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Reforming European Security

A Turkish Perspective

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NATO is entering its most consequential transformation since the end of the Cold War. This paper argues that the Alliance is being pulled toward a *NATO 3.0* model by two structural drivers: the changing character of warfare, made visible by the war in Ukraine, and the redistribution of transatlantic burden-sharing as the United States gives greater priority to homeland security and the Indo-Pacific. The resulting Alliance will remain transatlantic, but it will have a more European center of gravity, a stronger industrial focus, deeper technological integration and greater dependence on the resilience and capacity of individual Allies.

For Europe, the central challenge is not strategic autonomy in the abstract, but strategic responsibility in practice. A stronger European pillar inside NATO can reinforce transatlantic cohesion if it is inclusive, capability-driven and anchored in Alliance requirements. The paper therefore warns against an EU-only approach to European defence. The United Kingdom, Türkiye, Norway and Ukraine are indispensable contributors to European security; excluding them from emerging EU defence-industrial mechanisms would weaken the capability base Europe is trying to build.

The paper concludes that NATO–EU cooperation must be normalized through pragmatic arrangements that preserve legal positions while enabling practical collaboration. Ankara could help unlock the Cyprus-related impasse without prejudicing its policy of non-recognition, while the EU should reciprocate by opening meaningful defence and security mechanisms to Türkiye and other non-EU Allies.

Europe's future security architecture should reinforce Alliance cohesion, not create new divisions between EU and non-EU Allies.

Revitalizing the Western European Union could provide an inclusive political platform for managing the renewal of European defence and security within a NATO-compatible framework.

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I Overview

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was established on 4 April 1949, in Washington, D.C., by 12 founding countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Canada. Over the 77 years since its inception, it has remained the world's most durable defence pact. It has adapted its organisational structures and strategies to changing geo-political conditions, provided security guarantees to its members and deterred potential threats by maintaining strong European and transatlantic ties. During the Cold War, NATO played a central role in preventing crises and conflict as a balancing factor in the bipolar order. The European security architecture it helped build also contributed indirectly to higher welfare and living standards across Allied societies.

Today, the Alliance is undergoing its most consequential transformation since the end of the Cold War. Two forces are driving this shift. The first is the emergence of a new character of war, defined by uncrewed systems, artificial intelligence, electronic warfare, precision strike, persistent battlefield transparency and industrial-scale attrition, made visible by the war in Ukraine. The second is the redistribution of transatlantic burden-sharing, as Washington increasingly directs strategic attention and resources toward homeland security and the Indo-Pacific. Together, these forces are set to transform the Alliance into one with a more European center of gravity, a stronger industrial focus, deeper technological integration and greater reliance on the resilience of its members.

This paper explores the political, institutional and defence-industry-related challenges associated with this transformation. It also analyses Türkiye's potential contributions to this new-generation Alliance: NATO 3.0.

II The NATO 3.0 Vision and its Drivers

NATO 1.0 was built for collective defence against the Soviet Union. NATO 2.0, which followed the end of the Cold War, reoriented the Alliance toward non-Article 5 missions: crisis management, peace support, stabilization and counterterrorism in the Balkans, Afghanistan and elsewhere, notably under the rubric of cooperative security. NATO 3.0 represents a departure from both models.

Driver 1 – Changes in Warfare

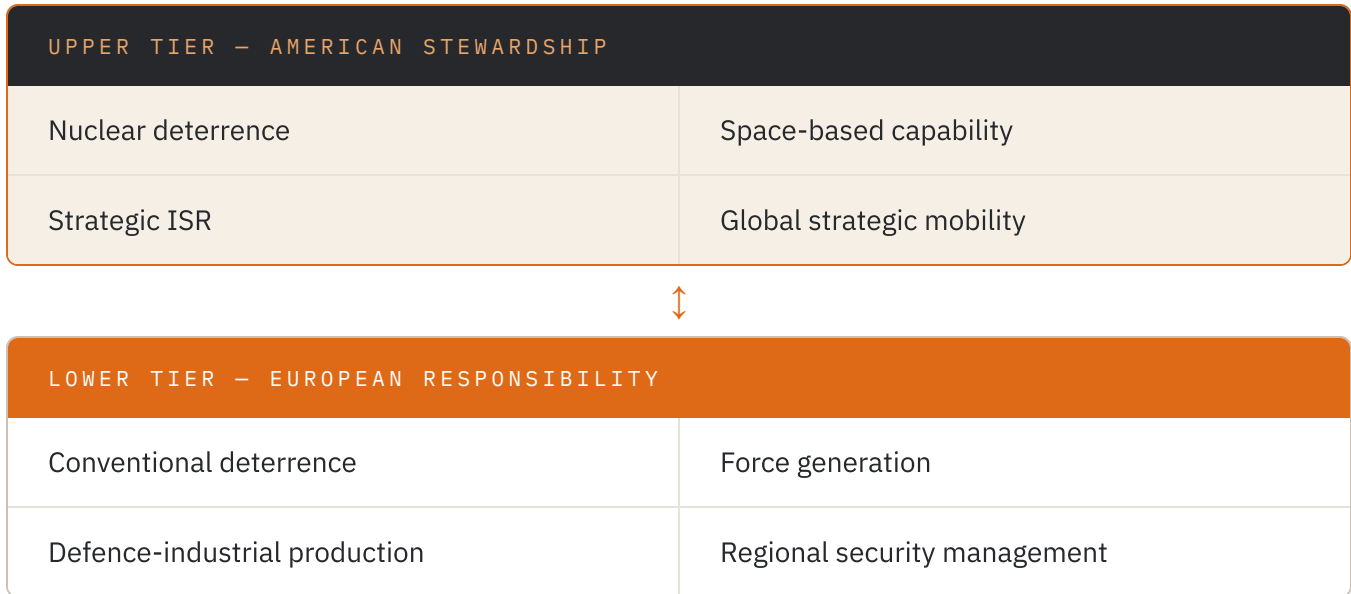
The Alliance must now prepare simultaneously for high-intensity, state-on-state warfare; malign proxy forces and non-state actors; multi-domain operations across land, air, sea, space and cyber; large-scale force mobilization and sustainment; defence-industrial competition with peer and near-peer adversaries; long-duration conflicts that exceed post-Cold War force-planning assumptions; AI-enabled battle networks integrating sensors, shooters and command nodes; and hybrid or sub-threshold warfare below the level of open conflict.

