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TÜRKİYE'S PLACE IN EUROPEAN SECURITY: MILITARY POWER, STRATEGIC  
GEOGRAPHY, AND ALLIANCE TENSIONS

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis assesses Türkiye's position in European security by examining military capability, strategic geography, alliance tensions and the evolving relationship between NATO and the European Union (EU) and the larger European security environment. This thesis will analyze how Türkiye can be assessed in terms of the changing European security order, especially in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and increasing uncertainty regarding the Transatlantic commitment. The thesis asserts that Türkiye is both strategically vital and politically controversial. Although Türkiye is not an EU member state, it has had continued political disputes with Europe. Türkiye's NATO membership, its geographical position, its military capabilities, its role in the Black Sea region, and growing defense industrial capacity illustrate how Türkiye is extremely important for European security. Türkiye's historical contributions to European security, both during and after the Cold War, and its present-day relevance to European security in the context of the Ukraine conflict and the Black Sea are examined, alongside a broader examination of alliance dynamics. The primary conclusion reached was that European security cannot simply be analyzed based on the institutions of the EU. In order to create a credible security architecture, a viable security architecture must include capable non-EU-NATO allies such as Türkiye. While a politically complicated matter, it is argued that Türkiye's strategic value is very likely to remain strong; therefore, flexible and pragmatic forms of cooperation will be necessary in creating a more stable European security framework.



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## INTRODUCTION

European security has entered a period of significant transformation. The majority of European security discussions during the post-Cold War era were based on ideas regarding the expansion of institutions, the increase of interdependence economically, the management of crises, and the eventual decrease of conventional war between nation states. The full scale Russian invasion of Ukraine is now challenging those ideas and has returned “hard security” to the center of the European strategic thinking. Hard security questions include: deterrents, defense of territory, military preparedness, defense expenditure, weapons production and the unity of alliances. NATO’s 2022 Strategic Concept reflected this shift by reasserting collective defense and deterrence as key functions of NATO. The 2025 Hague Summit Declaration reinforced this idea by emphasizing investment in defense, preparedness, resiliency and the improvement of the defense industrial base. Overall, it is seen here that European security cannot continue to be discussed only through the lenses of institutions, norms, and integration. Instead, power, geography, military capabilities, and strategic vulnerability must all play a part in assessing European security.

These shifts have also led to renewed discussions of whether Europe should be able to assume greater responsibility for its own security. The United States continues to be indispensable to NATO and to European defense; however, there is increasing uncertainty regarding the long-term course of U.S. foreign policy. Therefore, European nations are examining where they want to locate the burden of responsibility within the transatlantic partnership. Consequently, European strategic autonomy, a strong European pillar within NATO and improved defense industrial cooperation are being examined as alternatives. However, this examination raises a fundamental question: which countries will belong within a new European security architecture? If European security is developed only through the institutional lens of the EU, then it will likely exclude strategically important actors for the protection of the continent. This is especially significant in the case of Türkiye.

Türkiye holds one of the most ambiguous positions within European security. Türkiye is not a member of the European Union; its relationship with the EU has been shaped by ongoing political disputes, democratic concerns, tensions with Greece and Cyprus and differences in



opinions regarding regional issues such as Syria, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Russia. At the same time, Türkiye has long been a NATO ally with one of NATO's largest militaries, an important geographic location, and a rapidly developing defense industrial capacity. Additionally, Türkiye is situated at the intersection of several regions that directly impact European security, including the Black Sea region, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. This situates Türkiye in such a way that it cannot reasonably be viewed as an external actor within any serious consideration of European security.

The conflict in Ukraine has made Türkiye's uncertainty more apparent. Türkiye controls access to the Turkish Straits under the terms of the Montreux Convention, Türkiye plays a unique role in the Black Sea, and Türkiye maintains relationships with both Ukraine and Russia. While supporting Ukraine militarily and diplomatically in ways that are beneficial to Ukraine, Ankara maintains lines of communication with Moscow. This balancing act frequently generates friction with Western partners; however, it also demonstrates Türkiye's ability to function as a significant regional player. Therefore, Türkiye's role in European security is not only a product of institutional membership; rather, it is influenced by geography, access to military bases and ports, regional influence, and strategic leverage.

Türkiye's expanding defense industry also improves this relevance. The conflict in Ukraine has illustrated that successful sustained conflict requires more than just high-tech weaponry; it also requires production capability, supply chain logistics, existing stockpiles, and the ability to replace weakened military supplies over time. Currently, European countries are attempting to improve their particular defense industrial capacities and address capability gaps. In this context, Türkiye's growth in areas such as unmanned systems, naval vessels or platforms, ammunition, and military technology increases its importance as a potential defense industrial partner. Even though Türkiye still relies heavily on external technologies and international supply networks for some products, its developing production capacity provides Türkiye with greater freedom in negotiations regarding European defense industrial cooperation.

This situation presents the primary mystery of this thesis. On the one hand, Türkiye is a contentious issue regarding politics and is institutionally constrained; on the other hand, Türkiye is strategically difficult to exclude from any discussion of European security. Furthermore, despite having limited relations with the EU and having diplomatic options that create distrust among different European states, Türkiye's status as a NATO member, its

military capabilities, its role in the Black Sea, its strategic geography, and its growing defense industrial capacity place Türkiye as a major player within the greater European security environment. Thus, rather than only considering whether Türkiye is “in” or “out” of Europe, we need to consider how to conceptualize a country that is institutionally outside of the EU but structurally linked to European security.

This thesis seeks to answer the following research question: How should Türkiye be considered when discussing its position within the evolving European security architecture in terms of its military capabilities, its strategic geography, and its alliance tensions?

This research question is significant because it extends beyond the typical discussion concerning whether or not Türkiye should join the EU. Additionally, this research question expands beyond viewing Türkiye only as a difficult NATO ally. Rather, this research question views Türkiye as a security actor whose position is representative of three overarching tensions inherent within the contemporary European order: tensions between institutional bounds established by the EU and collective defense provided by NATO, tensions between political disagreements and strategic requirements, and tensions between autonomous strategies pursued by Europe and continued reliance on non-EU allies.

The central argument of this dissertation is that due to its geopolitical location, NATO membership, military capabilities, leading role in the Black Sea region and defense industrial development, it would be unreasonable to exclude Türkiye from any realist conception of a European security architecture. On the other hand, political disagreements, institutional obstacles, democratic concerns, and different views on foreign policy create long term tensions within alliances and do not allow for full integration of Türkiye into all of Europe's security arrangements. Therefore, Türkiye's role exists within a paradoxical space: it is not fully included in European security architectures, yet it is crucial to numerous strategic problems faced by Europe.

This argument is not saying that Türkiye can be simply incorporated into the EU's security systems, as well as it is not ignoring the seriousness of political disputes at present between the government of Ankara and European governments. Instead, this argument is that the current state of the global security environment makes exclusion from cooperation among NATO member states less desirable than before. To the extent that European states are presently seeking to build their defense capacities, increase the deterrent effect for potential competitors, and generally prepare for what appears to be an increasingly unstable

international security environment, they will need to collaborate with other capable NATO member states which are outside of the EU. Türkiye's role should therefore be assessed not through a simple logic of membership or exclusion. Accordingly, it is proposed that the various components of European security, including NATO, the EU, bilateral cooperation, mini-laterals and defense industrial partnerships should be used to assess its contribution to European security.

Therefore, the thesis argues for a more realistic and multi-layered conception of European security. Collective defense and deterrence will continue to be at the center of NATO activity. Similarly, although not exclusively focused on defense-related issues such as funding, procurement, sanctions and industrial coordination, the EU will emerge as an increasingly important component of European security. However, neither framework individually and sufficiently accounts for the complexities of the continent's strategy realities. Ultimately, a credible European security framework must include non-EU NATO allies whose geographical presence and military capabilities are critical to regional stability. Clearly, Türkiye is one of the most obvious cases in point. Its role will remain complicated, but its relevance will last.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is built primarily on realism, while also drawing on alliance theory and the concept of strategic autonomy. While other theoretical perspectives could have been used in this study to address the role of Türkiye in European security, the use of realism allows for a focus on the impact of power dynamics and geography on interstate relations. The return of large-scale war to Europe has highlighted once again the salience of military capability, geographic location, deterrence, and national interest in shaping international relations. Therefore, in this specific security environment, realism offers insight into why Türkiye's value as a strategic partner continues even in the face of political disagreements and institutional exclusion.

Alliance theory represents another significant body of literature for understanding the Turkish position. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is not only a collective defense organization but also a community of shared values among member states. Rather, alliances are formed based on perceived threats, burden sharing, strategic interests, and internal bargaining. Therefore, the relationship between Türkiye and NATO illustrates many of the complexities naturally contained in alliance politics. On the one hand, Türkiye has frequently pursued an independent foreign policy and has created tensions within NATO. Yet, due to its military capabilities and geographic location, Türkiye maintains a level of strategic importance that

makes it difficult to exclude from European security considerations. Accordingly, Türkiye serves as a model of an ally who can be difficult to cooperate with due to political reasons, however, it is nevertheless an indispensable ally in terms of its strategic usefulness.

The concept of strategic autonomy provides a third analytical dimension. The discussion of strategic autonomy has taken center stage in recent years as several European countries have sought to improve their ability to act independently in areas such as defense and security. As part of this effort to improve European independence in defense matters, there has been increased consideration given to whether an EU-centered approach to defense would provide more effective support to European security needs. However, this dissertation takes a critical view of what it means to achieve strategic autonomy. If achieving strategic autonomy refers to improving the defensive capabilities of European countries while maintaining a complementary relationship with NATO, then strategic autonomy can be seen as contributing to improved European security. On the other hand, if it turns into an EU-centered project and leaves behind capable non-EU NATO allies, it may be destructive to the overall security architecture, which is supposed to become stronger through this project. Therefore, Türkiye serves as a test case for determining whether EU strategic autonomy efforts will ultimately benefit European security or undermine it. As EPRS notes, European strategic autonomy continues to face capability and coordination challenges, making cooperation with capable partners outside the EU an important issue (EPRS 2025).

Methodologically, this thesis relies on a qualitative examination of Türkiye's place within European security. As such, the thesis does not aim to assess quantitatively the military strength of Türkiye nor technically the components of its defense industry. Rather, the thesis will investigate Türkiye's position strategically using historical analysis, institutional analysis and contemporary developments in security. The thesis will draw upon both academic literature, NATO and EU documents, policy reports, think tank publications, as well as select policy discussions from the most recent years. This methodology is suitable given that the research question relates to the political and strategic implications of Türkiye's location with respect to European security structures and not only the technical comparative analyses of military capability.

Additionally, the scope of this dissertation is purposefully narrow. It assesses Türkiye's role in European security since the beginning of the Cold War era until today with special attention to the post-2022 period. The Cold War represented an important moment for Türkiye's position as a key NATO ally and southeastern anchor of Western security. During

the post-Cold War era, new uncertainties arose regarding NATO's transformation, EU security initiatives, debates surrounding strategic autonomy and Türkiye's increasing view of its foreign policy goals. The period after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is especially significant because it has raised issues related to hard security deterrence, defense production and the Black Sea to the forefront of European strategic thinking.

The thesis focuses mainly on three dimensions of Türkiye's role. The first is strategic geography. Due to Türkiye's unique geographical position connecting Europe to the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean, the Caucasus region and Balkans region, as well as its connection to the Middle East. These regions are not peripheral to European security but are directly tied to issues related to military access, energy security, migration, maritime security, regional instability, and great power competition. The second is military and defense industrial capacity. Türkiye possesses considerable military capacity and operational experience in addition to rapidly expanding its defense industries. Consequently, Türkiye presents itself as a relevant player at a time when multiple European states are seeking to build their military capacities. Third is alliance tensions. A full understanding of Türkiye's role requires reference to ongoing disputes regarding Cyprus, Greece, Syria, Russia, democratic standards and Türkiye's exclusion from certain EU defense frameworks.

This thesis aims to depart from two primary but limited approaches toward understanding Türkiye's place within Europe. The first is viewing Türkiye primarily through the lens of EU accession. Although historically speaking, Türkiye's accession process was highly important for understanding Türkiye's relationship with Europe, it is insufficient for addressing contemporary security realities. Despite the accession process being largely frozen today, Türkiye's strategic significance has not diminished. The second is viewing Türkiye only as an inconveniently situated NATO ally. While capturing real tensions between Türkiye and its allies, this approach fails to completely account for why Türkiye continues to be impossible to eliminate from European security planning. This dissertation asserts that Türkiye should be viewed as a structural imperative for security in Europe whose continued relevance originates from geography, military capability, alliance membership and regional influence.

The approach of this research is significant for the larger discourse about European security. The research demonstrates that European security can not only be defined by the institutions of the European Union, as these institutions play a growing role in coordinating defense, in

procuring weapons, imposing sanctions, and implementing industrial policies. However, they do not represent all strategic players in Europe. As examples of Türkiye, Norway, and the U.K. demonstrate that European security exists outside of EU member states. Thus, a practical European security architecture would need to be both multi-layered and flexible. Specifically, such an architecture could consist of NATO's deterrent capabilities; the EU's institutional capacities and industrial capabilities; and cooperative efforts with non-EU countries via bilateral arrangements, mini-lateral arrangements, or project-by-project arrangements. Similarly, recent analyses concerning EU-Türkiye defense cooperation emphasize the importance of pragmatic engagement and targeted cooperation regardless of existing political barriers (Taştan et al., 2025).

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 sets forth the theoretical framework by evaluating realism, alliance theory, strategic autonomy and evolution of alliance tensions from the Albright "3D"s debate up until today. Additionally, chapter one discusses why assumptions related to power, security and geography continue to represent reality in contemporary European security environments and how alliance theory and strategic autonomy provide additional clarity on Türkiye's ambiguous position.

Chapter 2 explores the historical evolution of Türkiye's role within Western security. Starting with Türkiye's NATO integration during the Cold War and its function as NATO's southeastern anchor, Chapter 2 goes on to analyze how Türkiye's role evolved after the Cold War as NATO extended its mission area and the EU began its own security and defense initiatives. Chapter 2 illustrates that although Türkiye's strategic importance has remained consistent, but its institutional position has become increasingly complex.

Chapter 3 examines contemporary perspectives on Türkiye's role in European security. Chapter three analyzes contemporary trends affecting Türkiye's involvement in European security, including the Black Sea, the war in Ukraine, Türkiye's military capabilities, the development of its defense industry, and obstacles to political engagement among actors. Chapter three illustrates that in addition to historical relevance, Türkiye currently holds significant importance with regard to deterrence, regional security and defense-industrial capability.

Chapter 4 evaluates the friction created in alliances and changes across the Atlantic. The chapter evaluates how NATO has changed, what is uncertain with the changing American commitments and also debates surrounding whether Europe should have its own "strategic

autonomy" or not. This chapter also makes the argument that what role could Türkiye play if there is a more European-oriented defense strategy. Furthermore, it is mentioned that the relevance of Türkiye may grow because other European allies are taking greater responsibility for their own defense, however that role would continue to be influenced by politics and by limitations imposed by institutions.

Chapter 5 is a reassessment of Türkiye's position within European security, based on an analysis of the results from the previous chapters. This chapter argues that the position of Türkiye reflects both the continued existence of strategic necessity and the dilemmas associated with exclusion and being an indispensable player. Finally, it concludes by going back to the core research question. Consequently, it asserts that Türkiye can best be described as a strategically indispensable yet politically controversial player whose position will likely remain crucial to creating a credible European security strategy.

## **Chapter 1 – Theoretical Framework**

### **1.1 Realism and Security Architecture**

International security has historically been defined by realism theory that establishes states as the primary actors within international relations and assumes that the international system is anarchic; that is, without a single authority able to enforce laws and rules to protect the State's national interests and therefore Security. As a result, all states are ultimately responsible for ensuring their own survival, thereby creating a perpetual atmosphere of uncertainty in international politics. In this context, Cooperation among states is always limited or conditional due to individual state interests and security considerations. This aspect of Realism makes it one of the most effective models used today to understand why security concerns remain dominant within state behavior.

Classical Realism defines the nature of human beings as having a major impact upon the dynamics of international relations. Classical Realists argue that Politics is ruled by objective laws created by human nature and that power is the ultimate goal that motivates State behavior (Morgenthau 1948). Therefore, conflict is seen as an exceptional event rather than a normal occurrence, driven by the struggle for power among states. While providing an excellent foundational model, it is generally viewed as inadequate for describing structural changes occurring within the international system.

Therefore, this thesis will utilize a neorealist perspective, primarily through the works of Kenneth Waltz. Classical Realism focuses on human nature, while Neorealism focuses on the structure of the international system. Waltz defines the fundamental characteristic of international politics as Anarchy, that is, the lack of a Central authority to govern the relationships among States, and contends that this structure dictates how States act regardless of their internal characteristics and ideology (Waltz 1979). In an anarchic environment, states can rely only on their own capabilities to secure their survival, resulting in competition, counter-balancing activities, and a constant search for security.

Neorealism's emphasis on the distribution of power has direct implications for how states assess potential threats. Thus, changes in military capability, wealth, geography, and so on, lead to new assessments of opportunities and threats, resulting in a constant need for adaptation in alliances and other security agreements. Therefore, states will work together only if there is an immediate benefit, while remaining cautious, since cooperation might create dependency or leave a state vulnerable to exploitation.



Power is understood in its broadest sense in order to understand international security. Power encompasses both the use of force and access to strategically important geographic locations, the ability to command key routes of transportation, and the power to influence regional dynamics. For example, a country situated in the middle of several regions may be considered strategically important due to its location, regardless of whether it possesses significant military capability. A broader definition of power is especially applicable to a country like Türkiye that is located where three different geographical areas intersect: Europe, the Middle East, and the Black Sea region.

Neorealism further disputes the belief that international organizations have the ability to transform state behavior. International organizations such as NATO or the EU can provide a mechanism for states to work together toward common goals. The organizations themselves may be unable to eliminate inter-member conflicts or competition. John J. Mearsheimer argues that international organizations lack sufficient independent authority over how states act and thus are largely representative of the interests of strong states (Mearsheimer 2001). Therefore, states do not follow institutional norms; rather, they make decisions based on their own perception of what will help them most with respect to their own national security. Mearsheimer's reasoning provides an explanation for the difference in Türkiye's level of commitment to European security and Türkiye's exclusion from multiple EU defense mechanisms.

Realism has provided a useful lens for analyzing European security. While the EU defines itself as a normative or value-oriented organization, realist theory indicates that, ultimately, national security decision-making is guided by strategic thinking.

There is an identifiable divide between a country's desire to accomplish a policy objective and a country's need to secure its national security when looking at the role of non-EU actors in relation to all aspects of European security. A good example of a nation that possesses significant military capability, in addition to geographic advantages, yet has been denied access to major EU defense mechanisms is Türkiye. While realism provides a very comprehensive theoretical framework to explain international security issues, it generally contrasts with liberal theories that emphasize cooperation, international institutions, and common values. Liberal theory illustrates that international organizations are able to create stability and foster collaborative relationships amongst countries over long periods of time. For instance, the European Union represents both an entity that facilitates cooperative

interactions and a mechanism by which the preferences and behavior of individual member states can be shaped.

Although many of these arguments are optimistic about international organizations' potential to prevent future conflicts among members, some scholars view them skeptically. Realists contend that institutions are ultimately determined by the interests of those states in membership and cannot impose themselves on the basic security concerns of member states. Institutions, in other words, may show cooperative tendencies, but they are not independent producers of cooperation. Rather, they represent expressions of underlying power relationships (Mearsheimer 2001), functioning primarily as sites for states to interact rather than as independent agents capable of producing stable order.

These debates take on special relevance when looking at European history. The European Union serves as an example of post-national cooperation, with a high degree of interdependency in terms of economics and politics among its members, which leads to a reduced potential for conflict. While the EU has taken many steps forward in developing a single foreign policy and a mechanism for making collective decisions regarding external policies, when it comes to issues related to "hard" security, such as defense planning, developing military capabilities, and making strategic decisions, member states continue to pursue their own separate national security interests. The EU's failure to develop a coherent defense strategy during a time of crisis indicates that, although the EU has established institutions, realist influences remain. This is demonstrated by EU member state decision making processes relative to providing financial and military aid to Ukraine. For example, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán approached financial and military support to Ukraine cautiously and, in some cases, appeared to be more aligned with Russia than with the rest of the EU. He actually publicly disagreed with EU-wide agreements on both humanitarian and military support to Ukraine (Reuters 2023) to protect Hungary's national interest. Events like those in Ukraine demonstrate that even at the most developed institutional levels, state actions are typically driven by what best protects their interests rather than simply by commitments to shared norms or values.

