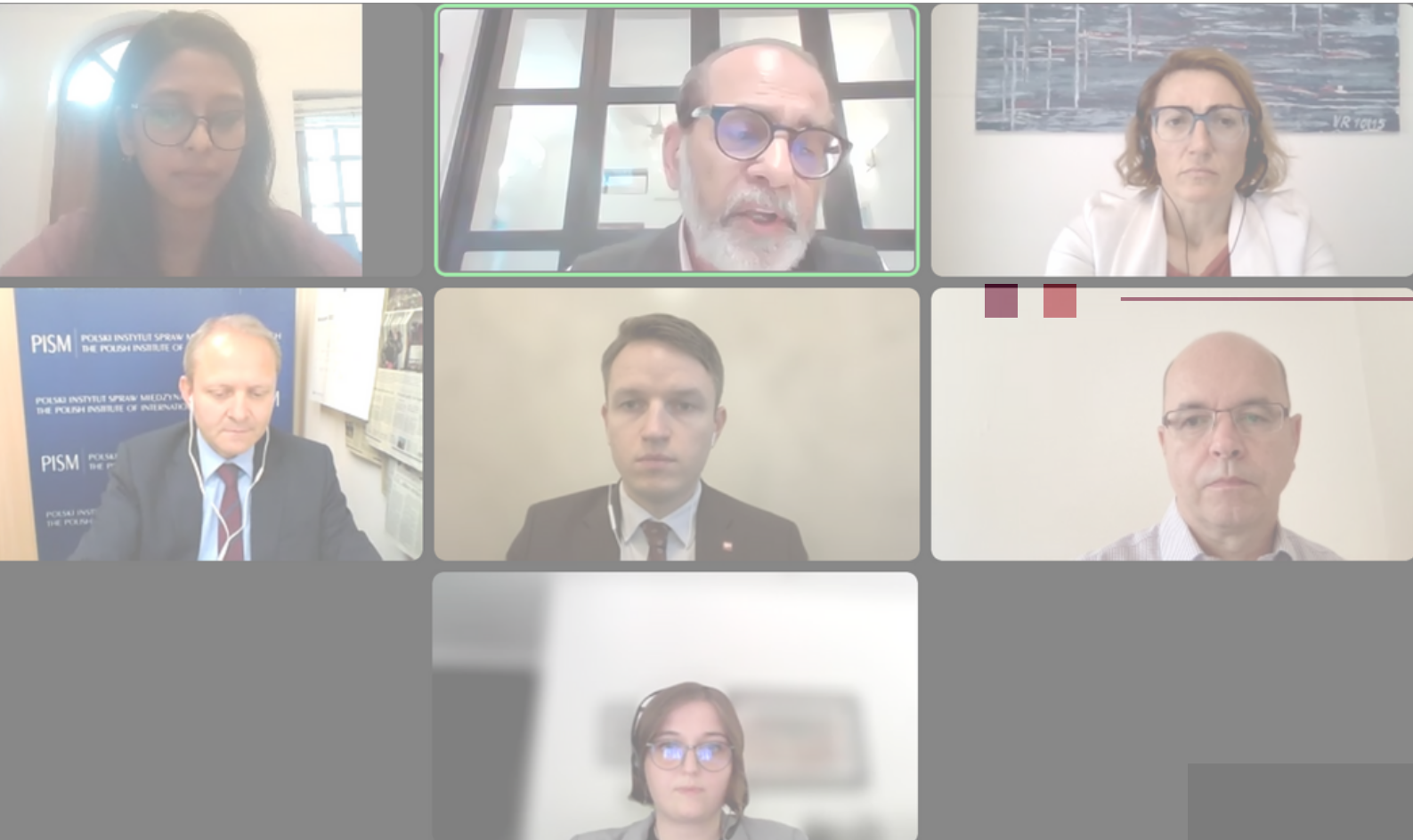


# EUROPE'S DEFENCE DIVIDE: PROBING THE FAULTLINES

## WEBINAR REPORT

15.09.2023



# EUROPE'S DEFENCE DIVIDE: PROBING THE FAULTLINES

WEBINAR HOSTED BY COUNCIL FOR STRATEGIC AND  
DEFENCE RESEARCH-KONRAD-ADENAUER-  
STIFTUNG

## PANELISTS



*Amb. Rakesh Sood  
(Moderator)*



*Ms. Velina  
Tchakarova*



*Dr. Wojciech  
Lorenz*



*Mr. Linas Kojala*



*Dr. Ulrich Speck*



*Ms. Alicia Pommer*



# BACKGROUND

The Russia-Ukraine war has catapulted discussions around European defence and strategic autonomy into the limelight. The conflict is now well into its second year, and the Ukrainian defence, sustained by European and American assistance, has raised many questions about the implications of the 'return of war to Europe'. The renewed importance of NATO has highlighted the impact of Europe's continued and overwhelming dependence on the United States for its security. At the same time, multiple Western European leaders have mentioned strategic autonomy as an aspirational strategy for Europe.