These pressures point toward a specific future architecture for the Alliance: not a set of aspirations, but a structure with six identifiable components.

1 A Two-Tier Strategic Architecture

The Alliance is likely to divide functionally into two structural tiers. An upper tier – nuclear deterrence, space-based capability, strategic intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), and global strategic mobility – will remain under American stewardship, since no European Ally can replace it on the relevant timeline. A second tier – conventional deterrence, force generation and defence-industrial production – will require greater European responsibility and investment within NATO's enduring transatlantic framework, while preserving Alliance cohesion and American strategic leadership.

FIGURE 1 – THE TWO-TIER ARCHITECTURE



2 A Split Command Structure

That two-tier division is mirrored in command. SHAPE retains a U.S. Supreme Allied Commander Europe by convention, but its planning baseline shifts from assured, large-scale American augmentation to a European-first, American-reinforced model, in which reinforcement may arrive later, in smaller volume or be partly diverted to a simultaneous Indo-Pacific contingency. Allied Command Transformation's role grows correspondingly: its force-design output moves the Alliance away from the legacy concepts of NATO 2.0 toward AI-enabled, multi-domain warfighting doctrine built around holding the line in days rather than weeks. The structural effect is a command architecture in which American leadership at the top is retained for cohesion, while European staffs increasingly author and implement the plans that determine what happens in the first days of a crisis. Allies may further decide the location and commanders of operational- and tactical-level headquarters.

3 A Framework-Nation Concept

Below SHAPE, the order of battle reorganizes around a small number of standing framework nations, each generating, commanding and sustaining a multinational corps anchored to a specific sector of the Alliance's periphery, under Allied Land Command (LANDCOM), Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM) and Allied Air Command (AIRCOM). This replaces the rotational, ad hoc battlegroup model that characterized NATO 2.0. Several Allies, including Türkiye, possess the necessary capabilities and enablers — including multi-domain command experience — to serve as framework nations in different theatres and operational contexts. Türkiye has successfully assumed the role of framework nation in previous operations, including the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan, and is set to undertake command of the Allied Reaction Force in 2028–2030.

4 A Sensor-to-Shooter Tactical Mesh

This is the layer where NATO 3.0's architecture is tested. Political will, command structure and industrial output matter little if the formation in contact cannot sense, decide and strike faster than it is being sensed, targeted and struck. Inside each framework-nation corps, the basic building block of the force must therefore change. Rather than concentrating uncrewed systems, electronic warfare and AI-assisted targeting in specialist units, NATO 3.0's tactical structure should embed networked manned-unmanned teams at every echelon, down to the company and platoon levels. Ukraine has shown that formations without organic drone and counter-UAS capabilities have little chance of survival on the digital battlefield. All formations need a sensor-to-shooter tactical network suited to this environment.

5 A Federated Industrial Base

Sustaining combat power also requires restructuring industrial production. Rather than relying on 32 largely redundant national defence-industrial bases, NATO 3.0 should consolidate production around pooled regional consortia coordinated through the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA) and the Defence Production Action Plan. Individual Allies would specialize in specific product lines — munitions, drones, missiles and naval platforms — and feed multiple framework-nation corps, rather than maintaining shallow, self-contained capacity. This follows directly from the same two forces: Washington is no longer expected to absorb European surge demand through its own industrial overflow, and attritional warfare consumes equipment at a rate no single national industrial base can sustain alone.

6 An Institutional Connective Layer

Binding the framework-nation concept, the tactical mesh and the federated industrial base together is a layer of standing agencies and accredited institutions that shifts from a supporting to a load-bearing role.

From peacetime to wartime postures. NSPA, NCIA and most of the Alliance's standing agencies were built around a peacetime governance model. NATO 3.0 requires them to operate on two predefined postures: one for routine procurement and standardization, and another for pre-authorized crisis and wartime functions. Agencies that cannot demonstrate and exercise the latter in peacetime will not be able to operate at the tempo NATO 3.0 demands in crisis.

New Centres of Excellence for new domains. The current COE network has largely been accredited in line with NATO 2.0's mission scope. The changing nature of warfare is creating capability gaps faster than the network can be reorganized to address them. Counter-UAS systems and doctrine are the clearest example. This six-part architecture is not yet built; it is the structure toward which both forces are pulling the Alliance if current trajectories hold. It is up to Allies to discuss and define the final NATO 3.0 vision.

