

# Rethinking European Security

## VILNIUS WORKSHOP REPORT

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### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In March 2024, in partnership with Rethinking Security, BASIC hosted a track 1.5 workshop in Vilnius, Lithuania to discuss the present and future of European security. The workshop was the first of five regional workshops organised in fulfilment of the aims of the 'Turning Point: Realising a Sustainable Security Architecture for Europe' project, referred to as 'Rethinking European Security'.

This project is driven by the need to address rising multipolarity that has seen an increase in military conflicts and a breakdown of international rules-based order. This trend has rapidly accelerated with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which highlighted the collapse of post-Cold War diplomacy and the need for a new security architecture. New agendas and directives are needed to combat current and future security risks, most importantly climate change and its effects on security. This project seeks to generate a sustainable security systems change in Europe and beyond.<sup>2</sup>

The workshop in Vilnius was held under Chatham House Rule and was attended by official representatives and non-governmental experts from Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Sweden, and the US.<sup>3</sup> BASIC gives thanks to participants for their active engagement in workshop discussions, with the main findings detailed in this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Dr Gry Thomassen, Research Director at BASIC, for her useful comments and feedback.

<sup>2</sup> A working paper produced by BASIC was distributed to attendees to provide background information on these subjects, thereby allowing for informed discussion.

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this project, Europe is conceptualised beyond strict demarcations of territory. Europe is comprised of political, cultural, and economic ties that extend beyond geographical boundaries. As such, the US holds substantial influence in Europe and was represented at this workshop.

# Main Findings

## Although it is critical to Europe's security to support Ukraine, not everything depends on the outcome of the war.

Workshop participants were asked to consider the most urgent dimensions of security now and in the next decade. What followed was a discussion regarding if 'everything' depends on Ukraine and the outcome of the war. Participants unanimously agreed that challenging Russia's aggression is of paramount importance. There was agreement that this should be done, foremost, through continuing to provide Ukraine with military support and to act cohesively, and in solidarity, as a Western bloc. Some participants expressed that the West could be doing more to support Ukraine and that it would be useful to have consensus amongst states around what kind of tactical support could be given.

It was questioned in the workshop whether Russia could be changed. Some participants believed that the West should encourage Russia to change from within, or domestically. Some participants asserted that Russia could be cooperated with on 'soft issues', such as through scientific collaboration in the Arctic, to produce positive incentives. Other participants argued that it would be impossible to change Russia, although they did not expand upon which aspects or views of Russia should be changed, such as civilian or elite perceptions. Participants pointed to their interpretation of history, stating that the current war is informed by past decades of Russian and Soviet antagonism.

Regardless of how optimistic participants were on the future of European relations with Russia, all agreed that Russia must be contained in a bid to prevent it from being disruptive and dangerous to its neighbours, including, in broad terms, the West, but also zooming in on perceived threats to Eastern Europe, with particular focus placed on the Baltic countries. Some participants framed the objective of containment towards Russia as a core tenant of a future European security architecture. They argued that while Russia is unlikely to be defeated in totality, it must be weakened to the point where its future calculus of aggression changes.

Participants agreed that while winning the war in Ukraine may not be 'everything', it is important that the West – with an emphasis on NATO – unwaveringly supports Ukraine by giving it what it needs to succeed. One participant queried whether 'everything depends on the United States' in this case, as there is uncertainty if the US will continue to support Ukraine – and European security, more broadly – if Trump were to win this year's presidential election. As such, most participants agreed that Europe should undertake more burden-sharing in its defence - to both ensure its own security and to make itself a more attractive partner to the US - and pursue cooperation with the US regardless of the election outcome.

Although it was recognised that the war in Ukraine is unlikely to end in the immediate future, there was some discussion pertaining to the importance of European solidarity during the peace process and beyond. It was acknowledged that any peace settlement should include arms control measures. Further, it was suggested that such a settlement should include the views and voices of smaller European states that neighbour Russia. If arms control measures are implemented, this will have far-reaching consequences, with potential increased stability. Recognising and accounting for the views and needs of European states that, according to some participants, have historically been sidelined in negotiations underscores that a future European security architecture would be inclusive.

