

Europe's Quest for Strategic Autonomy:

The Idea of a European Army and
Türkiye's Role in the Future Security Architecture



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Introduction

The relationship between people's quest to live under better conditions and the satisfaction they derive from life has been a subject of debate since the very earliest periods of the history of thought. Initially addressed primarily within the framework of philosophical thought, this issue has, since the 20th century, evolved into a more systematic and theoretical field of study alongside the development of the social sciences. During this process, one of the most effective approaches to explaining the needs underlying human behaviour has been the 'Hierarchy of Needs' model developed by the psychologist Abraham Maslow. Maslow classified human needs into five successive basic levels, arguing that individuals' behaviour and goals are shaped by needs of varying nature. According to this approach, an individual's orientation towards higher-level expectations and goals is closely linked to the fulfilment, to a certain extent, of the basic needs found at the lower levels of the hierarchy. Consequently, the model demonstrates that human beings are not merely creatures striving to meet their basic life requirements; rather, they possess a multidimensional structure that is oriented towards increasingly complex needs such as safety, belonging, esteem and self-actualisation. At the first level of the hierarchy of needs developed by Maslow lie the basic physiological needs that must be met for a person to sustain their biological existence. Once vital needs such as nutrition, water, sleep and sexuality have been met to a certain extent, the second stage of the hierarchy is constituted by the 'need for security'. This sequence demonstrates that, from a human perspective, security is regarded as one of the fundamental needs that follows immediately after the basic necessities of life.

The historical process also demonstrates that the quest for security played a significant role in the formation of human communities. Rather than acting alone in the face of various threats arising from nature and the environment, people have benefited from the advantages offered by living in communities. In the process stretching from the hunter-gatherer groups of the Palaeolithic period to the more permanent settlements of the Neolithic period, the practice of living together has gradually taken on a more structured and organised character. With the spread of settled life, population growth and the diversification of social relations, small settlements gradually evolved into more complex political and social structures over time; the emergence of towns and, subsequently, city-states paved the way for security to transcend its status as a mere individual necessity and become one of the fundamental issues of collective life and political organisation.

The evolution of human communities from individual lifestyles to organised structures such as tribes, and subsequently to more complex political organisations, has brought about a significant change in the nature of the need for security. Initially emerging as a fundamental need for the individual to protect their own existence, security has acquired a collective character with the advancement of socialisation; alongside the process of state formation, it has become one of the fundamental functions of political organisation. In this respect, security is a concept too broad to be confined solely to the protection of a person's physical existence. The preservation of the values, achievements and resulting interests held by individuals and societies is also considered to fall within the scope of security. Peter Hough's identification of security as a fundamental element amongst the reasons for the emergence of the state also points to this strong relationship between the state and security. Consequently, the state and security present themselves as two phenomena that, in terms of their historical development, cannot be considered entirely independent of one another.

The shift of the need for security from the individual to the societal level has also necessitated the existence of an organised and legitimate authority capable of meeting that need. Thus, the security that individuals once sought to ensure through their own means has, over time, been entrusted to the responsibility of political authority. Throughout the tradition of political thought, stretching from antiquity to the modern era, the idea that one of the state's most important functions is to establish social order and protect individuals from threats has been reiterated in various forms. In this respect, the state has been regarded not merely as an institutional structure performing administrative functions, but also as a supreme political authority that safeguards the continuity of social existence and achievements.

One of the most influential explanations of the relationship between the state and security is set out in Thomas Hobbes's work "Leviathan", published in 1651. At the heart of Hobbes's political thought lies the idea that, in the absence of a common and binding authority, people may be driven into conflict. For this reason, individuals accept the sovereignty of a common political authority in order to protect their lives and possessions and to escape the climate of insecurity arising from the constant threat of conflict. Hobbes's "Leviathan" metaphor represents a powerful mechanism of sovereignty that individuals create of their own volition, yet which, once established, transcends them. The establishment of such an order also entails the restriction of individual freedom to a certain extent. In other words, the individual relinquishes a portion of their absolute freedom; in return, they benefit from the order and security provided by the state.

The approach that ascribes a superior status to the state is not limited to Hobbes alone. In Hegel's political thought, too, the state is placed in a special position that transcends individual interests and stands above social life. The approach attributed to Hegel, in which the state is described as 'God's march through the world', reflects the idea that the state carries a meaning higher than that of a mere administrative organisation. In this understanding, the state is regarded not as a simple sum of individual wills, but as the institutionalised form of social and historical existence.