Driver 2 – Burden Shifting

The second structural driver of NATO 3.0 is the redistribution of responsibility within the Alliance. After the Cold War, complacency prevailed among European states regarding the security and defence of the continent. Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the destabilization of eastern Ukraine and repeated warnings by senior U.S. officials did not sufficiently alter this mindset. The first Trump administration shook European decision-makers; the second has made the message even more explicit. While Russia's war on Ukraine continues, Europe has understood that it must do much more to defend itself. The style of future U.S. administrations may change, but the substance of this expectation is likely to remain.

Credible deterrence entails conventional, nuclear, ballistic, cyber and space capabilities, as well as new technologies, under a single command. More specifically, the fundamental issue of nuclear deterrence — a critical component of the transatlantic security bargain that merits attention — is addressed by NATO's Nuclear Planning Group (NPG). Its recent ministerial-level statement clearly articulated a determination to modernize nuclear capabilities and strengthen nuclear planning. The U.S. commitment in this domain appears intact. Washington can therefore be expected to continue providing capabilities only it can supply at scale, including nuclear deterrence, strategic intelligence, space-based capabilities and global strategic mobility. European Allies, by contrast, should assume primary responsibility for conventional deterrence on the continent, force generation at scale, defence-industrial production and day-to-day regional security management.

This shift exposes a structural weakness rooted in the NATO 2.0 era. Because most Allies spent three decades focused on expeditionary, non-Article 5 missions, force structures across much of Europe disbanded the echelons — division, corps and army — needed for high-intensity, large-scale warfare. Rebuilding that kind of institutional capacity, doctrine and combat culture is not a matter of budget alone; historical experience suggests that it can take a generation. The gradual drawdown of forward-deployed U.S. forces sharpens the urgency of this gap and increases the number of capable units the Alliance will need in the interim. This comes against a European reality in which demographic trends and the absence of conscription have deepened the recruitment challenge.

III Redefining the European Defence-Industrial Base for NATO 3.0

Europe has to close the gap in conventional capabilities between itself and the U.S., thereby assuming a significantly larger portion of the burden that has rested on the U.S. for decades. Such an enterprise would require Europe to spend more on defence and to produce conventional and innovative capabilities faster and at scale.

A Europe that contributes more to its own defence strengthens the Alliance, improves burden-sharing and reinforces transatlantic cohesion. European capability development should therefore be viewed not as an alternative to NATO but as an investment in NATO's long-term effectiveness. Recent geopolitical developments have accelerated this logic. Growing strategic competition, the war in Ukraine, pressure on defence-industrial capacity and changing expectations in Washington have all reinforced the need for Europeans to assume greater responsibility for their security. The goal is therefore better understood as *strategic responsibility* rather than strategic autonomy.

Since 2016, the EU has been more energetic than ever in seeking to Europeanize defence and strengthen the European pillar within NATO. Brexit was a serious inflection point for European security. Following Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine in 2022, the EU began adopting a range of strategies, initiatives and instruments — including the ReArm Europe Plan / Preparedness 2030 and SAFE — to shoulder more of the burden within the transatlantic framework.

These efforts remain handicapped by their non-inclusive nature. As necessary as they are, the redefinition of the EU's role in the security and defence of the continent can succeed only if the contributions of major non-EU NATO nations are embraced through a lasting political and institutional settlement. This does not require reopening debates on EU membership or extending institutional decision-making rights to non-members. Project-based cooperation, differentiated partnerships, association arrangements and capability-driven participation models — including flexible decision-making formats — can preserve EU decision-making autonomy while ensuring that Europe benefits from the full range of Allied capabilities and strategic culture.

The strategic objective should therefore remain a stronger European contribution to Euro-Atlantic security through a stronger European pillar within NATO, supported by seamless NATO–EU cooperation. The differing memberships and institutional structures of the two organisations inevitably generate political and legal complexities, and it may be time to consider some creative solutions there as well.

NON-EU NATO ALLIES

≈80%

of NATO's defence expenditure is accounted for by non-EU Allies, as former Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg repeatedly emphasized¹ — underlining that Europe's security extends well beyond the EU's institutional boundaries.

Secretary General Mark Rutte has reinforced this strategic reality by stressing that "the contributions and capabilities of NATO's non-EU Allies are indispensable for our collective defence" and that involving non-EU Allies in EU defence-industrial efforts is "vital" for Europe's security. As he has further cautioned, "we must avoid creating new barriers between Allies that would only increase costs, complicate production and hamper innovation."²

Europe's defence challenge is fundamentally one of strategic readiness. The issue is not simply whether Europe can spend more money or manufacture more equipment. The question is whether Europe can create a defence ecosystem capable of translating strategic objectives into operational requirements, operational requirements into industrial capacity, and industrial capacity into sustainable military power.

Europe can close many of its capability gaps over the next decade, particularly in munitions, drones, air-missile defence and conventional military systems. However, reducing dependence on critical strategic enablers and building the industrial ecosystem required for future high-technology warfare will require sustained political commitment, industrial integration and long-term investment.

The defence and deterrence of Europe extend beyond the European Union. The broader European security architecture and defence-industrial base must include critical non-EU Allies such as the United Kingdom, Türkiye and Norway. Europe's ability to address capability gaps and design effective deterrence should therefore be assessed within a wider NATO framework, not through an EU-only perspective. Europe is facing a dangerous security environment from both the East and the South; this requires all parties to set aside past biases and adopt approaches appropriate to the threat.

