the UN Charter (*Ibidem*). It presents one of the most important policy achievements in European history since the Peace of Westphalia, which received its major structural push during the three decades after the end of the Cold War. Its ability to produce and pursue values defines its very substance. There is the whole set of values that result from this synergetic integration effort, with the rule of law as the most significant, universal and all-encompassing, along with democracy, human rights, the market economy, free and fair elections, and freedom of the media at its core.

The main characteristics of the European integration process are complementarity and complexity, as well as synergy between the hard power approach: collective defense (NATO), and the soft power one: welfare state and crisis management (the EU), comprehensive security (the OSCE), and human rights (CoE), all within the collective security of the UN. This is a unique combination of soft power backed up with the strong support of hard power, which forms the backbone of the whole process and its efficiency. In addition to this, it all counts as a set of parameters that enabled its crystallization (expanded, strengthened, and synergized) during the last three decades. Last but not least, during this period, relations within the triangle comprising the EU, the US, and the Russian Federation received crucial geopolitical importance for the European integration process and its efficiency; since recently, relations with China are advancing with a progressive trend. The diplomatic aspect of this endeavor was accelerated following the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, which formally established European diplomacy (the European External Action Service – EEAS). Since that time, the EU has also been represented in international affairs by its President (President of the European Council) and Foreign Minister (the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission). The EU's global appearance and activities were equipped with appropriate representatives and diplomatic tools.<sup>3</sup> From one point of view, the European integration process enabled Europe to become a continent with the highest living standards, welfare, and environmental awareness; from another, it served as an example of a structural and complementary strive for peace and cooperation as a result of the resolution of historical conflicts and destruction. Only structural institutional complementarity within a set of related international governmental organizations, backed up by a vibrant civil society and resting on the previously elaborated values, is the condition for achieving it. Hence, this can become a universal, global policy lesson and approach.

### **THE EU AND NATO POST-COLD WAR ENLARGEMENTS**

It is rather obvious that the enlargements of both the EU and NATO rest at the very heart of the previously discussed process, its nature, and

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<sup>3</sup> Figuratively speaking, it also provided Europe's phone number, if we paraphrase Kissinger.

philosophy. The membership dynamics in both the EU and NATO was high in the first part of the period after the end of the Cold War. In both cases, the first decade produced three new members, while the biggest expansion followed in the second decade: in the case of the EU, 12 new members in two rounds, and of NATO, 9 new members, also in two rounds; here, the 2004 dual enlargement stands out as a historical and unique one. In the third observed decade, the membership dynamics slowed down significantly: only one new member in the case of the EU (2012) and only two in the case of NATO (2017 and 2020).

We present the dynamics, members, and years of membership in the following two tables.

Table 1 – The Membership Dynamics of the EU

1995	1995	2004	2007	2012
Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom	Austria, Finland, Sweden	Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia	Bulgaria, Romania	Croatia
12	3	10	2	1
12	15	25	27	28

Source: The Author

Table 2 – The Membership Dynamics of NATO

1999	1999	2004	2009	2017	2020
Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States	Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland	Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia,	Albania, Croatia	Montenegro	North Macedonia
16	3	7	2	1	1
16	19	26	28	29	30

Source: The Author

The general picture of the future enlargement trend of the EU looks like this at the moment: the candidate countries from the Western Balkans, with Montenegro and Serbia already engaged in the negotiation process, as well as Albania and North Macedonia waiting for the date to start the negotiation process; Bosnia and Herzegovina with the Association Agreement; and Kosovo with its membership ambition. Turkey remains the candidate country, with the negotiation process practically at a standstill. There are also three Eastern European aspirant countries: Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. One policy comment has to be added here. It should be pointed out clearly that the EU enlargement to the Western Balkans remains the organization’s unfinished business. Additionally, the majority of its enlargements so far have been implemented with more than one new member. Having in mind the historical background, social, administrative, and political similarity, to name but a few common characteristics, this enlargement should be en bloc based as well (Jazbec, 2021). The EU’s tool box and approach practice

offer enough maneuver space for this to materialize. Slovenia, as a member since 2004 of both NATO and the EU, counts among those countries that offer continuous, genuine and systematic support for this goal to be achieved. It also has the most comprehensive and policy-founded experience in the region among the member states. Hence, one could speculate that this list of candidate/aspirant countries gives a very clear impression of the possible physical limits of the geographic enlargement of the EU. However, thirty years after the end of the Cold War, the broader usefulness of the EU's value system is coming to the forefront. It could be speculated that the value-based enlargement of the EU is gaining importance and implementation potential. Prospects for future NATO enlargement changed with the war in Ukraine. In the Western Balkans, Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Kosovo further express this ambition, while, as it seems, the situation with Ukraine has changed. However, the biggest change – and till recently, rather unexpected – happened in the Nordic region. Finland has already officially applied for membership in NATO, and Sweden has expressed its clear intention to do so soon.<sup>4</sup> The European security architecture is undergoing its most significant structural change since the Cold War's end.

