IAI
Istituto Affari Internazionali



ISSN 2280-6164

DOCUMENTI IAI 16 | 01 - JANUARY 2016

# Challenges to European Security: A Transatlantic Perspective

by Maria Elena Sandalli

## ABSTRACT

Europe's security is manifestly precarious: Islamic State militants have carried out acts of terrorism on European soil, relations with Russia continue to be divisive and uncertain, and the implications of such political dynamics on European energy security have become a regular matter of debate. In light of these concerns, both within and along the borders of Europe, the question boils down to finding possible solutions at the transatlantic level. Divergent European and American policy objectives, on the one hand, and the European Union's fragmented foreign policy, on the other, are making it increasingly difficult to define and implement a common security agenda, but the need to do so is paramount. The participants at the 2015 Transatlantic Security Symposium discussed ways in which transatlantic players can react to such threats; much emphasis was placed on NATO's newly regained role and adaptation within this shifting security environment.

keywords

*European security* | *NATO* | *Russia* | *Ukraine* | *Islamic groups* | *Terrorism* | *Energy security* | *Natural gas* | *Transatlantic relations* | *United States* | *European Union*

ISSN 2280-6164

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# Challenges to European Security: A Transatlantic Perspective

by Maria Elena Sandalli*

## Introduction

Europe is currently surrounded by a ring of fire, having to face close threats to its security. Notably, militants of the Islamic State have penetrated its territory and carried out brutal terrorist acts, while the crisis in Ukraine has injured relations with Russia and ignited fears of energy vulnerability. Within this framework there has been talk of NATO's rekindled role and presence in Europe as an instrument of containment and hard power. Against the preoccupying implications for Europe's future, this international conference analysed joint efforts at the Transatlantic level aimed at defining and implementing a common security agenda, taking into account the rapidly-evolving landscape both within and along the borders of Europe. Participants included security experts and civil officials from Europe and the United States – as well as from countries with which the West has a vested and well-established interest in cooperating with – in order to compare and contrast views and opinions on the current global security agenda and its proposed actions.

The conference was organised into four panels on the following topics:
- the threat of Islamic State terrorism;
- the Russia-Ukraine crisis;
- the role and structural reform of NATO;
- the challenges to European energy security.

The 2015 Transatlantic Security Symposium marked the eighth edition of the program. Since its inception, this initiative has fostered – on an annual basis – a fruitful exchange of ideas on matters of crucial importance to both sides of the Atlantic. This year, the event was generously sponsored by Compagnia di San Paolo, the NATO Public Diplomacy Division, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the US Embassy in Rome. It was held in Rome

* Maria Elena Sandalli was a stagiaire at the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI). This report has been carried out under the scientific supervision of Nona Mikhelidze, senior fellow at IAI and the scientific coordinator of the eighth edition of the Transatlantic Security Symposium 2015.

· Report of the eigth edition of the Transatlantic Security Symposium "Challenges to European Security: A Transatlantic Perspective" organised in Rome on 26 October 2015 by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) with the support of Compagnia di San Paolo, the NATO Public Diplomacy Division, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the US Embassy in Rome.

at the International Conference Hall of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation on 26 October 2015.

## Session I. Fight Against Terrorism: How to Deal with ISIS?

Ettore Greco (left), Gianfranco Incarnato (right)

**Omar Ashour**'s paper tackles why the Islamic State is resilient to military interventions in the region, and more broadly, why under-populated insurgent organisations have sporadically managed throughout history to successfully resist state forces. It concludes that the Islamic State is a symptom, not a cause, of the political environment that thrives in the Middle East, and that true defeat of ISIS can only be achieved by eradicating the region's structural deficiencies; namely, the lack of democratic government transitions, the cycle of repression and radicalisation that has been perpetuated for decades and the deeply-rooted culture of violent extremism.

The underlying apparent paradox of the Islamic State's structure and course of action is puzzling. As stressed by Ashour's paper, this is an organisation that has few variables working in its favour, both from geographical and numerical perspectives. It operates primarily in flat, arid territories of Syria and Iraq, although it has managed to extend its scope of action to Africa and Europe both directly and through splinter groups. Moreover, it is a divisive organisation, not only in terms of its *raison-d'être* – the ideological contrast between the Shia and Sunni branches of Islam – but also within the very jihadist elite committed to its cause. Over the past years, its brutality has led the Al-Qaeda and Al-Nusra fronts to distance themselves, and it has suffered military backlashes which have undermined it considerably but never truly knocked it down.

