

“YES, EU CAN IF EU JUST DO IT”

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EDITORIAL



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Co-funded by
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I write this Editorial following an experience that has stayed with me for months. Shortly after the so-called Turnberry Deal, I attended a closed-door discussion with senior European Union (EU) officials and a group of think tankers. I left the room dispirited. What I heard was not strategy, nor ambition, but hesitation dressed up as realism:

"We were in shock. We will see. We must assess the political reality. Turnberry is a truce; it brings relief and predictability. It is the best bilateral agreement we could get with the United States (U.S.). The anti-coercion instrument is difficult to trigger. What leverage do we really have? Nothing that matters to the U.S. The security relationship is vital; we cannot take risks."

With this mindset, Europe will struggle to adapt to a world that is rapidly shifting beneath its feet. We speak of [strategic autonomy](#), yet behave as if dependency were an immutable law of nature. We pride ourselves on being rational, nuanced, and measured, but this too often translates into a lack of initiative and courage. It makes us predictable in our inaction, which in geopolitics is a weakness.

Europeans tend to overestimate the risks of action and underestimate the risks of inaction. Yet history shows that the cost of doing nothing is often far higher. The transatlantic relationship, long considered the bedrock of European security, is crumbling fast. What is the value of commitments made by an American president who, at the slightest disagreement, threatens to walk away from NATO? What does 'alliance' mean when it becomes a vehicle for political alignment with Washington? Europe cannot afford to ignore these signals. Nor can it continue to assume that strategic over-dependence is sustainable.

More than a century ago, Richard

Coudenhove-Kalergi urged Europeans to "think in continents, not in countries." His words resonate today with renewed urgency. Europe's challenge is not merely to react to crises, but to define a coherent vision for its place in the world. That vision must be ambitious, forward-looking, and rooted in concrete action. One unifying theme could be technological transformation, a domain where sovereignty, security, and prosperity intersect.

There are some encouraging signs that Europe is beginning to move and that the direction is shifting. What follows is not an exhaustive list, but a snapshot of initiatives that suggest Europe is capable of more than it often believes.

The first example is satellite navigation. Europe has already demonstrated its capacity for strategic autonomy with Galileo, operational since 2016, and EGNOS, which enhances positioning signals for aviation and maritime use. But the work does not stop there. Plans for a new generation of low-orbit satellites, sometimes referred to as FUTURNAV, aim to strengthen resilience and precision. Unlike traditional geostationary systems, these smaller satellites orbit closer to Earth, improving signal reliability and reducing vulnerability. This is not merely a technical upgrade; it is a strategic necessity in a world where space infrastructure is increasingly contested.

The same logic applies to finance. For decades, Europe has relied heavily on American-controlled payment systems such as Visa, Mastercard, and PayPal. In normal times, this dependence may seem benign, but with current geopolitical tensions, it becomes a vulnerability. We have recently seen examples of European citizens being [targeted](#) by Washington for doing their job as judges or as United Nations civil servants. The development of a digital euro, long discussed yet always delayed, is now gaining

momentum under the guidance of the European Central Bank. Beyond its technical features, the digital euro represents a broader ambition: to ensure that Europe retains control over its financial infrastructure. At the same time, the Eurogroup is accelerating efforts to strengthen the euro's international role. As its new President Kyriakos Pierrakakis [recently noted](#), the euro's global standing cannot be taken for granted in an era of geopolitical competition and monetary fragmentation. Completing the Savings and Investment Union and enhancing centralised supervision are essential steps in this direction. Financial sovereignty cannot remain a distant dream.

Digital capability is another pillar of European autonomy. Europe has long lagged behind the U.S. and China in key technological sectors, but recent developments suggest a change in trajectory. The French Artificial Intelligence company Mistral has emerged as a serious contender in the global digital race, forming partnerships with technological firms such as the Dutch semiconductor giant ASML. Poland has become a haven for thousands of start-ups, many of which are in the tech sphere. There are other such moves. They are not isolated successes. They are part of a broader ecosystem that includes startups, research institutions, and industrial partnerships. The challenge now is to scale these efforts, ensure access to capital, and create a regulatory environment that both guarantees respect for our values and fosters innovation. Europe does not need to replicate Silicon Valley, but it does need to compete on a global scale.

Perhaps the most significant shift is taking place in defence policy. For the first time, the EU has begun to finance defence spending through common debt instruments. The creation of the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) mechanism marks a historic step toward collective capability-building. With

potential funding reaching up to almost EUR 200 billion, SAFE aims to strengthen Europe's industrial base and reduce reliance on external suppliers. Meanwhile, discussions around using the European Stability Mechanism as a defence financing tool signal a deeper transformation. If realised, this could unlock hundreds of billions of euros for rearmament and supply chain resilience. National efforts are also accelerating. Germany, for instance, is planning massive increases in defence spending, with security companies like Rheinmetall expanding production capacity at unprecedented speed. The economic impact of these decisions is already visible: European defence firms are outperforming major U.S. tech stocks, and increased spending is feeding into industrial activity. Even bond markets are responding, with rising yields reflecting expectations of sustained investment. This is more than a policy shift; it is the emergence of a European defence economy.

Taken together, these examples point to a simple conclusion: Europe is not powerless. On the contrary, it possesses immense economic, technological, and institutional resources. What it often lacks is not capacity, but confidence. The reflex to defer, wait, and assess endlessly before acting is our Achilles' heel. In a world where others are willing to take risks, hesitation becomes a strategic liability. Yet this does not mean Europe needs to abandon caution or prudence. Boldness and responsibility are not mutually exclusive, but leadership requires initiative. A positive example of the EU rising to the occasion came during the COVID-19 pandemic, when joint vaccine procurement enabled it to leverage its collective weight. Why not apply the same principle to energy and defence? Joint procurement could transform Europe's bargaining power, reduce fragmentation, and ensure greater security of supply. In a world of resource competition and supply chain disruptions, acting together is not just more

efficient, it is indispensable. It is also the best recipe for defending our way of life.

Europe stands at a crossroads. It can continue to rely on assumptions that no longer hold, clinging to a model of interdependence that others are actively reshaping. Or it can embrace a more assertive role, grounded in its own interests and capabilities. Strategic autonomy is not about isolation. It is about choice: the ability to act, or not act, on one's own terms.

The initiatives outlined above, space infrastructure, digital currency, defence investment, and joint procurement, are not ends in themselves. They are building blocks of a more resilient, more sovereign Europe. But they require political will. They require a shift in mindset from caution to confidence, from reaction to anticipation. The tools are there. The resources are there. The first steps have been taken. What we now need is the courage to follow through, to believe that ["Yes, EU can if EU just do it."](#)

All the opinions expressed in this publication are the sole view of the author, and do not represent the position of the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) or of its Members.

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