The historical foundations of the school of thought that links the emergence of the state to human social existence can be traced back to Ancient Greece. In Aristotle's political philosophy, human beings are regarded as beings who, by their very nature, are inclined to live together with others and to form part of a political community. In line with this approach, social organisation, which began with the family, developed through the formation of broader communities and ultimately culminated in the political community known as the polis. The aim of this organisation was not merely to meet people's basic needs for survival; it was also to create a social structure in which order was established, the common good was safeguarded, and a virtuous life was made possible. Consequently, the state has been regarded not merely as a chance consequence of people living together, but as a political manifestation of the organisation of social life within the framework of specific rules and institutions. Furthermore, the fact that the state—originally established to ensure the security of individuals—has, over time, become a political entity in its own right that requires protection has also broadened the scope of the concept of security. Thus, the concept of security, which initially focused on the protection of the individual and society, was expanded to include the protection of the state's sovereignty, political order, territorial integrity and continued existence. This transformation laid the intellectual foundations for the concepts of state security—which would acquire a systematic framework in the modern era—and, subsequently, national security.

What threatens national security? What steps need to be taken to counter these threats? These questions have led to the emergence of different approaches over time.

Questions regarding how international security is to be ensured, who the subject of security is, and from which sources threats arise have paved the way for the development of diverse theoretical approaches within the discipline of international relations. Realism, the most long-standing approach within these debates, views security primarily through the prism of the state's survival and the preservation of its sovereignty. In realist thought, the international system is regarded as an anarchic structure in which there is no binding higher authority above states. Consequently, states are largely required to ensure their own security through their own capabilities. The concepts of power, national interest and survival thus lie at the heart of the realist understanding of security. However, a state's efforts to enhance its security by developing its military capabilities or forming alliances may create a perception of threat amongst other states and lead to the adoption of countermeasures. This situation, conceptualised as the 'security dilemma', demonstrates that the pursuit of security can, paradoxically, generate even greater insecurity. Neo-realism, which develops system-level explanations of realism, argues that state behaviour is influenced not only by human nature or the preferences of political leaders, but also by constraints arising from the structure of the international system. Whilst the defensive realist approach, associated with Kenneth Waltz, emphasises the need to maintain sufficient power to safeguard security, John J. Mearsheimer's offensive realism argues that, under conditions of uncertainty, great powers seek to acquire as much power as possible and establish regional supremacy.

In contrast to realism's power- and competition-centred conception of security, idealist and liberal approaches have argued that international politics does not necessarily have to generate constant conflict. Idealist thought, which became particularly prominent in the wake of the devastation caused by the First World War, placed special emphasis on international law, shared norms, institutionalisation and collective security in the prevention of war. This approach, which found its political expression in the ideas of Woodrow Wilson, is based on the assumption that states acting within common institutions can contribute to the establishment of security in a more lasting manner. Liberalism, on the other hand, builds upon this intellectual foundation to argue that democratic governance, economic relations, international institutions and interdependence can raise the costs of conflict and encourage cooperation. With the interdependence approach developed by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, the security agenda has been extended beyond military matters; economic, social, technological and environmental relations have also become elements of international security analysis. Thus, from a liberal perspective, security has been assessed not merely in terms of military capability, but as a phenomenon linked to the intensification of relations between states and societies and the regulation of these relations by institutions.

Marxist and world-system approaches, on the other hand, highlight that security issues stem not only from military competition between states, but also from economic structures and unequal power relations. From a Marxist perspective, political and social relations cannot be considered in isolation from modes of production and the distribution of class power. Consequently, the question of whose interests security policies serve takes on particular significance. Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems approach broadens this debate to a global scale, explaining the international system through the unequal economic relations between the centre, the semi-periphery and the periphery. Accordingly, economic dependency, the unequal distribution of resources and structural disparities within the global capitalist system do not

merely create development problems; they also lay the groundwork for the emergence of political fragility and security issues. Consequently, security becomes a broader issue, linked not merely to the neutralisation of military threats, but to an understanding of the structural inequalities generated within the international system.