As well, recent developments in Europe's security environment have similarly highlighted these limitations. The war in Ukraine has brightly illustrated the importance of having military power and deterrence in place, and how much European countries rely on NATO and, therefore, ultimately the U.S. for their security. Additionally, the rapidly increasing

relations between the U.S., Israel and Iran in the Middle East, have further highlighted the extent to which the security of Europe is influenced by numerous factors beyond Europe itself. For example, if there were to be increased conflict in this region, it would likely have negative implications for European energy security, regional stability, and the potential for the conflict to expand into other regions. All of these are issues of concern to European nations (Euronews 2026). Therefore, security threats are no longer limited to specific geographic areas. The fact that Turkish security is tied to both European and Middle Eastern security contexts supports the notion that European security should be viewed as part of an integrated whole. Because of its geographical and regional ties, Türkiye acts as a bridge connecting Europe to the Middle East. Moreover, in order to truly understand the totality of European security, it would be impossible to overlook the significance of Turkish security. In light of recent events, I believe that realist arguments about the role of geography in determining a country's strategic position have become increasingly relevant. In addition, with the increased interdependence among countries, what constitutes "security" has moved beyond simply being able to defend a territory. Instead, security now includes considerations regarding regional relationships and the ability to exercise control over critical transshipment routes. As a result, states are at an advantageous position when they are capable of influencing the affairs of multiple regions simultaneously.

Accordingly, from a realist perspective, there is little justification for replacing or ignoring this particular aspect of Turkish strategy. At the same time, however, the way in which the European Union views security cooperation appears to reveal some contradictions. Specifically, although the EU continues to improve its capacity to respond militarily and thereby increase its level of autonomy as an actor in matters related to security, it has yet to formally include all strategically relevant actors in its efforts. Therefore, there exists a considerable difference between the stated goals of the EU in terms of improving security and the reality of how it currently implements those policies. From a realist viewpoint, if strategically relevant actors such as Türkiye were to be excluded from various cooperative frameworks due to their exclusionary nature, then the overall effectiveness of the framework could potentially decline during periods of heightened uncertainty in international relations.

Therefore, Türkiye serves as a particularly illustrative example in this regard. On the one hand, Türkiye provides support to European security in several forms, including military capabilities, regional influence, and its participation in NATO. Conversely, despite providing

significant levels of support to European security through each of these mechanisms, Türkiye has been institutionally excluded from participating in key defense-related initiatives implemented by the EU. Rather than examining this dynamic strictly through either political or normative lenses, realism enables us to interpret this development as a structural contradiction between the strategic necessities associated with maintaining effective security and the institutional preference of the EU.

Neorealism has long been regarded as one of the most influential theories used to explain the causes of conflict and patterns of state behavior in international relations; however, over the years, neorealism has been subject to numerous criticisms. One of the primary criticisms made against neorealism is that it focuses too heavily upon the role of states and international systems while paying insufficient attention to other variables that can impact a state's behavior toward another state. These variables include domestic politics, leadership characteristics, ideological beliefs, and identity. Critics contend that these domestic-level variables can significantly affect how a state pursues its foreign policy agenda (Keohane 1986).

An additional significant critique of neorealist theory comes from constructivists like Alexander Wendt. He argues that threats aren't solely based upon military strength and material power; rather, threat assessments depend greatly on previous experiences, a nation's history with another country, and the social interactions among countries (Wendt 1992). Furthermore, liberal theorists criticize neorealism because it does not place sufficient emphasis on the roles of international institutions and cooperative behavior. From this point of view, organizations like NATO and the EU are not simply instruments of powerful nations. Rather, they represent mechanisms where individual member-states can work together to reduce conflict within their region and influence one another to behave in certain ways (Keohane 1986).

Although there exist many critiques of neorealism, the theory will serve as an important foundation for this investigation. As outlined previously, this dissertation focuses primarily on issues relating to military capability, strategic geography, security competition, and alliance relationships. These concepts are very closely associated with the tenets of realism. While domestic and ideological influences certainly exist, the overall external security context facing Europe, NATO, and Türkiye is mainly characterized by long-term strategic issues and geostrategic interests.

## 1.2 Alliance Theory

The formation of alliances is a major issue in international relations, particularly within realist theory, where the primary actor is the state and all actors operate in an uncertain environment. Since there are no external authorities to provide security guarantees in an anarchic system, states will form alliances when doing so appears beneficial for enhancing their security and balancing perceived threats. These forms of cooperation are formed through strategic calculations made by states based on interest and risk assessments (Walt 1987), and although these alliances may appear stable from an outside perspective, tensions often exist beneath the surface.

Stephen Walt's work provides significant input toward developing alliance theory; he posits that states do not merely respond to power, but to threats (Walt 1987). He further notes that perceptions of threat depend upon numerous variables, including geographic proximity, military capabilities, and perceived intentions. Therefore, a state is more likely to form alliances when faced with a direct and immediate threat than when responding to abstract notions of power. As a result, alliances tend to be flexible and responsive to changes in security environments rather than permanent structures.

Another crucial element of alliance theory is burden sharing; this concept addresses how the costs and responsibilities associated with collective defense are distributed among members. Most collective defense alliances exhibit unequal distributions of responsibility and costs, with some states providing a significantly larger portion of both military and financial resources than other member states. These inequalities can lead to tensions within the alliance, particularly when the states shouldering the largest burdens feel that other members are not meeting their obligations fairly. Olson & Zeckhauser argue that collective defense arrangements provide strong incentives for smaller members to rely more on stronger allies, thereby helping to clarify why issues related to fairness and contribution arise regularly (Olson & Zeckhauser 1966). Additionally, issues surrounding burden sharing have proven to be recurring problems within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) regarding the relationship between the U.S. and European allies concerning disputes about defense spending and strategic commitments.

Alliances do not eliminate the two major risks facing allied states. These include abandonment, in which allies fail to deliver the support needed at critical times; and entrapment, in which allies become involved in conflicts that threaten their own security. The constant interplay between the two risks requires states to strike a balance between dependency and independence in their behavior (Snyder 1997). Therefore, managing both of these risks creates an unstable relationship in terms of alliance behavior. The relationship between the two can be observed through several examples from the past few years, specifically concerning the ongoing conflict between the U.S., Israel, and Iran. Several European countries were concerned about becoming directly or indirectly involved in a conflict they had neither initiated nor fully supported. This demonstrates one of the ways in which the risk of entrapment is illustrated through alliance theory.

Furthermore, when the United States took action to attack Iran without full coordination with all of its European allies, those same European allies became increasingly concerned about the commitment of their fellow member states. Even though NATO has existed since 1949 as a collective body, it was not activated collectively in this instance (Reuters 2026) because NATO's membership could not reach an agreement regarding a unified strategic approach. While some European allies of the United States, including Spain, France, and Italy, actively opposed or refused to cooperate militarily with the U.S. against Iran, this demonstrated continued divisions between member nations' threat assessments.

Therefore, what happens in practice often contradicts what is stated in formal commitments. This indicates that alliances are not always unified, even under extreme circumstances. Differences in national interests, strategic objectives, and threat perceptions will continue to define how states act individually and collectively through the alliance structure. As such, alliances should be viewed as fluid and frequently contentious arrangements, rather than as fixed and unchanging bodies. Thus, disputes amongst NATO allies would not be perceived as aberrations.

As such, these conceptual frameworks are very helpful in analyzing Türkiye's role within NATO. While Türkiye is a significant player within NATO due to its substantial military capabilities, it has historically developed strained relationships with many of its other member states based on differences related to regional issues and strategic priorities. Based upon alliance theory, these types of strains are quite common, representing the natural tension between cooperation and competition and negotiation that is embedded in the concept of an

alliance. As such, any disputes involving Türkiye should be viewed as components of a larger set of alliance dynamics as opposed to independent anomalies.

Although alliance theory is beneficial in explaining cooperation between states, it illustrates limitations in achieving complete unity within an alliance, especially during instances of rapid geopolitical change.

Alliances are often viewed as being formalized and working together effectively; however, due to conflicting interests of individual nations and changes in national strategic objectives, they rarely function as effectively as envisioned. This can be seen clearly within larger alliances like NATO, where member states do not necessarily have the same definitions regarding what constitutes a threat or how to address those threats (Webber et al. 2012). This represents one reason why alliance theory continues to be applicable today.

A primary challenge facing modern-day alliance politics is the increasing divergence between the U.S. and its European allies. Even though NATO serves as the principal security arrangement for the Euro-Atlantic region, there has been an increase in disagreements among member states concerning the priority of various issues. Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has primarily concentrated on addressing global security issues outside of the confines of Europe. Conversely, many European states have demonstrated reticence towards involvement in regional conflicts outside of their proximal regional areas of interest. These divergences affect both operational decision-making and longer-term questions of loyalty and commitment amongst member states.

While the above points illustrate some of the issues associated with alliance relationships, another factor contributing to the instability of these arrangements is the attempt made by the European Union to establish its own security and defense capabilities. This endeavor has come to be referred to using the concept of "strategic autonomy." While this effort is designed to enhance Europe's capability to make decisions independent of other international organizations, it does raise questions relative to duplication and coordination with NATO. Thus, from a theoretical standpoint related to alliances, this adds an extra layer of complexity to the relationship between member states. The need for member states to reconcile their obligations to NATO with their engagement in EU-level security-related activities can create overlapping organizational structures and unclear priorities.

The creation of two distinct organizational frameworks has significant ramifications for non-EU NATO member-states. Specifically, Türkiye. For many years, Türkiye has been a longstanding member of NATO and has contributed significantly to the military capabilities of the alliance. Additionally, Türkiye plays a vital role in maintaining regional stability and security. However, Türkiye's inability to participate in critical EU defense initiatives creates a structural imbalance from a theoretical alliance context. Furthermore, from an alliance theory perspective, this situation can be characterized as a form of selective cooperation where certain actors receive inclusion into specific security arrangements while others are excluded despite their strategic significance.

Selective cooperation provides several implications for evaluating whether or not EU-wide cooperative security efforts are effective. If alliances are intended to collectively enhance security for participating states, excluding a capable actor could potentially decrease the overall strength of the system instead of enhancing it. Therefore, Türkiye's position illustrates a broader dilemma present throughout alliance systems that exist currently. Specifically, political considerations and boundaries created through institutional arrangements often do not align with the strategic requirements of each state.

In addition to differing assessments of risk and potential threats affecting how alliance members perceive Türkiye's role in alliance affairs, varying levels of political contention among alliance members will continue to negatively impact the prospects for cooperation involving Türkiye. Some states view Türkiye as a necessary ally due to its geographic location and military capabilities, while other states harbor reservations toward Turkish involvement due to existing political tensions. As noted earlier, varying perceptions among alliance members will contribute to further fragmentation and reinforce the notion that alliances are not uniform collective entities. Instead, alliances represent negotiated agreements subject to contestation.

To me, this is perhaps one of the clearest contradictions present within ongoing European security debates. On one hand, Europe seeks to strengthen its defense capabilities and promote greater cooperative efforts across all member states. Simultaneously, Europe limits the participation of one of its most capable and strategically positioned partners. This tension helps explain why the case of Türkiye is not only a political issue, but also an alliance management problem.



### **1.3 Strategic Autonomy**

The concept of strategic autonomy has taken on greater significance in the context of European security debates since recent global events have created new challenges. Simply stated, strategic autonomy will allow the European Union to make independent decisions regarding security and defense matters; it does not rely solely upon outside entities, such as the United States. As an abstract notion, the concept of strategic autonomy has been a subject of discussion for many years. It has, however, recently acquired additional relevance due to the conflict in Ukraine and a developing perception that Europe needs to assume responsibility for its own security. This view is consistent with the ideas presented by the European Union's Strategic Compass (European Union 2022). While the theoretical implications of strategic autonomy are relatively easy to understand, its practical application continues to be debated.

The promotion of strategic autonomy from an institutional standpoint has occurred primarily through several EU-level initiatives designed to promote increased levels of collaboration among member state defense organizations. Examples of such collaborative mechanisms include Permanent Structured Cooperation and the development of enhanced defense industrial capabilities throughout the Union. The ultimate objective of these various initiatives is to create a more organized and capable European defense system that can effectively address emerging threats. These collaborative initiatives, however, raise significant questions concerning relationships between the European Union and NATO.

As viewed through the lens of Alliance Theory, there are two potential interpretations of the pursuit of strategic autonomy. First, pursuing strategic autonomy may represent a rational response to uncertainty based on long-term concerns regarding future U.S. commitments toward the security of Europe. At the same time, however, it may produce tensions within the transatlantic alliance, especially when European defense initiatives are seen as being redundant to the existing systems of NATO. This tension illustrates a deeper argument over whether European security will continue to be associated with NATO, or rather evolve towards an autonomous system.

At the same time, strategic autonomy is not limited to military capabilities; it includes how decisions are made politically. The European Union has a goal to be able to make decisions together as a group; however, this objective is often hampered by different national interests among its member states. Therefore, although the concept of autonomy implies a unified and independent entity, reality is frequently much more complicated, with disagreement among member states limiting the breadth and efficacy of the EU's security policy.

Given this context, the issue of inclusion becomes quite relevant. As the European Union creates its own defensive frameworks, it must determine who is included in this developing construct. This question is especially salient regarding third-country nations that have close ties to European security (such as Türkiye) and therefore would likely be interested in becoming part of the EU's defense construct. Although Türkiye is an integral part of NATO and provides critical strategic value to both NATO and the EU, it currently does not participate in many of the EU's defense-related initiatives. Consequently, there exists a scenario wherein a central security actor is excluded from the structures that were established to enhance European defense.

This practical aspect of strategic autonomy can best be understood through reviewing the specific mechanisms developed by the European Union in recent years. An example of one of the most significant developments in this area is Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which was created in order to enable enhanced defense cooperation among those member states that choose to engage in PESCO (Council of the European Union 2026).

With PESCO, EU member states plan to develop their coordination on military planning, capability building, and cooperative projects in a more methodical manner than previously existed. While theoretically such programs would enhance the operational efficiency of EU member states' defense efforts and create greater capacity for collective defense, they represent a more centralized approach than previous approaches.

Recently, the EU has also adopted several additional measures aimed at increasing defense production and improving industrial preparedness. The SAFE initiative represents one of the most recent attempts by the EU to grow the size of the EU's defense industry and to improve its overall ability to meet increased demand for security due to growing insecurity (European Commission 2024).

Nevertheless, the mechanism of developing these mechanisms has revealed a fundamental contradiction. Although the European Union stresses the need for better defense capabilities, political and institutional barriers often limit cooperation. Therefore, participation in larger scale projects generally favors either the member states or the chosen partners; consequently, strategically significant actors can be excluded from the system. Consequently, there are doubts about how best to pursue strategic autonomy on the most efficient basis and within the widest possible range.

Türkiye represents one of the most obvious contradictions of this type. Türkiye is a NATO member that possesses considerable military capabilities, operational experiences, and an industrially developed defense sector. Moreover, due to its geographical location, Türkiye has special significance concerning many issues, for example, the Black Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Middle East. Despite these advantages, Türkiye has been excluded from virtually all EU-defense frameworks recently established, including those related to industrial cooperation and capability development. That demonstrates my belief that institutions must work together to achieve broad-based cooperation and therefore that strong institutions are insufficient to assure successful cooperation.

A realist would argue that excluding Türkiye from these defense frameworks weakens instead of strengthens the overall security framework. If the objective is to increase Europe's ability to react to crises, then excluding a capable actor because of political considerations creates a disconnect between strategy and institutional practices. Accordingly, the debate regarding strategic autonomy encompasses not only whether Europe will be able to become more independent, but also whether Europe is willing to establish its own security cooperation based upon practical necessities instead of narrow political preferences.

Furthermore, this issue relates closely to the broader theme of this dissertation. The example of Türkiye illustrates that European-security discussions cannot be comprehended solely based on formal membership or institutional identity. Instead, they should be examined through capabilities, geographically-located factors, and strategic necessity. Hence, the question is not merely if Europe will be able to develop greater independence, but also whether it will be able to accomplish this in a manner that excludes one of its most crucial security partners.

## 1.4 From Albright's 3Ds to Contemporary Alliance Tensions

The ongoing discussion regarding the relationship between European defense initiatives and the transatlantic alliance has taken place for many years. Despite being called "new" lately by many people involved in the conversation regarding strategic autonomy, most of the key issues have been present since previous eras. One of the most useful references in this discussion is the position made by then U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright at the end of the 1990s. During a period when the European Union was trying to increase its ability to provide security and defense for itself, Albright identified three key principles that should govern the process. These principles would come to be commonly referred to as the "3Ds" and are still very relevant today for understanding the tension currently existing between NATO, the European Union, and all of those non-EU nations that contribute to transatlantic security (Albright 1998).

Although these principles seem to be quite relevant to current security issues, they were developed during a time when there was much less knowledge available concerning what strategies would work best in modern times. The first principle was no decoupling. This means that the development of European defense initiatives should not weaken the strategic bond between Europe and the United States. For decades, NATO was based on the premise that both North America and Europe shared one common goal of ensuring security. Based on Albright's views, if new European defense organizations were created, they needed to support this bond and not create another competitive security arrangement. This was a major concern, as the possibility of a separate and independent European defense organization might eventually lead to greater separation between Europe and the United States. This separation could result in weaker alliance bonds and uncertainty within the transatlantic relationship (Albright 2003).

The second principle was no duplication. Albright stated that European defense initiatives should not develop identical military capabilities, command structures, and so on, as exist within NATO. Practically speaking, this meant that NATO and EU defense organizations should not duplicate each other's functions or capabilities. It does not make sense to use finite resources to develop parallel organizations instead of using them to enhance overall security. This issue remains alive today, as arguments continue as to whether European defense

organizations will supplement or compete with NATO, and how responsibility will be divided among various entities (Albright 1998).

The third principle was no discrimination. This is particularly pertinent to the subject matter discussed in this thesis. Albright stated that European defense organizations should not limit participation to EU member states. Instead, NATO members that did not participate in EU institutions should not be excluded from participating in transatlantic security arrangements. Therefore, EU member states and non-EU member states alike can contribute to collective security regardless of their individual status as an EU member state. The intent here was to maintain strategic inclusivity and to emphasize that security cooperation should occur based on the strength of contributions rather than solely based upon formal membership in an institution (Albright 1998).

These principles represented several concerns about the potential future direction of European defense. However, they also provided a broad framework that could be used to evaluate subsequent developments.

There was no doubt that Europe had a role to play in its own security, but the real question was how it could do so without undermining the unity of the Alliance and further fragmenting the partnership amongst other member states. Therefore, Albright's comments went beyond just a policy statement; she also offered a warning about the potential structural cracks that may arise if institutions seek to expand their roles without engaging with each other in a manner of mutual strategic vision.

Albright's three D's are still very applicable today. All of the current debate around strategic autonomy, burden sharing, and institutional exclusion reflects the same dilemmas that Albright highlighted decades ago. It is not the character of the problem that has been altered, but rather its degree of difficulty. The competitive dynamics at the international level have increased dramatically since 2000, while the transatlantic relationship has become increasingly uncertain. Consequently, the danger of decoupling, duplication, and discrimination has become much more apparent.

Therefore, Albright's three D's represent more than simply historical context. They serve as an important conceptual tool for analyzing some of the contradictory aspects of contemporary European security debates. Furthermore, they also help clarify why Türkiye's position can't be explained solely based on political disagreement or institutional barriers. The greater issue

concerns whether European security is being developed along lines of strategic necessity or if it is instead being developed based upon narrow political considerations.

It is clear that Albright's framework is particularly pertinent when considering developments over the past decade. Although the trans-Atlantic alliance remains formally intact, the level of trust within the alliance as well as the level of strategic coherence continue to be tested. One of the key moments in terms of this erosion was during the presidency of Donald Trump, who took a distinctly different view towards NATO than his predecessors. Trump continuously called into question whether NATO was truly worth defending and attacked European nations for not spending enough money on their military defenses. Trump's comments raised serious questions as to whether the United States' security guarantees could be relied upon in the future (NATO 2019). Therefore, this time frame demonstrated that there continued to exist unresolved structural problems within the alliance.