Still, ISIS has consistently risen from the ashes. One explanation is that, contrary to widespread belief, this is an insurgency led by highly-skilled and experienced individuals that have been active in the anti-establishment and military fields for decades. Their strategic know-how has manifested itself in two ways. First, the narrative used by ISIS to gain popular support has been framed in identity-related terms. By playing on sectarianism, ISIS has set Islamic factions against one another in a never-ending cycle of suspicion, intense pride and glorified violence. Indeed, its founder and leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is praised as the protector of Sunni Muslims against the imperialist West and the infidels at large. Second, the political rhetoric voiced by ISIS is very much geared toward the creation of an Islamic utopia. Ashour argues that, by engaging in state building and proto-governance, rather


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Nathalie Tocci (left), Ettore Greco (right)

than fighting the Syrian army, ISIS officials win the hearts and minds of the local population and provide the rosy prospect of an actual State based on the glorification of Sunni Islam.

However, when explaining the Islamic State's perseverance, it is also important to note the key mistakes committed by incumbent state forces. Ashour underlines the importance of the loss of an accuracy gradient playing to the jihadists' advantage: the farther the conflict is from the centre of the country – and the deeper into the periphery – the more the incumbent loses precision in its military endeavours, provoking an incidental guerrilla force by which the local population joins the rebels. This causal effect has been exploited by the terrorists in their recruitment practices; they have leveraged local support to obtain manpower and enlarge their army, as well as for other logistical and material ends.

Yet, the fundamental problem highlighted by Ashour is the existence of a deeply rooted culture that exalts the notions of division and repression and rejects those of compromise and reconciliation, hence providing fertile soil for ISIS and an overall hospitable environment for other forms of terrorist activity. Unless a culture of political legitimacy is fostered, symptoms similar to ISIS will continue to materialise. Transatlantic efforts at fighting ISIS should be oriented accordingly.

Participants agreed that the origins and enduring survival of the Islamic State are rooted conspicuously in Sunni grievances. If these are not promptly addressed, and an alternative provided, fighting ISIS will become increasingly strenuous. In light of this general awareness, one speaker argued that, in order to provide counter narratives, Sunni grievances must be correctly intercepted by the enemies of ISIS; these grievances are concrete ones, and they include widespread political oppression, a severe lack of financial resources and the arbitrary application of the rule of law, which have hampered the population's ability to survive without belonging to and being identified as a group. Another discussant echoed this opinion by affirming that the cleavages brewing in the region have more to do with politics and economics than religious or ethnic motives. In short, ISIS thrives because it provides security within an environment where incertitude reigns supreme. Views differed, however, on the notion that Middle Eastern politics are hostile to compromise and reconciliation, having a tendency to choose bullets over ballot boxes. One speaker warned in this sense against the medievalisation of the region: the juxtaposition of an allegedly violent Middle East to an allegedly peaceful and secular West.


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Omar Ashour

Efforts were also made to locate the Islamic State within the scope of larger regional issues. One discussant recalled that ISIS did not take shape out of nowhere, but is rather the result of previously existing terrorist groups operating in the area. Some of these groups are still active, although with diminished efficacy, such as the Islamic State of Iraq, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Taliban in Afghanistan, all of which were at least substantially weakened – tactically if not strategically – by the West. As a consequence of this reliance on tactics, long-term objectives were missed and the merger of various entities advocating Jihadist and Salafist ideals gave birth to ISIS. Speaking from a historical angle, another researcher added the Wahhabist component to the debate over wider regional issues surrounding the Islamic State, focusing specifically on the ambiguous attitude of the Saudi Kingdom toward the rise of this organisation. The political elite and the modern Saudi identity are deeply rooted in the Wahhabist doctrine, which was instituted by the first monarch and founder of Saudi Arabia, Ibn Saud. The ISIS phenomenon, made manifest by its crusade against Alawites, Shiites and other confessions, is thus widely perceived as a return to the original Wahhabist project.

Yet most of the discussion concentrated on proposed actions to counter the ISIS threat. While there was overall consensus on the need to carry out structural reforms in order to build a solid political platform that impedes the advancement of these forces, views diverged on the means by which to do so and on the fate of Assad. In the words of one speaker, the Syrian president should be the prime target in the fight against IS, while the belief that his regime is only a marginal aspect of the bigger picture transpired from other interventions. Two speakers openly noted that military solutions are necessary to bring about change. Military tools are fundamental for security, state-building initiatives and long-lasting political stability. Moreover, to quote one discussant, those preaching non-military interventions are the ones that have no skin to gain because they are either less directly involved in the conflict or moved by other priorities: a reference to Turkey's relations with Kurdistan being made in this regard. Clearly, as ISIS creeps into Europe and points the gun at European civilians, the West will be persuaded to take a firmer stance.

Unanimity was reached on the need to follow up military interventions with political ends. This is crucial for several reasons; to stop ISIS from co-opting other terrorist networks, to integrate marginalised groups who currently seek refuge in ISIS and to avoid the multiplication of splinter factions in Africa, the Caucasus and the Arabian Peninsula.


