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Security, Soft Power, and Feminist Foreign Policy of the European Union

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Introduction

The European Union (EU), a powerful testament to the potential of cooperation and integration between European nations, was forged in the aftermath of the Second World War and fully crystallized following the collapse of communism. This exceptional endeavor has evolved into a bastion of peace, stability, and prosperity amongst its European member states. The shattering impact of two global conflicts catalyzed the continent's nations to pioneer an innovative model of cooperation, thereby laying the foundations of the modern EU. Over the subsequent years, the EU has demonstrated its pivotal role in precluding conflicts within Europe, fostering an unprecedented epoch of peace and collaborative diplomacy.

Underpinning the EU's transformative influence is the principle of supranational governance, an audacious departure from traditional political structures, that has acted as the catalyst for a profound metamorphosis of a continent scarred by warfare. By integrating nations that were once embroiled in bitter disputes, the EU has engineered a robust framework that promotes dialogue, negotiation, and collective decision-making. Moreover, the EU's steadfast commitment to the resolution of disputes through peaceful means, underpinned by an unwavering adherence to core values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, has established the foundations for a harmonious and stable Europe.

Nevertheless, the EU, with its all-encompassing scope and operating milieu, has been a frequent target of critique, leading in some instances to the dramatic exit of member nations. This precipitated a wave of "Eurosceptic" sentiments across not only the existing EU membership but also aspirant nations. The sphere of security and defense is a focal point of such skepticism, with detractors highlighting the EU's seemingly marginal role in maintaining regional and international peace and security as a potential flaw. The gravitas of this critique is underscored by the centrality of security to the concerns of state actors, impacting both the stability of the region and its capacity for expansion.

The evidence presented within this paper suggests that European policymakers have demonstrated a remarkable degree of resilience and adaptability. They have deftly reconfigured

the bloc's policies to fortify its capability to respond effectively to significant global challenges that directly impinge upon the safety and welfare of European citizens.

EU's in Regional Security: In NATO's Shadow or a Rising Giant?

The organizational theory in sociology elucidates that entrenched paradigms within landscapes and major establishments tend to capitulate under the weight of substantial external breakdowns. This effectively suggests that considerable incidents invariably precipitate shifts in collective paradigms.

For centuries, European perspectives maintained the notion of security as a sovereign concern, overshadowing its potential as a collective value and universal objective—one that could pave the way for a peace durable enough to conclude all wars. Post-Westphalia, Europe has endured numerous paradigmatic collapses, provoking a widespread reconsideration of strategies pertaining to security, defense, and foreign policy. The Second World War preceded the North Atlantic Treaty in a similar way as the Congress of Vienna paved the way for the Concert of Europe. It follows, however, that the NATO-dominated security structure is not destined to be perpetual.

As early as 1950, several European nations contemplated the establishment of a centralized European defense framework. This minilateral endeavor between the Benelux countries, Italy, West Germany, and France, was envisaged as an alternative to the United States' hegemonic influence. Ambitious aspirations, including the formation of multinational combat units and a unified defense budget regulated by a 'European Defense Minister,' were consigned to obscurity. As Jean Monet reflected in 1976, “The thought that the realization of the Coal and Steel Plan would allow minds to get used to the idea of a European Community before we would get to the delicate issue of common defense, but the events did not give us enough time.”

In the subsequent decades, political blocs, treaties, and frameworks — which would later serve as the cornerstone of the European Union — remained largely symbolic, inactive, and non-inclusive, overshadowed by the more functional, targeted, and clearly-defined North Atlantic

Treaty. States displayed a marked reluctance to centralize their defense and security initiatives, opting instead to institutionalize their cooperation based on a neorealist principle of collective defense. The early European institutions, bolstered by NATO security guarantees, successfully mitigated the potential for severe conflicts within Europe. The synergy between value-based cooperation and robust military protection has forged a dual strategic culture. In this construct, the European Economic Community has been instrumental in shaping values, while NATO has assumed responsibility for their preservation. As a result, no autonomous endeavors concerning European Security had materialized.