Ultimately, participants agreed that not everything depends on the outcome of the war in Ukraine, namely the future of European and global security and subsequent strategic landscapes. However, continued and expanded collaboration between NATO members to support Ukraine is integral to European security. Those who initially posited that everything depends on Ukraine later conceded that even if the war does not end favourably for Ukraine and the West, NATO has become stronger and proved itself to be formidable. Participants agreed that Europe – including its NATO members – must continue to consolidate its resources and further assert itself.

## Many believe there is a false choice between tackling traditional security measures and climate and energy securities.

It was established from the outset of the workshop that climate change poses significant risks to global security. Workshop participants discussed how ecological crises lead to three levels of risks: direct (such as floods and storms), cascading (including cross-national chains of effects and supply implications), and transition to low-carbon energy (relating to critical materials and maintenance). Importantly, climate change was positioned as a security risk, particularly in the context of Europe, as it has faced the devastating consequences of climate change, including crises such as heatwaves, wildfires, and floods. Indeed, Europe has experienced a temperature increase at twice the pace as any other continent.<sup>4</sup> Europe's militaries

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<sup>4</sup> Associated Press, 'Europe Is the Fastest-Warming Continent, at Nearly Twice the Average Rate, Report Says', NBC News, 22 April 2024, <https://www.nbcnews.com/science/environment/europe-fastest-warming-continent-twice-global-average-report-rcna148829>.

have had to adapt to climate change by securing their military installations and associated infrastructure, as well as through developing new technological capabilities.<sup>5</sup>

It was argued that conversations around climate security<sup>6</sup> and 'hard' security frameworks should be de-siloed and mainstreamed. Participants reasoned that this is, in part, due to some military equipment, such as jets, having been taken offline due to increased heating. Further, participants mentioned that climate change can lead to instability, incentivising terrorism, mass migration, and societal risks. In terms of military readiness, the workshop discussed how climate change has made it difficult to predict extreme weather events. In addition, it was suggested that security postures be adjusted in response to a melting Arctic. These considerations informed the majority of participants' views that it is a false choice to invest in traditional security measures - otherwise referred to as 'hard security' - or climate, or energy, securities. This is due to climate change's effects on traditional security, necessitating the state to take a broad view of security challenges.

The workshop further agreed that energy security cannot be neglected when conceptualising European security and a future European security architecture. An energy trilemma was considered: security of supply, sustainability, and affordability. Participants reflected on how Europe has historically diverged on how it views energy security. They argued that Germany has advocated in the past for increased trade - thereby securing their energy supply - with Russia, with some believing that Russia could be brought closer to Europe through economic interdependence. Participants reflected that the Nordic states have focussed on the green transition, which has caused them to invest in renewable energies, rather than relying upon other nations for supplies. Participants agreed that Central and Eastern European states have consistently treated energy security as a hard security issue in that they have anticipated that their access to energy through Russia, for example, could be weaponized against them, and have sought to procure their energy supplies from their allies.

Yet, participants acknowledged and welcomed that, since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, there has been recognition across Europe that it is Russia's strategy to use its energy resources as a tool to apply political and economic pressure to the West. For example, one participant asserted that European access to gas was likely disrupted by Russia when the Nord Stream pipeline was destroyed.<sup>7</sup> As a result, Europe has been working in tandem to pursue self-reliance in the energy sector, with the EU imposing energy sanctions on Russia. Participants argued that this approach should continue for the foreseeable future.

The benefits of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency were also discussed. Multiple participants pointed to the fact that critical materials dependency would not be as great as a constant need for fuel, nor would a short-term disruption in materials be as critical as a disruption in fuel supply. One participant pointed to willingness from the US to assist other countries in the clean energy transition as it seeks to diversify its supply chains away from China and works to curb climate migration. As another participant pointed out, becoming interconnected with allies, rather than adversaries, through renewables is a collective good. This approach would serve as a tenant within a new European security architecture.