The diversification of the security agenda following the Cold War has, in turn, led to variables previously regarded as secondary—such as identity, culture, norms, discourse and gender—becoming increasingly prominent in security studies. The constructivist approach argues that the concepts of threat and security are not fixed and objective categories; rather, they acquire meaning through social interactions, identities, norms and discourses amongst actors. This perspective highlights that, in order to understand why an actor is perceived as a threat during a particular period, one must look not only at their military capabilities but also at the meanings attributed to that actor and their identity-based relationships. On the other hand, the English School argues that, by bridging the gap between realism's emphasis on power and interests and liberalism's understanding of norms and institutions, states can form an international community shaped around common rules, institutions and values, even whilst operating within an anarchic system. The feminist approach to security, too, challenges the limitations of the traditional state-centred and military understanding of security, drawing attention to the effects of war, violence and insecurity on different social groups. Thus, the historical development of international security thought can be interpreted as a transformation from a narrow concept of security—explained solely by the question 'how is the state protected?'—into a multidimensional field of inquiry encompassing the questions 'who is protected, against which threats, by what means, and under what conditions?'

As a Key Theory: The Copenhagen School

This approach, which emerged in the 1980s and sought to establish a security framework based on the behaviour of states—a process accelerated by the power vacuum at the end of the Cold War—takes its name from the University of Copenhagen, where it was founded. Having commenced its work in 1985 with the establishment of the 'Centre for Peace and Conflict Research' at the same address, the school initially focused primarily on the non-military dimensions of security and European security. The school, whose name was given by McSweeney and which was pioneered by scholars including Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, as well as Jaap de Wilde, Morten Kelstrup and Pierre Lemaitre, has seen the name adopted by all its members. In doctrinal terms, the school aims to operate on the basis of two motivations: to free the concept of security from a narrow military-political approach, and to protect this ambiguous yet important concept from becoming inconsistent.

If the Copenhagen School were to be positioned in relation to previous work in the field, it would not be incorrect to say that its position lies somewhere between traditional state-centred security studies and post-structuralist security studies. The School's theorists began by defining the concept of security. According to Barry Buzan, one of the School's leading theorists, security—which is in fact a vague concept—is generally defined as the absence of threats to fundamental values. In addition to this approach, the concept of 'threat' is not merely a situation encountered in the military sphere that results in conflict or war. Any situation that places individuals' existence and their vital and social activities at risk, or seeks to eliminate them, should be assessed as a threat and falls within the scope of security.

The Copenhagen School is based on three fundamental approaches. The first of these is the 'Sectoral Approach'. This concept is based on the categorisation of threats and the related

concept of security. According to the Copenhagen School, security—which is not merely a military matter—is examined across five sectors under the principle of the sectoral approach: military security, political security, economic security, environmental security and social security. Sectoralisation refers to the process of removing a specific issue from the realm of normal political processes, presenting it as an existential threat, and thereby legitimising extraordinary measures. In this approach, security is a process constructed through discourse—as we shall detail below—rather than an objective state of affairs. Military security, the first of the sectors mentioned above, has historically been the starting point for security studies. Throughout the Cold War, security was defined almost entirely within the framework of military threats; the struggle waged by states to protect their sovereignty and territorial integrity was regarded as the fundamental domain of international security. Military security encompasses an actor's defence capabilities and deterrence against the risk of armed attack. States develop armies, defence systems, strategic alliances and deterrent policies to ensure military security. According to the Copenhagen School, the 'protection of physical assets' lies at the heart of this sector. These assets include both national borders and the state's political integrity. In the process of sectoralisation of military security, political elites and defence institutions are the key actors. When these actors succeed in persuading society to perceive a particular development as a threat, extraordinary measures may be implemented. Such measures may include mobilisation, an increase in the defence budget, rearmament or military operations outside national borders. Political security comes second; it is one of the most critical sectors, coming immediately after military security. Political security concerns the protection of a state's administrative structure, regime, legitimacy and ideological integrity. This sector analyses developments that threaten the state's existence not only physically but also at a political level. Political security is generally closely intertwined with the military and social sectors. For example, threats to the political regime are often suppressed through military measures. Alternatively, pressures on the identity of an ethnic group can be addressed at two distinct levels: within the context of both social and political security. For this reason, the Copenhagen School advocates viewing these sectors not as distinct entities separated by rigid boundaries, but rather as interrelated analytical domains. How political security is perceived is largely linked to the type of regime in place. In authoritarian regimes, even the existence of an opposition can be presented as a threat to political security. The third sector of security is economic security. Within the Copenhagen School's sectoral approach, economic security focuses on developments that threaten states' and societies' control over material resources and their economic stability. This sector analyses how internal and external threats to the functioning of economic structures are constructed within the security discourse. Economic security refers to the vulnerability of a state or society in the face of developments that threaten its economic independence, production capacity, access to resources and market stability. Factors that may threaten economic security include: difficulties in accessing energy and raw materials, excessive external borrowing, inflation and unemployment, trade wars, uncontrolled foreign investment and external dependence in strategic sectors. Another area of security is environmental security. Environmental security addresses the impact on individuals, society and the state of threats arising from the degradation of the natural environment. According to the Copenhagen School, environmental issues, like other sectors, are a matter of security and should be analysed in this context. Environmental security refers to situations where developments such as the depletion of natural resources, climate change, the destruction of ecosystems, the loss of biodiversity, drought, water conflicts, deforestation and environmental disasters pose a threat to societies and states. Such threats generally develop slowly, but their effects are long-term and devastating. The Copenhagen School argues that environmental problems threaten the fundamental