In this more challenging geopolitical environment, the European Union has understandably moved to strengthen its defence technological and industrial base through initiatives designed to reduce fragmentation and improve capability generation. The emerging Security Action for Europe (SAFE) framework reflects this ambition by linking industrial resilience, procurement coordination, innovation and capability development.

SAFE is both necessary and strategically important. But it also raises a broader question: if EU instruments become increasingly important vehicles for generating the capabilities Europe needs, can participation realistically be limited to EU members alone? The answer is increasingly difficult to sustain.

Türkiye, the United Kingdom and Norway demonstrate this reality particularly clearly.

Although outside the EU, all three are deeply integrated into Europe's security architecture, supply chains and value chains through NATO and through their operational, industrial and strategic contributions. They are not external actors seeking entry into Europe's security ecosystem; they are already among its indispensable contributors. Current arrangements for participation in EU defence initiatives impose restrictive conditions on third countries, including limitations on funding, information security, export controls and political approval mechanisms. Some safeguards are understandable and necessary. But when political constraints override strategic considerations, Europe risks weakening the very mechanisms designed to strengthen its security.

The United Kingdom remains one of Europe's principal military powers and an essential contributor to deterrence and defence innovation. Norway's role in Arctic and maritime security has become increasingly important, supported by advanced technological capabilities and strategic geography. Türkiye's position illustrates the dilemma most clearly. For more than 70 years, Türkiye has been an integral part of the transatlantic security system. It hosts critical NATO infrastructure, contributes to regional deterrence, and has developed competitive defence capabilities in areas ranging from uncrewed systems and naval platforms to aerospace and advanced technologies. Türkiye adds military scale, strategic access and growing defence-industrial capacity at the intersection of Europe, the Black Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Caucasus and the broader Middle East. Yet political obstacles continue to limit Türkiye's involvement in parts of Europe's evolving defence architecture.

SAFE should therefore not become a test of institutional exclusivity, but of strategic adaptability. Europe's objective should not be to replicate NATO inside the EU or create parallel defence structures. The objective should be to strengthen Europe's contribution to NATO by building a broader, more resilient capability base. That objective becomes harder to achieve if some of Europe's strongest security contributors remain only partially integrated into emerging capability frameworks. Full normalization of NATO–EU cooperation would facilitate this process.

IV Overcoming Obstacles to NATO–EU Cooperation

Rather than allowing longstanding political disputes to inhibit cooperation, NATO and the EU should seek pragmatic solutions that preserve established political and legal positions while enabling practical collaboration where common interests exist. Existing commitments – including the objective in the 2018 NATO–EU Joint Declaration to involve non-EU Allies "as fully as possible" in relevant initiatives – deserve more consistent implementation.³

The evolving security environment also calls for moving beyond the limitations of earlier NATO–EU arrangements. Without reopening institutional debates or altering either organisation's decision-making prerogatives, more flexible frameworks could facilitate cooperation in capability development, military mobility, defence innovation, critical-infrastructure protection, cyber defence, emerging technologies and defence-industrial resilience. Structured consultations with key non-EU European Allies on capability planning, industrial priorities and resilience would enhance coherence while respecting the European Union's decision-making autonomy.

At a time when defence resources, although increasing, remain finite, complementarity must be reflected not only in political declarations but also in practical implementation. Duplicating capability requirements, procurement mechanisms or industrial investments would weaken rather than strengthen Europe's collective security. The objective should therefore be to ensure that European defence initiatives reinforce NATO's deterrence and defence posture while generating greater interoperability, resilience and industrial capacity across the Alliance.

Ultimately, the principle of the indivisibility of security should apply equally to NATO–EU cooperation. Strategic inclusivity is not a political concession but a force multiplier. Europe's future security architecture will be most effective if it mobilizes the broadest possible range of Allied capabilities while remaining anchored in NATO as the cornerstone of Euro-Atlantic security. In an era of systemic competition and accelerating geopolitical risk, strategic pragmatism offers the most credible bridge between political reality and Europe's long-term security requirements.

Informal workarounds have allowed both organisations to collaborate despite political obstacles – but they are no longer sufficient. Seamless cooperation has become a strategic requirement.

Ankara Can Help Change the Script

At the heart of the current impasse lies the longstanding dispute over Cyprus. Türkiye's non-recognition of the Greek Cypriot-led Republic of Cyprus — which, in Türkiye's view, contradicts the constitutional order of the 1960 Republic of Cyprus based on the political equality and co-ownership of the island between the Turkish and Greek communities — has led Ankara to resist official NATO engagement involving such an EU-member Cyprus, while Cyprus has in turn persistently blocked Türkiye's defence and security engagement with the EU. As a result, official NATO–EU engagement remains severely restricted, and the EU is unable to draw fully on Türkiye's considerable defence and security potential, even as an increasing number of EU member states pursue such cooperation bilaterally.

This institutional impasse has become too costly. The challenge for Ankara is not whether it should abandon its support for the Turkish Cypriots as politically equal co-founders of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960, or deviate from its broader Cyprus policy. The real question is whether Türkiye can devise a pragmatic way forward, without prejudice to its policy of non-recognition, that opens space for meaningful NATO–EU cooperation and gains support from key EU actors.

Ankara prides itself on its mediation efforts and its ability to break diplomatic deadlocks in some of the world's most difficult conflicts. By taking a bold initiative and announcing a new way forward on NATO–EU relations, Türkiye could achieve two objectives. First, it could counter depictions of Ankara as an obstructionist in NATO–EU relations. Second, and more importantly, it could strengthen its profile as a pivotal actor shaping the future European security architecture and place the onus on the Greek Cypriots, Greece and other EU member states to reconsider Türkiye's involvement in EU-centred security and defence initiatives.