### **THE EU AND THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION**

During the previous two years, we saw an increase in policy, political, and diplomatic interest in the Indo-Pacific region and its importance to the EU, coinciding with the previous troika EU Presidency (Germany, Portugal, and Slovenia) and the current one (France, the Czech Republic, and Spain). The previous troika made significant institutionalized steps forward, with France leading the way with corresponding activities. Hence, it is important to note that the forthcoming Czech Presidency is also taking the same approach. We can state that an important series of documents were adopted as well as a variety of meetings organized with this topic in focus (State of the Union, 2021). Among them, the EU's Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific was adopted and the Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific was organized (2001 and 2022, respectively) (Jazbec 2022). There would be at least two reasons for this enhanced EU's interest and focus on the Indo-Pacific region.

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<sup>4</sup> Announced when this paper was finished.

The first reason is a definite global strategic shift from the transatlantic relations that dominated the last more than half a century. This has already been observable for at least half of the period after the end of the Cold War. It became a political fact as a result of the Trump administration's clear policy shift. At the very center of the change is the steady rise of China in global affairs. It has become increasingly obvious throughout the last decade. Looking at the span of the Indo-Pacific region, its rising global importance is obvious: generally stretching from the east coast of Africa to the west coast of the Americas, with the huge land and sea mass in between, the space is rich with competitiveness. With a handful of the biggest and most influential countries in the world and a variety of the most important minerals and other resources, it is going to be the center of world affairs, relations, and dynamics. The EU has no other choice than to take part in this dynamic. Another reason is the usefulness of experiences and lessons from the European integration process for this region. There are a number of open and frozen conflicts and tensions as well in the region. One would hardly see any more useful policy approach than this from the European experience. This would be in brief: bridging the historical gap of confrontation as the first step; establishing the multilateral frame that would produce circumstances for peaceful development, growth, and transformation; complementarity of the output of a variety of multilateral actors; compensation of tensions through such a web; production of values with democracy; resting on the rule of law; and no war as the consequent result.

When comparing European political history with that of the Indo-Pacific region as well as its current multilateral setting, it is clear what the necessary next steps are. Therefore, the EU can play an important role in the region for mutual benefit. The European integration process was globally determined by relations between the US and Russia (Soviet Union), while the strategic dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region was (and will be) primarily shaped by relations between the US and China. However, the issue of India remains open, and the role of Russia still has to be defined (it is not an integral part of the region, though). Last but not least, the EU is doing its part and, ideally, improving it as well. With a variety of structural changes after the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has all the necessary instruments and capabilities to be an equal part of the global policy arrangement.



## CHALLENGES TO THE EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

Generally speaking, the European security architecture is witnessing the same package of challenges as the rest of the main global actors and processes. These challenges stem primarily from the characteristics of the contemporary global community. However, some of them, as far as Europe's security architecture is concerned, relate to the specifics of the EU. For the sake of methodological simplicity and topical clarity, we will in this part of the text use the EU in the meaning of Europe and its security architecture as well. In the first group, we would see the following challenges: the climate crisis (together with the warming of the temperature, the rise of the sea level, decarbonization, transition to green and digital economy); pandemic (the current one and similar future ones); food and water safety, production and distribution; global increase in migration flows; failed and dysfunctional states; the rise of autocratic regimes and the decrease of democracies; shortage of efficient global consensus to tackle those issues; growing discrepancy between the rich minority and poor majority, etc. (Jazbec, 2022, pp. 227-231). Along with the question of nuclear safety (nuclear weapons are still being developed and tested, though much less than during the Cold War), this forms the question of the survival of the global international community (i.e., mankind). Not counting natural disasters (basically all of them are at least partially stipulated by man-made activities), mankind is for the first time in its history capable of multiplied self-destruction (Benko, 1997, pp. 352-363). This is an entirely new situation and a challenge for decision-makers at the global level. From one perspective, for reasons related to the world, and from another, for the sake of its own wellness and functionality, Europe must deal with this extensively. We think the second group is divided into the inner and outer challenges.

Inner challenges relate to the question of the EU's institutional setting and decision-making activities. This system is well developed, balanced, and broad, but it is difficult to reach decisions in an adequate amount of time. In some cases, the member states can easily block the adoption of a decision for whatever reasons. It is increasingly worrying that the member states use this against candidate countries to significantly slow down their progress towards membership.<sup>5</sup> More than a decade after the Lisbon

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<sup>5</sup> There is, of course, also the other way around: do candidate and aspirant countries do enough to proceed towards membership? But this would hardly pose any serious challenge to the EU and its functionality.