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Lorenzo Kamel (left), Fatma Ceren Yazgan (right)

While everyone acknowledged the gravity of the current situation, one expert warned against the risk of spreading panic. He questioned whether the West is truly losing the war of ideas against ISIS by pointing out that within a population of 1.2 billion Muslims there are 30 thousand IS militants, and that for every one-hundred foreign fighters that have joined the organisation, millions of refugees have fled those lands. Despite this data, few participants or audience members were reassured.

By way of conclusion, the dilemma concerns finding a middle ground between a hasty solution to the problem and the danger of losing too much time, as this second option might increase the likelihood of the ISIS threat spilling over into the neighbouring states of Iraq and Syria. Transatlantic efforts at fighting Islamic State terrorism should proceed cautiously, bearing these complexities in mind.

## Session II. Dealing with the Ukrainian Crisis: a Transatlantic Strategy?

The second session emphasised the urgent need for the development of transatlantic strategies aimed at preventing military escalation in Crimea and at assisting Ukraine in its reform process, in light of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis. Despite conflicting ideas on the efficacy of sanctions, the underlying belief was that they alone are not sufficient to truly deter Russia from pursuing its objectives in the region.

In an approach to possible resolution mechanisms to the crisis, **Wayne Merry**'s paper singles out one salient and problematic point, namely the transatlantic gap in responding to this particular situation. Despite efforts by Washington and Brussels to maintain surface amity and cohesion in reaction to Russian policy in Ukraine, the fact remains that the underlying mindsets and policies of the US and the EU are totally different. This divergence has had profound repercussions on the idea of a global NATO, since the Alliance is finding it increasingly complicated to confront and combine its member states' security concerns.

The paper proceeds by identifying a number of attitudes on both the American and European sides which exemplify their lack of continuity regarding Russia. In terms of sanctions, the underpinnings of American and European policies are wholly different. European sanctions toward Russia are intended to orient Russian policy toward Ukraine in the near- to medium-term. American sanctions, on


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the contrary, are structural and by essence irreversible, grounded in the notions of containment, isolation and regime change which reflect the United States' stance *vis-à-vis* the Kremlin. In short, European sanctions are temporary and directed toward specific targets while American sanctions are punitive and permanent. This is the result of the not-too-distant history of Russia-US confrontation and of scars which have never healed. The Cold War heritage is still palpable today, and it comes as no surprise that even before the Russian intervention in Ukraine it was diplomatically impossible for the two parties to organise bilateral meetings on the margins of the G-8 and G-20.


From left to right: Oleksiy Haran, E. Wayne Merry, Nona Mikhelidze

Much of the debate following Merry's presentation focused on the causes that triggered the Russian response in Ukraine. The respective views were multifaceted. According to one panellist, the assertion that it was the EU's desire to pull Ukraine into its sphere of influence through the Association Agreement is completely misguided. Far from being true, this is the illusion that the Kremlin would like to give the rest of the world, while in reality it was Russia's undeniable opposition to the Association Agreement that ignited the crisis, fearing that Ukraine would slip out of Russia's geopolitical grasp. This opinion was endorsed by another panellist who criticised Russia's claim of primacy over Ukraine and stated that Russian control of Ukraine would have persisted regardless of the Association Agreement. A third panellist, by contrast, located the origins of the crisis within the flawed European security architecture, which has prevented the EU from correctly interpreting Russia's interests. In this sense, the Association Agreement was interpreted by the Kremlin as a deliberate provocation. In fact, since the end of the Cold War, the West's obstinate suspicion and constant downplaying of Russia's interests in the region have been crucial in transforming Russia from a pro-Western country to an anti-Western one. This statement, however, did not sit well with some of the other participants who did not share the idea that Russia ever saw herself as part of the Western world nor longed to become a part of it.

The domestic causes of the conflict were also discussed. The Ukrainian and Russian speakers disagreed over Ukraine's internal political scheme, which was deemed by the former to be characterised by a competing multiparty system, free and fair elections and a vibrant civil society enjoying full freedom of expression, and by the latter as an undemocratic censorship state despite the Euromaidan demonstrations. Due to this tense domestic situation, the Russian speaker argued, the Ukrainian crisis cannot be wholly attributed to the Russian factor.

Oleksiy Haran (left), E. Wayne Merry (right)

An interesting parallelism emerged between the EU's Eastern partnership, including the Association Agreement, and Russia's Eurasian Economic Community. One speaker argued that the latter Community was in all reality a structural harbinger to a more politicised Eurasian Economic Union in full-fledged confrontation with the European Union. This logic, he continued, was a point of political contention and highly important in shaping the crisis. The West should be warned against Russia's strategy of playing a waiting game: keeping pressure on the Ukrainian economy in the hope that deteriorating economic conditions will lure the country into the Eurasian Economic Union.