Some participants questioned what impacts Europe could make concerning climate change when it is a large, global issue. Particularly those from small European countries warned that their governments and policymakers would be unlikely to view mitigating climate change as a national or regional issue,<sup>8</sup> rather, it is an issue that should be addressed on a global scale through an institution like the UN. Other participants challenged this view, arguing that climate is an area of mutual interest that should be tackled, including in tandem with countries that do not share the same views on much else. Cooperation with Russia through the OSCE concerning climate mitigation and adaptation was cited as an example of joint actions that can be

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Gry Thomasen, 'NATO and Climate Change: Towards a Joint Understanding and Response' (BASIC, June 2024), <https://basicint.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/NATO-and-Climate-Change.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> The UN Development Programme asserts that 'climate security refers to the impacts of the climate crisis on peace and security, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Climate change can exacerbate food, water, and livelihood insecurity, with cascading effects such as increased competition over natural resources, social disruptions, and displacement. This can lead to increased tensions, conflict, and instability in a country or region.' UNDP, 'What Is Climate Security and Why Is It Important?', UNDP Climate Promise, accessed 26 August 2024, <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-climate-security-and-why-it-important>.

<sup>7</sup> Since the workshop took place, it has come to light that a Ukrainian national has been suspected of being a member of the team who planted the explosives, leading to some uncertainty regarding Russia's potential involvement. Melissa Eddy and Julian E. Barnes, 'Germany Issues Arrest Warrant for Ukrainian Over Nord Stream Explosion', *The New York Times*, 14 August 2024, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/14/world/europe/nord-stream-explosion-germany-ukraine-arrest-warrant.html>.

<sup>8</sup> These arguments are in contrast to the tenets of the Climate Paris Agreement, which commits signatories to reduce their emissions and adapt to climate change, strengthening these commitments over time. *Along with* these national efforts, the treaty specifies that international cooperation and coordinated solutions are necessary to combat climate change. All states that were represented at this workshop have signed and ratified this document, indicating that they are aware of their individual obligations. 'Paris Agreement', United Nations Treaty Collection, accessed 26 August 2024, [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=XXVII-7-d&chapter=27&clang=en&gl=1\\*1iq53al\\*ga\\*MjA5OTQ4MzkwNS4xNjk5NzY3OTUy\\*ga\\_TK9BOL5X7Z\\*MTcyMzY1MDYzNi41LjAuMTcyMzY1MDYzNy4wLjAuMA](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVII-7-d&chapter=27&clang=en&gl=1*1iq53al*ga*MjA5OTQ4MzkwNS4xNjk5NzY3OTUy*ga_TK9BOL5X7Z*MTcyMzY1MDYzNi41LjAuMTcyMzY1MDYzNy4wLjAuMA).

taken. In fact, the OSCE already organises activities to address potential security risks attributed to climate change and presents itself as a platform to have dialogue on these issues.<sup>9</sup>

Some participants questioned if climate and energy security should be prioritised when state resources are finite. They argued that these resources need to be invested into Europe's war fighting capability. As one participant stated, aggressors do not care about damaging the planet; the focus must be placed instead on defeating Russia and deterring it from attacking its neighbours again. These discussions exemplified the difficulty of de-siloing concepts related to climate change threats on security and traditional security threats.

While, in some cases, it might be difficult to fully tackle such a vast array of problems, participants agreed that awareness still must be had on the interconnectedness of these challenges. In any case, as one participant pointed out, it is unlikely that national finances would be diverted from tackling climate change to addressing traditional security challenges, and vice versa. Due to the interconnectedness of these concepts, it is only possible to tackle both simultaneously.