The landscape, however, has changed following the collapse of Communism, atrocities in the former Yugoslavia, and the War in Iraq. The idea of an autonomous defense organization resurfaced in the early 1990s in the wake of the European Union. Maastricht Treaty was the first European legal act that institutionalized the concept of a unified and coordinated approach to security. It introduced the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), designating it as one of the three key pillars of the European Union. The introduction of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1999 has proven that the events finally "gave enough time" to shift the paradigm and push for the EU's autonomy in security and defense-related matters. Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union introduces the so-called solidarity clause - an obligation of mutual assistance in case of a terrorist attack or any disaster. A tangible legislative basis has paved the way for the establishment of the EU political, security, and military committees, EU Defense Agency, EU Battle Groups, and Frontex.

The expanding array of the EU's capabilities has significantly augmented the bloc's stature, bringing it closer to parity with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In 2002, the EU and NATO announced the establishment of a strategic partnership based on mutually reinforcing cooperation. The forthcoming Berlin Plus agreements allowed the EU to access NATO's collective assets and capabilities for EU-led crisis management operations. The EU's assertive evolution, along with the enhancement of its capacity to define and meet independent strategic security goals, has attained it the status of a significant decision-maker and can rightfully be termed a "giant" (Merand, 2008).

The EU has embarked on robust collective initiatives designed to bolster regional security, primarily through the establishment of rule-of-law missions in the former Yugoslavia and Caucasus, a series of state-building initiatives purposed towards the creation and enhancement of institutions that uphold human rights and advocate for accountability. The European Council's 2022 decision to establish the European Political Community (EPC) — an intergovernmental forum whose scope extends beyond the framework of the European Union to include all European countries plus the Caucasus — underscores the European commitment to pursue a regionalized and autonomous security policy.

EULEX, the European Union's rule of law mission to Kosovo, is the country's second security responder after the Kosovo Police. The EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia played a critical mediation role in the negotiation of a ceasefire agreement during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. In addition, in the wake of the 44-day Karabakh War in 2020, the EU played an increasingly proactive role in ending the hostilities and restoring regional stability. During the 2022 EPC summit in Prague, both Armenia and Azerbaijan affirmed their commitment to the UN Charter and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Alma-Ata Declaration of 21 December 1991, thereby recognizing each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. This marked a significant development in the region's diplomatic landscape, further underscored by Armenia's agreement to facilitate a civilian EU mission along the border with Azerbaijan, which Azerbaijan agreed to cooperate with for a maximum period of two months. This agreement culminated in the establishment of the EU Monitoring Capacity in Armenia (EUMCAP), which was fully operational from 20 October 2022 to 19 December 2022. During this period, EUMCAP carried out a total of 176 patrols, serving as a tangible manifestation of the EU's commitment to maintaining stability in the region. The EU Monitoring Mission in Armenia, established in 2023, aims to ensure an environment conducive to EU-supported normalization efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, build confidence and human security in conflict-affected areas, and contribute to stability in the border areas of Armenia. In a recent EU-mediated meeting, Armenia and Azerbaijan moved closer to reopening rail links between mainland Azerbaijan and the Nakhichevan exclave, further paving the way for the resolution of territorial disputes.

In light of these developments, the EU's role in ensuring security in the region cannot be overstated. The bloc has marshaled all available resources to support peace and stability in the South Caucasus. However, pressing challenges that may cause another paradigm shift still remain. In April 2023, Azerbaijan installed a checkpoint along the Lachin road, granting it complete control over military and transit activities between Karabakh and Armenia. This development was met with concern by the EU, which expressed apprehension over the increased tensions and the potential violation of the 2020 ceasefire agreement. The efficacious implementation of the European Union's civilian monitoring mission necessitates proficient negotiations with Baku, ensuring access to observers on both sides of the border. The forthcoming EPC summit in Moldova on June 1st, 2023, holds potential answers regarding future progress and the role of the EU in resolving the conflict. In addition, the efficacy of the European Union's comparable missions in Georgia and Moldova, should their 'frozen' conflicts escalate, remains a pertinent question to explore.