One idea that all participants seemed to have in common was that Russia's influence in the former Soviet space is structural and multi-layered and, as a consequence, Russia's political and military involvement in its neighbouring states is inevitable, as previously manifested in Georgia and Kosovo. The speakers' positions differed, however, as to whether Russia's attitude in this respect is shareable or not. According to one scholar, the notion of 'sphere of influence' is not a prerogative of Russian politics, and it is hypocritical for the rest of the world to point its finger when several countries have their own spheres of interest to take care of. Understandably, Russia views the current Ukrainian project as one aimed not at self-sufficiency or autonomy, but rather at becoming a pawn in the hands of an offensive West. Having been expelled from the European security architecture post-1989, Russia justified its intervention in Ukraine as a matter of security. In opposition, other speakers pointed out Russia's inexcusable behaviour and grave violation of international law in annexing Crimea to divert attention from democratic reforms in the country. Putin's bold assessment of Russians and Ukrainians as 'one people' was also mentioned as an attempt to justify Russian intervention in a sovereign country on grounds of ethnic identity, and as a clear attempt to exert Russia's sphere of influence.

Consensus was reached over the sanctions' precariousness. These sanctions, it was argued, are neither aimed at regime change nor at obliging Putin to let go of Ukraine, but are symbolic in nature and therefore inherently short-lived. Moreover, European disunity threatens the survival of sanctions and has been cleverly exploited by Russia in its overtures to Greece, Cyprus and Hungary. Similarly, sanctions targeted toward specific individuals of the Russian ruling elite were defined by one speaker as 'aspirational' because they might be a boomerang for Europe, resulting not in a split of the Russian ruling elite but in greater cohesion instead. Financial sanctions are, on the contrary, of greater impact because global financial institutions are hesitant to engage in the Russian markets as it might compromise their ability to operate in other more profitable arenas. While agreeing with this evaluation,


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another expert argued that the European energy trade will hardly be contained by sanctions given that, despite American objections, EU-Russian energy exchange has been consistently successful.

Sergey Markedonov (left), Sonia Lucarelli (right)

Concerning future proposals for action, it was agreed that adherence by the West to the signed agreements is crucial. One speaker stressed that if the EU and the US are unable to construct and implement tougher sanctions, they should make a greater effort to respect their shared commitments such as the Budapest Memorandum – which includes security assurances directed at Ukraine's territorial integrity and political independence – and the Geneva format for multilateral discussions. This speaker also reminded the audience that the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada viewed Russia's annexation of Crimea as a breach of the Memorandum and should therefore take a firmer stance, especially toward Moscow's continued military involvement.

More than one panellist underscored the need for transatlantic players to treat Ukraine as a foreign policy priority, but views differed on the burden sharing between Europe and the United States. Due to NATO's difficulties in aligning the security concerns of its member states, one participant stressed that it is up to both Europe and the United States, as individual entities, to confront the crisis in Ukraine. This may take a backseat in Washington, but it must be a prime target for Brussels since Ukraine is a European country and a fully-fledged European economy. Another participant urged Europe and the United States alike to increase their joint commitment in Ukraine by implementing and enforcing the Minsk agreements with a goal of obtaining a definitive withdrawal of Russian troops from Donbass. OSCE monitoring in occupied territories has allowed for free and fair elections; nonetheless, more than one participant expressed the idea that the OSCE should be seen as an auxiliary tool, not a political player capable of supplanting, or even acting on behalf of the EU. Crucial military guarantees on the EU's side must be complemented, as debated by a third participant, by a regulatory environment and transparent governance enacted through the European Neighbourhood Policy. The EU's engagement is fundamental and should be targeted towards generating improvements in Ukraine's economy and politics to prevent the country from fracturing or becoming disillusioned, and ultimately from turning back to Russia. This assessment recalled the words of a previous speaker who underlined an overall mistrust in Ukraine of the actions and intentions of its Western partners.

Overall, the panellists recognised that the most compelling issue currently at stake is Ukraine's future, in defence of which more convincing and durable actions must be taken on a Transatlantic level, particularly by Europe. Sanctions can only solve part of the problem, but should not be seen as the primary tool for ending


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Nona Mikhekidze (left), Roy Allison (right)

this critical scenario, especially if one considers the uneven impulses driving America and Europe, in addition to the lack of unity affecting the EU's foreign capabilities.

## Session III. NATO and European Security: Back to the Roots?

The *fil-rouge* of the third session was NATO's role and structural reform in view of the upcoming 2016 Warsaw Summit. To what extent do new global challenges require that NATO updates its mission, renews its military posture and rebuilds its defence capability? In brief, should NATO return to its origin as an instrument of protection from and containment of generally recognised enemies of the Alliance?

Following the demise of the bipolar global order, forty years after the birth of NATO, the geography of Europe has changed considerably. The consolidation of Europe into an entity that is 'whole and at peace' has underpinned NATO's structural transformations. On the one hand, NATO's enlargement since the end of the Cold War has gone a long way East – its current borders are no longer located on German territory but on the Baltic states, hence acquiring a larger area under its defence umbrella. On the other hand, over the past twenty-five years NATO has experienced a rapid downsizing of its militaries and command structure, which stood at 23,000 men at the end of the Cold War and now stands at 6,000. This transformation in NATO's military capacity has scaled down and simplified the organisation in light of today's conflict scenario, which requires high-mobility, out of area and low-intensity operations. At the same time, recent incidents on NATO's new border with Russia, as well as in aspiring NATO member states such as Ukraine and Georgia, have raised doubts on whether NATO should return to its roots as a full-fledged defence alliance endowed with a full spectrum of wartime capabilities.