There is also a broader strategic rationale. Faced with uncertainty over the durability of American engagement, European states and Canada are increasingly exploring mechanisms to complement or, in some scenarios, partially substitute for NATO. Unless Türkiye secures treatment on an equal footing with other non-EU NATO Allies, it risks marginalization in a potentially more EU-centred continental security architecture. Helping unlock NATO–EU cooperation may therefore be one of the most efficient ways for Ankara to consolidate its seat at the table.

There is no simple formula for advancing such an agenda, but the approaches of the five EU member states that do not recognize Kosovo — Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain — offer useful precedents. Each has found ways to sustain its policy of non-recognition while allowing the EU to move forward with practical arrangements. Spain eventually accepted Kosovo passports for Schengen travel, and Cyprus committed itself to fully considering the views of all EU member states. These examples allowed EU engagement to proceed without prejudice to national recognition policies and avoided the kind of institutional deadlock Türkiye now faces over Greek Cypriots' involvement in NATO–EU cooperation.

Türkiye could consider a similar approach. It could safeguard its policy of non-recognition by conditioning more flexible NATO–EU engagement – without excluding any new members – on a NATO Council decision explicitly affirming that such engagement does not prejudice the sovereign right of NATO member states to determine their own recognition policies. The EU has used comparable formulations concerning Kosovo. Such language would make clear that Türkiye's opening does not imply any change in its long-established Cyprus policy.

Türkiye's readiness to allow strategic discussions between NATO and the EU without excluding Cyprus would be unexpected but strategically significant. It would separate a bilateral issue from the broader question of European security architecture. At a time when this issue has become an overriding concern for many Allies, Türkiye could cast itself as a responsible European actor while contributing to the success of the NATO Summit it is hosting.

Any opening of this nature would be controversial in Türkiye, stirring intense political debate and possibly generating resistance within government institutions and the civilian and military bureaucracy. To be politically feasible, it would have to involve reciprocal openings by the EU. Ankara could use such a step, with support from friendly EU member states, to strengthen its case for deeper security dialogue with the EU and participation in EU-led defence and security initiatives. A critical achievement would be parallel security arrangements between NATO and Cyprus on one hand, and Türkiye and the EU on the other. If a formula to overcome the Cyprus barrier is engineered with Ankara's support, the EU should in return seek to lift obstacles to Türkiye's participation in EU-led defence-industrial initiatives such as the European Defence Agency, ReArm Europe, SAFE and military mobility.

V Creative Institutionalism & the Revitalization of the WEU

Overcoming the Cyprus-related obstacle to NATO–EU cooperation will also require a renewed and inclusive institutional setup for a NATO-compatible European security order. This task has two components. The first is to open EU-led processes more effectively to Ankara's participation.

Annex II of the 24–25 October 2002 Brussels European Council decisions on the implementation of the Nice provisions for involving non-EU Allies in European Security and Defence Policy — commonly known as the Nice Implementation Document — contains useful elements in this respect.⁴ In the spirit of these largely unfulfilled commitments, the EU could establish a permanent, structured mechanism for continuous strategic dialogue on security and defence with Türkiye, other non-EU European Allies, Ukraine and Canada. The EU would retain decision-making autonomy, but could involve these NATO Allies and Ukraine in internal discussions on European security, giving them an opportunity to shape — not veto — EU decisions that affect their national interests. Coupling such a commitment with progress on Türkiye's inclusion in the European Defence Agency, SAFE and the military mobility package would help convince Ankara that a genuinely inclusive mindset is emerging.

The second component is the need for a political agency to drive the European transformation of the Alliance. European Allies will increasingly need a platform — excluding the United States — to deliberate on strategies and implementation plans. Some trade-offs can be discussed more openly in such a setting, and European Allies must also be prepared for the unwanted scenario of a non-cooperative U.S. administration. This is why there have been calls for a "European Security Council."⁵ Allocating this role to the EU is problematic, however, given the continuing difficulty of building streamlined cooperation between EU structures and non-EU European NATO nations.

A viable alternative is the Western European Union (WEU), a European security and defence organisation created in 1954. During the Cold War, the WEU provided a framework for European cooperation in defence and security among countries that were also members of NATO and the emerging European integration project. It served as a bridge between NATO and European integration, allowing European states to discuss defence issues collectively while NATO remained the main structure for transatlantic security.

FIGURE 2 – THE WEU'S LAYERED MEMBERSHIP (EST. 1954)

Full members

Treaty-based political authority and full decision-making rights, covered by the mutual-defence clause.

Associate members

Consultation and participation in Council and operations, but no full institutional control; protected via NATO Article 5.

Associate partners

Central and Eastern European states drawn into European security after the Cold War — Poland, Hungary, the Baltic states and others.

The WEU's layered membership structure reflected the different relationships European states had with NATO, the EU and European defence integration. Associate members were allowed to participate in WEU Council meetings and many WEU military and operational activities, especially where NATO-related security issues were concerned. However, they did not have the same decision-making rights as full members: they could not block decisions reserved for full members and were not full participants in the WEU's treaty-based political authority. In practice, associate membership gave them consultation and participation rights, but not full institutional control.