In terms of Albright's first principle, "no decoupling," this moment was particularly pivotal. While Trump's comments did not result in a formal disintegration of NATO, his repeated expressions of doubt as to the long-term commitment of the United States created uncertainty among European nations. Many European governments began to reassess their reliance on Washington.

That worry was, arguably, a major driver of renewed calls for "strategic autonomy" and, therefore, while there were no institutional disconnections between the U.S. and EU, the fear of institutional disconnection had already become a key factor in shaping contemporary European security discourse. The second principle, non-duplication, is also very relevant today. The EU's expansion of its defense endeavors using new money, new planning mechanisms, and new industry-based programs has led to increased debate about how those new activities will relate to the capabilities of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Those who support greater EU defense capabilities do so by saying they will enhance the alliance. However, those opposed to additional EU defense capabilities say that multiple institutions involved in planning will lead to inefficiencies and confusion in crisis situations. It is not the question of cooperation that is at issue here; rather, it is the issue of whether the new organizations and their plans are created in a coherent and coordinated way.

The third principle, no discrimination, is perhaps the most directly related to the core thesis of this dissertation. Many of the current European defense initiatives have been developed

within institutional structures that preferentially benefit EU member states or a small select number of preferred partner nations. That preference has real-world implications for many countries, such as Türkiye, that are strategically important to European security but are not entirely included in several EU defense frameworks. That same concern, voiced by Madeleine Albright nearly three decades ago, is just as relevant today.

That exclusion is especially significant given the growing geopolitical instability surrounding the region in recent years. The war in Ukraine, tensions in the Black Sea Region, and the ongoing conflict between the United States, Israel, and Iran are examples of where European security cannot be compartmentalized from neighboring regions. NATO has consistently stated that the Black Sea Region is strategically important to Europe's overall security and stability; that instability on NATO's southern flank must be addressed; and that cooperation among NATO allies in theatres that are increasingly interdependent (for example, NATO 2024) is essential. All of these themes are ones where Türkiye plays a critical role due to both geographic location and military capability, and regional involvement. Therefore, excluding a country like Türkiye from certain components of Europe's developing security architecture represents a disconnect between strategic requirements and organizational structure.

A contradiction exists as the foundation of the larger dialogue discussed in this dissertation. European entities are becoming aware of the necessity to increase their defensive partnerships and strategic capabilities; however, political disputes and restrictive policies will likely impede additional inclusiveness in cooperation with appropriate partners. Therefore, although European entities are likely attempting to increase their security capability, they may also be reducing the number of potential contributors.

Therefore, the shift from Albright's 3 Ds to today has revealed that the underlying contradictions of trans-Atlantic security were never completely solved. Instead, these issues appear in different forms due to changes in geopolitics and institutional choices. The Turkish example provides evidence of this fact. Türkiye's situation cannot be viewed as a simple bilateral political relationship but is one component of a much broader structural question regarding how Europe should organize itself strategically in this new era of strategic competition. I believe Türkiye's position highlights this contradiction.

## **Chapter 2 – Historical Evolution of Türkiye in Western Security**

### **2.1 Cold War and NATO Integration**

Türkiye's entry into the Western security structure was mainly influenced by the Cold War-era international relations that developed at the end of World War II. With relations quickly deteriorating between the West and the USSR, and with rising fears of a possible invasion from the East as well as growing military rivalries in Europe, the European continent experienced an unprecedented level of uncertainty. Strategic geography played an increasingly important role in how all major actors calculated their security interests. Strategically located between Europe, the Black Sea, the Balkans, and the Middle East, Türkiye would become increasingly important to both the U.S. and the overall Western security architecture during these early years of the Cold War (Leffler 1980).

The post-World War II years produced serious worries among many Western governments about the potential future distribution of power in Europe. With the Soviet Union having established itself as a prevailing power throughout much of Eastern Europe, along with instability in the Mediterranean creating fears that Moscow may eventually increase its reach into the southern regions of Europe, Türkiye's geo-political position became increasingly important not just for the U.S., but also for defending Southern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean.

The control of the maritime routes through which the Black Sea connected to the Mediterranean held important strategic consequences for Türkiye because military capability and geo-political influence were becoming crucial elements of Cold War security strategies ("NATO and Southern European Security" 1988). Relations between Türkiye and the Soviet Union from 1946-1960 were shaped primarily by two problems; the first problem was the Soviet Union's demand to revise the Montreux Convention and have a larger role in the governance of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. Also, Soviet leaders made territorial claims over the Turkish provinces of Kars and Ardahan (De Luca 1951).

Although the demands made by the Soviet Union did not result in war with Türkiye, they created significant unease among Türkiye's elite politicians and strengthened their belief that the Soviet Union posed a serious and immediate strategic threat to Türkiye (De Luca 1951). The changes described above heavily impacted the direction of Türkiye's foreign policy from



1945 onward. From approximately 1922 until the start of World War II, Ankara had generally followed a very cautious foreign policy based on a strategy of preserving balance while limiting its participation in great-power conflicts. However, by the end of World War II, the international situation was quickly evolving toward a new type of conflict: the Cold War.

This shift in the international system eventually led Turkish decision-makers to conclude that a neutral foreign policy would be insufficient to ensure national security. To Turkish policymakers, it became apparent that in addition to being an ideological competitor to itself, the Soviet Union also represented a geographic competitor whose actions potentially threatened Türkiye's sovereignty and strategically vital location.

Western nations were becoming more aware of the potential value of Türkiye as an element in their overall European Security Framework at the same time. From the developing West's point of view, Türkiye would represent a defensive barrier against possible Soviet expansion into the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern areas. Additionally, Türkiye provided a strategically advantageous access to other areas deemed vital to both European stability and NATO's planning. According to Leffler (1980), Türkiye was primarily viewed by Americans as having been significant in this area due to the requirement for strategic security rather than simply as being aligned ideologically.

Türkiye's search for external security assurances had become more urgent as the Soviets increased their pressure on Türkiye throughout the late 1940s. The U.S., meanwhile, was beginning to define itself internationally within the emerging Cold War structure.

Policymakers in Washington began to believe that unstable politics and weak economies in various parts of the world created openings for Soviet control. Over time, these concerns caused Washington to move toward a more broadly defined policy of containment aimed at preventing further Soviet expansion into all of Europe and neighboring areas. The Truman Doctrine was announced in 1947; it is generally agreed upon that this event marked one of the most critical developments in the progression of the new U.S. foreign policy.

The Truman Doctrine demonstrated the U.S. commitment to help countries that are being pressured externally and are politically unstable. Initially, the doctrine was directed towards helping Greece and Türkiye; however, its overall goal was to protect the strategic balance of power in Europe and limit Soviet power in the eastern Mediterranean area (Leffler 1980). Türkiye received more than temporary military assistance from the United States. It was an

initial step for a long-term strategic relationship between Türkiye and the Western bloc. Military and economic aid programs to Türkiye increased its military capability as well as cooperation with Western powers. In time, Türkiye has been incorporated into a larger

European and Trans-Atlantic security umbrella, which would be formalized when Türkiye joined NATO. In addition to ideological reasons for aligning itself with the West, Türkiye's actions were also influenced by realistic factors at work internationally. As the threat from their neighbor grew more apparent, Turkish decision makers began turning to creating alliances and using external balancing measures. Therefore, Türkiye's alignment with the Western bloc was both ideologically driven and strategically driven due to survival, territory defense, and regional stability (Aydın 1998). However, there have been internal debates about Türkiye's increasing level of integration into the Western security umbrella.

A number of elite members of government and military are very supportive of alignment with the West, while other elite members are concerned about becoming overly dependent upon outside forces. However, for much of the first decade of the Cold War, concern over Soviet expansion overshadowed these concerns. At the end of World War II, Türkiye had developed strong ties with the emerging Western Security Umbrella prior to officially joining NATO. Türkiye's close ties with the Western security umbrella continued to grow with its participation in the Korean War. Türkiye's participation in the Korean War was a major factor in leading to Türkiye's official membership in NATO and a deeper integration into the European security architecture.

Türkiye's growing ties with the Western security umbrella grew visibly apparent during the Korean War. Following North Korea's invasion of South Korea, the UN requested member nations provide military support to respond to North Korea's aggression.

While the conflict took place outside of Türkiye's immediate physical surroundings, Türkiye sent troops to Korea. The decision to do so held great significance at the level of both strategy and politics and went far beyond the battlefield itself. Participating in the Korean War offered Türkiye an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to collective defense and boost its standing within the emerging Western alliance system. At this time, membership in NATO was one of the primary goals of Türkiye's foreign policy.

As such, Turkish leaders felt that participating militarily would serve as proof to Western governments that Türkiye not only possessed a valuable geographic location due to which it

was worth including in their collective defense plans, but also possessed a strong political will to defend Europe and the wider Western community (Leffler 1980). Türkiye's involvement in the Korean War, therefore, served as an important factor in forming perceptions regarding Türkiye among many Western European governments. Prior to the beginning of NATO, some member states were hesitant to expand membership beyond the core Western European countries.

However, with respect to their own contributions to the Korean War effort, these states came to believe that Türkiye had demonstrated a capacity to participate actively in collective defense planning. In many ways, Türkiye's participation in Korea accelerated its political and military integration into the wider transatlantic security framework. Ultimately, this integration culminated in Türkiye being officially admitted into NATO in 1952 along with Greece. Membership in NATO signified a major turning point in Turkish foreign and security policy. For the first time in modern history, Türkiye found itself institutionally linked to a collective Western-based defense alliance predicated upon deterring aggression through mutually binding security commitments.

Membership in NATO also tied Türkiye closely to the developing European security system established throughout the Cold War. In terms of its relationship to the alliance, Türkiye's strategic value went far beyond only a symbolic political association. Strategically situated on NATO's southeast flank, Türkiye formed a key geographic nexus linking Europe to the Black Sea, the Balkans, the Caucasus region, and the Middle East all at once. Its multi-dimensional geography enhanced NATO's defensive capabilities on its southern front while simultaneously lowering potential Soviet influence over strategically sensitive areas ("NATO and Southern European Security" 1988).

Additionally, Türkiye's strategic position increased its operational value to NATO planners. It provided NATO with a strategic margin that did not exist previously, and allowed for intelligence-gathering activities, regional surveillance and monitoring, and cooperation on military issues.

In the 1950s and 1960s, NATO's presence in Türkiye developed rapidly by means of military bases, radar equipment, and logistical support. These developments changed Türkiye into one of NATO's principal front-line states during the Cold War (Aydın 1998). Cooperation over military matters additionally promoted modernization in the Turkish armed forces. American

military assistance and NATO affiliation helped implement institutional changes, training programs, and technological progress in the Turkish military. With each additional year of NATO affiliation, the Turkish Armed Forces have increasingly taken part in the adoption of alliance standards and strategic doctrines. The development of the Turkish Armed Forces' abilities has been augmented by their long-term connection to the Western defense framework.

However, there was no complete absence of tensions between Türkiye and its Western partners. One of the greatest crises arose during the Cyprus Crisis of 1974. After Türkiye intervened militarily on the Island of Cyprus following a Greek-backed coup, disputes between Ankara and some NATO member states increased greatly. The United States eventually implemented an arms embargo against Türkiye, which caused considerable discontent amongst the political and military elite in Türkiye. To a great extent, this crisis illustrated that participation in an Alliance does not preclude differences between Allies at times of divergence in territorial interests and national priorities. The Cyprus crisis further revealed another contradiction that will remain influential in shaping Türkiye's relationship with European security institutions.

Despite being strategically very important for both NATO and the Defence of Europe, political trust between Ankara and some Western governments repeatedly declined during times of regional instability. According to Krebs (2001), the relationship between NATO's principles of collective solidarity and National Interests created tension in relations between NATO members, especially in cases where either side had competing national interests, such as in the case of Türkiye and Greece. Regardless of these tensions, Türkiye maintained an extremely significant position in NATO during the entire duration of the Cold War. For NATO, Türkiye provided military ability, geographical access, and regional influence that could not be easily substituted.

Similarly, Turkish policymakers generally saw NATO membership as a vital tool in countering the power of the Soviet Union, while maintaining national security.

In terms of how the Cold War years have set up a number of long-term dynamics that are still being used as a basis for discussion regarding Türkiye and European security, three main elements can be identified. First, the geographic position and military capabilities of Türkiye were recognized by all parties involved to be directly related to its potential use as an ally or

asset to the West, particularly within the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, regardless of whether or not Türkiye had aligned itself politically with the West. This represented a major shift from previous relationships, where Türkiye's value was primarily seen in terms of its political allegiance to one particular side.

Secondly, while there has historically been some level of trust and cooperative relationship between Türkiye and Western allies, this relationship has also historically included significant levels of mistrust and disagreement. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that similar types of disagreements will occur when cooperation between these two entities increases.

Finally, the Cold War provided clear evidence that Türkiye's value to Western security alliances tends to grow when there is increased global instability or uncertainty about regional developments. These characteristics of Türkiye's involvement with the West continue to influence our understanding of how we view Türkiye's role in both NATO and the overall European Security Architecture.

In addition to the historical context that frames this analysis, we would argue that these same strategic factors that led to Türkiye's decision to become part of a Western-led security alliance continue to drive much of the debate on issues such as NATO membership, regional stability, and future cooperation on European security today.

## **2.2 Türkiye as NATO's Southeastern Anchor**

After becoming a new member of NATO in 1952, Türkiye was able to evolve from an alliance member into one of the organization's key actors in the region for strategic purposes. By the time the Cold War began, the security planning for NATO had expanded beyond merely military power and included geographic location and the accessibility of certain regions. Within this larger strategic context, Türkiye held a unique position within NATO due to its geographical position between Europe, the Black Sea, the Balkan States, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Middle East. From NATO's point of view, Türkiye greatly improved NATO's Southeastern Flank.

As Soviet expansion continued to move through Eastern Europe and the Black Sea Region, NATO recognized that Southern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean were at risk and therefore became increasingly vulnerable. Under these conditions, the geography of Türkiye offered NATO operational depth and regional proximity. In essence, the defense of Southern Europe was very closely tied to maintaining stability in the Black Sea Region and the Eastern Mediterranean. One of the greatest aspects of Türkiye's strategic significance during the Cold War was the Black Sea.

The Soviet Union developed significant naval and military assets in the area; as a result, there were continuous concerns from NATO member countries about maritime security and the overall regional balance of power. As the control of the Turkish Straits rested solely in the hands of the government of Türkiye, the nation held a unique position in the larger global security arena. The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles carried extreme geopolitical importance as they provided a direct waterway between the Soviet-controlled Black Sea and the Mediterranean and greater European bodies of water (De Luca 1951).

NATO planners viewed the protection of stability surrounding the Turkish Straits as being directly tied to defending all of Europe. Policymakers from the West feared that increased Soviet influence in the Black Sea and/or Eastern Mediterranean would negatively affect NATO's southern defensive line and create additional pressure on Southern European states. Therefore, Türkiye's value to NATO grew both due to its military capabilities and the regional balance and strategic access it offered to the alliance.

The geographical location of Türkiye created many operational advantages for NATO planners compared to many of the remaining NATO member countries, which were primarily located in the western part of Europe. As a result of its geographic positioning, NATO was able to simultaneously observe activities happening in several regions; specifically, the Balkans, the Caucasus region, the Black Sea, and the Middle East. Therefore, Türkiye's complex geography has made it an important operational component for NATO as well as its neighboring countries (Kınıklıoğlu 2015).

Throughout this period, military cooperation between Türkiye and NATO increased substantially. From the 1950s through the 1960s, NATO invested vast sums in developing military infrastructure, communications capabilities, and intelligence assets in Türkiye. During this period, air bases, radar installations, and logistics facilities were established

throughout Türkiye to improve NATO's ability to detect and respond to Soviet military activities while strengthening regional coordination. In the long term, these investments in Türkiye's military capabilities contributed to the country becoming one of NATO's most important front-line states during the Cold War.

Additionally, the growing military interdependence between Türkiye and NATO further strengthened Türkiye's institutional relationship with the broader Western security architecture. The Turkish Armed Forces gradually adopted NATO's military doctrine, training methods, and standard operating procedures. This process provided Türkiye with an opportunity to modernize its military while establishing a long-term framework for the development of Türkiye's foreign and defense policy.

Security considerations, as well as dependency on alliances, were two major factors that influenced Turkish strategic thought during the Cold War (Aydin 1998). In addition to the political aspects, Türkiye's participation in NATO contributed to its position in the overall European security framework. Although Türkiye wasn't part of the EEC (European Economic Community) at that time, its contributions to NATO defense planning helped link Türkiye to the protection of Europe. Therefore, Türkiye's strategic significance during the Cold War went far beyond its bilateral relationships with the U.S. and became closely tied to maintaining the stability of the entire European security order.

However, although Türkiye's increasing strategic importance within NATO alleviated some internal tension within the alliance, different perceptions of threats, different regional priorities, and differences in opinions from various Western governments often caused friction between Ankara and many other Western governments; the majority of NATO members still viewed Türkiye as an essential strategic partner for the safety of Southern Europe and NATO's southeastern flank. Türkiye, therefore, became much more than just a peripheral NATO member by the latter half of the Cold War. It became a critical element of NATO's defense plan in the region and a significant player in European security.

Its strategic role would remain influential over Türkiye's relationship with NATO and Europe long after the end of the Cold War. Türkiye's geographical positioning greatly enhanced NATO's southeast flank during the Cold War, but it also generated significant internal political tension within the alliance. The previous section discussed how Türkiye developed into one of NATO's primary operational actors due to its position between Europe, the Black

Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Middle East. However, Türkiye's increased operational importance as a result of its geography did not create political harmony amongst all alliance members. Increasingly, regional issues involving Türkiye and Greece disrupted NATO's internal equilibrium, especially when considering its southern flank.

One of NATO's least stable areas throughout the latter years of the Cold War was the Eastern Mediterranean. Disagreements over Cyprus, maritime borders, and regional influence produced significant disagreement between Ankara and Athens. Both countries are members of NATO, which further complicates their relationship.

The strained relations between Greece and Türkiye led to a difficult dilemma for the alliance due to the reliance of NATO on both countries to secure their southeastern border. Amongst the many issues that created tension between Greece and Türkiye was the Cyprus dispute, which would become the most dangerous threat to the alliance's ability to work together. Increasing inter-communal fighting on the island, combined with rising tensions between Greece and Türkiye, made the diplomatic relations deteriorate, even though both of them are NATO members.

The Cyprus dispute is a larger issue than just a local dispute. It developed into a greater global geopolitical issue that impacted NATO's strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean. The lack of cooperation between two allied nations during a time when tensions with the Soviet Union were at an all-time high weakened NATO's efforts to coordinate defenses in the south flank (Balçı 2020). Türkiye's response to the Cypriot crisis in 1974 increased the tension after it intervened militarily to support the Turkish community after a coup supported by Greece took place.

While Türkiye claimed the actions taken to protect its citizens and fulfill obligations as a guarantor country under previously agreed-upon international treaties, the reaction to the intervention by several Western governments was negative. Relations between Türkiye and the United States began to deteriorate, resulting in the U.S. placing an arms embargo on Türkiye. The Cyprus crisis illustrated one of the main contradictions in NATO's southeast flank during the Cold War. The fact that Türkiye was strategically important to NATO due to its geography, military capability, and access to the region did not preclude Türkiye from being involved in numerous conflicts with Greece, weakening the political unity of NATO.



National interest and differing security priorities often prevent institutional alliances from preventing conflicts between member- states (Krebs 2001). The Cyprus crisis also showed how regional disputes can impact broader European security assessments. Concerns existed amongst NATO officials regarding whether continued instability between Greece and Türkiye could decrease NATO's operational efficiency in the Eastern Mediterranean and provide opportunities for the Soviets to increase their influence in the region. Moreover, while tensions between Greece and Türkiye presented a problem between the two individual nations, they also posed security concerns for NATO related to maintaining stability in the Southern defense structure. Despite the tensions between Greece and Türkiye, no attempts were made by NATO members to isolate Türkiye from the alliance.