However, the continent and the European Union remain fractured on the matter. Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), with their proximity and heightened concerns regarding Russia, does not trust Western Europe to stand up to Russia and rejects the idea of strategic autonomy from the US.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Increased European military expenditures must not create the illusion that Europe is fit to engage in warfare and rivalize Russia in military matters.
- Without US aid,

Against this backdrop, this webinar sought to understand the various points of divergence between Western Europe and Central Europe defence challenges.

Key questions discussed were:

1. What are the major points of contention between Western Europe and CEE regarding European defence and strategic autonomy?
2. What would a European form of strategic autonomy, if realised, look like and what are the implications for NATO?
3. There has been talk that meaningful strategic autonomy would require, along with increased defence spending, much deeper integration. Does that appetite currently exist within the EU?

Ukraine would have collapsed within a week, despite European assistance. The United States is still the economic and military powerhouse, which strengthens European unity in the Ukrainian invasion.

- The undeniable dependence of European states to the United States is emphasized by NATO regaining its importance. With the war in Ukraine, it has resurfaced as the main security architecture. EU member states have called for more weight with regards to the European pillar in NATO by increasing its cooperation with the EU, the US remains the unofficial figurehead of the organization.
- Europe is plagued by a divergence in views: The transatlantic camp including Eastern and Central Europe and Scandinavia and the camp in favor of a stronger Europe less dependent on the United States. Europe's inability to determine its ultimate objective in the war in Ukraine has prevented an adequate response.

Moreover, the neutral camp calls for negotiation and dialogue vis-a-vis the resolution of the Russian invasion. The polarization has also been observed in other continents. Asian players such as India, Indonesia, and Japan have remained neutral, not opposing Russia directly.

- Although Russia has failed its early-strategic objectives, Ukraine has not yet won the war. Panelists argue that the 'western' public opinion in favor of continuing the conflict will steadily falter. Without public support from its own people and the international community, Russia will be encouraged, and will win the war.

## IEWS EXPRESSED

Ms. Pommer began the webinar with an introduction to the subject. She talked about the assessment of the Russian War against Ukraine and how it is closely related to the awareness of the geographical sphere and history of its neighbouring countries.

She drew attention to what can be derived from Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of Germany and eponym of the foundation, and their foresightful stance on the strategic autonomy in Europe. According to her, that involves the perception that Russia posed the highest security threat to Germany.

She stressed upon the importance of the EU-Transatlantic Relationship as well as on Europe's Strategic Autonomy, and on the relevance of strengthening ties with the Eastern European EU-members and a strong backing for Ukraine.

As the opening speaker for the webinar, Mr. Linus Kojala began by defining Russia as an existential threat and highlighting how Kremlin's belligerence extends beyond Ukraine.

He highlighted multiple significant issues that are likely to affect Europe. Firstly, as a result of expanding threats, such as China, American hegemony and influence will diminish in Europe.

Secondly, despite recent improvements in military equipment and ammunition, it is still unfit to engage in warfare. He expressed concerns about how only a third of NATO members spend the suggested 2% of GDP on military expenditure. To address these challenges, Mr. Kojala urged the European member states to cooperate instead of competing on military matters. Furthermore, he highlighted how Europe must develop key geo-strategic infrastructure in Eastern Europe and Scandinavia to solve logistical issues. In his concluding remarks, he encouraged regional powers to take on more leadership and increase their military presence in neighboring countries to Russia such as his homeland, Lithuania.

Remarking on Europe's reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Ms. Velina Tchakarova spoke about how it has adversely affected the EU's strategic autonomy which "ceased to exist" on the 24th of February. According to her, without American aid, Ukraine would have capitulated in a week. She further criticized European decision-makers for not having one united objective with regards to the necessity of restoring Ukraine's territorial sovereignty.

However, she noted significant improvements in Europe's stance since the beginning of the war. European capitals have been hit by the severity of the situation fearing alarming consequences such as continued Russian territorial expansion.

As a result, the EU has increased military aid to Ukraine. The military organization will soon integrate Sweden and Finland, two historically neutral and alliance-free nations.

In her final remarks, she noted that institutional cooperation between the EU and NATO can prevent isolationist Trump-like administrations from hijacking multilateral cooperation.