It was initially underscored that the Alliance must make long-term adaptations to face present challenges, particularly Russia. On the political side, the question is how to engage, diplomatically and at governmental level, with this major global player. There is no doubt that there has to be a dialogue, but the 'what' and 'when' are yet to be defined. One forum could be the Ukrainian crisis, where the Alliance and Russian forces are moving in the same space and closely watching each other's steps; alternatively, Russia's incursion in Syrian and Iraqi territories occupied by the Islamic State could convince a coalition of the willing – comprising some members of the Alliance – to wage war against ISIS. On the military side, the adaptation is delicate and costly. Russia has undertaken a large-scale modernisation process following the conflict with Georgia in 2008, which has to be duly faced by the


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Claudia Major

Alliance. In this respect, one should recall the 2014 Wales Summit decision to reverse the trend of declining defence budgets back to 2 percent of GDP with a goal of effectively meeting NATO's capability priorities; a percentage that might be still too low. Finally, on the institutional level, the question that surfaced is whether NATO is fit for the task of providing effective command and control in the possibility of war-fighting in the Euro-Atlantic area; granted, NATO's military presence exceeds Russia's in conventional terms, but it lacks the resources for high-intensity combined-arms activity.

This agenda – designed for political, military and institutional adaptation – is on the table as leaders move towards the 2016 Warsaw Summit. The cause of these problems can ultimately be traced back to NATO's structural fallacies, and to the gradual devolution of authority from the military to the political level, which has made the Alliance sluggish. Indeed, NATO must concentrate on its political responsiveness in order to react more effectively and anticipate military involvement.

**Claudia Major**'s analysis dealt primarily with NATO's core task of collective defence in the context of new internal and external challenges. Rather than returning to its roots, she argues that NATO should focus on reinventing itself by fulfilling three goals: ensuring political unity and regional coordination, living up to its military commitments and up-scaling its resources. NATO's re-education is further complicated by today's external environment, characterised by the simultaneity of crises and their hybrid nature. The Alliance no longer has the luxury of concentrating on collective defence alone, but must focus to an even greater extent on crisis management and cooperative security, both of which are at the forefront of Europe's concerns.

This assessment on NATO adaptation and near-future implications resonated with the other panellists and the audience. A fruitful discussion ensued in which several issues were debated.

First, attention was placed on the need to elaborate a transatlantic strategy in order to deal with shared interests and challenges. Views differed on political and military relations, as well as the degree of cooperation, between the United States and Europe within the Alliance. According to a couple of speakers, it is an indisputable fact that the United States has left Europe, both in physical and political terms. The internal setting of NATO has changed, as argued by one panellist, and this has been made manifest through the United States' voluntary decision to revoke the leadership of certain projects and initiatives. For example, the Readiness Action Plan adopted at the 2014 Wales Summit marked the most substantial military adaptation since

Riccardo Alcaro (left), Claudia Major (right)

the end of the Cold War, providing a comprehensive package of measures to respond to the threats posed by Russia as well as the risks emanating from the South, Middle East and North Africa; yet, the United States did not claim leadership for this Plan, leaving the responsibility to the Europeans instead. Despite the United States' critical importance both as a policy and decision-maker within NATO, the remarkable fact remains that the United States has loosened its grip on what happens in Europe in such a way that European member states of the Alliance must rely on themselves and build a tight network of security. This position was not, however, supported by all: one participant reminded those present that the US has more nuclear weapons deployed in Europe than India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea have in their entire arsenal, and spends billions of dollars for maintenance of these weapons. It was nevertheless acknowledged by all that Europe must implement its political weight and visibility within the Alliance, paying particular attention to the regions in the South and East.

The debate on regional alliances went hand in hand with this very salient point. Indeed, one scholar reminded the audience that there is an important regional focus within NATO's adaptation and modernisation package. NATO's relearning process in Europe's changing security environment is grounded in a less dispersive, more concentrated regional engagement. An increased military presence in Eastern Europe – following the decision made at the 2014 Wales Summit in the framework of the Readiness Action Plan – is expected to result from the creation of Force Integration Units in Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria and Poland to better manoeuvre operations in the area. The Eastern and Southern fronts of Europe must work together, and this could come about, for instance, by establishing mutually-beneficial maritime surveillance pools, hence increasing bilateral cooperation and coordination. According to another panellist, the fact that Europe is today much more dependent on itself – and therefore requires a more robust security architecture – implies that there must be more regional commitment; although the Baltic and Eastern European states are important players in this respect, the potential contribution of Nordic countries is just as crucial. This invitation to discuss Finland and Sweden was applauded by another panellist as a way to broaden the discussion beyond immediate concerns.