The European Union is no longer overshadowed by the North Atlantic Treaty, with the Union's capabilities significantly enhanced as a result of such inter-organizational cooperation. The ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine represents another major external event prompting a paradigm shift in Europe. The Versailles Declaration, issued in March 2022, recognized the EU's need to bolster its defense capabilities, fortify its defense industry, and invest strategically in infrastructure and technology to tackle both traditional and hybrid threats. Its operational implementation framework, the EU Strategic Compass, proposes an ambitious plan of action to strengthen the EU's security and defense policy by 2030 in four key pillars: act, invest, partner, and secure. The 'act' and 'invest' pillars call for strategic investments and enhanced collaboration among member states. The 'partner' pillar reiterates the commitment to NATO, and other strategic partners, upholding the Declaration's assertion of maintaining important alliances even while pursuing greater autonomy. Finally, the 'secure' pillar captures the Declaration's emphasis on responding to evolving security threats, including cyber-resilience and defense-related space activities. In essence, the Versailles Declaration and the Strategic Compass together illustrate a clear trajectory towards a stronger, self-reliant EU that can manage its own security, reducing dependencies, and contributing positively to global peace and stability. Both these documents

underpin the EU's collective resolve to adapt and respond to the changing security landscape while embracing greater strategic autonomy.

The concept of a robust, centralized security and defense mechanism in Europe no longer appears utopian. According to a 2022 survey, 60% of Europeans favor the idea of a common European army, marking the highest level of support for such a notion to date. The concurrent development of the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (EURDC) framework consisting of EU battlegroups, indicates a strong and decisive paradigm shift caused by the Russian aggression against Ukraine. By pursuing a policy of continuous integration and using both soft and hard power tools to foster global development, the European Union is poised to strengthen its role in preserving international peace and security.

Soft Power in Security: The Role of Values and Economic Interests in Shaping the EU as a Global Actor

Soft power might be considered a vague concept because the means and mechanisms through which it influences international actors are complex and underspecified (Rothman, 2011). However, its importance has been paramount since the inception of the EU. Maastricht Treaty's objectives of the European Union's external action include promoting its values and international cooperation to contribute to peace and security.

Although few official documents directly describe the EU's actions as soft power, multiple initiatives focus on promoting European values and interests globally. The most recent include: "EU Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024" and Joint Communication by the High Representative and the European Commission: "A New EU-US Agenda for Global Change." There are also numerous initiatives directed at other countries through the EU Eastern Partnership.

The European Union has successfully utilized strategic communication and public diplomacy to shape narratives, counter disinformation, and promote its values and policies globally to enhance its image and facilitate transformation. Initiatives like the EU's East Strategic Communication Task Force, which address disinformation, and the Europe Direct information centers, contribute

to the EU's soft power efforts. As a result, nations find European values appealing and integrate them into their political landscapes, enhancing international security as a result.

With the rising use of sharp power by authoritarian regimes and the rapid spread of AI, the above initiatives and counter-misinformation solutions, even past proposals, e.g., the European Parliament resolution to counteract anti-EU propaganda, need to be built upon and further expanded. Disinformation should be countered with quality journalism produced by the largest media outlets from across the alliance and not just through government-sponsored counterinformation campaigns.

Enhancing the 2020 European Council's resolution on encryption necessitates a collaborative effort between the private sector and Brussels. This partnership is instrumental in countering cyber threats that compromise European values and in fostering the dissemination of soft power to bolster security, with an emphasis on cybersecurity.

Actions described in the latest General Report on the activities of the European Union in 2022 are promising and seem to focus on fighting disinformation. The EU appears to invest in developing new tools to "impose political, economic and reputational costs on the perpetrators of harmful information manipulation and interference, including those who target elections and open media environments." These actions should perhaps be conducted in cooperation with other countries that are part of the broadly understood Transatlantic West to better defend shared values and economic interests from the sharp power of non-democratic states and to better appeal to the EU's eastern neighbors.