Dr. Lorenz began by disputing the common belief that Russia felt provoked by EU and NATO expansion noted that Moscow's invasion was encouraged by Europe's inability to defend its borders and hence invaded Georgia and Crimea. He further countered the common belief that Russia has already lost the war. He argued, that despite the failure of its early strategic objectives the war is far from over.

In his opening remarks, Dr Ulrich Speck highlighted that Europe's strategic autonomy was never meant to defend against Russia. European member states, particularly Germany, fought for further cooperation with Russia.

Emmanuel Macron urged prioritizing the South: North Africa, the Sahel instead of concentrating on Russia and the “growing threat” in the East. He continued by stating that Macron was eager to push for united European defense during Trump’s presidency. He recalled how Trump’s election halted transatlantic cooperation. He identified how two camps exist in Europe with regards to their stance on Russia. Macron and potentially Schulz want to deal and negotiate with Russian officials.

The French President also urges the development of a European security architecture. In contrast, central and eastern Europe and Scandinavia believe in transatlanticism and no negotiation with Russian belligerence. As a German national, he highlights his country’s middle ground. Germany is closely tied to Ukraine and the US but believes in Macron’s ambitions for a strong and united Europe.

## IMPRESSIONS

The Q&A section developed the idea of two opposing camps concerning their stance on Russia, extending the concept to extra-European countries. Mrs. Tchakarova and Mr. Speck mentioned nations with a less aggressive stance towards Russia and China, such as France, India, Spain, and perhaps Germany, versus transatlantic anti-Russian states such as Poland, the Baltic States, and the US. In response, to a question on the role of the UN in the conflict, Ms Tchakarova noted how despite the Security Council's inefficient response, the General Assembly has been symbolic in depicting Russia's falling image on the international stage.

She also discussed the global trend towards de-dollarization, efforts undertaken by most neutral countries, for example, BRICS, in the conflict. Mr. Lorenz summarized the difference in French and Polish mentality, with France prioritizing Western Europe and a strong European military and with Poland prioritizing Eastern Europe, the Russian threat and closer ties with the US. Ambassador Sood delivered the final remarks commenting on the current sanctions and the growing food crisis. Mr. Lorenz argued that despite the heavy sanctions, Europe must act and solve the alarming food crisis.

# ANNEX 1

**Ambassador Rakesh Sood** has served as India's first Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva and later as Ambassador to Afghanistan, Nepal and France. After retiring in 2013, Ambassador Sood was Special Envoy of the Prime Minister for Disarmament and Non – Proliferation till May 2014. He is also a distinguished fellow at CSDR.

**Dr. Ulrich Speck** is an independent foreign policy analyst based in Heidelberg. He writes a weekly geopolitical column for a Swiss newspaper, and is a member of the DGAP Zeitenwende Action group. Dr. Speck has been a fellow at the GMF in Berlin, the Transatlantic Academy in Washington/DC, Carnegie Europe and Elcano in Brussels and has worked for Radio Free Europe in Prague.

**Dr. Wojciech Lorenz** is the coordinator of the International Security program at the Polish Institute of International Affairs. He is the author of the book 'Deterrence. Strategy and politics' and his research areas are NATO, nuclear and conventional deterrence, and Polish security policy. He was a former journalist at the Polish Radio, the Polish BBC Section in London and was a civilian specialist at the Polish Military Contingent in Afghanistan (2013-14) and coordinator of the research project on the protection of Ukraine's critical infrastructure against cyberattacks (NATO SPS program, 2014).

**Mr. Linas Kojala** is the Director of the Eastern Europe Studies Centre, a think tank in Vilnius, Lithuania, and Lecturer at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science at Vilnius University. He is currently serving as an associate at the negotiation task force, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard university. He was a Baltic Sea Fellow in FPRI's Eurasia Program in 2020.

**Ms. Velina Tchakarova** is an expert in the field of geopolitics with over twenty years of professional experience and academic background in the field of security and defence. She is the founder of FACE: For A Conscious Experience e.U. She is the former Director of the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES) in Vienna, Austria. She is currently serving as an instructor at the Real-World Risk Institute, a member of the Strategic and Security Policy Advisory Board of the Science Commission at the Austrian Federal Ministry of Defense.

**Ms. Alicia Pommer** is currently working as a Research Officer at the India Office of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS). Ms. Pommer, a former scholarship holder of KAS, holds a Master's degree in Political Science from the University of Bonn, Germany. Ms. Pommer has also served as a chairwoman of the Young European Federalists Bonn and Hannover, a bipartisan political youth organization advocating for the creation of a democratic European federation for more than four years.