Tactical necessities continued to take precedence over political differences due to Türkiye's geographical location remaining critical in order to maintain balance vis-à-vis Soviet influences in the Black Sea, Balkans, and Eastern Mediterranean regions.

Western policy makers viewed Türkiye as a critical piece in maintaining European security. At the same time, the increasing level of tension created an ever-complex dynamic that ultimately shaped the relationship between Türkiye and the broader Western security community. In this regard, cooperation on many issues has been conducted alongside growing levels of mistrust, disagreement, and at times, political crisis. This trend would be seen again during the post-Cold War era and is now one of the fundamental characteristics in how Türkiye relates to both NATO and other European security organizations.

Therefore, at the end of the Cold War, Türkiye had taken on a dual role as it represented both a critical strategic anchor for the defense of its own region, but was also viewed as creating much political division within NATO member states. This dual nature is most likely going to continue to define the debates surrounding Türkiye's place in the evolving security framework of Europe.

## **2.3 Post-Cold War Transformation and Expanding Security Role**

The end of the Cold War has produced significant changes in the international security system, which have caused NATO's political-military strategic aims to undergo considerable transformations. As a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the

beginning of 1991, a large number of politicians and academics questioned whether NATO would continue to preserve the same level of strategic importance as it had achieved in the bipolar era. A similar debate developed concerning Türkiye's place in the alliance. Since Türkiye's Cold War significance was mainly because of its function in sustaining the balance of the Soviet presence in the Black Sea region and defending NATO's southeastern flank, there were initial expectations by many analysts that the country's relative importance would be diminished or eliminated once the Soviet threat dissipated. However, instead of diminishing, evidence from the 1990s indicated that Türkiye's strategic value continued to exist and evolve within both European and transatlantic security structures.

Rather than a focus solely on territorial defense against the Soviet Union, NATO has become increasingly focused on using the alliance for crisis management and for addressing the various forms of conflict, including regional conflicts, peacekeeping, and other security issues located outside of Central and Eastern Europe's core. This shift in emphasis has been especially pronounced with regard to the Balkans. In the late 20th century, Yugoslavia violently disintegrated and produced significant humanitarian disasters and security risks for the entire continent. It was also clear from the violent conflicts in Bosnia and later in Kosovo, that instability in the Balkans posed a direct threat to both wider European security and to stability in the surrounding region. Therefore, NATO increased its participation in peacekeeping and military operations in order to reduce violence and prevent further destabilization.

It is under this set of circumstances that Türkiye emerged as a key player providing support to NATO's growing operational capacity. Türkiye participated in numerous Alliance missions and peacekeeping operations throughout the Balkans and supported other aspects of NATO's broader effort to stabilize the region. Its historical, cultural, and physical connection to the Balkans has greatly enhanced its position relative to operations taking place there. Additionally, as NATO transitioned from a primary focus on territorial defense to one primarily based upon crisis management and regional intervention operations, Türkiye's contribution to those operations has grown significantly (Kınıklıoğlu 2015).

As well, NATO itself underwent a larger-scale transformation in terms of institutions. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO's focus has shifted from traditional collective territorial defense toward flexible security responses, including regional partnerships, counterterrorism, and crisis prevention. NATO's Strategic Concepts developed in the 1990s and early 2000s

reflect this changed security environment by identifying instability, regional conflicts, and new or emerging non-traditional threats as increasing risks for Euro-Atlantic security (NATO Strategic Concepts Archive). Moreover, because of these changes, Türkiye was able to remain relevant at the strategic level even though the Soviet threat, which had originally formed the basis for NATO's Cold War organization, no longer existed. The geography of Türkiye continues to provide operational access to several strategically significant areas of operation, including the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Black Sea, and the Middle East. In other words, while Türkiye lost its original "Cold War" significance as an important NATO ally with the end of the Cold War, its new role within the alliance represents an adaptation to NATO's changing security agenda.

The post-Cold War era at the political level was characterized by increasing tension about how the Turkish State would be engaged with the European Union and the larger Western security framework. As part of developing a stronger security and defense identity for itself, the European Union pursued several initiatives related to what has come to be known as the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) during the 1990s and early 2000s. While the ESDP is designed to enhance the ability of the European Union to provide for its own defense, it has also been viewed as creating inter-institutional disputes over NATO cooperation and decision-making procedures.

One of the major issues for Türkiye during this time frame was the positioning of Türkiye within the emerging European Union security structures. Türkiye remains a member of NATO with considerable military capability and operational contribution. However, Türkiye does not have membership status within the European Union. Therefore, there has been growing frustration from Ankara concerning discussions of European defense initiatives that can impact NATO's operation without providing Türkiye with participation rights in decision-making processes.

Therefore, by the end of the 20th century, the post-Cold War period started to create a more complex relationship between Türkiye's strategic value and its role within the European security framework. NATO views Türkiye as an important regional actor. Increasingly, however, within Europe, there are questions raised about whether or not Türkiye will continue to play a larger role in the evolving European security architecture. This emerging paradox will become even more evident in the coming years as regional instability and new geopolitical challenges shape European security concerns.

The shift in the international system post-Cold War did not just change the priorities of NATO but also how European security was perceived. Prior to the Cold War, European security policy discussions were largely concerned with defending territory and deterring military attack from the Soviet Union. Post-Cold War, however, European leaders found themselves dealing with a very different security environment due to ethnic conflict, regional instability, terrorism, mass migrations, and the disintegration of states along Europe's periphery. Both NATO and the European Union began to rethink their respective roles within this changing security context.

This changing security environment creates opportunities and political complexities for Türkiye. The regionally unstable environments surrounding the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Black Sea, and the Middle East increase Türkiye's strategic location. The growing interest by the European Union in establishing an independent security mechanism, however, produces greater disagreement on where Türkiye fits into future European defense initiatives.

The wars in Bosnia and Kosovo had a great impact on how those discussions evolved. Governments in Europe understood that they couldn't contain instability in the Balkans by themselves and needed coordinated military and political action. In intervening in the region, NATO showed again the ongoing importance of transatlantic cooperation as well as Europe's reliance on alliance resources when facing large-scale security crises. Throughout the Balkans, Türkiye was involved in many NATO operations and supported efforts to stabilize the area; thereby reaffirming its operational relevance within the framework of the alliance (Kımkıloğlu 2015).

In addition to the challenges related to developing institutionalized security mechanisms, the Balkan crisis also led to an increase in European efforts to develop their own, institutionally based, security capabilities independent of U.S. leadership. From the end of the 1990s through the beginning of the 2000s, the European Union made increasing attempts to expand and deepen the European security and defense policy to enhance Europe's capacity to provide effective responses to regional crises. Those attempts, however, rapidly created institutional and political problems for non-EU NATO member states, most notably Türkiye. The European debate over the status of Türkiye in European Security Institutions has been a reflection of an overall insecurity at the political level in Europe.

While Türkiye continues to provide military support to NATO operations, as well as for regional management of security concerns, the exact position of Türkiye from a political standpoint, as well as that of its institutional relationship with Europe, remains unclear. Questions concerning identity, compatibility, and belonging to the community frequently limited the extent to which deeper security cooperation could occur, even though Türkiye remained strategically significant for maintaining stability in Europe (Kınacıoğlu 2010). Türkiye became increasingly concerned that future EU defense initiatives would ultimately decrease Türkiye's influence over decisions.

This issue evolved into an even larger contradiction within the emerging European security framework. As a result of both its military capabilities and geographical location, Türkiye was still one of NATO's most valuable members; however, there has always existed some degree of reluctance on the part of European leaders regarding Türkiye's involvement in European institutions. As such, security co-operation with Türkiye developed under continuing political ambiguity.

The post-Cold War era also made clear that many of the security threats facing Europe were developing outside the boundaries of Europe, rather than internally. Specifically, conflicts in the Balkans, instability in the Caucasus region, migration pressures, terrorism, and concerns for energy security all have reinforced the strategic value of Türkiye's geography. Thus, while Türkiye remains a significant contributor to European defense, its role in European security is becoming more multi-dimensional than it was during the Cold War. During the Cold War, Türkiye served primarily as a defensive shield against potential conventional attacks. However, Türkiye is now viewed as a regional player involved in numerous security challenges that are directly impacting European security.

As such, perceptions within NATO have come to view Türkiye as operationally essential in spite of changing geopolitical realities. As well, NATO's increasing emphasis on crisis management, regional interventions, and flexible response systems to provide security has enhanced the value of member states that can offer geographic access, regional influence, and military support in unstable neighboring areas. Thus, Türkiye's strategic importance has shifted towards the post-Cold War environment rather than diminishing when the Soviet Union collapsed (Oğuzlu 2012).

By the beginning of the 21st Century, Türkiye was virtually at the center of almost every important regional security discussion concerning Europe. However, simultaneously with this development, questions regarding Türkiye's position within the larger European system continued to be unanswered. It is this growing disparity between strategic necessity and political hesitancy that will continue to shape discussions related to Türkiye's future participation in European security cooperation.

## **2.4 Strategic Autonomy Debates and Türkiye's Exclusion**

The second half of the 2010s saw an enormous increase in debates around the idea of European strategic autonomy, especially after there was much uncertainty as to whether U.S. security guarantees toward Europe would remain reliable over the long term. As such, while discussions were present in the post-Cold War era concerning strengthening Europe's independent defense capability, the seriousness of those debates grew exponentially under the presidency of Donald Trump.

Trump consistently expressed his criticism of NATO member states' lack of sufficient defense expenditures and questioned publicly whether or not it was fair that the United States bore the brunt of responsibility for ensuring the collective defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) at the expense of its other member states. The transactional nature of how President Trump approached transatlantic relations led to rising fears among many European government officials regarding their own ability to rely upon America's security guarantees going forward. With increasing uncertainty as to what transpired regarding the transatlantic relationship, European leaders placed greater emphasis on developing autonomous defense capabilities within Europe.

"Strategic Autonomy" evolved from being a primary focus within institutionally based debates to being a central theme in Europe-wide strategic planning related to security. In response to calls for greater EU military coordination, defense manufacturing capabilities, and crisis management tools, which could operate autonomously if necessary, European policymakers stated that the European Union required them. At the same time, Russia's increasingly aggressive foreign policy greatly exacerbated European security concerns. The conflict in the Black Sea area grew dramatically with the annexation by Russia of Crimea in

2014; however, the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, changed the way that Europeans perceive the threat. Issues related to territorial defense and military preparedness, as well as those relating to energy security and deterring aggression in regions, have been brought back to the center of European strategic thought.

Due to this development, NATO's Eastern and Southeastern regions have become extremely important in broader security-related discussions (NATO Strategic Concepts Archive). However, these developments highlighted a major contradiction within the evolution of Europe's emerging security structure. On one hand, European governments continue to stress the need for enhanced military capabilities and increased strategic coordination. However, political hesitancy with regard to Türkiye's position within these new initiatives continues. The contradiction is evident because Türkiye remains one of NATO's most strategically significant military contributors.

Türkiye's relevance to current European security issues stemmed from both geography and capability. Türkiye is situated at a vital intersection connecting Europe to the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the eastern Mediterranean, and the Middle East. Moreover, Türkiye has the second-largest NATO military force in terms of personnel, while it has been increasing its internal defense capabilities and operational capacities since the beginning of the last decade. At the same time, political and institutional disputes concerning Türkiye have often made it difficult for several European actors to pursue closer cooperation with Ankara. Türkiye's significance in European security calculations was amplified by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

The ability of Türkiye to regulate maritime traffic through the Turkish Straits under the Montreux Convention greatly impacted European military access to the Black Sea throughout the conflict. Additionally, Türkiye's diplomatic efforts helped facilitate negotiations on the establishment of a Black Sea Grain Corridor Agreement. This development added to the growing recognition that regional stability in regions bordering Türkiye continues to be highly relevant to larger European security interests. However, numerous recent statements made by European policymakers suggest that they are now recognizing the growing strategic importance of engaging Türkiye more actively in their evolving security structure.

Finland's foreign minister, Elina Valtonen, indicated that Europe needs greater security cooperation with partners like Türkiye because of rising levels of global geopolitical

instability. Hungary's foreign minister, Péter Szijjártó, emphasized how Türkiye's expanding defense sector is gaining increased attention as part of European security discussions, especially given Europe's need for expanded military production capacity following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In addition to demonstrating an increase in strategic cooperation with Türkiye beyond classic alliance relationships, debates about European Defense Industrial Capacity provide yet another illustration of this trend.

The growing number of reports about potential European interest in using Turkish defense technology, such as unmanned aerial vehicles and Türkiye's KAAN fifth-generation fighter aircraft project, demonstrates how strategically cooperative arrangements continue to expand outside of long-standing alliance structures. Furthermore, reports indicating that Spain is interested in pursuing alternative procurement strategies related to defense illustrate how difficult it will become for Europe to ignore Türkiye's rapidly developing defense industry (Hip 2025).

Tensions arising from disputes over Cyprus, relations with Greece, democracy, and other politically related issues periodically disrupted further progress toward increased European cooperation; however, Türkiye's ongoing strategic value has maintained its importance. Debates about identity, institutional membership, and political compatibility have hindered the development of an inclusive European security structure (Kınacıoğlu 2010). Consequently, the debate over European strategic autonomy has eventually disclosed a larger paradox central to the evolving European security order. Europe will require additional military capabilities, regional relationships, and operational flexibility to counter growing geopolitical instability. However, the uncertainties surrounding Türkiye's role in the broader European context have restricted the complete integration of one of the world's most important military actors into new European security programs.

The debate concerning Türkiye's role in Europe's evolving security environment also indicated that this is not merely a dispute between Türkiye and the EU. Differences have developed among Europeans themselves regarding the organization of European security and the role that Türkiye would have in such organizations. While some European governments have viewed Türkiye mostly through political and institutional lenses, increasing numbers of government officials are now viewing Türkiye's potential contribution to the future of European Security primarily in terms of its strategic and military contributions. Differences



in view were made clearer by the increase in geopolitical instability around Europe beginning in the 2020s.

The conflict in Ukraine, concerns about Russia's intentions, instability in the Black Sea region, and questions about America's long-term commitment to defending European nations prompted numerous European governments to assess their own strategic priorities. Consequently, a number of policymakers began to emphasize the practical need for greater security cooperation with states that possess significant military capability and strategic geographic location, including Türkiye.

Beginning at the same time, political disagreements concerning Türkiye contributed to larger-scale European debates. The issues of democratic governance and Eastern Mediterranean disputes (Cyprus, Greece) were significant points of contention for many European actors and their respective relationships with Ankara. Therefore, discussions about the role of Türkiye within various European security initiatives typically involved contrasting policy priorities among European actors. Many government representatives emphasized political and institutional priorities; an increasing number of officials were primarily concerned with capability, geographic location, and the operational necessities associated with Türkiye's expanding defense industries. This is illustrated in the recently discussed European defense cooperative and defense manufacturing capacity issues.

After the start of the Ukraine War, numerous European governments stated publicly that the current defense industrial base was insufficient for the rapidly evolving security environment. As such, the growth of Türkiye's defense industries and capabilities has been gaining increasing attention throughout Europe. Hungary's Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó has articulated this new view of Türkiye's defense production capacity as strategically relevant to meeting Europe's future security requirements. A similar discussion regarding Türkiye's potential as a viable option for alternative fighter aircraft for Spain, due to its reportedly pursuing evaluation of the KAAN fifth-generation fighter aircraft project, has also developed (Hip 2025).

A comparable trend was additionally observable in the overall debates on cooperative European Security arrangements following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The emphasis placed by Finnish Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen upon regional cooperation with countries such as Türkiye, amid rising levels of geopolitical instability surrounding Europe in the wake

of this war, exemplified an increasing awareness that the long-term European security architecture may need to consider the military, geographical, and operational capabilities of states that are significantly more powerful than many other actors within the region. However, such changes have not eliminated existing political divisions amongst European countries concerning Türkiye's greater role. Rather, they demonstrate the presence of different strategic cultures and security perspectives amongst European actors.

Some European governments continue to emphasize conditional political criteria and institutional constraints; however, there is an increasing number of governments that are adopting a more practical and security-focused stance, reflecting the reality of geopolitical rivalry and military necessity. From a realist viewpoint, these differences represent a significant structural impediment to the realization of Europe's own ambitions for strategic autonomy. In general, realist positions recognize that effective balancing behavior, military coordination, and strategic coherence are all essential features of a security system facing outside threats. However, ongoing internal disputes amongst European countries about Türkiye complicate attempts to develop a coherent and integrated defense framework at a time when Europe faces increasing security-related challenges.

This understanding of discussions around Türkiye's place in Europe indicated that Europe's lack of strategic autonomy was not simply a function of institutional capability or military spending. It also had a political dimension, involving the many competing security interests among European states. As geopolitical developments increasingly pushed Europe toward greater strategic integration, the inability of European states to reach an agreement on Türkiye limited efforts to develop a comprehensive and strategically cohesive European defense architecture.

Therefore, the gap between the need for greater strategic action in response to growing global instability and political hesitancy to move forward became even larger in the modern era. Europe requires stronger military relationships through bilateral alliances, greater operational flexibility, and more effective regional coordination mechanisms in order to respond to rapidly developing geopolitical instability. However, political disagreements over Türkiye's place in Europe have so far prevented the establishment of a more unified security architecture capable of addressing these broader strategic needs.

The ongoing transformation of Türkiye's relationship with European security institutions shows a broad historical background, from the Cold War to the present. At each stage of European Security Development, Turkish and European Leaders have disagreed, among other things, over Cyprus, Turkish-Greek relations, and how they would cooperate through various administrative systems. Although these debates are ongoing, Türkiye has consistently been viewed as an important player in the wider European security environment.

Due to its geography and military contribution to contain the Soviet Union, Türkiye was a critical element in NATO's Southeastern Flank during the Cold War. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, while Türkiye continued to be a critical element in handling emerging security concerns in the Balkans, Black Sea Region, the Middle East, migration and refugee crises, terrorism, and broader regional unrest, it also modified its relevance in responding to those same emerging security concerns. Most recently, after Russia invaded Ukraine and Europe became increasingly concerned with its ability to defend itself militarily, Türkiye reiterated its value to regional security and military cooperation.

At the same time as the discussions on the strategic autonomy of Europe showed the differences within Europe about what to expect from Türkiye's part concerning the security architecture of Europe's future, there were also diverging views among European governments about how to balance their strategic necessities and defense cooperation with their political disputes and institutional concerns. Consequently, tensions between the interest of Europeans to establish an independent security policy and the hesitance of political disagreement have continued to affect the way Europe relates to Türkiye. According to realism theory, the conflicting opinions regarding Türkiye prevent the emergence of a more robust and unified European defense system.

In addition, despite the fact that Europe is facing increasingly common challenges due to geopolitical threats, the conflicting opinions regarding Türkiye are still creating obstacles for wider military collaboration and integration in terms of strategy. However, the continuously changing nature of the regional security environment shows once again that Türkiye continues to be an important partner for European security due to its military strength, low-cost production of weapons, operational experience, and geographical location.

## **Chapter 3 – Türkiye’s Contemporary Role in European Security**

### **3.1 Black Sea Security and the Ukraine War**

The Russian aggression against Ukraine started in February 2022, and this aggression has fundamentally changed the European security environment, and these developments have brought back security concerns over the Black Sea. Most of the post-Cold War period, European security debates at first focused on problems like migration, terrorism, crisis management, and regional instability. Nevertheless, the start of a great scaled regional war on the eastern European continent once again showed the significance of territorial defense, conventional military power and geopolitical competition. In this regard, Black Sea has become regionally so important because Black Sea connects the Caucasus, Russia, Eastern Europe, and the greater Euro-Atlantic security network.

The rising significance of the Black Sea immediately attracted attention to Türkiye’s role within the geographical security structure. Oppose to European countries, which did not get involved in the conflict directly, their involvement was mostly economic or political, Türkiye’s position in the conflict is unique as a result of its full control over the Turkish Straits and geographical location. The Dardanelles and Bosphorus form the only naval access way between the Mediterranean and Black Sea, these unique strategically crucial for every single state within the region. Therefore, with the outbreak of war, the importance of the Turkish Straits has never been this much since the outbreak of World War II.

