

# The European

## Security and Defence Union

### How to defend Europe?

Strategic ambitions  
in the face of high  
geopolitical pressure



**Romania –  
a strong partner  
in allied defence**

General Gheorghiuță Vlad,  
Chief of Defence,  
Bucharest



**Finland in NATO –  
added value to  
European defence**

Dr Hanna Ojanen,  
President EuroDéfense-  
Finland, Helsinki

Guest commentary

# The challenges awaiting the new European Commission

by Jean-Dominique Giuliani, President Robert Schuman Foundation, Paris



The results of the European elections of June 2024 produced little change in the majority in the European Parliament and Ursula von der Leyen was elected for a second term on 18 July by the same coalition as before. However, the background against which the new Commission will be getting down to work has undergone substantial change.

Russia's war against Ukraine has confirmed the crying need for more strategically oriented European policies. The total cynicism and brutality of Putin's revisionism and expansionism has acted as a wake-up call for Europeans. Have they, however, drawn all the right conclusions?

The evolution of the world's major economies, all facing environmental and digital transitions, is challenging the current fiscal and monetary orthodoxy. Fiscal restraint leads to stagnation, as the example of Germany clearly shows. In its quest for growth, the European Union must explore new policy avenues so as not to continue being outpaced by the United States or overtaken by China.

At the same time, European citizens have shown that they are deeply unhappy about their governments' European policies. The accumulation of regulations and the method chosen to impose change go a long way to explaining the success of far-right parties at the European elections. The Commission will therefore have to change its approach and find ways of associating businesses and citizens more closely with the decisive choices for the future.

Finally, in the face of new challenges, institutional questions have once again surfaced in the debate about the future of Europe. How can a larger budget be secured? What is

the best way of stimulating more investment? How can foreign policy be made more unified and more effective?

It will be incumbent on the European Commission to come up with an entirely new approach.

To be more "geopolitical", the EU must convince all its Member States, and not just the Commission, to be more proactive and more effective in their foreign policy. Ursula von der Leyen has certainly become the face of Europe, but she has often done so by encroaching on the powers of member states, provoking irritation and even dissidence. It will be up to Kaja Kallas to give full expression to the role of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, on which Josep Borrell made an excellent start but on which the services of the Commission are still a few steps behind.

On economic and fiscal policy, there must be a total reappraisal of thinking and practice. The current orthodoxy holds back growth and innovation which are more than ever essential in these times of transition. In addition, they lead to cost-of-living pressures on households and feed the extremist vote. The EU must also realise that its vast internal market can generate more consumer spending and is not just a means of promoting exports driven by competitiveness based on wage restraint and stagnant living standards.

Such are the new challenges facing the incoming European Commission, which must also include on its agenda a debate about the European treaties. In the light of international developments, it is crucial to take the right decisions; they must be bold and courageous. ■

 [www.robert-schuman.eu/en](http://www.robert-schuman.eu/en)