



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



FOCUS EUROPE

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FOCUS EUROPE

This monthly publication analyses strategic developments in Europe and India's relations with the EU and major European powers and is authored by Amb. Ruchira Kamboj, Senior Fellow for International Security and Global Affairs. Your comments and feedback may be addressed to the author at ruchira@dpg.org.in. To subscribe, please [click here](#).

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Cover Images:

1. EU Ministers for Defence hold an informal meeting to discuss key priorities under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) on June 8, 2026, in Nicosia. Source: [European Council](#)
2. António Costa, Nikos Christodoulides and Ursula Von Der Leyen, at the press briefing of EU leaders on June 18 and 19, 2026, in Brussels. Source: [European Union](#)
3. India's External Affairs Minister, Dr S. Jaishankar, took part in the Foreign Affairs Council in its Gymnich format in Cyprus on 28 May, 2026. Source: [Dr S. Jaishankar](#)

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Focus Europe:
**Europe in Transition: Emerging EU Trends and Implications
for India**

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Europe in Transition: Emerging EU Trends and Implications for India

by

Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj

Introduction

The European Union's deliberations during June 2026, culminating in the formal European Council meeting of 18-19 June, offer valuable insights into Europe's evolving strategic direction. While many of the discussed themes: Ukraine, defence readiness, energy security, strategic autonomy, enlargement, and external partnerships, have featured prominently in earlier European Council meetings in March and April, the June discussions suggest that the European Union is gradually moving beyond identifying challenges towards implementing practical responses.

Overall, four broad trends emerge. First, Europe is increasingly prioritising security and defence. Second, the pursuit of strategic autonomy is increasingly being translated into operational policies and institutional mechanisms. Third, Europe continues to combine hard security measures in its eastern neighbourhood with diplomacy and de-escalation in West Asia. Finally, the EU is actively diversifying its external partnerships, including with India, as it seeks to hedge in response to an increasingly turbulent geopolitical landscape.

The June Decision Cycle

Defence Ministers' Meeting: The Security Turn Becomes Visible

The informal meeting of EU Defence Ministers held in Cyprus on 7-8 June offered perhaps the clearest evidence of Europe's ongoing transformation. Discussions focused on strengthening Europe's defence industrial base, increasing joint procurement, improving military readiness, supporting Ukraine over the long term, and protecting critical maritime routes such as those linked to the Red Sea, through Operation ASPIDES. Rather than introducing entirely new priorities, the meeting demonstrated how Europe's defence agenda is increasingly centred on implementation and capability-building.

For decades, Europe largely relied on NATO and the United States to provide security guarantees. Defence spending remained relatively low, while European integration concentrated on economic and political cooperation. The Ukraine war has fundamentally challenged these assumptions.

Today, European leaders increasingly recognise that security cannot be taken for granted. Defence preparedness, industrial capacity, and military readiness have become central policy concerns. Discussions now focus not only on spending more but also on producing more, whether ammunition, equipment, or advanced defence technologies. This broader shift was also reflected in the appointment of former Dutch Defence Minister Kajsa Ollongren as Secretary-General of the European External Action Service, alongside David Cvach, France's ambassador to NATO, as Deputy Secretary-General for Peace, Security and Defence. Together, the appointments underscored the EU's growing emphasis on defence, security, and closer cooperation with NATO.

The debate surrounding Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union is also revealing. The article obliges EU member states to provide aid and assistance if another member state becomes the victim of armed aggression. At the same time, it explicitly acknowledges NATO as the foundation of collective defence for those states that belong to the Alliance. This tension captures the essence of Europe's strategic autonomy debate. Europe seeks greater autonomy, yet NATO remains indispensable to its security. Article 42(7) therefore highlights both Europe's ambitions and its limitations.