conditions of human life and therefore, in some cases, have an existential nature. For example, the risk of island states being submerged as a result of climate change directly threatens their physical existence. Unlike the other security theories mentioned above, the Copenhagen School's approach to environmental security has broadened the scope of security studies and demonstrated that ecological threats can also become serious security issues. Assessing environmental threats within the security framework ensures that these threats are taken more seriously, whilst also raising ethical, political and governance questions. The final element of the Copenhagen School's sectoral approach to security is societal security. One of the most original contributions of the Copenhagen School's security studies—and one that sets it apart from traditional approaches—is the concept of 'societal security'. This sector focuses not on the individual or the state, but on the identities and social cohesion of communities. According to Buzan, societal security concerns the measures a society takes in the face of developments that threaten the continuity of its collective identity. At the heart of societal security lies collective identity, which forms the answer to the question 'who are we?'. Identity-based structures—such as ethnic groups, religious communities, linguistic communities or national cultures—are engaged in the struggle to sustain their existence. This struggle intensifies in the face of external or internal threats. According to the Copenhagen School, when a society feels its identity is under threat, the issue shifts into the realm of security. Such threats may arise from the perception that the foreign population poses a threat to identity – particularly the fear of cultural assimilation arising from migration – the incompatibility of ethnic or linguistic minorities with the state identity, the weakening of local culture in the face of global culture, and ideological or identity-based interventions by other countries. In this context, the subject is not the state, but society. However, society is not a single, monolithic entity; there is often competition between different identities. For example, in a given country, both majority and minority groups may feel that their identities are under threat. This situation can also fuel social conflicts.

Another significant contribution made by the Copenhagen School to security literature is its second approach: 'Securitisation'. This concept has often become such a fundamental approach that it has even come to overshadow the school's name. It is a process of constructing security, the core argument of which is based on 'Discourse Analysis' and 'Speech Acts'. In social science research, the concept referred to as 'discourse' constitutes a field of analysis distinct from reality as defined by language. Although the two concepts are often treated as interchangeable, this is not an accurate classification. What we refer to as 'discourse' is a broad form of speech that encompasses meanings far deeper than mere words. In this respect, discourse is a higher-order phenomenon that encompasses elements of social relations such as ideas, knowledge and power. Furthermore, discourse can be understood as the transformation of thought into action. This formulation establishes an ontological relationship between discourse and language. The Copenhagen School has incorporated the concept of 'speech act' into the concept of security—a key dimension of international relations—again drawing on discourse analysis. In this context, whilst studies on securitisation focus on how security issues are produced by actors, who articulates the existential threat to the referent object, and the processes of employing extraordinary measures against such threats, it is argued that the threat to states or the international system is created or brought to an end through the discourses of leaders. One of the key points here is that the threat situation articulated through discourse constitutes a state of affairs requiring immediate intervention and urgent measures. These measures must be fully accepted by the public, who must participate in and endorse the actions to be taken in response to the threat.