The EU and the US are connected both culturally and through NATO. Therefore, cooperation in spreading shared values described in the Joint Communication between the High Representative and the European Commission appears critical. Promoting democratic governance, human rights, and sustainable development together would likely assist in protecting the EU's economy, helping to secure its position globally.

Assessing Feminist Foreign Policy: Concrete Strategy or Theoretical Construct?

We shall a priori define "feminist foreign policy", before assessing an evaluation of its hypothetical appropriateness within the contemporary EU foreign policy and security realms.

The modern concept of security within the EU is still characterized by a policy paradigm of masculine dominance and androcentric perspective, lacking contemplation of the knowledge and the experience of women, and other oppressed groups. The Greens-European Free Alliance proposed within the EU Parliament to incorporate intersectional feminism and gender mainstreaming as guiding principles for EU foreign policy. It defined them as cardinal postulates to be upheld by the EU when participating in multilateral fora and in all political and strategic dialogues, including those with third parties about their human rights obligations. (*“Making the EU Foreign Policy a Feminist One,” 2021*)

Various scholars suggest that the feminist foreign policy implements international treaties and agreements that advance the rights and participation of women and other political minorities effectively. They also reaffirm how the Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy, introduced in 2014, is based on four Rs: rights, resources, representation, and reality check. (*Feminist Foreign Policy - Imperative for a More Secure and Just World | Heinrich Böll Stiftung | Brussels Office - European Union, 2019*)

The International Peace Institute provided evidence, through research conducted apropos “Women’s Roles in Peace Processes”, that women’s involvement in peacebuilding process increments the likelihood of a peace agreement to be reached in the short term, while also enhancing its sustainability, and the likelihood of both peace and gender-sensitive rules to being included. This transparently stands as a point to take into consideration as Europe has been pressurized and discomposed since February 2022, with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, after years of peace interrupted by episodic bellicose circumstances. (*O’Reilly & al., 2015*)

Research have indicated that a state level of peace is strictly related to the treatment assured to its women. It has also been provided that economic growth is typically more rapid in nations with reduced gender disparities. Therefore, feminist foreign policy promotes political stability and economic development, while also advocating for human rights. (*Hudson, 2012*) (*“Making the EU Foreign Policy a Feminist One,” 2021*)

Nevertheless, feminist foreign policy presents incompatibilities with contemporary institution incorporating the role of guarantors of security, *inter alia* NATO. The feminist foreign policy framework challenges the realist perspective of International Relations, which valorizes the state and its military sector perceiving violence as endemic to the global system. It adjudges the

establishment of peace ministries as fundamental to the promotion of peace principles. Nonetheless, the unpredictability of sudden shifts within the security sector could consequentially result in ambiguous effects; an outcome to be avoided as Europe palpitates with a major war in its Eastern neighborhood. (*Blanchard, 2003*) (*Feminist Foreign Policy - Imperative for a More Secure and Just World* | *Heinrich Böll Stiftung* | *Brussels Office - European Union, 2019*)

Conclusion

An overview of selected executive policies, concepts, directives, and treaties combined with a track record of activities performed under the patronage of the European Union suggests that the bloc has demarginalized its role in ensuring both regional and international peace and security by devising strong cooperation frameworks with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. A series of external events has convinced European policymakers to maneuver their way into autonomy in the security sphere by adopting more assertive, resilient, and relevant strategies of collective security. Whether or not these strategies will be effective in the long term depends on the willingness of policymakers to pursue a more robust path of transformation by amending the existing foundational legislative base of the EU to achieve full security and defense autonomy. The war in Ukraine will play a major transformational role in the process and may serve as its catalyst, while the EU's mediation efforts in the Caucasus have already proven a strengthened stance of the bloc in the region.

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