

NATO and Europe After the Ankara Summit: The Path to Strategic Responsibility

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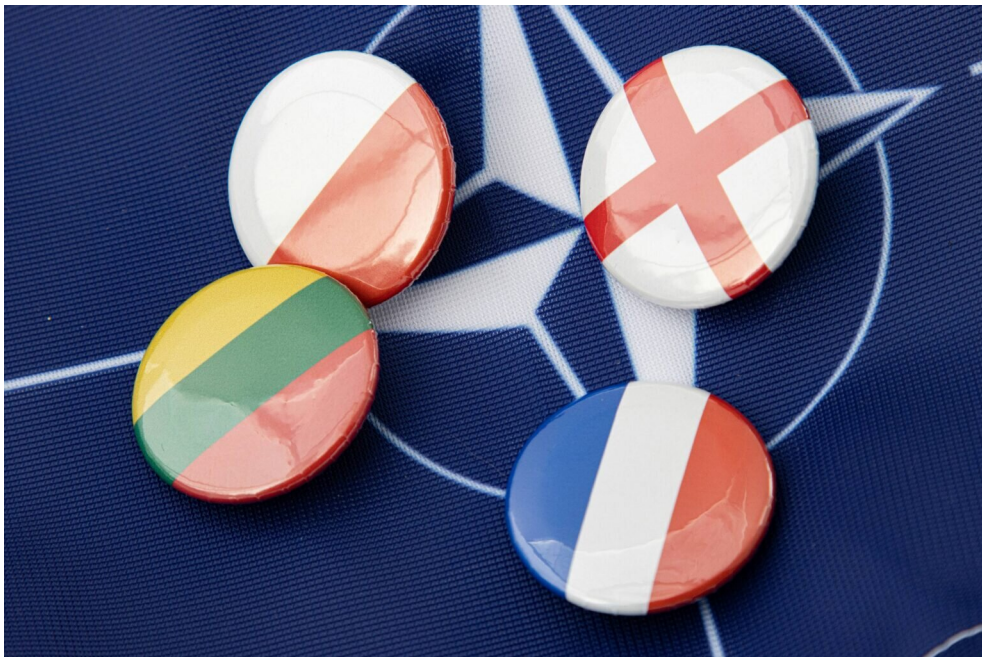


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A Guest Contribution by Gianni Pittella, former Vice-President of the European Parliament and former leader of the S&D Group.

The NATO Summit in Ankara marked another important step in redefining the Alliance's role in an increasingly unstable international environment. Russia's aggression against Ukraine, growing tensions in the Indo-Pacific, cyber threats, hybrid warfare, and the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence have transformed the global security landscape. NATO remains the cornerstone of transatlantic security, but one lesson emerges more clearly than ever: a stronger NATO requires a stronger Europe.

For decades, European security relied heavily on American military leadership. That model is now under growing pressure. The United States continues to be Europe's indispensable ally, but Washington increasingly expects European countries to assume greater responsibility for their own defense. This is not a sign of weakening transatlantic solidarity. On the contrary, it is the necessary evolution of a mature partnership. The Ankara Summit reaffirmed the Alliance's unity and its commitment to collective defense. It also highlighted the importance of increasing defense spending, improving military readiness, strengthening industrial capacity, and enhancing resilience against new forms of conflict. These objectives cannot be achieved without a significant European contribution. Europe must therefore accelerate the construction of its own defense capabilities. This should not be interpreted as an alternative to NATO but as its European pillar. Strategic autonomy has often been misunderstood as strategic separation. It is neither desirable nor realistic. Europe's ambition should be strategic responsibility: becoming capable of acting when necessary while remaining fully integrated within the Atlantic Alliance. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that modern warfare is no longer defined solely by conventional military power. Drones, satellite intelligence, cybersecurity, data management, artificial intelligence, and industrial resilience have become decisive factors. Europe must invest not only in weapons systems but also in innovation, digital technologies, and a competitive defense industry capable of producing at scale. This also requires overcoming the fragmentation of European defense procurement. Twenty-seven national markets cannot efficiently compete with global powers. Joint procurement, common research, shared military capabilities, and integrated supply chains should become the new standard. The European Defence Fund and other common initiatives represent important first steps, but much more ambition is

needed.

Financing this transformation will require innovative solutions. Europe cannot meet its

security ambitions solely through national budgets. Common European financing

instruments—including forms of jointly issued debt dedicated to strategic investments—should become part of the discussion. Defense, like climate transition and

digital competitiveness, increasingly represents a European public good.

At the same time, Europe must continue supporting Ukraine. Its resistance is not only about

defending national sovereignty but also about protecting the principles upon which the

European security order has been built for decades. A just and lasting peace can only be

achieved from a position of strength, not through concessions that reward aggression.

The Ankara Summit also reminded us that security is broader than military deterrence.

Energy security, protection of critical infrastructure, supply chains, economic resilience,

democratic institutions, and the fight against disinformation are now integral components of

collective defense. NATO and the European Union must deepen their co-operation across all

these dimensions.

The future of transatlantic relations will not be determined by the amount of dependence but

by the quality of partnership. An economically stronger, technologically more advanced, and

militarily more capable Europe will not weaken NATO. It will make the Alliance more credible,

more balanced, and more effective.

History has repeatedly shown that European integration has advanced through crises.

Today's geopolitical challenges should become the catalyst for completing another unfinished chapter of the European project: the construction of a genuine European Defense

Union within a strong Atlantic Alliance.

The message after Ankara is therefore clear. NATO remains indispensable. But Europe's

credibility—and ultimately NATO's strength—will increasingly depend on Europe's

willingness to assume greater responsibility for its own security, while preserving the unity

that has guaranteed peace and stability across the Atlantic for more than seventy-five years.

About the Author: Gianni Pittella is a distinguished Italian politician and longstanding advocate for European integration. He previously served as the First Vice-President of the European Parliament (2009–2014) and as the Leader of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) in the European Parliament from 2014 to 2018. Over the course of his extensive public career, Pittella served as a Member of the European Parliament for nearly two decades (1999–2018) and later as a member of the Italian Senate. A prolific commentator on European integration, governance, and foreign policy, he has authored several works on the challenges and future of the European project, including *A Brief History of the Future of the United States of Europe*.

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