The third and final security approach of the Copenhagen School is the abstract construct known as 'Regional Security Complexes'. This concept is essentially analysed by dividing the global arena into security compartments. According to Buzan, one of the architects of this theory, states across the globe are, in fact, interdependent in terms of security. However, as threats and insecurities are largely related to proximity, the interdependence of neighbouring states cannot be the same as that of distant states. In this context, anarchy and geographical divisions give rise to regional complexes where security interdependence is concentrated. Similarly, the natural interdependencies established between different states facing a common threat are expressed in this sense. According to the same approach, countries in certain geographical regions define their security in relation to one another rather than in terms of their own internal circumstances. In other words, a state's security threat often originates not from outside, but from neighbouring countries. This, in turn, triggers mutual security interdependence and the transmission of crises. According to the Copenhagen School, the Middle East is a classic example of a regional security complex. Although global actors such as the US and Russia play significant roles in the Middle East, the region's own internal dynamics are the key determining factors. The Copenhagen School argues that a security complex must not be 'formed by external influences'; the Middle East meets this criterion because the actors within it constantly perceive one another and define themselves in terms of threats. Instability in Iraq affects Syria, the crisis in Syria affects Lebanon; the Palestinian issue shapes the security perceptions of all Arab countries. Security issues know no borders and spread throughout the region. This makes the region a security sphere that must be examined holistically. Similarly, East Asia, particularly with its increasing economic and military interactions over the last thirty years, is a unique complex shaped by its own internal security dynamics. Just like in the Middle East, the states in East Asia (China, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, Taiwan, etc.) are directly influenced by one another's security policies. For example: China's pressure on Taiwan leads to an increase in the regional military presence of Japan and the US, whilst North Korea's nuclear tests prompt changes in the security strategies of South Korea and Japan; these relationships create a situation of mutual security interdependence and competition.

In all the respects mentioned above, the Copenhagen School is a key approach due to its ability to analyse security issues today.

Understanding European Security through the Copenhagen School's Approach to Security

Europe's capacity to establish its own security independently emerges, within the historical development of European integration, not merely as a military and institutional issue, but as a multidimensional problem area that must be assessed in the context of the definition of security, the perception of threats and the formation of a common strategic identity. The European security architecture that took shape following the Second World War was institutionalised largely around the military superiority of the United States and NATO's collective defence mechanisms. Whilst this structure has made significant contributions to the security of Western European states, it has also, to a certain extent, limited the emergence of the political will to develop Europe's independent defence capabilities. In particular, US policies during the Trump era and the effects of the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine highlight the necessity of an independent security policy for Europe. At this juncture, the Copenhagen School's approach to security serves as the fundamental theoretical framework for our assessment.

When assessed within the framework of the Copenhagen School's approach to security, this situation demonstrates that security cannot be explained solely by the distribution of material power; perceptions of threat, political discourses and collective identities are also decisive in shaping security policies. The sectoral approach to security, developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, highlights the need to examine security not only in its military dimension but also in the political, economic, social and environmental spheres. In this context, Europe's quest for strategic autonomy can be interpreted not merely as an initiative aimed at reducing military dependence, but also as an effort to develop a shared threat assessment and political will regarding Europe's own security.

The concept of a European Army represents one of the most advanced possibilities for integration at both the institutional and military levels within this endeavour. However, the creation of a joint European military force does not merely consist of bringing together national armies under specific command structures or the joint use of defence resources. From the perspective of the Copenhagen School's securitisation approach, the key determining factor is which political actors present the problems facing Europe as threats to the existence of which reference objects, and through which discourses. According to securitisation theory, for an issue to acquire the status of a security problem, it depends not only on the existence of an objective threat, but also on authorised actors defining the issue as an existential threat and the relevant target audience accepting this definition. From this perspective, the idea of a European Army can be linked to attempts to define the existing dependencies of European institutions and Member States in the defence sector as a common security issue, and to legitimise models of integration that go beyond ordinary political cooperation. However, differences amongst European states regarding their conceptions of sovereignty, national interests and security priorities make it difficult for this narrative to be embraced to the same extent by all member states.

The transformation of European security following the Cold War also offers a meaningful area of study from the perspective of the Copenhagen School's theory of regional security complexes. This approach argues that security relations tend to concentrate in specific regions due to geographical proximity, historical interaction and perceptions of mutual threat. The conflicts arising from the break-up of Yugoslavia highlighted the impact of security issues in Europe's immediate neighbourhood on regional stability, whilst the roles assumed by the US and NATO in managing these crises revealed the limits of Europe's independent capacity for intervention. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the large-scale military offensive it launched against Ukraine in 2022 have, in turn, brought about a significant shift in the European security agenda. These developments have reinforced the view, particularly amongst Eastern European states, that the military threat posed by Russia constitutes a priority security issue; they have accelerated policies aimed at increasing defence spending, raising the level of military readiness and developing the defence industry. However, the fact that states in southern Europe are placing greater emphasis on Mediterranean security, irregular migration, terrorism and instability originating in North Africa demonstrates that the European security complex harbours divergent perceptions of threat within its own ranks. Consequently, one of the key challenges to Europe's move towards a common defence structure is the reconciliation of differing regional security priorities within an integrated strategic approach.