A point of contention among the speakers involved the core aspect of NATO's adaptation agenda. One speaker warned against focusing too closely on the intra-institutional perspective, which overshadows the real challenge, namely European security in light of Russia's intentions. NATO's resource scarcity is a given issue. European countries enjoyed a peace dividend after the end of the Cold War, partially thanks to the EU's rampant integration process. This, coupled with the economic


ISSN 2280-6164

ISSN 2280-6164

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From left to right: Andrew Budd, Riccardo Alcaro, Claudia Major

crisis that hit Europe hardest in 2008, caused European countries to slaughter their defence budgets with cuts up to 30 percent. The resulting European *bonsai* armies – as defined by a group of security and defence experts – are completely useless in military terms, as the failed intervention in Libya recently indicated. In order to further project NATO's military power, one panellist commented, the aim should not be to reverse the trend of declining defence spending to the 2 percent threshold, but rather to invest an even greater share of national budgets on defence. Nevertheless, it was agreed, the debate on resources and military capabilities should not rest exclusively on numbers. To think that all Alliance members are willing to devote such a quota of their budget to military expenditure is naive and short-sighted. Rather, the emphasis should be on pooling and sharing resources, using the current, albeit meagre, budgets in a more orderly, output-oriented manner.

Whether political cooperation represents a viable long-term alternative to boosting military capabilities is doubtful – yet, given the general consensus over the unlikelihood that the 2 percent deadline will be reached anytime soon, attention shifted to complementary approaches in confronting European security challenges. According to one speaker, this involves breaking away from the sectoral narrative that views crisis management and collective defence as separate NATO duties located, respectively, in Southern and Eastern Europe. As a matter of fact, collective defence should begin when crisis management fails, and this is true for both regions. The solution must arrive through widespread awareness of the threats Europe is facing, both internally and externally. Unconventional, hybrid-type warfare is being waged throughout the European neighbourhood; the Russia-Ukraine crisis is only a speck in a whole constellation of crises reaching to the Middle East, from interstate war and piracy to foreign fighters and the refugee exodus. NATO must persevere in displaying its political unity, possibly in close cooperation with other actors such as the EU and the UN, to formulate responses to the security challenges of the 21st century, from cyber threats to ideological fanaticism and the claims of minorities, while bearing in mind that these threats spread quickly and pervasively.

NATO's lack of cohesion and, most notably, its transatlantic gap were touched upon once more in the concluding phase of this session. It was widely acknowledged that American leadership has been the binding glue of the Alliance, yet the American political elite have lost interest in Europe and in transatlantic issues at large. This poses a serious threat to the survival and enduring unity of the Alliance, and should fundamentally be a siren for Europeans to re-establish their foundations and reinforce their security and defence infrastructure. The subject of European

Silvia Colombo

security is of utmost significance in light of contemporary challenges. While some speakers warned against viewing Russia as the sole enemy at the risk of reinforcing conflictual dynamics, it is evident that – due to this country's geographical proximity to Europe – the need to supplement Europe's military capacity stems from Russia's hegemonic nerve on its borders with Europe.

## Session IV. Dealing with Uncertainty and Volatility: Challenges and Opportunities for Europe's Energy Security

The subject of Russia emerged once again during the conference's fourth session. Russian energy supply is definitely one of the most controversial elements of Europe-Russia relations in light of current geopolitical circumstances. A pronounced energy-security nexus has emerged due to the heterogeneous distribution of energy stocks across the globe. European states require large imports to meet their domestic demand. Maintaining stable and friendly relations with energy-rich regimes has, therefore, become a key foreign policy objective for the EU, especially given that 53 percent of Europe's total energy consumption is foreign-sourced. Nevertheless, Russia's annexation of Crimea has drawn attention to fundamental doubts about EU relations with countries violating international norms. The implications of such political dynamics on European energy security take centre stage in **Katja Yafimava**'s paper.

Yafimava focused her discussion on two questions; namely the role of gas as a foreign policy weapon and the desirability of reducing European reliance on Russian gas. It has been established that the average level of European dependence on Russian gas stands somewhere within a reasonable 25-30 percent range; however, this value does not uniformly apply throughout Europe. In the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis, the European Commission ran a comprehensive study on European energy security: the results indicated that countries in the Baltics and in South-Eastern Europe are more dependent on Russian gas and therefore more vulnerable to interruptions in the normal flow of gas supplies. By contrast, Western Europe's dependence is healthier and more diversified. Consequently, the debate on reducing European reliance on Russian energy boils down to a handful of truly vulnerable states which, moreover, share another common denominator: the fear of Russian aggression, rekindled by events in Ukraine.