Foreign Affairs Council: Setting the Stage for the European Council

The Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), chaired by High Representative Kallas met on 15 June 2026, just days before the European Council. The meeting served as an important preparatory forum, allowing EU foreign ministers to coordinate positions on key policy & security issues that would later be discussed by European leaders. The agenda centred on Ukraine, Russia, the Middle East, Iran, the Western Balkans, and Europe's wider external partnerships, reflecting the increasingly geopolitical orientation of EU foreign policy.

Ukraine remained the central focus of the discussions. Foreign ministers reaffirmed the European Union's commitment to continued political, financial, military, and humanitarian support for Kyiv, even as Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha participated via videoconference to brief ministers on the evolving situation on the ground. Alongside discussions on continued assistance, the Council formally adopted a new package of restrictive measures against Russia. The sanctions targeted Russia's energy revenues, military-industrial complex, propaganda networks, individuals responsible for human rights violations, and mechanisms used to circumvent existing sanctions through third countries. 'Every measure further restricts Russia's room for manoeuvre', tweeted Kallas in defence of this policy. Unlike the subsequent European Council meeting, which provided political endorsement of the Union's broader Russia

strategy, it was the Foreign Affairs Council that translated political objectives into concrete foreign policy measures through the formal adoption of these sanctions.

At one level, the sanctions package appears to be a continuation of existing policy. Since 2022, the EU has repeatedly imposed sanctions in response to Russia's actions in Ukraine. Yet the June package reflects something deeper. Europe increasingly sees Russia not as a temporary challenge but as a long-term strategic competitor.

Earlier hopes that relations with Moscow could eventually return to normal have largely disappeared. Instead, the dominant framework today is one of deterrence, containment, resilience, and long-term competition. Ahead of unveiling the proposed 21st sanctions package against Russia on 9 June, Kallas captured the EU's approach in a tweet: 'Brick by brick, we are collapsing the foundations of Russia's war economy.'

While Europe has adopted a relatively hard-edged approach towards Russia, its response to developments in West Asia remains notably different. Kallas' engagement with the Iranian Foreign Minister and the EU's repeated emphasis on de-escalation demonstrate Europe's preference for diplomacy over confrontation in the region. 'The Middle East does not need another escalation. All parties must return to the negotiating table.'

This difference is not accidental. Unlike Ukraine, where European security is perceived to be directly at stake, Europe's interests in West Asia are primarily linked to stability, energy security, trade, and freedom of navigation. The possibility of wider regional escalation, particularly around the Strait of Hormuz, remains a major concern for European policymakers. Any disruption to maritime routes could significantly affect global energy prices and, by extension, European economic stability. Europe therefore seeks to position itself as a diplomatic actor capable of encouraging dialogue and preventing escalation. This reflects both strategic calculation and practical limitations. The EU does not yet possess the military cohesion or political consensus necessary for a more assertive role in the region. Consequently, diplomacy becomes not merely a preference but a strategic necessity.

The Iran file therefore reveals an important aspect of Europe's emerging foreign policy. The EU is increasingly willing to employ different tools in different theatres. In Ukraine, it combines sanctions, military assistance, and security commitments. In West Asia, it prioritises diplomacy, dialogue, and crisis management. This flexibility suggests a more mature and pragmatic approach to foreign policy than is often acknowledged.

Taken together, the FAC served as an important bridge between operational diplomacy and strategic political decision-making. Many of the themes that dominated the European Council meeting later that week, including Ukraine,

sanctions, energy security, defence, and external partnerships, were first debated and refined at the ministerial level. The FAC thus illustrates the European Union's layered decision-making process, with ministerial deliberations helping to shape the strategic direction subsequently endorsed by European leaders.

The European Council Meeting: Consolidating Europe's Strategic Transformation

The European Council meeting of 18–19 June served as the culmination of several themes that have engaged the European Union throughout 2026. It was also the last formal meeting under the Cyprus Presidency, as the baton now passes to Ireland.

