

Europe's Security at a Crossroads: Beyond U.S. Leadership?

In a multipolarized world, good transatlantic relations can no longer be taken for granted. U.S. priorities are shifting, and Europe faces the question of whether it can build stronger security structures of its own. This working group introduces the debate on NATO and EU security initiatives, and the concept of "strategic autonomy." Participants reflected on how shifting power balances affect Europe's security architecture and transatlantic cohesion.

Summary of the Discussion in the Working Group

On the first day, discussions focused on the current and historical transatlantic relationship, particularly Europe's capabilities and dependencies on the United States. The group's discussions highlighted key U.S. dependencies and why Europe seeks to reduce them. Participants discussed challenges related to strategic autonomy and by analyzing several possible scenarios concluded that Europe certainly faces tremendous challenges, but should aim to become more independent and united. On the second day, the group addressed EU decision-making and the European pillar in NATO, highlighting that unanimity requirements slow defence decisions. The group discussed different interests such as industry, different member states and the European Commission among others. They concluded that "Europe needs a faster and more flexible decision-making process." They suggested that a qualitative majority vote might help to make the process more flexible.

Key Questions Emerging from the Discussion

- How can the EU increase its defence capabilities without damaging the relationship with the U.S.?
- What changes to the decision-making process would be necessary to make the development of the EU defence capabilities more effective?

Summary of the Discussion at the Closing Panel

The closing panel engaged directly with the group's questions on European strategic autonomy and the future of transatlantic security. Panelists broadly agreed that the shift toward greater European defence responsibility is now structural, not temporary, regardless of U.S. political cycles. One panelist emphasised that "the question is no longer whether Europe can lead — it is whether Europe will choose to," pointing to the EU's rearmament initiatives as evidence of political will finally meeting institutional capacity. A point of tension emerged around NATO's role: some panelists cautioned against framing autonomy as a departure from the Alliance, while participants pushed back on the feasibility of European self-reliance without American enablers. The discussion concluded with consensus that young Europeans must hold their governments accountable for translating defence spending commitments into genuine capability.