The WEU also had a status for associate partners — Central and Eastern European states that were neither NATO nor EU members when the category was created but were being drawn into European security structures after the Cold War. This flexible structure allowed the WEU to act as a bridge between NATO, the EU and post-communist Europe before most of its functions were absorbed into the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy.

Revitalizing the WEU could address two needs at once. It could provide a political forum for the European family to strategize on European security, acting in alignment with NATO and the EU. WEU 2.0 would therefore be a political organisation focused on European security rather than a substitute for NATO or the EU. It could also offer a way to anchor Ukraine and possibly Canada more firmly in the European security debate, especially given the difficulty of providing Ukraine with a clear commitment on NATO membership. The end state should be an institution that supports European coherence and helps build an effective security architecture suited to today's global and regional threat environment.⁶

VI Towards a Lasting Transformation of European Security

Europe's security will ultimately depend not on institutional boundaries but on its ability to align political frameworks with strategic realities. Strategic inclusivity, underpinned by pragmatic NATO–EU cooperation and the full mobilization of Allied capabilities, is therefore not merely a political preference but a strategic imperative. Europe's future security architecture should reinforce Alliance cohesion rather than create new dividing lines between EU and non-EU Allies. A stronger European pillar inside NATO remains the most credible path forward.

For Türkiye, this transformation presents both a strategic responsibility and a political opportunity. As a long-standing NATO Ally with significant military capacity, strategic geography, operational experience and a growing defence-industrial base, Türkiye is well placed to contribute to a more capable European pillar. But this contribution requires a more inclusive institutional environment that recognizes a basic fact: European security cannot be built through EU-centred mechanisms alone. Its effectiveness will depend on whether political obstacles can be managed pragmatically and whether the capabilities of all relevant Allies – including Türkiye, the United Kingdom, Norway, Canada and potentially Ukraine – can be mobilized behind a common strategic purpose.

The coming period will test not only Europe's ability to spend more on defence, but also its ability to think and act strategically. Building NATO 3.0 will require institutional creativity, industrial coordination, operational realism and political courage. Europeans will have to assume greater responsibility without weakening the transatlantic bond, while NATO and the EU will need a more functional division of labour that does not generate new exclusions. If Allies meet this challenge, Europe will be better positioned to deter aggression, sustain long-duration competition and preserve the Euro-Atlantic security order in an era of systemic geopolitical risk.

ANNEX I

Türkiye's Contribution to a Stronger European Pillar within NATO

<h2 style="color: #C8513E;">1936</h2> <p>Montreux Convention — control of the Turkish Straits.</p>	<h2 style="color: #C8513E;">2028</h2> <p>To command NATO's Allied Reaction Force (2028–2030).</p>	<h2 style="color: #C8513E;">1952</h2> <p>LANDCOM established, hosted in İzmir.</p>	<h2 style="color: #C8513E;">360°</h2> <p>Coverage across the eastern flank and southern periphery.</p>
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Army- and Corps-Level Command Capacity

One of the least discussed gaps facing a more European NATO is the shortage of officers and headquarters experienced in commanding large-scale, multinational land formations. Decades of battalion-level expeditionary deployments have left many European armies thin at higher levels of command. Türkiye, by contrast, has continuously maintained army and corps headquarters, large-scale manoeuvre-planning capacity and mobilization-planning expertise — institutional knowledge that cannot be rebuilt quickly once lost. This gives NATO a ready pool of officers and headquarters capable of commanding multinational brigades, divisions, corps and army-level formations as the Alliance reorients toward territorial defence.

Allied Land Command (LANDCOM)

The presence of NATO's Allied Land Command in İzmir is among Türkiye's most consequential institutional contributions to the Alliance. Established in 1952 and reorganized in 2012, LANDCOM has recently absorbed the missions of the Combined Force Land Component Command and the Multicorps Land Component Command, transforming it into a fully combat-ready warfighting headquarters responsible for NATO land warfare doctrine, land-force interoperability, readiness standards, force integration and the codification of lessons learned. As land warfare returns to the center of Alliance planning after three decades of expeditionary focus, LANDCOM's role — and Türkiye's role as its host — grow correspondingly more important.

Framework-Nation Potential

NATO's forward defence posture increasingly depends on a small number of framework nations capable of organizing and sustaining multinational forces. Türkiye possesses deployable formations, established army/corps command infrastructure, logistics capability and extensive operational experience — the combination required to serve as a framework nation for multinational initiatives and regional security arrangements. Few Allies possess this combination of force mass and command structure at the required scale.

Black Sea Security Architecture

No serious discussion of European security can bypass the Black Sea, and no European state can replicate Türkiye's role there. Türkiye controls the Turkish Straits under the 1936 Montreux Convention and contributes continuous maritime situational awareness, sustained naval presence and the authority to manage military access to the Black Sea in wartime. Since 2022, Ankara has used this authority effectively, while separately brokering, alongside the United Nations, the 2022 Black Sea Grain Initiative and supporting alternative export corridors that have helped sustain Ukrainian grain exports critical to global food security. No other Black Sea littoral state, and no Western European Ally, can perform this function.

The Southern Dimension of NATO 3.0

The Alliance must also address instability across its southern periphery. Terrorism, irregular migration, maritime insecurity, energy-security challenges, regional conflicts and hybrid threats emanating from the Middle East, North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean continue to affect Allied security. Türkiye's geography, military capabilities, intelligence networks and regional engagement provide NATO with important options for managing these challenges as part of a 360-degree approach to deterrence and defence.