Treaty entered into force, some adaptations should be made. Here we can also see the issue of the enlargement that was basically stopped during the last decade. On the whole, no significant improvement has been achieved. Outside are those of a global nature, which directly influence the EU and its inner and outer positioning as well as functionality. Relations in the triangle of Europe-US-Russian Federation have been critical throughout the post-Cold War period. The lesson of the European integration process is very telling: cooperation, synergy, and complementarity at both the bilateral level and in multilateral fora are here of key importance. This structural balance that was providing balance rested on the so-called membership specifics: the OSCE has been the only multilateral structure with the participation of both the US and Russia; the EU is the only one without any of the two; NATO with the membership of the US only; and the CoE with the membership of Russia only. There is a strong policy impression that in the years following the double enlargement of the EU and NATO, this structural relationship started to lose its dynamics and pace.<sup>6</sup> The decade of crises witnessed a continuous deterioration of this trend. There is, however, one issue that stands above all these challenges, although it is closely related to them – or they all relate directly to it: the issue of war. War is perhaps the most frequent topic on the human agenda. There is an obvious, significant, and globally important trend of reducing its demonstration towards the end of the Cold War and forward. The European integration process is a clear manifestation of this, and the EU as a highly unique structure in human history proves this as well. This proof stems directly from European history, as presented earlier, and has been enhanced by the globalization process. Hence, such structures are also not established to counter wars by traditional means or states that pursue wars.<sup>7</sup> The only way to counter this is a structurally coordinated effort to indirectly minimize the war potential and capability of the aggressor. The broader this effort is internationally, the more chances there are to succeed and succeed soon. The war in Ukraine, as a consequence of Russian aggression – and *via facti*, its breach of international mutually accepted legal and other norms – is a clear case of this. Yet, it also shows

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<sup>6</sup> It would take too much research attention, space, and discussion to prove this here empirically.

<sup>7</sup> The exemption here is, of course, NATO as the most developed defense structure in human history, but also that NATO shows high level restraint against the use of force.

something additional. The majority of documented wars following World War II have demonstrated that the aggressor never prevails. Today, it is essentially impossible to do this. The Vietnam War has shown that even a ratio of 1:10 in favor of the aggressor is ineffective (even this proportion is almost impossible to reach). Hence, this author would claim that this war is most probably the last one of its kind. But what still remains is the destruction (psychical, social, psychological, etc.) caused by the aggressor's activities in each war. Almost three decades after the signing of the Dayton Peace Accord, one can see how difficult the post-conflict reconstruction of society is. The issue of war is not only the issue of Europe, but it is Europe – with the Ukraine at its core – that is facing it most decisively now. This presents the biggest and most acute challenge to the international community at this stage. Europe is capable of finding some solutions to those challenges by itself. Here we have primarily in mind the enlargement process. In view of the so far presented context, circumstances, and challenges, this looks rather easy to accomplish. It will also be a test of the EU's capability to move ahead with its plans to become a global player. Its member states have to be clearly aware of this fact. Pursuing whatever narrow interests for whatever reason will just deepen the standstill and take Europe away from the center of global affairs. The European integration process and its experiences as well as applicability confirm this. Hence, further strong and continuous production of values and their spread is so immensely important. This is the most important global soft power advantage that Europe has in comparison with any of its competitors. This advantage seems unachievable by any of them in the near future. In this view, the responsibility of the EU member states, but also candidates and aspirants, grows. To see the bigger picture and to follow it would be the dividing line.

## CONCLUSIONS

When discussing the European security architecture during the three decades after the end of the Cold War, one finding stands out in particular. It is the enlargement process of the EU and NATO that has contributed most significantly to European stability. This effect has been accelerated by the transatlantic and trans-Asian dimensions, which guaranteed its conceptual and structural parameters. Therefore, relations within the triangle of the US, Europe, and Russia played an outstanding role during that period. Consequently, this trend should continue in the future, especially for the sake of successfully dealing with global priorities

(climate crisis, migration, pandemic). However, the war in Ukraine puts a strategic and structural question mark on this. It remains to be seen what future trends there will be in the development of the European security architecture. For the time being, it seems that the inclusion and the role of Russia have changed dramatically, both structurally and conceptually. On the other hand, it also seems that the enlargement of both the EU and NATO, as fundamental multilateral pillars with strong bilateral effects, will remain one of the cornerstones of the same process. Even more, one could say they received important impetus as a direct consequence of the war in Ukraine (Western Balkans, Nordic, and Eastern Europe). This additionally supports our discussion on the European integration process and its production of values as the main characteristic and benefit of recent European history. Additionally, this offers further possibilities and outreach for Europe as a global actor, and its relations with the Indo-Pacific regions could serve as an illustration of this endeavor. Last but not least, the current stage in the development of European affairs in a broader sense, with a decisive stamp on its security, shows the constant and high dynamics of international relations. These processes have grown in complexity, but also in unpredictability, over the last decade and a half. This trend, including its unpredictability, will continue. Hence, an increased level of global cooperation and coordination is necessary to deal efficiently with issues on the political, diplomatic, and security agenda. The European security architecture, as it has been formed after the end of the Cold War, presents a solid foundation for Europe to play an important role globally. For this to be achieved, it should continue with its main trends, adapting them to the development of global affairs structurally but also influencing them with a value-based approach.

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