At the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the implementation of the Montreux Convention was very important for Ankara. Right after the invasion began, Turkish authorities legally recognized the developments as a war and announced that Türkiye would apply the conditions of the convention that regulates passage through the Turkish Straits. Decision of Turkish government have limited the ability of aggressive states to reinforce more warships into the Black Sea and effectively protected the legal structure governing access to the region (Reuters 2022). Despite of the desicision was showed firstly as a legal obligation growing from the convention, its strategic consequences were massive. With the Montreux

Convention, Türkiye has managed to prevent any kind of military escalation in the Black Sea in a very unstable moment in the Russia-Ukraine war.

Looking at a wider security perspective, the execution of the Montreux Convention illustrates how much the location of Türkiye still continues to be a unique role in European security conditions. When the Cold War was still ongoing, Türkiye's strategic advantage mostly stemmed from its positioning on NATO's southerneastern flank and also its closeness to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The Ukraine war showed how geography and location is still equally significant in the remaining security surroundings, whereas different circumstances. Instead of serving primarily as a barrier wall against Soviet expansionism, today Türkiye with its fast growing military power functions as a major actor influencing stability, security, access and mobility following one of Europe's most delicate geopolitical regions.

The war additionally drew NATO's focus to the Black Sea. In some of the strategic documents, member states have increasingly understood the importance of regional stability, resilience, and deterrence as an answer to Russian military campaigns. The Black Sea was seen as a financial and cultural hub before, but this is not the case anymore, the area is linked to European security concerns directly. The war not only affected Russia and Ukraine but also affected member states like Bulgaria, Romania, and Türkiye. As a result, keeping the stability in the Black Sea has become a priority of the greater Euro-Atlantic security plans for the Alliance (NATO Strategic Concepts Archive).

Within this framework, especially Türkiye's positioning is not simple, it is more complex. As a member state of NATO, Türkiye supports the alliance's other security concerns all around the world, and it has proven itself in Kosovo, Libya and Afghanistan. Ankara has managed to maintain communication channels with Moscow and Kyiv while the conflict was still going on. This approach triggered criticism from all sides, until this time it has also allowed Türkiye to maintain some kind of diplomatic flexibleness that only small numbers of states have. In my opinion, being able to have decent communication abilities with both sides shows Türkiye's recent security policy. Türkiye geographically and politically is in the middle of East and West choosing a side would be illogical. Also, by keeping its diplomatic closeness with both sides, Türkiye makes itself an actor that is irrational not to cooperate with.

This important role of Türkiye becomes even clearer in the light of the greater effects that conflict created for Europe. The Ukraine war has shown that it is impossible to separate European security concerns from harmful developments occurring in neighboring states. Consequently, countries that are capable of having influence over other players gain more strategic importance. The Republic of Türkiye is located in the Black Sea Region, which is why Türkiye represents more than just a key player; it keeps being a significant element of greater European security architecture.

Because of these reasons, developments in the north of Black Sea did not increase Türkiye's strategic importance but instead made it more visible than before. Permanent geographical advantages, institutional connection with NATO and its allies, and diplomatic accessibility and influence have become more obvious while the conflict is evolving. The next section explores how this functionality outstretched beyond military might with Türkiye's arbitration, maritime security dynamism, and efforts to keep peace and stability in the Black Sea region.

Meanwhile Türkiye's application of the Montreux Convention illustrated its significance from a legal and military point of view, Ankara's responsibilities and tasks went beyond the regulation of maritime permission. As the conflict kept going, Türkiye was one of the two countries along with Hungary, that managed to have communication with both sides. However, in the case of Hungary, its relationship with Ukraine was worse than with Russia. This flexible diplomatic mobility of Türkiye was more visible when talks and meetings about Black Sea Grain Initiative started to take place. It is an agreement that eased the exports of Ukrainian grain and other agricultural products to smoothly pass through the Turkish Straits without any threat.

The importance of the grain deal passed beyond the financial and economic concerns. The movement of grain exports from Ukrainian harbours led to major concerns about global food security, especially in regions that are seriously dependent on grains and agricultural foods. The African continent was the most affected region due to its overwhelming population and lack of development. Dialogues, including Russia, Türkiye, Ukraine, and the United Nations, finally had a common agreement, and they signed a deal. Thanks to this deal, the movement of shipments was secured, and Türkiye has played a leading role throughout this hosting negotiations in Istanbul and encouraged diplomatic communication between the two parties (Reuters 2023).

When viewed from a European Perspective, the significance of the grain deal should not be underestimated. The war in Ukraine has proven that modern day security problems can go beyond traditional military danger. Maritime trade routes, food security, economic stability, and supply chains have formed a greater understanding of stability and security. Also, one of the benefits of this deal is that it gave relief to European economies. Econometric evidence claims that the agreement between Russia and Ukraine lowered wheat prices and gave rise to considerable welfare gains. According to this finding, the initiative of the deal did not only contributed to economic stability but also decreased pressure on European markets, where Ukrainian wheat is also in used, and this way, prices of basic needs like bread or pasta stayed stable (Poursina et al, 2024).

At the same moment, the conflict raised other security concerns within the naval area. The usage of vast numbers of naval mines created a risk for civilian shipping and tankers that are used for trading and logistics in the Black Sea. To be able to overcome these challenges, Romania, Bulgaria and Türkiye have started a trilateral initiative to target the increasing threat posed by freely drifting mines at every corner of the Black Sea. The agreement that is signed by the other NATO and EU countries has shown the importance of a regional coordination mechanism in maintaining European shores against any kind of unexpected developments (Reuters 2024).

These occurrences outline that Türkiye's role within the Black Sea region cannot be understood simply by the traditional military power perspective. At the same time, the Republic of Türkiye contributed to crisis management, diplomatic mediation and regional coordination for its own and wider security concerns by cooperating with neighboring countries which are NATO and EU members. These developments prove that Türkiye is not just a regular player in the region but a powerhouse that can resist any kind of aggressor by uniting other states. This particular ability of Türkiye makes it a valuable ally on the ground.

Latest developments illustrate that the value of Türkiye is not likely to diminish in the short-term future. As the war kept going and even got bigger in scale, cooperation between Türkiye and Ukraine expanded across various areas associated with security and defence. When Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visited Istanbul in 2026, he insisted on the importance of strengthening security cooperation and new arms deals, showing Kyiv has accepted the fact that Türkiye's growing influence and strategic importance within the region (Reuters, 2026). Also, in another interview, Zelensky stated that “without Ukraine and

Türkiye, Europe cannot match Russia.” This statement comes from the Ukrainian president who is dealing with Russian aggression, and its reliability is very high because President Zelensky knows what kind of power Russia holds better than most of the European leaders and clearly says who can and cannot stop it.

In my opinion, the Ukraine-Russia war has unmasked a reality that was often overlooked by many European leaders about European security. For decades, discussions about Türkiye’s strategic importance have mostly focused on historical explanations linked with NATO enlargement, regional geography, and the Cold War. The conflict that emerged in the Black Sea region has shown that this legacy of Türkiye is not just coming from the past, but with the changing geopolitical conditions, it creates new areas where diplomatic engagement, Turkish military capabilities and geographic positioning still contribute directly to the welfare and security of the European continent. Türkiye played a visible and crucial role. Developments that have occurred in the Black Sea region strongly contribute to the broader argument developed through this thesis: regardless of repeated political disagreements between Europe and Türkiye, strategic and geopolitical realities continue to underline Türkiye’s significance within the evolving and changing European security architecture.

### **3.2 Defence Industry and Military Capabilities**

The Ukrainian war has dramatically reshaped European Security concerns and drawn attention to the role of the military and its power capabilities. Continental security architecture has evolved and continues to change rapidly. Right after the Cold War period, when democratization was on the rise and the number of conflicts was getting less and less, Europe’s security discussions focused firstly on peacekeeping operations, terrorism, crisis management, and migration. Even though the military capabilities stayed important, any large-scale conventional war was mostly considered a low possibility and created less concern. The Russian invasion has changed everything the other way around; these assumptions have been challenged by this new conflict on the continent. Military readiness and territorial defence play an essential role again.

Among the most significant consequences of the war was the new understanding of collective defence and deterrence. In an increasing way, NATO started to strengthen its military



presence, improve force readiness, and highlight its ability to respond to large scale conflicts. NATO's current strategic discussions mirror a greater recognition that in today's world conventional military threats still stand, and these new developments shape the Europeans security environment (NATO). Inevitably, the military capabilities of the member states once again become a main feature of security planning across the whole of Europe. Member states' new agreement of 5% GDP share for their defence expenditures can be seen as a big step towards this new vision.

The war also uncovered a few structural vulnerabilities within European defence systems. For many years, most European countries decreased their military production facilities and defence spending while investing in other policy areas. These decisions that are made appear logical and sustainable in a stable and peaceful environment, without any major war or conflict. On the other hand, the Ukraine-Russia war made it obvious that there are important shortages in ammunition stocks, defence industrial capacity, and production capabilities. As European governments raised military assistance and support to Ukraine, new concerns and problems occurred about whether domestic industries can keep long-term production and replace their out of stock inventories or not. Because of this very reason, the war has shown the gap between Europe's security aims and the resources available to support them.

Latest analyses illustrate that many of these problems originate from long standing developments that are way before the conflict itself. The decline of defence industrial capacity after the Cold War created an environment that many European states felt needed to guard down their defences because there was basically no need for it in a militaristic manner. The Ukrainian war has shown that these limitations being applied by European governments are not beneficial anymore, therefore, European capitals have decided to expand military supply programs, increase defence budgets, and invest in the modernization and enhancement of their armed forces. In that context, the conflict did not act as a development that showed the origin of Europe's defence challenges but instead acted as an important development that uncovered still existing weaknesses within the continent's security structure (IISS, 2024).

Inside this constantly changing environment, the strategic significance of states holding key military capabilities has increased remarkably. As institutional cooperation and political coordination stayed crucial; the conflict has signaled that it eventually depends on the availability of reliable military assets. Countries capable of supplying equipment, personnel,

operational experience, and regional influence accordingly and normally occupy a significantly rising position in the European security meetings.

Republic of Türkiye portrays one of the most important representations of this development. As a continued NATO member, the state maintains considerable military capabilities and broad operational experience gained through decades of contribution to the alliance's activities and territorial security operations. Türkiye's strategic significance can be strengthened by its natural geographic location at the meeting point of the Black Sea region, Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. There is no other NATO member country that strategically neighbors this much of a region at the same time. This positioning of Türkiye makes it very unique compared to other allies.

The significance of geography became clearer right after the outbreak of the Ukraine-Russia war. As mentioned in the previous part, any kind of change and developments in the Black Sea straightly affects the greater European security architecture. Nevertheless, Türkiye's contribution passes beyond its geographical importance. In a boiling environment like today's world, Turkish military capabilities and expertise come from years of experience from the terrorism problem since the 80's and recent cross border military operations in Syria and Iraq. These capabilities of the Turkish army maintain a strategic value for both Europe and NATO more widely.

At the same moment, the unstable security environment has shown that military might cannot be measured only by the number of troops, geographic location, or size of the force. Modern wars demand long term sustained production ability, technological innovation, and fast working factory lines to be able to replace the army's equipment needs over extended conflicts. The Ukrainian war has proved that defence production capabilities are very much connected to strategic influence and military success. Afterward, European security progressively contains not only militaristic capabilities but also strong industrial planning to be able to support them.

These types of developments are especially important for Türkiye. Over the last 20 years, the Turkish government has slowly but steadily invested in its defence industry base and managed to decrease its dependence on foreign suppliers in critical sectors. Even though significant limitations in a few sectors remain, the Turkish Republic's defence industry's growth and successes have started to mirror its greater strategic profile. The next paragraphs

explore important big steps and new developments in the Turkish defence industry and how this successful progress is related to the country's strategic relevance.

When the Ukraine war started to expand and showed no sign of ending any time soon, European governments started to realize that they should strengthen their military capabilities and renew their arms stocks. After these developments, the industrial side of security has become seriously significant. Under these circumstances, Türkiye's growing defence industry stood out as an important player.

In the last two decades, the Turkish Republic has transformed its defence sector into a strong and rising competitive exporter and producer of military systems from a mostly import dependent industry and army. Baysal states that this kind of rapid transformation actually represents one of the most outstanding developments and advancements in the worldwide defence market in recent years. With a comparative analysis of international arms sales, he explains that between 2007-2011 and 2019-2023, Türkiye escalated its share of global arms exports by more than 400 percent. These developments in defence industry outperform other emerging defence exporters and consistently improve its position in the international rankings (Baysal, 2024). These kinds of findings suggest that Turkish improvement in the defence area is not only a political agenda and narrative but a sustainable trend backed by increasing industrial capacity and technological development.

An equivalent assessment is provided by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. The IISS claims that the Turkish defence sector has evolved from a place where it had a place of dependence on external suppliers to becoming a growing and expanding capable of exporting and producing high military technologies. Instead of serving only as one of the biggest consumers of defence products, Türkiye has reached a level of manufacture, capacity to design and, export a greater range of military systems and equipment (IISS, 2024). This progress is strategically important because it allows and expands Türkiye's contribution to European security exceeding its military power and traditional advantages of geography. As Turkish industrial capabilities kept growing, its relevance inside the greater Euro-Atlantic security discussions has additionally raised.

The importance of these advancements has become especially apparent since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Meanwhile, European states increased their additional production, defence spending capacity, and budget, started interest in Turkish defence firms from

Western partners. Reuters(2026) reports that officials from Türkiye expect a rise in exports to Western countries as European countries speed up rearmament efforts and look out for reliable industrial partners. According to the report, various NATO members are considering Turkish systems as part of a greater attempt to diversify supply sources and strengthen defence industry toughness (Reuters, 2026). In this regard, Türkiye seems not only as a NATO ally located on the southeastern flank of the alliance, but besides as a potential contributor to new emerging Europe's defence industry requirements.

At the same time, Türkiye's growing role should not be understood only in terms of the rise and success of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). When Bayraktar drones, especially the "TB2", have received a fair amount of international attention. Baysal states that Türkiye's defence industrial expansion has been much greater. He draws attention to the country's expanding and growing capabilities in sectors such as precision-guided ammunition and military electronics to naval and aerospace technologies (Baysal, 2024). The expanding international presence of companies such as Turkish Aerospace Industries, Baykar, ROKETSAN, and ASELSAN reflects the birth of a more diversified industrial base instead of dependence on a single defence product.

On the other hand, the improvements of defence industry of the Turkish Republic should not be taken as an indication of entire strategic autonomy from external producers and major powers. This kind of inference is especially significant since political discussion frequently matches fundamental manufacturing with full independence. The Defence Studies research shows a more reliable assessment of the current situation in Turkish production levels. Kurç, Güvenç, Mevlütoğlu, and Egeli (2025) state that regardless of important advances, Türkiye keeps dealing with technological, financial, and structural obstacles that limit the possibility of total self-sufficiency. The author's analysis illustrates that current defence production always depends on complicated supply chains, international technological cooperation and advanced components forming complete autonomy difficult even for top military powers in the world (Kurç et al., 2025). These comparable problems persist in Türkiye's crucial sectors of defence production since all developed countries that produce their own defence systems are still somehow dependent on other countries for materials or technologies.

The latest research by Baysal (2024) makes a similar conclusion. With accepting the Turkish Republic's powerful accomplishments in localization and autonomous production, he doubts both the desirability and the feasibility of entire self-sufficiency. The author claims that

seeking to focus on every side of defence production may overload technological and financial resources, decrease efficiency and limiting innovation, which would lead to a blockage in the sector. As an alternative, he implies that a much more stable way to increase production efficiency, mixing internal production with specific international cooperation, might yield broader long-term advantages, the sharing of production would reduce the burden on every cooperating partner (Baysal, 2024). This discussion is especially suitable because it questions the belief that geopolitical and strategic victory demands full autonomy from external partners or states. As mentioned before, every state that has high capacities of defence industry production has its own weak point and is by any means whatsoever dependent on other providers, allies or states, because these developed countries reach maximum efficiency by doing this to be able to afford these systems way cheaper.

Türkiye has started the modernization of its current fighter aircraft and is also trying to produce its first 5<sup>th</sup>-generation aircraft domestically. The project of KAAN signifies a significant step towards Türkiye's attempt to strengthen national technological capabilities. Reuters reports that it is expected for Turkish government will buy more fighter aircraft for the Turkish army until domestic production reaches the desired levels (Reuters, 2025). Instead of showing weakness, this mirrors a greater framework inside international defence area. Even most developed countries usually count on foreign components and technologies, besides that they also require partnerships when a technological transition is happening.

From this point of view, the cooperation between Türkiye and European defence industries should not be seen as an obstacle to strategic independence. Instead, it might be the best solution and answer to modern security challenges. Europe is looking for broader defence industrial capacity, at the same time, Türkiye keeps expanding its production capabilities and technological expertise in the sector. Besides, it seems that Europe will not reach its desired defence industry production levels any time soon. Cooperation in sectors like technology sharing, supply-chain integration, research and development, and joint production integration might produce benefits for the both sides. European countries would have a chance to access surplus production capacity and experience in operations, at the same time, Türkiye can benefit from cooperation and collaboration with states maintaining decades of expertise in complicated defence technologies.

Finally, the importance of Türkiye's defence industry stretches beyond arms export economics. As Baysal (2024), the IISS (2024), and Kurç et al. (2025) altogether indicate,

Türkiye's strategic importance comes from its expanding ability to export, innovate, and produce inside defence sector. With these developments, it has become one of the most discussed materials of European security in a context of rapid production, industrial capacity, and military resilience, in this way it has regained its strategic significance. However, few political disagreements between Türkiye and a number of European countries keep creating obstacles on the way, when it's looked at from a greater strategic environment, the current conditions back up practical cooperation. Therefore, growing defence industrial capabilities of Türkiye strengthens the argument that its contribution and benefits to European security should be considered not only by military manpower or geography, but also with its rapidly expanding role as a producer, exporter, and potential defence industrial partner.

### **3.4 Political Obstacles to Cooperation**

Regardless of Türkiye's expanding strategic importance in European security, institutional and political obstacles still limit the development of further cooperation between European actors and Türkiye. With the end of the Cold War and the beginning of new security challenges, opportunities emerged for much closer collaboration in sectors like migration, counterterrorism, regional stability, and crisis management. Nonetheless, these kinds of opportunities have mostly been suppressed by long going political disputes and different understandings about regional order, identity, and security.

One of the most important obstacles comes from the continuation of undetermined political disputes between certain European Union member states and Türkiye. The dispute in Cyprus is still especially influential in this respect. However, security cooperation between European actors and Türkiye has increased in a large number of sectors, the Cyprus dispute keeps affecting greater political relations and provoking institutional cooperation. Similar challenges can be seen in the relationship between Türkiye and Greece, especially with respect to maritime border issues, airspace disputes and competitive claims for energy resources in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. More recent tensions over maritime jurisdiction

and resource extraction indicate that these issues are still live and contentious; therefore, they continue to create opportunities for conflict rather than being the remnants of historical conflicts that will eventually fade away. Thus, many times, bilateral disagreements become part of larger debates on European security cooperation and regional stability.

Furthermore, in addition to the politically based differences, some researchers suggest that there are additional structural elements at play contributing to these difficulties. Specifically, Oğuzlu & Kibaroglu argued that due to different conceptual frameworks used in approaching security by Türkiye and much of Europe, the two parties' approaches to security issues are quite dissimilar. The European model of security has evolved from an emphasis on multilateral governance, cooperative security, and the reduction of traditionally perceived state-to-state threats. Conversely, the models of security employed in Türkiye have been shaped by its history as a country located in a region of heightened levels of geopolitical competition, territorial concerns, and immediate threat environments. Therefore, while such differing strategic views may allow for cooperation, they frequently generate differing sets of priorities and expectations with regard to how to achieve security policy (Oğuzlu & Kibaroglu 2008).

These differences contribute to the degree of mutual distrust between Türkiye and the European Union, which occasionally complicates their interactions. Skepticism among Europeans regarding the democratic standards and foreign policy practices of Türkiye, along with its regional activities, has frequently made them skeptical about deeper forms of institutional integration. Simultaneously, Turkish policymakers have frequently expressed disappointment with what they see as the inconsistent nature of European policymaking and the unequal treatment they receive with respect to security-related cooperation. As a consequence, political disagreements based upon mutual distrust make finding compromise extremely difficult even when shared security interests are present.