Defence-Industrial Cooperation in NATO 3.0

The credibility of a more European NATO will depend heavily on industrial cooperation, and Türkiye offers concrete opportunities in several sectors where European rearmament programmes currently lack sufficient capacity.

Shipbuilding

The MILGEM corvette programme and TCG Anadolu, the Navy's first drone-carrying amphibious assault ship — concurrent-build capacity few European yards can match.

Missile Development

Roketsan and related firms — cruise-missile expertise, anti-ship production, precision-guided rockets and long-range strike know-how.

Aerospace & Aircraft

TAI — Hürkuş, Hürjet, Gökbey and the TF Kaan fifth-generation fighter programme add capacity to NATO's aviation ecosystem.

Drones & the Drone Wall

UAV production, operational deployment and EW support; the ANKA-3 stealth platform, expected in service by 2026.

Armour & Battle Tanks

Serial production of the indigenous Altay MBT began in 2025; FNSS and Nurol Makina have exported to 20+ countries.

Strategic Infrastructure

Air bases, pipelines, ports, logistics corridors, early-warning and missile-defence infrastructure; AWACS aerial refuelling support.

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Fatih Ceylan

AMBASSADOR (R) · PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO NATO, 2013–2018

Ambassador (R) Mehmet Fatih Ceylan was the Turkish Permanent Representative to NATO from 2013 to 2018. He retired from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) after almost forty years in 2019. Prior to his service at NATO, Ambassador Ceylan served as the Deputy Undersecretary for Bilateral Political Affairs where he was in charge of bilateral political affairs for Asia, Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia and Northeast Mediterranean, Cyprus, Greek and Maritime and Aviation Affairs, and International Security and Defence Affairs from 2010 to 2013. Before this, he was Director General for Bilateral Political Affairs for Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia between 2009-2010, and Ambassador to Sudan until 2009. His service as Deputy Director General at NATO Department (2004-2006), Head of NATO Department (2002-2004), Deputy Permanent Representative at WEU and the EU in charge of security and defence matters (2000-2002), and his successive appointments right before and after the end of the Cold War as the First Secretary at NATO Military Affairs Department (1988-1990) and as the First Secretary and Defence Counsellor at the Turkish Permanent Mission to NATO (1990-1995), contributed to his knowledge and experience in primarily NATO-related security and defence issues.



Alper Coşkun

SENIOR FELLOW, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

Ambassador (R) Alper Coşkun is a senior fellow within the Europe Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, DC. His research focuses on Turkish foreign policy, especially in relation to the United States and Europe. He is a retired career diplomat of thirty-two years with extensive experience in both bilateral and multilateral settings. He was the director general for international security affairs at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2016-2019), covering NATO, transatlantic relations, as well as Euro-Atlantic security/defence and arms control/disarmament matters. He has held positions within the Turkish Foreign Ministry at various levels on issues related to maritime jurisdiction affairs, counter terrorism/intelligence, and NATO/Euro-Atlantic security matters. He has served in the cabinets of both the minister of foreign affairs and the undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His foreign assignments include Turkish missions in Moscow, Athens, and the United Nations, as well as NATO, where he was the deputy permanent representative. Previously, he was a faculty member of the NATO Defence College in Rome.



Tacan İldem

AMBASSADOR (R) · NATO ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL, 2016–2020

Ambassador (R) Tacan İldem, a member of NATO Experts Group that presented a report entitled "NATO 2030: United for a New Era", is a senior Turkish diplomat. Since the start of his long career in 1978 till February 2021 he held bilateral and multilateral positions including NATO Assistant Secretary General between 2016 to 2020. He served as the Turkish Ambassador to the Netherlands and Permanent Representative to NATO and the OSCE. He also served as Director General for International Security Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chief of Cabinet, Principal Foreign Policy Advisor and Spokesperson of the President of the Republic. His postings abroad also include those at the Embassies in Washington DC, Athens and New Delhi. Ambassador İldem is a graduate of Ankara University Faculty of Political Science. He is a recipient of the decoration of Grand Officer of the Order of the Star of Italian Solidarity and the Medal of Gratitude of Albania.

NK

Nihat Kökmen

RETIRED LIEUTENANT GENERAL, TURKISH AIR FORCE

Retired Lieutenant General Nihat Kökmen was born in Eskişehir in 1959. After completing his primary, secondary, and high school education in Ankara, he entered the Air Force Academy in 1977. He graduated from the Air Force Academy on August 30, 1981, with the rank of Lieutenant. Retired Lieutenant General Nihat Kökmen served in various capacities within the Turkish Air Force Command, including as a pilot, staff officer, and commander. He also served as Deputy Undersecretary at the Ministry of National Defence, Air Planning Officer at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Europe (SHAPE) (Mons/Belgium), and Turkish Military Representative to NATO (Brussels/Belgium). In addition, he served as a unit commander at the Ghedi Air Force Base in Italy during NATO's 1999 Kosovo Air Operation. Retired Lieutenant General Kökmen, during his 38-year career as a pilot, accumulated a total of 3900 flight hours, including 200 hours in operational flights, flying various types of aircraft (F-16, F-104). He is a recipient of the NATO Medal, the United Nations Medal, and the Turkish Armed Forces Medal for Outstanding Courage and Selflessness.