The changing nature of transatlantic relations is also a significant factor in the strengthening of Europe's quest for strategic autonomy. The growing importance of the Indo-Pacific region in the US's global strategic priorities, the demands of successive US

administrations for burden-sharing regarding European defence, and the volatility of American foreign policy are increasing uncertainties regarding the future of Europe's current security dependence. From the perspective of the Copenhagen School, these developments demonstrate that, alongside external threats, dependence on a security provider can also be transformed into a security issue through political discourse. However, whilst the securitisation of strategic autonomy creates a political basis of legitimacy that could facilitate the development of a common European defence capability, it may also give rise to new disagreements regarding the redefinition of relations with NATO. At this juncture, the question of whether the European Army will be a military structure independent of NATO or a complementary mechanism that strengthens the Alliance's European component is not merely an institutional choice, but a debate linked to the security identities and strategic priorities of European states.

Consequently, the theoretical framework offered by the Copenhagen School demonstrates that it would be insufficient to explain the debate on a European Army solely in terms of a lack of military capability or institutional fragmentation in the defence sector. The emergence of a common European defence structure depends not only on the integration of military resources but also on the development of shared threat perceptions, the acceptance of securitisation discourses by the relevant political communities, and the achievement of sufficient political consensus on the sharing of sovereign powers in the defence sector. Furthermore, the 'de-securitisation' approach—which entails shifting security issues from the framework of constant extraordinary threats to institutional negotiation and ordinary political processes wherever possible—is also significant for the sustainability of European integration. In this respect, Europe's objective of strategic autonomy should be viewed not merely as a quest to establish an independent military force, but as a comprehensive process of political transformation requiring a balance to be struck between the construction of a common understanding of security and the preservation of national sovereignty.

Turkey's Strategic Position within the European Security Architecture

As Europe's quest for strategic autonomy becomes increasingly evident, it raises the question of which institutional principles and strategic priorities will shape the continent's future defence architecture, whilst also necessitating a reassessment of Turkey's position within this framework. Although Turkey lies outside the European Union, its NATO membership, military capabilities, geographical location and the multifaceted relationships it has forged in response to security challenges in its neighbourhood demonstrate that European security cannot be addressed solely within the institutional boundaries of the European Union. Viewed through the lens of the Copenhagen School's understanding of security, this situation indicates that security spheres do not always coincide with political and institutional boundaries. Indeed, the 'regional security complexes' approach developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver argues that states' security issues do not arise in isolation; rather, they gain meaning within regional interactions shaped by geographical proximity, historical ties, interdependence and perceptions of threat. Within this framework, Turkey can be regarded not merely as a military partner capable of contributing to European security from the outside, but as one of the key actors in the interactions between Europe and the security spheres surrounding it.

Turkey's geographical and strategic relations with the Black Sea region, the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East enable different regional security dynamics to influence one another via Turkey. However, rather than treating all these regions

as a single, homogeneous security complex, it would be more illuminating to examine the distinct security relationships between them and the roles Turkey plays in these relationships separately. The military and political uncertainties arising from the Russia-Ukraine War in the Black Sea, the potential for a resurgence of ethnic and political tensions in the Balkans, disputes over maritime zones and energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, the balance of power in the Caucasus, and instability stemming from the Middle East, all contribute to making Turkey's security agenda multi-layered. When the implications of these developments for European security are taken into account, it becomes apparent that a significant proportion of the threats and risks facing Turkey intersect, either directly or indirectly, with the security agendas of European states. From the perspective of the Copenhagen School's approach to regional security, this overlap demonstrates that security relations between Turkey and Europe are not solely derived from alliance obligations, but are also based on geographical and strategic interdependence.