Another important distinction was made between the geopolitical and commercial dimensions of Russian gas. Regarding the former, Russia can potentially use gas as a weapon, defined as the reduction of supplies to European states in order to


ISSN 2280-6164

ISSN 2280-6164



From left to right: Ettore Greco, Gianfranco Incarnato, Lorenzo Kamel

force compliance with strategic and political goals. For Russia, energy is clearly a factor of international status; what must be assessed is the actual likeliness that they will use this tool as weapon. Limiting the supply of gas to Europe would have profound commercial repercussions on Russia's federal budget, more than half of which originates from oil and gas revenues. In short, Russia's capacity to exercise this threat is limited by a high cost. Commercial reasoning aside, in terms of political intent Russia has always denied any intention to cut European gas supplies. Historical evidence validates this argument. Indeed, over the past fifty years Russia-EU energy cooperation has been consistently stable; furthermore, Russia has established itself as a reliable and competitive energy provider compared to others.

While the actual threat of a gas weapon may be overblown, the importance of the matter with regards to the international political equilibrium is that global awareness of this threat has increased following events in Ukraine. This has been especially true in countries whose societies have been branded by the Soviet legacy. Not only are countries belonging to the former Soviet space more reliant on Russian gas, they also fear present-day Russia attempting to re-establish Soviet hegemony, and this fuels hostile feelings that may easily spill over into Europe.

Much of the debate focused on the nature of the energy relationship between Russia and Europe. The political and commercial dimensions were once again brought into the picture. One speaker pointed out an interesting paradox: while political relations between Europe and Russia are falling apart and at their lowest point in the past quarter-century, the gas relationship is instead at its apex. This is not to say that the commercial component of Europe-Russia energy trade is de-politicised. Views differed on whether to treat these two dimensions separately or complementarily. According to one speaker, if one considers state-owned Gazprom's business policy, it is unthinkable to separate the commercial from the political. The interconnection between the Russian gas giant and the Kremlin's geopolitical objectives was supported by another speaker as well. The blending of commercial and political interests has also manifested itself through the Kremlin's attempt to cement its position in the European markets by replacing the Ukrainian transit route with an alternative Turkish one.

Turkey could indeed prove to be a major partner for both Russia and the EU. On the one hand, as one participant highlighted, Turkey could turn out to be a competitor of Russia for energy deliverance to Europe; but Turkey has frequently found itself caught in the line of fire between these two parties. For instance, Turkey's response

Conference participants

to the 2008 conflict in Georgia was limited by its dependence on Russia, as are its options today in Syria. This speaker noted that while, theoretically, an energy partnership between Turkey and the EU by virtue of the Caspian basin would be ideal, the lack of a common policy has forced the project to abort. More broadly, the lack of coordinated responses to the Russian question has led to subprime results such as Germany's "free-riding" behaviour. Unless the EU is serious about establishing linear communication with Turkey in the energy supply field, Turkey may once again look to Russia as an energy ally.

In analysing alternatives to Russian gas, including cleaner and more sustainable sources of energy, panellists asked themselves whether adequate infrastructure exists to support such a transition. It is true that Europe has been a pioneer in the "renewables" market, but relinquishing gas entirely is unfeasible for a number of reasons. First, Central and Southern European states have a long way to go in diversifying their supplies, since they have only just begun to do so following the 2009 Russia-Ukraine gas dispute. Due to their exposure, countries that are heavily reliant on the Ukrainian transit route, namely Lithuania and Poland, have begun looking for alternatives. By building liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities they could considerably reduce their dependency on gas, but there is no guarantee that this or other forms of alternatives will be cheaper than Russian gas. Interestingly, one expert noted that resorting to LNG could be a bargaining tool for reducing the price of Russian gas; however, commercial tests have shown that one of the reasons why gas prices differ across Europe is that in some areas experience more limited competition than others, causing the price to rise. Second, access to alternatives is constrained by a lack of infrastructure that would have to be provided for by European taxpayers through the implementation of unpopular fiscal policies. Although the European Union has launched the Energy Union Strategy calling for an integrated European energy market and vowing to supplement funding for infrastructure by 2020, one panellist predicted that dependence on Russian gas is likely to remain significant until at least 2030.

Overall, there was clear unanimity on the idea that gas relations between Russia and Europe will endure. Commercial calculations appear to be driving the future of Europe-Russia energy relations. On the one hand, the high costs of losing European markets deter Russia from using gas as a political weapon; on the other hand, the likelihood of the EU replacing Russian gas with alternatives such as LNG and Azeri gas is low. Given the circumstances, cooperation between the two parties appears unavoidable.