YT

Yavuz Türkgenci

RETIRED GENERAL · COMMANDANT, TURKISH THIRD FIELD ARMY

Dr. Yavuz Türkgenci is recently retired general in the Turkish Armed Forces whose career spanned offices, including Western European Union (WEU) and NATO posts and as the commandant of the Turkish Third Field Army. He holds a PhD in Security Strategies and Management and an MSc in Weapon System Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. He is the author of books on Digital Knights (New Era for Land Wars, Unmanned Ground Vehicle Design), and Design and Management of Security Strategies in the Age of Artificial Intelligence. His main areas of focus are formulations of security strategies, concepts, defence planning, defence reviews, and defence industry strategies. He works on applying artificial intelligence to defence projects and unmanned systems such as ground and aerial vehicles.

SÜ

Sinan Ülgen

DIRECTOR OF EDAM · VISITING SCHOLAR, CARNEGIE EUROPE

Sinan Ülgen graduated in 1987 from the University of Virginia with a double major in computer sciences and economics. He undertook graduate studies at the College of Europe in Brugge, Belgium where he received, in 1990, a master's degree in European economic integration. He then joined the Turkish Foreign Service as a career diplomat. In 1992, he was posted to the Turkish Permanent Delegation to the European Union in Brussels where he became part of the team that negotiated the Turkey-EU customs union. Ülgen is the founder and managing partner of Istanbul Economics. The consultancy specializes in market entry strategies for international companies, political and economic risk analysis related to Turkey and regulatory affairs. Ülgen is also the director of the Istanbul based think tank, Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM) and a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe in Brussels. His research and opinion pieces have been published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Center for European Policy Studies, Center for European Reform, the Atlantic Council, German Marshall Fund, Brookings and the World Economic Forum as well as newspapers such as Le Figaro, Financial Times, Wall Street Journal, European Voice, Project Syndicate, and the International New York Times. He is also the co-author of a book on Turkey-EU relations with Kemal Derviş and a frequent commentator on Turkish affairs in the international press. Ülgen served on the academic advisory board member of the NATO Defence College in Rome. He was a member of the Europe Council of the World Economic Forum. He was also a member of the international policy experts group set up by the NATO Secretary General Rasmussen.



Çiğdem Üstün

PROFESSOR OF EUROPEAN STUDIES · EDAM

Çiğdem Üstün graduated with honors from the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Bilkent University and completed her master's degree in European Studies and International Relations at the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom. Her doctoral thesis on the comparison of EU and Turkish security cultures was published by I.B. Tauris in 2010, based on her research at the University of Limerick in Ireland. She holds an associate professorship in European Studies. Her areas of interest include European integration, enlargement, EU-Turkey relations, Turkish foreign policy, and EU Neighborhood Policies. Currently serving as a faculty member in the Department of International Relations at Istanbul Nişantaşı University, Üstün has also been a visiting researcher at the University of Limerick, University of Catania, and University of Cambridge. She has published numerous articles, books, book chapters, and opinion pieces in her areas of expertise, which have appeared on platforms like GMF U.S. On Turkey Series, Australian Institute of International Affairs, and E-ir. In 2024, she undertook the editorship of a special issue on the "Future of Europe: Reflections from Turkey" in the Ankara Journal of European Studies.



Ahmet Üzümcü

AMBASSADOR (R) · DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE OPCW, 2010-2018

Ambassador (R) Ahmet Üzümcü is a career diplomat with vast experience in multilateral diplomacy and disarmament and non-proliferation issues. Prior to his appointment as Director-General of the OPCW in December 2009, he was Türkiye's Permanent Representative to the UN Office in Geneva, where he chaired the Conference on Disarmament in March 2008. Ambassador Üzümcü completed his second term as Director-General of the OPCW in July 2018. Ambassador Üzümcü has also served as Deputy Undersecretary of State for Bilateral Political Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Türkiye's Permanent Representative to NATO and Ambassador to Israel, in addition to earlier postings to NATO, Aleppo and Vienna. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in International Relations from Ankara University. Ambassador Üzümcü received the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the OPCW in December 2013. In December 2015, H.E. Mr Laurent Fabius, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development of France, decorated Director-General Üzümcü with the Légion d'honneur (rank of officer). In 2019, he was made honorary CMG, Order of St Michael and St George, by the British Government for his services to international diplomacy and the rule of law.

ENDNOTES

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- 1 Jens Stoltenberg, former NATO Secretary General, on non-EU Allies accounting for roughly 80 per cent of NATO's defence expenditure. <https://www.nato.int/fr/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2019/05/06/remarks>. As of 2025, this share is around 75 %. <https://www.nato.int/content/dam/nato/webready/documents/finance/def-exp-2025-en.pdf>.

 - 2 Mark Rutte, NATO Secretary General, on non-EU Allies being "indispensable for our collective defence" and their inclusion in EU defence-industrial efforts being "vital." <https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2026/01/26/remarks-by-nato-secretary-general-mark-rutte-at-the-meeting-of-the-european-parliaments-committee-on-security-and-defence>

 - 3 Joint Declaration on EU–NATO Cooperation, Brussels, 10 July 2018. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/36096/nato_eu_final_eng.pdf

 - 4 Annex II to the Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council, 24–25 October 2002 (the "Nice Implementation Document"). <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/20917/72968.pdf>

 - 5 On proposals for a "European Security Council" as a platform for European Allies to deliberate on strategy. <https://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/commentary/european-security-council-between-strategic-need-and-institutional>

 - 6 Carl Bildt, "Europe needs a new security framework," Project Syndicate, 21 January 2026.



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