At this juncture, there is a clear institutional and strategic tension underlying the debates on the future of European defence. Whilst Turkey possesses the capacity to play a direct role in many regional developments affecting European security, it remains outside the European Union's core decision-making mechanisms regarding defence and security policies. This situation raises the question of the criteria used to define the boundaries of Europe's security sphere. When assessed within the framework of the Copenhagen School's securitisation theory, an actor's position within the security system is related not only to the material power it possesses, but also to how it is defined by other actors and within which security discourses it is situated. In this context, Turkey's place within European security may be influenced by the discourses of European political actors who define Turkey as a strategic partner, a regional power, a security provider or, in certain matters, a security threat. Consequently, among the factors determining Turkey's future within the European security architecture are not only military capacity and geopolitical importance, but also Europe's political perceptions of Turkey and the boundaries of the shared security identity.

From the perspective of the concept of a European Army, this situation points to a more comprehensive debate. The establishment of a joint European military force would not merely signify progress in institutional integration in the field of defence; it would also require the development of a common understanding regarding the threats against which Europe would use military force, the security of which political community it would seek to protect, and the basis of legitimacy upon which such action would be undertaken. In the Copenhagen School's approach to securitisation, the object of security refers to the element whose existence or continuity is perceived to be under threat and which is argued to require protection. In the context of European defence, this object of security may be defined, in some cases, as the territorial integrity of Member States; in others, as the political and institutional existence of the European Union; and in yet others, as the stability and shared values of European societies. A change in the reference object may also affect the scope of security policies and the position of the actors expected to participate in these policies. Designing European defence solely as a structure aimed at safeguarding the institutional integrity of the European Union could result in a model that limits the participation of NATO allies outside the Union, such as Turkey. Conversely, shaping the defence architecture on the basis of the security needs of the European continent and its immediate vicinity could open up a broader scope for Turkey's strategic contributions.

From Turkey's perspective, the relationship that European strategic autonomy will establish with NATO is therefore of decisive importance. NATO's concept of collective defence constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of Turkey's institutional position within the Euro-Atlantic security system. The development of an EU-centred defence structure in a manner that is compatible with and complementary to NATO could facilitate Turkey's contribution to European security through its existing alliance relationships. Conversely, the emergence of a defence model in which decision-making mechanisms are restricted solely to European Union members and institutional coordination with NATO is weakened could create new inconsistencies between the areas in which Turkey actually contributes to European security and its participation in political decision-making processes. From the perspective of the Copenhagen School, this issue can be assessed in terms of the relationship between different security communities and institutional affiliations. The shared understanding of security that has developed between Turkey and European states within the framework of NATO may not always align fully with the European Union's quest to strengthen its own political identity and strategic autonomy. Consequently, the future of European defence is linked not only to the technical dimensions of military cooperation but also to the extent to which different institutional security identities can be reconciled.

On the other hand, Europe's efforts to develop its defence capabilities also highlight the fact that security is not limited to the military sector. The Copenhagen School's sectoral approach to security recognises that military security is interlinked with political, economic, social and environmental processes. In this context, factors such as the defence industry's production capacity, access to critical technologies, the continuity of military supply chains and the procurement of strategic raw materials constitute areas where economic security and military security intersect. The move by European states to increase defence spending and develop their military production capacities is linked not only to strengthening military preparedness against current threats, but also to the objectives of reducing external dependence and safeguarding strategic freedom of action during times of crisis. The defence industry capacity that Turkey has developed in recent years in areas such as unmanned aerial systems, land and sea platforms, ammunition and missile technologies has, in this respect, become a factor that must be taken into account in assessments of the future of European defence.

However, the scope of potential cooperation between Turkey and Europe in the defence industry is not determined solely by production capacity and technological capability. Issues such as the sharing of defence technologies, joint production, export controls, supply security and strategic dependence are closely linked to political decision-making processes. From the perspective of the Copenhagen School, the significance of these issues stems from the fact that economic and technological relations can, under certain conditions, become the subject of securitisation processes. Presenting external dependence in defence procurement as an existential security threat may provide legitimacy for European institutions to reorganise their production and procurement policies. However, such securitisation could also result in Europe moving towards more closed and exclusionary mechanisms in the defence industry sector. From Turkey's perspective, the fundamental issue is whether Europe's pursuit of technological and industrial autonomy will evolve into a security narrative that restricts cooperation with third countries, or whether it will contribute to the formation of a more inclusive defence ecosystem based on complementary capabilities in the face of common threats.