## Resilience is important to our societies today.

Resilience is a subject that was raised throughout the entirety of the workshop. NATO's Article 3 sets out that member countries need to be resilient to withstand an attack or major catastrophe, reducing vulnerabilities through enacting military efforts simultaneously with bolstering civil preparedness.<sup>10</sup> To strengthen resilience, NATO provides guidance on how Allies can measure their preparedness. Much of this guidance depends on resilience of infrastructure and systems, which the workshop discussed at length. In addition, NATO defines three core functions of civil preparedness: 'continuity of government, continuity of essential services to the population and civil support to military operations'.<sup>11</sup> The workshop addressed the latter two of these three functions in particular.

In alignment with NATO's vision, participants expressed that national and collective resilience are paramount to being prepared and adaptable to crisis. Participants pointed to Europe's vulnerabilities in a changing political and climatic environment and, as detailed in this report, participants identified traditional and non-traditional threats to Europe's security pertaining to Russia's war on Ukraine and threats associated with climate change.

### Resilience in Infrastructure and Systems

Participants detailed the ways in which their countries are developing their defence capabilities to strengthen national and importantly collective resilience. The urgency of this development has been influenced by both Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and predictions at the time that the US will become more inward-looking, and therefore less assertive, in European security affairs. How European states can work together in collective defence, aiming to compliment one another's capabilities – rather than duplicate them – was of importance to participants. Workshop attendees also discussed the need for contingency plans, for example, contending that the EU must be strengthened as an institution in case NATO faces increased challenges.

When nations seek to understand their level of preparedness, they must consider how they meet requirements for national resilience, particularly within the context of climate change. One participant emphasised that agriculture must be made resilient to climate impacts, as the state is obliged to feed the population. Other participants pointed to the need for European nations to combat the uncontrolled movement of people, especially as migrants travel to Europe due to climate change impacts. These connections solidified participants' convictions that traditional and climate securities must be considered simultaneously to strengthen resilience within a new security architecture.

Participants agreed that infrastructure must be resilient in order to be protected and maintained. Climate and energy securities featured heavily in the workshop's discussion on this matter. It was mentioned that the most resilient militaries have more energy efficient fuel supply chains to reduce risks to troops that transport fuel in conflict zones. As one participant argued, resilience must be ever-present in critical energy infrastructure, as states must prepare for all potentialities, and should therefore focus on dependencies, diversification, and energy transition. Multiple participants highlighted the importance of speeding up the energy transition, as this is related to energy independence, thereby offering an opportunity for resilience, development, and prosperity - all of which are elements needed for strong European security.

Along with physical infrastructure, the workshop discussed the need for systems - predominantly online - to be resilient against attack. In particular, participants pointed to the need to be resilient against hybrid warfare. Threats to cybersecurity were mentioned, and it was suggested that the EU as an institution could lead in resilience against the increasing

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<sup>9</sup> OSCE, 'Climate Change', accessed 4 October 2024, <https://www.osce.org/occea/446296>.

<sup>10</sup> NATO, 'Resilience, Civil Preparedness and Article 3', NATO, accessed 26 August 2024, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_132722.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm).

<sup>11</sup> [NATO](#).

cyberattacks on online systems. Participants also pointed to the role that the EU could have in countering disinformation propagated by adversaries. Avenues through which acts of hybrid warfare can be carried out have only increased in recent years as technology has continued to advance. Therefore, a range of infrastructures and systems must be considered when European countries assess their levels of preparedness and resilience. In turn, these considerations must be had when developing a common European security architecture as well.

### Partnership and Cooperation in Resilience

The workshop observed that resilience is dependent upon a range of partnerships, including civil-military relationships. Multiple participants asserted that militaries are central to assisting civilians during natural disasters, which have accelerated in frequency and severity due to climate change. Furthermore, it was mentioned that the forward-looking nature of militaries will be crucial to European climate security. This has already been seen through NATO placing climate security on its agenda, as one participant pointed out.<sup>12</sup> From these observations, a couple of participants suggested that the framework of 'comprehensive national security defence' be utilised in a new security architecture.