According to Müftüler-Baç, the irony of today's relations between Türkiye and the EU lies in the fact that functional cooperation continues to grow even though there is an abundance of evidence suggesting that there are significant amounts of political difficulty involved. However, Türkiye is now involved in various areas of policymaking with the European Union, for example, in trade agreements, managing migrant flows, coordinating foreign policy efforts, and working together on energy production. Despite increased levels of functional interdependency within this new framework, this has not resolved all the political

problems associated with their relationship. Functional cooperation and political disagreements now coexist, thereby creating a multifaceted partnership where strategic necessity exists side-by-side with political difficulties (Müftüler-Baç 2017).

Therefore, the fundamental challenge facing Türkiye-European Security Relations is not a lack of shared interests. The main problem is that ongoing political disputes, barriers to institutionalization, and divergent security viewpoints hinder the ability to convert those shared interests into greater and longer-term forms of cooperation.

### **3.4 Strategic Necessity and the Future of Cooperation**

While political disagreement continues to hinder relations between Türkiye and European entities, political disagreement has not diminished practical incentives for collaboration. Recent changes in the global geopolitical landscape illustrate that strategic necessity and political reality can coexist next to each other. This relationship has been made apparent in the changing European security environment, where increased numbers of security challenges are creating opportunities for coordination among numerous actors.

This is especially true because there is now a greater acknowledgment that European security can no longer be seen exclusively through the lens of European Union membership. Müftüler-Baç points out that although the accession negotiations between Türkiye and the EU are frozen, Türkiye and the EU have developed multiple forms of functional interdependency in areas like foreign policy management, migration management, trade, and regional security. Therefore, despite the ongoing tension between the two parties, their cooperation in mutually beneficial areas continues, and it's considered important. Political tension has frequently led to cooperative arrangements being limited to specific issue areas rather than total disagreements.



Additionally, debates about the future of European security have gained momentum in light of increasing levels of global instability. Discussions regarding European strategic autonomy illustrate the wishes of numerous European states to enhance the ability of the continent to act independently against emerging security threats. Despite the desire of numerous stakeholders for a more independent European Security Architecture, the European Parliament Research Service indicates that these aspirations face significant barriers at the political, institutional, and operational levels (EPRS 2025). These challenges become even more difficult when taking into consideration the role of strategically relevant external actors like Türkiye.

It is therefore not just whether Europe will develop enhanced security capacities, but whether such development will occur without meaningful participation from other crucial regional actors. Previous sections highlight the connection between Türkiye's security issues and some of Europe's most urgent security challenges. Specifically, these include Black Sea stability, regional crisis management, migration pressures, and defense cooperation. Ignoring Turkish capabilities within broader European security discussions could create a disconnect between Europe's strategic goals and the real-world conditions underpinning its own security situation.

Besides, defense cooperation in Europe faces problems beyond those created by differences between Europe and Türkiye. A Center for European Policy Studies report notes that historical attempts to integrate European defense represent perhaps one of the greatest barriers to achieving European Integration in general due to differing national priorities, threat perceptions, and strategic cultures among member states (CEPS 2015). Thus, the obstacles to cooperation between Türkiye and Europe should be viewed as representative of a larger trend rather than an individual issue. Disagreements do not by nature prevent cooperation; they typically define the form and scope of cooperation.

Increasingly, developments show that security considerations can lead to pragmatic engagement even when essential political disputes remain unresolved. Ongoing discussions related to regional stability, defense industrial cooperation, NATO coordination ,and a prospective future European security regime illustrate that both sides maintain important incentives to continue talking. This is not meant to imply that long-standing disputes such as those over Cyprus or tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean will soon resolve. What it illustrates, however is that strategic interest increasingly provides motivation for both Türkiye

and European entities to pursue conflict resolution processes while maintaining lines of communication.

In conclusion, the future of Türkiye -Europe security relationships is likely to be defined by a combination of political disagreement and strategic necessity. Although political mistrust and unresolved disputes are likely to limit continued cooperation, but the evolving nature of the security environment will provide continuous momentum for bilateral engagement. Thus, whereas identifying potential areas for future cooperation may not be the primary concern for forthcoming years, determining mechanisms to manage political disagreements so as not to jeopardize mutual security interests connecting Türkiye and Europe are likely to form the largest challenge.

## **Chapter 4 – Alliance Frictions and Transatlantic Shifts**

### **4.1 Alliance Frictions and the Post-Cold War Transformation of NATO**

NATO's post-cold war transformation was nothing short of profound; the military alliance for defense against a common enemy had evolved into a broadened, multidimensional security organization that addressed everything from crisis management to counter terrorism, regional instability, and collective deterrence. In addition to the expansion of the alliance's responsibility, this evolution created new points of dispute amongst member states. As security interests expanded, NATO began to emerge as a platform where allies frequently disagreed on threat perceptions, strategic priorities, and how best to respond to emerging crises.

For Türkiye, however, these differences were especially obvious during the first two decades of the 21st century. Despite remaining one of NATO's strongest military powers and continuing to contribute significantly to alliance operations, the difference in opinion with many Western allies began to grow. Examples include the Syrian civil war, the varying views of Western countries towards armed Kurdish organizations, Türkiye's purchase of Russia's S-

400 surface-to-air missile systems, and Türkiye's removal from the Lockheed Martin F-35 fighter jet program. These issues created a great deal of tension between Ankara and Washington. According to RAND Corporation analysts, these events exacerbated a growing sense of strategic distrust in their bilateral relationship and raised concerns regarding the direction that Türkiye's foreign and security policies will take in the future (RAND, 2020).

Simultaneously, describing these changes only as a decline in Türkiye's standing within NATO provides an inadequate description. As the world becomes increasingly multipolar, Türkiye seeks to broaden its diplomatic and strategic opportunities while at the same time fulfilling its historic obligations to Western institutions. A CSIS analyst recently argued that Turkish foreign policy is increasingly characterized by a "balancing" and "hedging" approach in regards to competing centers of power, rather than adopting an exclusive alliance with a particular bloc (CSIS 2025). Because of this reason, Türkiye's relations with other actors such as Russia and China are not necessarily a sign of an abandonment from membership in NATO, but rather an effort to ensure maximum strategic flexibility in a constantly changing global environment. Even a few European states that are positioned in the center of the western hemisphere are looking for new collaborations after the Trump administration; it would be unjust to blame Türkiye for these decisions.

Ultimately, all of these developments represent larger structural changes occurring within NATO itself. It is becoming increasingly unlikely that NATO member states will share the same threat assessments. Some NATO member states perceive Russia as the greatest security threat, while others believe that the instability in the Middle East represents the greatest risk. Similarly, there are NATO member states that place greater importance on illegal migration pressures, terrorism, energy security, and potential threats posed by emerging technologies. Consequently, many disagreements within NATO today occur because of different assessments of what constitutes security and how to prioritize those elements.

Despite this increased level of disagreement among NATO member states, there appears to be considerable public support for NATO. The German Marshall Fund's annual Transatlantic Trends Survey reported that 77% of surveyed individuals in Türkiye felt that NATO represented an important element in ensuring national security in 2023, a number that is up from previous years (GMF 2023). Additionally, the same survey indicated a substantial increase in support among Turkish respondents for increased cooperation in European security matters and for a greater European role in defense affairs (GMF 2023). Ultimately,

this data indicates that while there may be disagreements between government leaders in terms of what policies their respective countries' governments pursue vis-a-vis the EU and NATO, this does not equate to a rejection of the overall transatlantic security framework.

Therefore, current challenges confronting NATO cannot be seen solely as evidence of institutional deterioration. Rather, they demonstrate the challenges associated with maintaining unity in an increasingly complex and fractured security environment. This has resulted in a scenario for Türkiye whereby simultaneous cooperation and disagreement exist. On the one hand, Ankara continues to derive benefits from its membership in NATO and remains a major contributor to NATO's strategic presence. On the other hand, Ankara pursues an increasingly independent foreign policy that creates disagreements with its allies.

Consequently, current tensions between alliances can be seen as less representative of a decline in NATO itself than it is reflective of changing forms of security cooperation that exist in the 21st century. The alliance remains operationally relevant for both Türkiye and its Western allies. However, the expectations and priorities of its members have changed dramatically since the early days of NATO.

Understanding these changing conditions is critical to understanding whether the trends associated with transatlantic security relationships will evolve positively or negatively, and ultimately how Europe's security landscape will evolve. It is significant to maintain diplomacy and communication to be able to overcome these issues on different topics, focus on prioritized problems and cooperate on them together.

While there has never been a lack of disagreement amongst NATO's member nations regarding their own roles or actions, this internal arguing could never be understood without taking into consideration all the larger trends impacting the international community. The current strategic landscape facing Europe today is very different than the one which existed right after the end of the Cold War. Increasingly rising levels of geopolitical rivalry, local conflict, and shifts in global power have impacted what each nation views as its highest priority for defense. Because of this, the discussion over the future of transatlantic security will not only include disagreements amongst the member nations of the alliance, but also uncertainty about the long term commitment to transatlantic security of the United States.

The move of the U.S. focus towards the Indo-Pacific region represents one of the largest factors shaping the future of transatlantic security. Although Europe remains a critical partner for the U.S., rising competition with China has caused the U.S. government to commit more and more resources to Asia diplomatically, militarily, and economically. There is no indication that this shift implies an abandonment of Europe by the U.S.; however, it does cause serious questions to arise about who will bear responsibility for defending Europe in the future as part of the transatlantic partnership (Brookings, 2025). Because of this, European governments are increasingly recognizing that if they want to protect their allied countries in the continent, they will need to take on more responsibility for defending them.

At the same time, the overall security environment has become much more unstable. According to the IISS, since 2010 there has been a continuous increase in armed conflicts, geopolitical rivalries, and regional crises throughout multiple parts of the globe (IISS 2025). The continued presence of conflict between Russia and Ukraine, instability in the Middle East, and increasing tensions elsewhere around the world demonstrate that we are moving into an era of increased uncertainty and competition in the international community. The increasing insecurity experienced by Europe makes it clear that Europeans will be challenged to defend themselves against many security threats at once.

As a consequence of these developments, there is currently a renewed interest in finding answers to the question of what the future of European security will look like. Carnegie Europe has just published an article highlighting that Europe looks for a completely new strategic approach toward a much more unstable international environment and a transatlantic relationship whose predictability is decreasing (Carnegie Europe 2026). This trend reflects a developing understanding that European security cannot continue to rely on assumptions derived from the post-Cold War order. For this reason, politicians are increasingly exploring options to enhance European capacities and, at the same time, keep cooperating with the United States.

These issues are similarly addressed in discussions related to the development of a new European security order. As stated by IPQ, there are still significant capability gaps for

European states in areas including intelligence gathering, strategic transport, long range attack weapons and logistics (IP Quarterly, 2025). Most notably, although European states have raised their defense spending in recent years, most of these capabilities continue to depend heavily upon U.S. support. For this reason, calls for greater European strategic independence exist alongside the pragmatic realization that transatlantic cooperation will be necessary for years to come.

Türkiye finds itself positioned favorably to benefit from these developments. A more unpredictable security environment combined with changes in U.S. policy priorities and ongoing discussions about Europe's strategic future will make it increasingly valuable for regional actors to contribute to joint security efforts. Türkiye's military capabilities, geographical location, and extensive experience managing security threats in various theaters create a set of assets that remain vital to both NATO and wider discussions over European security. Keeping that in mind, it is possible that the transformation of transatlantic relations may neither diminish nor decrease Türkiye's strategic significance but enhance it even further due to the added incentive for Turkish-Western cooperation.

It follows then that current disputes within NATO should not simply be evaluated through a lens of internal alliance differences. Rather, they represent a subset of broader systemic changes occurring within the international community and within the transatlantic alliance itself. Ultimately, it will be necessary to understand these broader changes in order to determine how Europe, the United States, and Türkiye will adjust to an increasingly complicated security environment in the coming years.

## **4.2 European Strategic Autonomy and Türkiye's Future Role**

In addition to the development of the international political economy of transatlantic relations and growing uncertainty surrounding potential futures of the relationship between Europe and North America, renewed discussions have emerged concerning "strategic autonomy" for Europe. Debates surrounding the need for enhanced defense capabilities for Europe have existed for many years. However, recent geopolitical developments such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, changes in U.S. strategic priorities, and long-term uncertainties

associated with external security assurances have elevated the debates to a crisis level. As a result of the combined impact of these developments, European decision makers are currently reviewing the foundation of the security architecture of Europe. As a result, strategic autonomy is becoming a central theme in the current debate over European security.

The concept of strategic autonomy represents the ability of European nations to be able to respond to their own security requirements, respond to crises independently, and pursue their foreign policy objectives with a higher degree of independence. Despite widespread political support for improving the defense capabilities of Europe, there is a different range of perspectives among European nations concerning the degree, feasibility and objectives of enhancing defense capabilities. According to the European Parliament's Research Service, numerous political, institutional and operational obstacles exist that disable the establishment of a more autonomous European Security Structure (European Parliamentary Research Service 2025). Such obstacles include varying threat perceptions by EU member states, differences in military capabilities among EU member states, and continued reliance upon NATO structures.

The existence of such barriers has shown that the creation of strategic autonomy will not replace membership in the North Atlantic Alliance, but instead provide Europeans with additional capacity for action while maintaining existing partnerships. Many European governments continue to perceive NATO as a core component of continental security. This perception is largely due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Much of the discussion concerning strategic autonomy therefore is centered around creating specific vulnerabilities and strengthening European capabilities through a cooperative framework (European Parliamentary Research Service 2025).

The problems discussed above were further complicated by internal problems developed within the European Defense Project. A study published by the Center for European Policy Studies stated that defense cooperation had traditionally represented one of the most difficult components of European integration due to differing national priorities, strategic culture, and security interests of EU member states (Center for European Policy Studies 2015). Therefore,

progress toward the establishment of a unified European defense framework has occurred at a significantly slower rate than expected by many policymakers. In summary, limitations to European Security Cooperation are not only based upon external actors but also on differing interests and priorities within Europe itself.

According to a number of polls conducted over the past year or so, public opinion indicates strong support for increasing cooperation to strengthen European Security. For example, large majorities in a number of participating countries viewed cooperation amongst Western allies as essential to addressing emerging security challenges according to results from the German Marshall Fund's Transatlantic Trends Survey (German Marshall Fund 2023). Moreover, these results show that although institutions and politics present significant barriers to the achievement of strategic autonomy, citizens' legitimate desire to increase European security cooperation remains strong.

Overall, these points illustrate a contradictory state of affairs within modern European security policies. On the one hand, European states increasingly recognize the importance of developing enhanced strategic capacities and resiliency. Nevertheless, practical implementation of strategic autonomy is restricted by domestic political disputes, capability shortfalls, and institutional constraints. Therefore, the challenge faced by European leaders today is not whether they should develop their security capacities to address an evolving and unpredictable global environment; however, how they can do so without undermining cooperative frameworks that have contributed to stability across Europe for generations.

While there are numerous considerations when it comes to European strategic autonomy, the most relevant issue is whether non-EU actors will play an essential role in the future security architecture of the continent. Since many discussions concentrate primarily on the abilities of EU member states, current security challenges continue to expand beyond organizational boundaries. The war in Ukraine, instability in the Black Sea area, energy security issues, migration pressures, and rising regional competition demonstrate that European security extends far beyond the formal territorial limits of the European Union. Moreover, any effort to create a more robust European security structure must also include the roles of strategically significant outside partners to the Union.



Türkiye represents an exceptionally critical player. Through evidence shown in this thesis, Türkiye offers a number of features that continue to make it important for European security. Its geographical situation gives it access to strategically crucial regions, including the Black Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. Furthermore, Türkiye possesses NATO's second greatest armed forces and has dramatically grown its defense industry capabilities over the past few years. These features have enhanced Türkiye's potential to impact regional security developments and at the same time raised its worth as a security partner.

Recently, policy debates reflect this reality. According to Chatham House, new debates about the future security architecture of Europe emphasize the importance of not just cooperating among EU member states, but also with other key European allies who reside outside of the Union, including Norway, the United Kingdom, and Türkiye (Chatham House 2026). This view contests approaches that would limit European security to solely transatlantic and regional partnerships. Rather, it emphasizes the need for a much more inclusive approach, which would incorporate all players with substantial strategic capabilities irrespective of their membership status in the European Union.

Additionally, the practical constraints associated with European strategic autonomy underline the importance of external partners. According to the European Parliamentary Research Service, Europe faces substantial capability deficits in several sectors of defense and security policy and various national positions on security issues lead to difficulties in achieving collective decision making and prevent its implementation (EPRS 2025). Similarly, the Center for European Policy Studies identifies diverse national priorities and historical patterns of differing strategic cultures as barriers to achieving greater defense coordination among European nations (CEPS 2015). These realities imply that a strong internal cooperative relationship will alone not provide a sufficient basis for the future of European security. The successful integration of additional great external partners into European security structures will likely be required.

A realistic perspective finds this outcome entirely predictable. Generally speaking, states develop security arrangements that serve to maximize their own strategic interests rather than ones that are limited by either institutional identities or preferences. Even though significant political disagreements exist between some European actors and Türkiye, they do not prevent the commonality of security interests that presently binds both parties together. As previously

outlined, cooperation in a variety of areas, including Black Sea security, defense-industrial cooperation, crisis management, and NATO activities, has continued despite repeated periods of tension between politics. Therefore, strategic necessity has been a more constant factor than political disagreement.

Data collected through surveys of public opinion also demonstrates that collaborative security mechanisms will continue to have legitimacy among Western societies. Results from the Transatlantic Trends Survey sponsored by the German Marshall Fund indicates that NATO and broader cooperative security initiatives continue to receive significant levels of support in almost all participating countries including Türkiye (GMF 2023). Differences exist regarding specific policies and priorities; however, the general results suggest that collaborative security strategies have retained substantial support from the public even as the global issues become increasingly complex.

Ultimately, the future role of Türkiye within European security will ultimately be influenced by how closely strategic necessities intersect with political restrictions. Politics will undoubtedly cause disagreements to remain well into the foreseeable future, and institutional limits will undoubtedly obstruct how deeply cooperation can occur. However, the broadening scope of international security environments increasingly reveals that exclusionary attempts by other member states are rapidly becoming impossible. Future importance of Türkiye for European security will depend on many factors beyond geography and military capability. It will also be determined by how well it can help in building a new security architecture that is an increasingly interconnected, flexible, and strategically driven system for European continent.

### **4.3 Future Prospects for European Security Cooperation**

European security cooperation will primarily be influenced by the interplay of two coexisting developments. Firstly, the global security environment continues to deteriorate, due to ongoing geopolitical competition, regional conflicts, and increasing uncertainty about how power is distributed globally. Secondly, traditional security systems are changing dramatically as both European and transatlantic actors develop new strategic perspectives. Combined, these two developments will create a more complex security environment than was created at the end of the Cold War.

A characteristic of this transition is the evolving nature of America's global strategy. The U.S. remains the dominant military player in NATO, but its attention has increasingly turned to the Indo-Pacific and the longer term threat posed by China's growth. As stated in Brookings' analysis on the future of the transatlantic alliance, this doesn't mean the U.S. will withdraw from Europe totally, but it means that the Europeans will bear greater responsibility for their own defense and security (Brookings 2025). Therefore, burden sharing and defense capability development are very likely to continue as core topics of discussion in transatlantic security debates for some time.

Simultaneously, the broader security landscape appears to be showing no signs of becoming any less unstable. The IISS reported that over recent years, there has been an increased number of armed conflicts, geopolitical competitions, and security crises occurring across various regions (IISS 2025). The continuation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, instability across parts of the Middle East, and increasing strategic competition amongst great powers can combine to create an environment wherein security issues become increasingly interconnected. Therefore, European policymakers must respond to both regional and global security threats at the same time in order to maintain unity among different national militaries.

This situation has brought back into view conversations regarding the future structure of the transatlantic alliance. Carnegie Europe states that Europe is looking for a new strategic vision that can balance greater European capabilities with continued cooperation across the Atlantic (Carnegie Europe 2026). There has clearly been a shift in thought here. Policymakers increasingly view European defensive efforts and NATO as complementary aspects of a larger security framework designed to improve strength and strategic readiness.

This rapidly changing international environment is affecting the behavior of the middle and regional powers. The Center for Strategic and International Studies notes how countries like Türkiye are now seeking more flexible foreign policy strategies that will allow them to have greater freedom of movement within a multipolar international system (CSIS 2025). This trend shows a larger development in global politics where states are frequently forced to navigate multiple levels of security, economy, and geopolitics instead of being confined to operating under fixed alliance systems. While this does not indicate that alliances are weaker than before, it does add complexity to managing alliances compared to previous decades.