In addition to the military and economic dimensions of European security, assessing it through the prism of social and political sectors is also important for understanding Turkey's strategic position. Issues such as irregular migration, border security, terrorism and social instability feature as priorities on the security agendas of European states to varying degrees. The Copenhagen School's approach to social security draws attention to the impact of perceived threats to the continuity of collective identities and social belonging on security policies. Within this framework, migration flows or cultural differences are not automatically regarded as existential security threats; rather, they may be framed as security issues through the rhetoric of specific political actors. Turkey's relations with Europe in the areas of migration management, border security and counter-terrorism are also influenced by such securitisation processes. Consequently, the sustainability of Turkey-Europe security cooperation depends not only on the development of joint operational capacity, but also on the political objectives for which security discourses are utilised and the extent to which shared challenges can be addressed within institutional negotiation processes.

At this point, the Copenhagen School's approach to 'de-securitisation' offers an opportunity for a complementary assessment of the future of security relations between Turkey and Europe. De-securitisation refers to the process of removing an issue from the discourse of existential threats—which legitimises extraordinary measures—and addressing it within ordinary political and institutional processes. Assessing all political disagreements between Turkey and the European Union, which are occasionally the subject of security-centred debates, within the framework of extraordinary threats may hinder the development of mutual trust and the institutionalisation of long-term cooperation. Conversely, strengthening institutional dialogue mechanisms in areas where mutual interests converge—such as the defence industry, regional stability, crisis management and military coordination—could contribute to security relations progressing on a more predictable footing. However, it should not be assumed that 'de-securitisation' is always possible or appropriate. In particular, it is essential to maintain effective defence and deterrence capabilities in the face of concrete threats, such as the possibility of a direct military attack. Therefore, the fundamental objective in Turkey-Europe relations should be to strike a balanced approach between developing joint security capabilities against real military threats and preventing political disagreements from being unnecessarily securitised.

Europe's efforts to forge a common security identity constitute another important area for assessment in terms of the role Turkey might assume in the future European defence architecture. In the Copenhagen School's approach, security relations are linked not only to current threats and military capabilities, but also to patterns of friendship and enmity that have emerged through historical interactions. The differing political and strategic approaches of European states towards Turkey can make it difficult for a common European security policy to adopt a consistent stance in its relations with Turkey. The fact that Turkey's military and geographical contributions come to the fore in some security matters, whilst political disagreements and mutual mistrust prove decisive in others, demonstrates the variable nature of this relationship. For this reason, it is not sufficient to explain Turkey's participation in European defence solely in terms of technical military criteria. The scope of this participation will also be linked to the areas of common security in which European states regard Turkey as an indispensable partner for cooperation, and the political and institutional conditions under which they accept such cooperation.

In this context, Turkey's position regarding the future of European defence is not a matter that can be explained solely by its lack of European Union membership. Turkey's position within NATO, its relationships with regional security frameworks, its military and technological capabilities, and how it is perceived by European states are all factors that could collectively determine the scope of its participation in potential defence arrangements. In an environment where Europe's security architecture is increasingly shaped by regional interdependence, technological capacity and strategic freedom of manoeuvre, Turkey's role must be assessed beyond the dichotomy of whether it should be excluded or included unconditionally. The key issue is how Europe's security needs and Turkey's strategic capabilities can be linked through which institutional mechanisms and on the basis of which political consensus.

Conclusion

Ultimately, from the perspective of the Copenhagen School, the debate over a European Army—beyond the goal of establishing a joint military force—is part of a broader political process concerning how Europe defines itself as a security community, which threats it deems existential, and which actors it recognizes as having a legitimate role in maintaining security. Turkey, given its multifaceted relationships with Europe and the surrounding regional security spheres, is a key actor that must be taken into account in this process. Therefore, the success of Europe's quest for strategic autonomy will depend not only on military and technological capabilities but also on the formation of shared threat perceptions, the functionality of political decision-making mechanisms, and the alignment between the institutional boundaries of European security and geographical realities. For Turkey, the decisive factors will be whether the emerging European defense architecture maintains its relationship with NATO, the extent to which decision-making and cooperation mechanisms are inclusive, and how Turkey's regional security capacity is integrated into this structure. Thus, the future of European defense emerges as a security transformation capable of reshaping not only the military dimension of European integration but also the nature of the strategic relationship between Turkey and Europe.

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