It was evident in the workshop that partnership and cooperation between, and within, institutions are also necessary to strengthen resilience, and are paramount to a new European security architecture. As mentioned earlier in this report, participants posited the benefits of European nations doing more burden-sharing in their cooperation with the US. This is to both ensure the US's commitment to European security and for Europe to strengthen their own defence should the US decide to withdraw from European security. A range of institutions, including the OSCE, EU, NATO, and the UN, were discussed in the context of making Europe stronger and more resilient.

Participants agreed that it is critical for the EU and NATO to work in cooperation within a new security architecture, complimenting each other's strengths. For example, it was suggested that NATO and the EU could work together more on developing European military capabilities; NATO engages in military strategy and operations, while the EU has legislation and financial resources that could be of benefit to states trying to reach their targets of investments in their militaries. The idea was put forth that the EU could play a larger role in crisis management, whereas NATO could focus itself on deterrence and defence. One participant further suggested that NATO and the EU should cooperate on a strategy to defend democracy as well.

The workshop recognised that the EU and NATO have not always had the warmest relationship. Some participants questioned if the EU and NATO's shared strategic outlooks were being overestimated. Instead, there was a suggestion that the European arm of NATO should be strengthened independently. Some participants also reminded the workshop that there is uneven membership to NATO and the EU in Europe, which will need to be addressed for any defence planning or crisis mitigation. Therefore, while collaborating institutions will be a defining part of a new European security architecture, there are challenges within these relationships too.

The workshop also discussed if a new institution would be needed to implement a future security architecture. The efficacy of existing institutions, such as the OSCE and UN – particularly the Security Council – was called into question. Participants felt that certain states have failed to cooperate within these institutions, with some states actively stymieing progress. One participant commented that because these institutions do not punish their members, they are less likely to be impactful international players. This would apply to these institutions' capacities to strengthen resilience as well.

Even with these deficits, however, participants still felt that these are worthwhile institutions to maintain, especially the OSCE. Participants commented on how structures must be kept in place in case they are needed for future European cooperation, particularly through facilitating dialogue with Russia and in strengthening arms control frameworks. However, a few participants questioned if a new institution with a clear mandate is needed to act on climate security either independently or through looking at it within already-existing institutions such as the EU, UN, and OSCE.

It was clear from these workshop discussions that such institutional partnerships are necessary to strengthen resilience. Yet, there was no definitive consensus relating to if a new institution would need to be utilised in a new security architecture to address traditional, human, and environmental, as well as energy, security concerns.

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<sup>12</sup> This is despite the fact that all countries represented at the workshop are members of NATO, which has made commitments to address climate change as a security issue. At the 2021 Brussels Summit, allies agreed to the Climate Change and Security Action Plan (CCSAP), which calls for 'a 360-degree approach and encompasses measures to increase both NATO's and Allies' awareness of the impact of climate change on security, along with developing clear adaptation and mitigation measures, and enhanced outreach...' NATO, 'NATO Climate Change and Security Action Plan: Compendium of Best Practice', n.d., [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230710-climate-change-best-practices.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230710-climate-change-best-practices.pdf).

## Recommendations

1. Continued consultation among allies and partner countries, and deepened alliance cohesion, are prerequisites for the continued political and military support of Ukraine. To make sure that all relevant European states are heard in the eventual settlement of the war, an allied consultation process should be instigated at an early date. As part of the consultation process, arms control and risk reduction measures should be considered.
2. Climate and energy securities are important to account for in a future European security architecture, as they are interrelated with traditional security risks. States should build awareness amongst their decision-makers on the interconnectedness of these challenges so that they may understand that it is a false choice to tackle traditional security concerns over environmental and energy security concerns.
3. Resilience enables nations to reduce vulnerabilities and withstand an attack or major catastrophe. To strengthen their resilience, European states must bolster their energy infrastructures, and climate mitigation and adaptation measures. Civil-military relationships and institutional partnerships should continue to be integral to states' successes regarding resilience as well.

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