Although there will certainly be continued challenges to successful transatlantic security cooperation, and although those disputes may now appear far more evident than they did before, there has been no erosion of the underlying shared interest that builds transatlantic security cooperation. According to RAND, although the nature of alliances means that current disagreements amongst NATO allies are more apparent than ever before, the many shared security interests which exist across all areas of defence planning, crisis management and regional stability will remain strong enough to ensure continued cooperation (RAND 2020). Therefore, current tensions between some NATO member states should be viewed as an example of how both the United States and its allies must adapt their strategic approaches to meet the new requirements of our rapidly changing strategic environment rather than being indicative of the dissolution of the NATO alliance.

Eventually, the future of European security cooperation is dependent upon whether or not both transatlantic and European actors can successfully balance the increasing need for each actor to have greater strategic flexibility while at the same time maintaining the necessity for united action. The various threats facing Europe are becoming increasingly globalized, interdependent, and unable to be addressed by any single country. Therefore, although the forms and methods of cooperation may continue to change, cooperation is likely to be vital in addressing the security challenges facing Europe.

Although there exists a lot of uncertainty about the future of European Security Cooperation, this uncertainty stems primarily from the fact that we are experiencing a time of great upheaval in our global environment. Ultimately, how much of a difference each state makes to the future of European Security Cooperation will depend upon how well the European states, United States and the rest of the world's strategic players can adjust to changes taking place in the global geopolitical landscape. Because it is impossible to know what the future holds with certainty, current discussions seem to indicate that three possible ways that the future of European Security could take shape in the next few years exist.

The first option for European Security in the near term would involve creating and continuing to utilize a robust transatlantic security framework centered around NATO, although this would occur in a more "adapted" and "Europeanized" manner. The idea behind this option would be to move away from the original method of overwhelming U.S. leadership in NATO, and instead focus on developing a more equal partnership between U.S. leadership and the defense efforts of the European member states. This idea is similar to Camille

Grand's description of an "organized transition," where the United States remains committed to supporting NATO, while at the same time, the European members of NATO gradually increase their commitment to their own defense efforts. With this type of arrangement, NATO would remain the cornerstone of European security, however, a more equitable balance of contributions from its members would exist, and therefore, NATO's structure would evolve. Although Grand acknowledges that this is not an assured outcome, he does point out that there are indications that recent U.S. policy decisions represent shifts into potentially less stable options, including either a more chaotic readjustment to new circumstances or a continued and/or deepened withdrawal of the U.S. from involvement in European affairs. Even though uncertainty currently surrounds whether the U.S. will remain involved in European security in some form, research shows that public opinion in both sides of the Atlantic continues to support transatlantic cooperation. Majorities on both sides of the Atlantic continue to believe that NATO is necessary for ensuring national security, and therefore, public support for NATO continues to remain strong despite changes in NATO's organization (GMF 2023).

A second scenario for European Security assumes that a more autonomous European security system will begin to emerge. Proponents of this approach advocate for reducing Europe's reliance on outside forces, and increasing the level of independent military capability within Europe. Increased interest in strategic autonomy reflects growing concern about the long-term reliability of American security commitments and a desire for Europe to better respond to regional emergencies. Still, there are significant barriers to overcome before Europe can achieve strategic autonomy. Capability shortfalls and institutional impediments continue to impede Europe's ability to operate autonomously in large-scale security operations (EPRS 2025), and like EPRS, IPQ similarly emphasizes that Europe remains dependent on American assistance in many areas, including intelligence, strategic transportation and advanced military technology (IPQ 2025). Thus, while increased strategic autonomy may continue to be an important goal for Europe, achieving full independence is unlikely anytime soon.

A third and increasingly discussed possibility for European Security postulates the emergence of a more networked and functionally driven security architecture, rather than one defined solely by membership in certain organizations. Instead of characterizing European Security as being a choice between NATO and strategic autonomy, proponents of this alternative emphasize the need for Europeans to work collaboratively with a larger number of actors based on functional requirements. Chatham House suggests that current debates in Europe are

increasingly transcending an EU-centric definition of security, and recognizing the necessity of working cooperatively with non-EU actors, specifically Türkiye, the UK, and Norway ,who are increasingly seen as critical for responding to common threats. Rather than being considered as peripheral partners, these countries are now being seen as key members of an integrated European security network, largely in topics like the integration of deterrent capabilities, regional stability, and crisis management (Chatham House 2026). The current view reflects a shift from a legalistic to a capability-based, and ultimately more practical model of cooperation. Whereby the ability to be effective is given priority over the establishment of specific institutional structures.

Although the third option seems most like what we would expect from a state based upon realism in how they respond to changes in their environment, there is no evidence to suggest that states will pursue completely independent policies, nor will they limit themselves solely to one specific type of alliance. States typically pursue flexible types of agreements in order to preserve as much strategic flexibility of action as possible. As stated above, the contemporary international system has become increasingly multipolar; therefore, it is logical for CSIS to observe that many countries are also currently attempting to adapt to these emerging changes through diversifying and pragmatically developing new types of security relationships with other actors (CSIS 2025). In this context, it is reasonable to assume that states will be able to develop additional resiliency within their security systems through cooperative efforts with multiple actors rather than through more strictly defined institutions.

In conclusion, I feel that the third scenario presents the most realistic and sustainable path forward for European Security. Given the complexity of today's challenges, geopolitical tensions, regional conflicts, migration pressures, and energy security concerns, technological transformation will likely prevent any one entity institutions and groups of states from unilaterally addressing security-related challenges. A collaborative framework composed of NATO, the European Union, and strategically relevant partners will enable greater opportunities for burden-sharing, joint capability development, and collective problem solving.

I believe that the recent events will support my argument. That there has been a choice made by NATO to hold a NATO Summit in Ankara cannot be seen as coincidental. Rather, it

reflects the continued strategic significance that Türkiye holds for NATO. While NATO doesn't specify how decisions on meeting locations are made, these summits do represent some degree of political and symbolic weight. Therefore, the selection of Ankara as the location for the 2026 NATO Summit could be viewed as confirmation that Türkiye remains highly relevant in addressing current security concerns, especially during times like now, with security concerns including Black Sea security, regional stability and defence cooperation having become central issues of discussion and action for NATO (Dalay 2026). Moreover, the summit held in Ankara is more than simply a meeting amongst diplomats, it shows that Türkiye will continue to play a key role in all discussions surrounding the evolving nature of European and Trans-Atlantic security. With Europe adapting to a constantly changing global environment, strategically important players like Türkiye will likely remain a crucial element of any successful and stable security architecture.

Therefore, ultimately, the future European security architecture will be shaped by adaptation rather than by replacing current structures. Therefore, the most successful European security architecture will be the one that allows for sufficient flexibility in terms of meeting evolving needs and sufficient cooperation among participating parties. From this perspective, an expanded framework that includes NATO allies; European partners; and critical regional actors offers the best opportunity for improving regional stability; enhancing the security interests of all parties; and managing an increasingly uncertain international system.

## **Chapter 5 – Reassessing Türkiye's Place in European Security**

The earlier chapters of this dissertation have assessed Türkiye's role in European security through several perspectives: theoretical, historical, current, and future. Chapter 1 provided the theoretical basis for the dissertation, drawing on realism, alliance theory, strategic autonomy, and the evolving alliances debates, from the Albright's "Three Ds" to today. Chapter 2 discussed how Türkiye became an integral part of Western security

structures historically and how Türkiye emerged as a Southeastern anchor for NATO, while also demonstrating how the emerging debate around strategic autonomy and exclusion began. Then Chapter 3 demonstrated how relevant Türkiye was to contemporary European security through the Black Sea, Ukraine conflict, military capabilities, defence industry development, and political barriers to cooperation. Finally, Chapter 4 described the broader transformation of NATO, Transatlantic relations, and possible future scenarios of European security cooperation.

Based on the previous discussion, this chapter seeks to provide an assessment of Türkiye's place in European Security by integrating key points from the dissertation. It does not seek to provide a new historical time frame nor an additional Case Study, but instead to summarize what the preceding analysis demonstrates regarding Türkiye's role in the developing European security order. The central assertion made here is that Türkiye is in a paradoxical manner; it is both politically contested, institutionally constrained, and strategically difficult to exclude. As a result of the shifting nature of European security away from issues such as civil society and democracy, instead towards issues of military capability, deterrence, defense production, regional stability, and burden sharing within alliances, this paradox has become increasingly apparent.

From a realist perspective, this trend is important. The fact that large scale warfare has returned to Europe, the increasing uncertainty surrounding whether U.S. commitments are to be short term or long term, and the resurgence of military power all underscore the importance of material contributors to security. Because of Türkiye's geography, its NATO membership, its combat experience, and expanding defense industrial base, Türkiye possesses a strategic value that can not be diminished by its current political relationship with the European Union. Even though the ongoing disputes over Cyprus and Greece, democratic standards, Syria, and other aspects of foreign policy orientation remain to limit the level of Institutionalized Cooperation between Türkiye and the European Union, they do not eliminate the existing security interdependencies between Türkiye and Europe.

Therefore, this chapter establishes three related statements. Firstly, it demonstrates that Türkiye's continued significance supports the idea that Türkiye remains a strategically significant player for European security. Secondly, it explores the European dilemma created by Türkiye's being mostly excluded and indispensable. Finally, it asserts that the most realistic future security structure for Europe will likely be flexible and inclusive rather than



being EU-centric. By making these assertions, this chapter provides foundational support for the conclusion, where the dissertation will directly address its primary research question and determine Türkiye's placement in the new emerging European security order.

## **5.1 Realism and the Persistence of Strategic Necessity**

It is clear from previous sections of this dissertation that Türkiye's role in European security is best understood as the result of continuing strategic necessity. Post-Cold War discussion centered around institutionalized cooperation and normative integration. However, more recent events have brought back the importance of power, geography, deterrence, and military capability. To state this clearly does not indicate that institutions and norms are not still relevant, but they are secondary to the practicalities of material capabilities and geographical location in a more unstable global environment. For this reason, the applicability of the realist theory discussed in detail in Chapter 1 continues to be very relevant today.

Realist theory assumes that all states operate in an inherently insecure international system. Furthermore, each State must secure itself through its own capabilities and positionings relative to other states. The ongoing war in Ukraine has certainly supported this view, as it has shown that Europe still has traditional security threats. Because of this, military preparation, a strong domestic defense industry providing weapons, and a robust territorial defense capability are again becoming cornerstones of European security policy.

That "hard security" issues have returned to prominence in the strategic thinking of European security is obvious from reading several recent documents produced by NATO. While the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept reaffirmed collective defense and deterrence as NATO's two core missions (NATO 2022), the 2025 Declaration issued at the Hague Summit placed emphasis on defense spending, defense readiness, defense resilience and the defense

industrial base (NATO 2025) and collectively reinforce that we are entering an era in European security thinking where "hard security" is taking priority over "soft security."

From a realist perspective, this type of international environment increases the value of those countries possessing military capabilities and strategic locations. Türkiye is such a country. Türkiye's value cannot be determined only through either NATO Membership or EU Relations. Due to its structural location as a bridge between major regions such as Black Sea region, Eastern Mediterranean region, Caucasus region, Balkan region and Middle East region, whose development will undoubtedly affect European Security, Türkiye will remain continuously important regardless of frequent political tensions.

Recent developments related to the Russia-Ukraine War have added additional weight to this point. The Black Sea has become a primary battleground for the conflict, and as such, Türkiye's role, including control of the Turkish Straits via the Montreux Convention and Türkiye's relationship with both Ukraine and Russia, adds additional strategic weight to its role. From a realist perspective, this illustrates that geography is a key factor in the development of power and influence.

Additionally, Türkiye's military strength provides additional support for its role in European Security. Türkiye possesses one of the largest militaries in NATO and significant operational experience. Based on CSIS data released in 2025, Türkiye is one of the top players in both the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean regions. Additionally, Türkiye is the second largest military in NATO and possesses a rapidly growing defense industry (CSIS 2025). These two aspects create extreme difficulty for excluding Türkiye from discussions about European security strategy, particularly as European countries seek to improve their overall military readiness levels and address capability gaps.

Türkiye's importance to the defense industrial base is similar. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine exemplifies that long-term warfare requires production capacity, technological advancements and resilience throughout supply chain. As such, NATO's efforts to fortify the Defense Industrial Base (DIB) have demonstrated that Türkiye's role within the alliance will continue to grow; although full independence from other countries has not yet been achieved.

Realism provides the foundation for understanding why Türkiye continues to play a vital part in NATO's collective effort. Although Türkiye's pursuit of an independent foreign policy does create tension, both Türkiye and NATO remain dependent on each other and their relationship is defined by a combination of Türkiye's capabilities and geography. Coşkun

states that “security interdependence” exists between Türkiye and Europe and that at some point, Türkiye may be able to act as a force multiplier (Coşkun 2025), which further demonstrates how the existence of mutual strategic interests can foster cooperation among nations with little to no trust.

A similar dynamic exists between North America and Europe. As described in Chapter 4, due to uncertainty surrounding U.S. commitments to European Security, Europeans have attempted to increase burden-sharing. Grand proposes a potential transition toward a more European NATO, in which European countries assume greater responsibility (Grand 2025). In this eventuality, Türkiye would become more valuable to Europe since Europe could not afford to exclude one of the strongest members of NATO.

This does not imply that realism offers a complete or unproblematic defense of Türkiye's policies. Realism acknowledges that political disagreements, democracy related concerns, disputes with Greece and Cyprus, as well as tensions concerning Syria and Russia exist. Nevertheless, realism demonstrates that these types of disagreements do not diminish Türkiye's strategic relevance. Excluding capable actors becomes increasingly costly in a more competitive environment.

Therefore, Türkiye's contribution to European Security should not simply rely on an institutionally aligned partnership. Despite lessened levels of integration into EU frameworks and current tensions in political relations, Türkiye's existing strategic capabilities provide significant contributions. Its geographic location, military capabilities, NATO membership and developing Defense Industrial base all contribute to the fact that Türkiye cannot be ignored.

As a final note, Türkiye's continued relevance serves as evidence of another basic position of this dissertation: that European security is shaped by institutions and values but ultimately by power, geography, and material capabilities. The emergence of hard-security issues has made these elements more visible, and Türkiye's role corresponds to long standing structural conditions rather than short term political decisions.

## **5.2 Between Exclusion and Necessity: The European Dilemma**

Strategic necessity has created a principal dilemma for Europe. On the one side, Türkiye remains a difficult political partner and a constrained institutional actor. Relations between the European Union and Türkiye were formed by concerns over democracy, disagreement with Greece and Cyprus, tensions in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, and disagreements over Syria and Russia. On the other hand, Türkiye is equipped with geographical, military, and defence industrial resources that offer considerable potential for contribution to European security. This produces a fundamental paradox: Although Türkiye is generally considered as being external to EU-centred security initiatives, it will likely be impossible to exclude it from the practical realities of European defence.

This dilemma has historical foundations, but became much clearer with the current geopolitical climate. As previously stated in Chapter 2, Türkiye's role in Western security was always defined via NATO as opposed to the European Union. Although NATO provided Türkiye with a central role in collective defence; the establishment of EU-based security structures during the post-Cold War period produced a more complex scenario. Türkiye remained strategically important but was marginally positioned within EU institutions and continued to face recurrent obstacles regarding both participation and decision making within EU frameworks.

The debate concerning European strategic autonomy further exacerbates this problem. With regard to the current war in Ukraine and uncertainty regarding U.S. commitment, there has been growing interest in enhancing Europe's ability to act independently in terms of security. Defining security too narrowly through EU membership potentially means excluding capable non-EU actors. EPRS points out that there are many capability gaps and political divisions that hinder European strategic autonomy (EPRS 2025), and these contribute to the need for cooperative efforts with capable external partners such as Türkiye.

Türkiye's inability to participate in certain EU defence initiatives illustrates this distinction. For a long time, Ankara has expressed concern that EU-focused approaches would weaken NATO while reducing Türkiye's influence in European defence discussions. Coşkun pointed out that it would be difficult for any type of European security structure that did not involve

Türkiye to function properly because it would damage NATO's central role (Coşkun 2025). From Türkiye's perspective, exclusion risks developing an environment whereby it supports defence through NATO; however, it is left out of participating in EU driven processes.

Recent discussions over defense funding for the EU add to the issue. As European states are raising their levels of military expenditure and building up their defense industries, new programs like the Safe Framework Program Agreement (SAFE) raise new issues concerning how non-European Union Allies will be able to participate in those efforts. Türkiye has expressed concerns that if there are too many restrictions placed upon its ability to cooperate in defense efforts among other things, then capable NATO allies like Türkiye will be unable to contribute effectively to Europe's defense needs (Gümrükçü 2025). There is a larger contradiction here as well. On one hand, Europe wants to grow its defense capability; on the other hand, certain institutional arrangements could limit cooperation with major players.

Bilateral disputes also significantly impact the nature of this relationship. Tensions between Greece and Cyprus continue to effect the extent to which Türkiye engages with EU security structures. Both Greece and Cyprus tend to link broadened cooperation to ongoing unresolved regional issues. The EU places a high priority upon solidarity amongst member states. However, due to their perceptions of the "Europeanization" of these disputes, Turkish authorities often perceive the linkage as unhelpful. Consequently, ongoing conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean continue to negatively affect more general security cooperation between these two parties, despite common interests such as maritime security, energy corridors and regional stability.

However, the EU does have legitimate reasons for exercising caution towards Türkiye. Differences in foreign policy positions, concerns relating to democratic norms, and differences in opinion on matters including the S-400 missile defense system and relationships with Russia have decreased trust between these two entities. However, these political concerns exist at the same time that an increasingly unstable security environment generates greater and greater costs associated with excluding Türkiye from various forms of cooperation. Therefore, cooperation should be based on a combination of capability considerations and perceived shared threats, not merely on the degree of political alignment.

At this point, the idea of security interdependence is a key component. Coşkun believes both Europe and Türkiye have continued structural ties and that co-operation will lead to common advantages for each country regardless of tensions (Coşkun 2025). Similarly, the SWP has

defined "an alignment of necessity," suggesting that co-operative actions will arise when the two sides share strategic necessities (Adar, Aksoy, and Seufert 2025). Additionally, the GMF assessments indicate that there are opportunities for practical interactions between the EU and Türkiye under the current environment, including within institutional boundaries (Taştan et al. 2025).

As a result, this highlights the limits of an exclusive EU-centric view of European Security. In addition to the economic and institutional roles of the EU, it does not encompass all strategically important actors. For example, Türkiye (alongside the UK and Norway), is a non-EU NATO ally who remains critical due to its capabilities and location. Dalay believes that any future European Security frameworks need to go beyond the borders of the EU to include such actors (Dalay 2026). If Türkiye were excluded from any European Security framework, it would reduce the effectiveness of any future European Security Architecture.

In sum, the dilemma is not primarily whether Europe trusts Türkiye, but rather whether it can afford to leave it out. With respect to hard security issues and the ongoing Russia – Ukraine conflict, along with fears regarding U.S. involvement in long term engagements, the importance of practical cooperation grows exponentially. In those cases, leaving Türkiye out may satisfy short term political interests but at a longer term cost to Europe's overall strategic posture.

In contrast, the dilemma also exists in reverse in this case. Even though Ankara wishes to increase the scope of its strategic independence and work with additional foreign partners, it continues to derive significant benefits from being part of the Western security community. Membership in NATO provides Ankara with a deterrent posture. Additionally, Ankara has an important advantage from its economic and technological ties with Europe. As Coşkun states, "the development of Türkiye's defense sector...does not diminish the degree of dependence on external sources, rather, it increases dependency due to increased reliance on global supply chains and high end technology." (Coşkun 2025)

Ultimately, Türkiye's situation cannot be narrowed down to a simple decision between being included or excluded from European Security. Türkiye is neither entirely inside nor outside of European Security. Institutionally limited, but strategically tied, politically contentious but militarily relevant - this contradictory position symbolizes a more general problem within European Security thinking - that of bridging institutional boundaries with strategic realities.