ISSN 2280-6164

This can only be achieved by perpetuating EU-Russia energy dialogue. At least two speakers agreed that while the Energy Union Strategy is undoubtedly a ground-breaking initiative, by making only one brief reference to Russia the document suggests that Russian gas is politically unwelcome. Whilst understandable in light of the Ukraine crisis, this is an urgent issue that requires rephrasing and normalisation. At the same time, as emphasised by more than one participant, it is only fair that the EU broadens its vision to other energy partners. North America and Australia are promising prospective suppliers of natural gas, as is the Eastern Mediterranean basin with which the EU is actively engaged. All in all, there is a fair margin for a transatlantic energy strategy that might allow Europe to diversify its supply routes and overcome its virtual dependence on a single supplier.

## Conclusion

The eighth edition of the Transatlantic Security Symposium once again represented an occasion for gathering views and opinions on the current global security agenda. The prescribed goal of identifying points of convergence and divergence between Europe and the United States was successfully met, while at the same time acknowledging that political cohesion within the European Union is vital for implementing shared Transatlantic objectives. As NATO – an organisation embracing the Euro-Atlantic space – announces its commitment to increased defence capacity, updates its mission and adjusts its military posture in the face of present challenges, the strategic implications of a renovated Alliance must be taken into account. Within this framework, the discussants explored the nature of Islamic State terrorism, the underlying triggers of the Russia-Ukraine crisis, and solutions to Europe's energy vulnerabilities. Admittedly, global leaders and societies at large are struggling to come to terms with these new scenarios and their destabilising consequences; nevertheless, efforts at producing an integrated and practicable approach – both on military and diplomatic grounds – must persist on both shores of the Atlantic in a mutual display of unity and determination.

*Updated 18 January 2016*


ISSN 2280-6164

# Conference Programme

Rome, 26 October 2015

## Welcome Addresses

**Gianfranco Incarnato**, Deputy Director General/Principal Director for Security, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

**Ettore Greco**, Director, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome

## Session 1

*Fight Against Terrorism: How to Deal with ISIS?*

| | |
|---|---|
| Chair | **Nathalie Tocci**, Deputy Director, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome |
| Paper-giver | **Omar Ashour**, Senior Lecturer in Middle East Politics and Security Studies, University of Exeter, Exeter |
| Discussants | **Fatma Ceren Yazgan**, Deputy Director General for Security and Intelligence Affairs, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ankara |
| | **Aaron Y. Zelin**, Founder of Jihadology.net, Richard Borrow Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington |
| | **Lorenzo Kamel**, Postdoc Fellow, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University and Associate Fellow, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome |

## Session 2

*Dealing with the Ukrainian Crisis: A Transatlantic Strategy*

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| Chair | **Nona Mikhelidze**, Senior Fellow, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome |
| Paper-giver | **E. Wayne Merry**, Senior Fellow for Europe and Eurasia, American Foreign Policy Council, Washington |
| Discussants | **Oleksiy Haran**, Scientific Director of the School for Political Analysis and Professor of the National University of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Kyiv |



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**Sergey Markedonov**, Associate Professor at the Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow

**Roy Allison**, Head of Russian and East European Studies, University of Oxford, Oxford

**Session 3**

*NATO and European Security: Back to the Roots?*

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|---|---|
| Chair | **Riccardo Alcaro**, Senior Fellow, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome |
| Keynote speech | **Andrew Budd**, Head Defense Capabilities Section, Defense Policy and Planning Division, NATO, Brussels |
| Paper-giver | **Claudia Major**, Senior Associate, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Berlin |
| Discussants | **Olaf Osica**, Executive Director, Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), Warsaw<br>**Greg Thielmann**, Senior Fellow, Arms Control Association, Washington |

**Session 4**

*Dealing with Uncertainty and Volatility: Challenges and Opportunities for Europe's Energy Security*

| | |
|---|---|
| Chair | **Nicolò Sartori**, Senior Fellow, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome |
| Paper-giver | **Katja Yafimava**, Senior Fellow, Oxford Institute for Energy Studies (OIES), Oxford |
| Discussants | **David Koranyi**, Director, Eurasian Energy Futures Initiative, Atlantic Council, Washington<br>**Valeria Termini**, Commissioner of the Italian Regulatory Authority for Electricity and Gas and Vicepresident of the Council of European energy regulators CEER, Rome<br>**Şaban Kardaş**, President, Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM), Ankara |


ISSN 2280-6164

ISSN 2280-6164

DOCUMENTI IAI 16 | 01 - JANUARY 2016

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

Founded by Altiero Spinelli in 1965, does research in the fields of foreign policy, political economy and international security. A non-profit organisation, the IAI aims to further and disseminate knowledge through research studies, conferences and publications. To that end, it cooperates with other research institutes, universities and foundations in Italy and abroad and is a member of various international networks. More specifically, the main research sectors are: European institutions and policies; Italian foreign policy; trends in the global economy and internationalisation processes in Italy; the Mediterranean and the Middle East; defence economy and policy; and transatlantic relations. The IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (The International Spectator), an online webzine (AffarInternazionali), two series of research papers (Quaderni IAI and IAI Research Papers) and other papers' series related to IAI research projects.

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