This chapter has demonstrated that Türkiye's position exists in a tension created by exclusion and necessity. While the political differences and institutional barriers remain real obstacles, they do not diminish Türkiye's strategic importance. Rather, they create the parameters under which cooperation must take place. The next chapter expands on this point by looking at possible ways to construct a more flexible and inclusive European Security architecture than exists today.

### **5.3 Toward a More Inclusive European Security Architecture**

The question posed above represents a larger issue regarding the future of European security: How can the boundaries of institutions be aligned with the realities of strategy? Because Türkiye is neither completely "in" nor completely "out" of European security, a strict EU-centric model is unlikely to meet needs. Rather, the changing nature of the security environment indicates a more fluid and multi-layered architecture combining the role of NATO with broader cooperation with actors outside of EU structures.

Clearly, European security extends far beyond the institutional boundaries of the European Union. The EU continues to play a critical role in regulation, sanctioning, and defense-industrial coordination but includes no strategically relevant actors outside of those. As noted previously, the UK, Norway and Türkiye each remain critical non-EU NATO allies whose military capabilities and geographical significance make them crucial to addressing security challenges. As Dalay has argued European Security cannot simply be managed by EU member states, close cooperation among such actors is needed to address common threats (Dalay 2026). Similarly, Coşkun has emphasized that due to security interdependencies, Türkiye and Europe are bound together by the costs of exclusion (Coşkun 2025)

These requirements for inclusion are strengthened by limitations of European strategic autonomy. Despite the increased priority placed upon autonomy since the War in Ukraine, strategic autonomy should not be confused with isolation. As highlighted by EPRS, despite recent efforts toward developing autonomous capability, there are still capability shortfalls and structural constraints present, which demonstrate that cooperation with other partner countries will continue to be required (EPRS 2025). Moreover, a long-term solution will

likely involve strengthening European capability while retaining parallel relationships with NATO and non-EU allies.

The future of the transatlantic relationship supports this view. According to Grand, NATO could develop into a more balanced structure where European allies will take on more responsibility while the US continues to be involved (Grand 2025) and the exclusion of Türkiye from such a structure will actually undermine rather than strengthen the security of Europe because of its military capabilities and geographic position. Moreover, both NATO's Strategic Concept for 2025 and NATO's Strategic Concept for Defense Against Terrorism (2022) emphasize the need for collective defense, deterrence, and preparedness in the face of increasing threats.

Therefore, a more realistic form of security is a multi-layered security structure. NATO would continue to serve as the primary mechanism for collective defense, while the EU would provide additional security contributions through defense industrial initiatives and coordinating institutions. Non-EU members would participate in the layered security structure using flexible forms of collaboration with the EU, such as bilateral cooperation, mini-lateral collaborations, joint procurement, and regional collaborations. As Coşkun has noted, mini-lateral and bilateral cooperation are significant ways to overcome political barriers to cooperation at the EU level (Coşkun 2025). GMF analysis has shown that there is an increased role being played by practical cooperative formats in EU-Türkiye defense relations (Taştan et al. 2025).

Furthermore, the defense industrial base in Türkiye may also represent an attractive source of real economic benefits from enhanced European defense cooperation. For instance, as many European governments pursue increased defense expenditures and seek to re-supply their depleted weapons caches, and ultimately acquire new weapon systems after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, affordability will be an increasingly important factor. In such a case, Türkiye's defense equipment could potentially provide European states with alternatives for procurement in specific domains at lower costs than those currently procured through traditional suppliers. The fact that several European states have limited budgets and require additional military force while simultaneously trying to manage fiscal constraints makes Turkish defense procurements especially appealing. While Turkish defense systems are unlikely to replace every high-end Western system, they can help create greater diversity and sustainability within the procurement process. Therefore, by working together with Türkiye,



European nations may relieve some of the financial burdens associated with rearming themselves, while creating an expanded range of potential partners in defense industries. Also, it should be noted that Türkiye produces every kind of defence industry product in NATO standards, the quality of the military supplies or vehicles is proven and can be integrated easily into European armies.

Additionally, geography provides another argument for inclusion. Challenges to European security exist well beyond Ukraine and affect areas extending from the Black Sea to the Eastern Mediterranean to the Middle East. Due to geography, Türkiye is uniquely positioned relative to these areas and is involved in a number of regional issues related to maritime security, migration and regional stability. Dalay has emphasized that Europe's security is deeply tied to its wider neighborhood, in which case Türkiye is one of the key actors in this region. (Dalay 2026) Therefore, failure to include Türkiye in discussions relating to security planning would result in under-addressing of the many important regional aspects of European security.

Recent developments have also demonstrated that Türkiye continues to maintain its relevance in terms of its membership in NATO. For example, the fact that it was decided to hold the 2026 NATO Summit in Ankara demonstrates that Türkiye has a high profile within NATO, and this decision shows where NATO places its priorities according to the latest developments. Finally, public opinion research indicates that cooperative mechanisms are likely to sustain, according to GMF survey results. NATO is viewed positively among all member countries, including Türkiye, with increasing levels of positive views toward NATO in Türkiye (GMF 2023).

However, an inclusive architecture will not automatically resolve existing tensions between states. Existing disputes with Greece and Cyprus, issues surrounding democracy standards and disagreement concerning regional policy initiatives will undoubtedly continue to influence their relations. Nevertheless, as Coşkun pointed out, although differences exist between the two neighbors based on political values, they share a deep rooted strategic interdependency that cannot be overlooked (Coşkun 2025). From a realist perspective,

cooperation does not require complete political agreement; only shared interests and mutual necessity are sufficient.

Based on this analysis, European security will likely be defined more effectively by a combination of NATO's deterrence role, the EU's institutional and industrial capabilities and contributions made by strategically relevant non-EU partners. The role that Türkiye plays in this framework will be complex but vital and will ultimately be determined by geography, military capabilities and its position within NATO.

Finally, a more inclusive and flexible security architecture will provide the best way forward for managing the contradiction between exclusion and necessity. Political differences will certainly be there always; however, strategic necessities require more cooperation.

Consequently, the potential future role of Türkiye within European security will rely less on formal integration processes and more on both parties' ability to establish practical forms of collaborative partnership based upon mutual interests.

## CONCLUSION

This dissertation assessed Türkiye's role in European security using its military strength, geographical position, alliance disputes and shifting arrangements in European and transatlantic security. The dissertation's primary research question was "How can we understand Türkiye in the developing European security framework?" Given that traditional views of European security have come under challenge due to wars, geopolitical rivalries, and uncertainty concerning transatlantic alliances.

Overall, the dissertation concluded that Türkiye is a strategically valuable player in European security, even though political conflicts continue to restrict agreement and institutional developments.

The overall finding of this dissertation is that Türkiye finds itself in a space where it is neither completely inside nor completely outside of European security. It is not a member of the EU and its relationships with the EU remain limited by political controversies, democratization issues, the Cyprus dispute, conflicts with Greece, and disagreements about regional policies. At the same time, it is a long standing NATO ally that possesses considerable military capabilities, a geostrategically significant location and rapidly increasing defense industrial production. These characteristics create a situation where it is difficult to exclude Türkiye from any realistic assessment of European security. Moreover, its function can best be seen as being politically disputed but strategically required.

Realism was specifically helpful in understanding this contradiction. While realism does not reject the significance of institutions, political values or diplomatic relationships, it does emphasize that ultimately, security is shaped by power, geography, state interests, military capabilities, and the distribution of threats. The current changes in the European security landscape reinforce this reality. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has once again placed deterrents at the forefront of European strategic thought. The fact that European countries will need to increase their military preparedness to counter Russian aggression has brought hard security back to the top of European strategic priorities. In light of these developments, Türkiye's relevance cannot simply be defined by the quality of its relationship with Brussels. Instead, it is based on structural features that are enduring whether there are ongoing political disagreements or not.

As discussed in Chapter 2, historical evidence indicated that Türkiye's role in Western security has historically been related to its strategic location and military effectiveness. During the Cold War, Türkiye was integrated into NATO as one of the key anchors for NATO's southeastern flank. Its value to NATO rested on three basic factors: its physical closeness to the Soviet Union, its control of access to the Black Sea, and its ability to assist in containing Soviet expansion. Türkiye's role in NATO during the Cold War was based on necessity rather than membership in an integrated Europe in terms of the EU model. Post-Cold War NATO continued to expand its scope beyond territorial defense to include crisis management, counter-terrorism, regional stability, and cooperative security. As a result, although Türkiye's role did not diminish after the end of the Cold War, it certainly evolved.

Post-Cold War developments also introduced new sources of friction however. As the European Union began to develop its own security and defense initiatives, Türkiye's position became increasingly ambiguous. Türkiye was part of NATO but outside of the EU's decision making processes. This created a long term institutional dilemma: Türkiye was expected to help provide security through NATO but was frequently left out of EU-centered security discussions. This dilemma became clearer as the debate surrounding European Strategic Autonomy emerged. From Ankara's perspective, EU strategic autonomy would represent a threat to NATO's centrality if it were to exclude non-EU NATO members like Türkiye. Conversely, from the EU perspective, deepening collaboration with Türkiye was made more complicated by continuing political disputes and other concerns including those relating to the Cyprus question and the direction of Turkish domestic and foreign policy.

As further explained in Chapter 3, today Türkiye is clearly visible in European Security through its activities in the Black Sea, the Ukrainian War and defense industrial developments. The Black Sea has become a key strategic region for European Security since Russia invaded Ukraine. Türkiye controls the Straits which connect the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. It plays a unique role under the Montreux Treaty and maintains communications with both Ukraine and Russia regarding the Ukrainian conflict and passage rights. Because of this reason, Türkiye has been able to support Ukraine in meaningful ways while simultaneously maintaining relations with Russia. This reflects a balance strategy that has at times frustrated Western partners but has also provided Ankara with a distinct diplomatic and regional role. Because of this, it demonstrates that Türkiye's strategic importance is not only theoretical but practical.

Türkiye's growing defense industrial base has strengthened the argument that Türkiye's contribution to European Security should not be evaluated solely on troop and vehicle numbers or geographic location. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that military effectiveness will depend significantly upon production capacity, supply chain durability, technological adaptability and the ability to maintain prolonged combat operations. With respect to these last four factors, Türkiye has grown visibly as a security actor through its emerging defense industrial base. While Türkiye has not reached complete defense industrial independence and still relies upon international cooperation in many sectors, it has established greater relevance to European states who are attempting to rebuild their own defense capabilities as a result of its expanding production capacity. Also, the Turkish army has gained so much experience on the ground in Syria, Iraq, and Libya. These experiences are very valuable in current conflicts that are at the doorstep of the European continent.

However, as stated earlier in this dissertation, Türkiye's role is far from unproblematic. There are major barriers to overcome before cooperation between Ankara and several European actors can deepen. Disputes exist with Greece and Cyprus; tensions are present throughout the eastern Mediterranean; concerns exist relative to Türkiye's democratization process; disagreements exist relative to Syria but less since the fall of the Assad regime; and Türkiye continues to develop closer ties with Russia. All of these barriers serve to prevent cooperation and hinder efforts to incorporate Türkiye more deeply into various aspects of European security initiatives.

Chapter 4 demonstrated that the evaluation of Türkiye's role must take into account the broader transformations in NATO and transatlantic relations. The alliance remains the principal framework for European collective defense, but its internal dynamics are shifting. The U.S. will continue to play an indispensable role in European security, although the uncertainty regarding the long-term commitment of American resources has led the European states to focus more strongly on burden sharing, defense expenditures, and strategic responsibilities. This does not signify that NATO is disappearing, or that Europe can easily replace the U.S. Instead, it signifies that the European side of the alliance will have to bear greater responsibilities for its own security.

Therefore, the concept of a more European security architecture cannot be developed only around EU member states if it is meant to be linked to NATO's deterrence structure and to the broader geography of European insecurity.

That is why the thesis has approached European strategic autonomy with care. Strategic autonomy can represent a positive objective if it involves strengthening Europe's ability to act, promoting defense production, enhancing readiness, and reducing excessive dependence on external actors. On the other hand, it can pose significant problems if it is considered to be only an EU-centered project that marginalizes non-EU NATO partners. All three countries, Türkiye, the UK, and Norway, indicate that European security extends beyond the institutional boundaries of the European Union. Especially, what is important here is Türkiye's geographical situation that links Europe to various unstable regions simultaneously. Therefore, a security architecture that excludes Türkiye may seem convenient in the short term in terms of politics; however, it would be strategically limited and harmful for the continent's safety in the long term.

Additionally, Chapter 5 synthesized the major conclusions drawn throughout the thesis in highlighting the tension between exclusion and necessity. Although Türkiye is not institutionally part of the EU security frameworks and disputes among politicians will continue to limit cooperation, the revival of hard security increases the costs of disregarding Türkiye's capabilities. Moreover, NATO's renewed focus on deterrence, readiness, defense spending and defense industrial bases confirm that Europe finds itself in a new era of European security in which material capability will weigh more heavily than it did during the optimistic post-Cold War years. In light of this new security context, Türkiye's military strength, geopolitical position, and defense-industrial capacities provide it with a level of relevance that institutional exclusion cannot erase.

This does not imply that Europe should completely ignore political problems in its relationships with Türkiye. An inclusive security architecture must not equate unconditional cooperation with the abandonment of political principles. Such issues as Türkiye's democratic regression, the Cyprus dispute, tensions with Greece, disagreements over Syria and Türkiye's balance between Russia and the West are critical obstacles that affect trust and limit cooperation possibilities. However, the main argument of this thesis is that political conflict and strategic necessity can coexist. While the presence of political conflicts does not

inevitably stop cooperation requirements, especially when the security environment becomes riskier and less predictable.

Consequently, it seems that Türkiye's role in European security is likely to be based on flexible and pragmatic forms of cooperation instead of institutionalized integration. Examples of such types of cooperation can include bilateral agreements, mini-lateral initiatives, cooperative defense projects, joint procurements, industrial partnerships and coordination mechanisms under the guidance of NATO can potentially serve as more practical routes for cooperation than ambitious initiatives aimed at solving all of the political conflicts that exist between Türkiye and Europe at once. This type of approach would certainly not resolve the underlying differences between Türkiye and Europe; however, it could enable cooperation where there exists a coincidence of interests. Furthermore, it would correspond to the reality that European security is no longer only dependent upon institutional identities; it depends on geographic locations, military capabilities, alliance memberships, regional influences and defense-industrial developments.

Türkiye's defense industry provides another layer to this argument. Since European countries are increasing their defense expenditures and attempting to reload their military supplies, cooperation with Türkiye could provide practical advantages. Turkish defense products could provide European countries with alternatives to expensive procurement options in specific areas where affordability, rapid cheap production and availability are crucial. This does not mean that Türkiye can substitute high tech American or European systems; nor does it signify that Turkish defense production is lacking external dependency. However, it does signify that Türkiye can assist in developing a more diverse and economically achievable defense environment. Thusly, cooperation with Türkiye may assist Europe not only militarily but also economically by expanding options for procuring defense products and entering into industrial partnerships available to European states.

This point is relevant since the future of European security will not be determined exclusively by statements of political intent. It will also depend upon whether European states can produce, purchase, maintain and operate the necessary capabilities to achieve deterrence and defense. The conflict in Ukraine has clearly indicated that military power is not only dependent upon sophisticated technologies but also upon quantity, durability, logistics and industrial capacity. Therefore, Türkiye's increasing defense-industrial significance improves its overall strategic significance. Additionally, Türkiye's increasing defense industrial

significance provides Ankara with greater leverage in its relationships with Europe since Türkiye is no longer simply a consumer of Western security but increasingly a developer of defense capabilities.

Moreover, the thesis demonstrated that Türkiye's own position is influenced by a tension between independence and interdependence. Ankara seeks to expand its flexibility between the West, Russia and the Middle East, other centers of power through its pursuit of a more autonomous and multidirectional foreign policy. However, this independence is subject to limits. Ankara continues to rely upon NATO membership, European markets, Western technological assistance and defense-industrial cooperation for its strategic autonomy. Therefore, its strategic autonomy does not reduce its reliance on the Western security environment; rather, it changes how it manages this dependency. Likewise, Europe cannot simply overlook Türkiye, regardless of how difficult political relations are. One of the primary realities of their mutual dependency is therefore a central aspect of their relationship.

As a result, one of the key contributions of this thesis is to surpass a straightforward inclusion-exclusion model. Türkiye should not be viewed only as a candidate country whose EU accession process has been suspended or only as an inconvenient NATO ally whose policies frequently provoke frustration. Both models are insufficient. Türkiye is best viewed as a strategically essential yet politically controversial actor in European security. This importance does not come from fully aligning with EU political priorities; rather, it comes from structural features of European security, such as geography, military capability, alliance membership, regional influence and defense-industrial growth.

Furthermore, this conclusion also has broad implications for how we conceptualize European security. To define European Security through EU institutions risks neglecting those actors who are central to the continent's defense environment. To define European security through NATO may diminish recognition of EU-led defense-industrial coordination and European strategic responsibility. Therefore, a realistic approach must be constructed by combining these two dimensions: NATO retains centrality for collective defense and deterrence, while the EU provides through regulation, funding, procurement, sanctions and industrial coordination. Beyond these two structures flexible forms of cooperation with non-EU allies are becoming increasingly required. Türkiye represents one of the clearest expressions of this fact.



Similarly, as stated previously, realism offers value as an analytical lens for examining current European security. Liberal Institutionalism and Constructivism can explain many aspects of the relationship between Türkiye and Europe, especially institutions, identity, norms and political trust although liberal-institutionalist approaches can explain many aspects of the relationship between Türkiye and Europe, nonetheless, the resurgence of war in Europe has made realist considerations visible. States have once again prioritized deterrence, military preparedness, defense production, alliance solidarity and geographic strategy. Specifically, Türkiye's position demonstrates that material considerations continue to determine security outcomes despite weakened political relations. Realist considerations do not signify that values and institutions are insignificant; rather, they manifest themselves within a security environment characterized by power and vulnerability.

However, this thesis also contains limitations. Primarily, this thesis has concentrated on assessing Türkiye's role in European security from a strategic and structural perspective. This thesis has not produced a technical assessment related to each element of Türkiye's armed forces or defense industries. Additionally, this thesis has avoided predicting exactly what future prospects for Türkiye-EU relations will be, which will depend on domestic politics, regional crises, leadership decisions, evolutionary processes within the Ukrainian conflict and bilateral relations. Potential future research could assess more concretely how Türkiye may enter into mechanisms for EU defense procurement and cooperation between Turkish and European defense industries and also public opinion in Türkiye-Europe will be decisive concerning potential security cooperative actions.

Regardless of these limitations, the central principle remains evident. The position of Türkiye within European security cannot be determined only by assessments of political alignments. Rather, it needs to be evaluated through interactions of geography, military capability, alliance politics and exclusion from institutions. As Europe faces a more dangerous and uncertain security order, cooperation with capable non-EU allies will become increasingly important.

In the final assessment, Türkiye occupies a middle ground between being an outside partner and being an integral participant within European security. This middle ground generates tension, yet also gives Türkiye a singular status. It is a NATO ally, a Black Sea player, a Middle East and Mediterranean actor, and a growing defense-industry producer state whose decision-making processes significantly impact European security. For Europe, managing disagreements within its relationship with Türkiye requires addressing both strategic

necessities and political challenges. For Türkiye, the real challenge is to keep its autonomy without undermining the Western security framework from which it continues to benefit.

To conclude, shaping a more powerful security architecture for Europe will demand a flexible definition of partnership. It will not suffice to rely only upon formal membership categories or established institutional frameworks. A more secure European security architecture will necessitate including actors that are strategically indispensable, although it is politically challenging. As outlined above, Türkiye serves as one example of such an actor. Therefore, this thesis concludes that a realistically conceived definition of partnership is needed to address challenges facing European Security.

Future European security will depend on a flexible conception of partnership. This cannot simply be defined by formal categories of membership or existing institutional borders. In order to provide a strong and sustainable European security framework, an architecture that includes actors who are strategically necessary, even if those states are politically problematic, those states will need to emerge. The political status of Türkiye's role in European security will continue to be controversial. However, its utility will persist.

Therefore, we must conceptualize Türkiye as a strategically important but politically disputed actor whose inclusion is a necessity in developing a more credible and complete European security architecture. Turkish presence in European security is mandatory if we all want to live in a more peaceful and secure continent.



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