Ukraine remained at the centre of discussions. European leaders reaffirmed their commitment to continued political, financial, and military support for Kyiv while also maintaining pressure on Russia through sanctions. The Council's conclusions reflected the increasingly widespread view within Europe that the outcome of the conflict is directly linked to the future security architecture of the continent. This is a notable departure from the earlier framing of the war as primarily a humanitarian or political crisis. Ukraine is now increasingly understood as a core European security issue.

It is important to distinguish between the various sanctions-related decisions taken by the European Union in June, including the proposed twenty-first sanctions package announced by the European Commission on 9 June, which remains under discussion among Member States, the measures adopted at the Foreign Affairs Council, and those politically agreed by the European Council. On 15 June, the Council adopted additional restrictive measures targeting Russia's energy revenues, military-industrial complex, propaganda networks, hybrid activities, human rights violations, and sanctions evasion. Three days later, the European Council politically agreed to renew the Union's economic sanctions against Russia for twelve months, instead of the previous six-month renewal cycle; this decision was formally adopted by the Council on 25 June. The longer renewal period reflects Europe's growing view of confrontation with Russia as a long-term strategic challenge rather than a temporary crisis.

The meeting also underscored the growing importance of defence preparedness. Throughout the discussions, leaders stressed the need to strengthen Europe's defence industrial base, improve military readiness, and enhance collective security capabilities. These priorities are closely linked to wider debates surrounding strategic autonomy. While Europe continues to rely heavily on NATO and the United States for deterrence and defence, there is an increasing recognition that European states must be able to assume greater responsibility for their own security. The June meeting

reinforced ongoing efforts to strengthen Europe's defence preparedness, military readiness, and collective security capabilities.

Economic resilience and competitiveness also featured prominently. European leaders emphasised the importance of strengthening the Single Market, reducing strategic dependencies, and improving industrial competitiveness. These discussions are closely connected to Europe's broader strategic autonomy agenda. The objective is no longer simply economic growth but economic security, ensuring that Europe possesses the technological capabilities, industrial capacity, and supply chain resilience necessary to withstand future geopolitical shocks.

Energy security remained another important theme. Although the immediate crisis generated by Europe's dependence on Russian energy has eased compared to the early years of the Ukraine war, concerns regarding energy resilience continue to shape policymaking. Developments in West Asia, particularly tensions involving

Iran and the Strait of Hormuz have reinforced European awareness of the vulnerabilities associated with external energy dependence. Consequently, the June meeting reflected continued efforts to diversify energy sources, expand renewable energy capacity, and strengthen partnerships with alternative suppliers.

Enlargement also featured as an important strategic priority during the June European Council meeting. Leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the accession processes of Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans, while emphasising that enlargement is increasingly viewed not merely as an institutional exercise but as a geopolitical instrument for promoting stability, resilience, and long-term security across Europe's neighbourhood. In the context of Russia's continued aggression and broader geopolitical competition, enlargement has acquired renewed strategic significance as the European Union seeks to strengthen both its internal cohesion and its influence across neighbouring regions.

The meeting also highlighted Europe's growing emphasis on external partnerships as part of a broader strategy to reduce vulnerabilities and strengthen resilience. Engagements with partners across the Indo-Pacific, Africa, and other regions reflect this trend.

Strategic Trends

From Welfare to Security

Perhaps the most important trend visible across recent meetings is Europe's gradual transition from a welfare-oriented mindset towards a security-oriented one. For much of the post-1945 period, Europe prioritised economic integration, social welfare,

regulation, and diplomacy. Security concerns were often delegated to NATO, while European institutions focused primarily on economic and political cooperation.

Today, however, the strategic environment has changed dramatically. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, instability in West Asia, and uncertainty regarding future American commitments have pushed security and defence to the forefront of European policymaking. The language emerging from EU institutions increasingly reflects this shift. Ukraine is now framed not only as a humanitarian concern but as a core European security issue.

Operationalizing Strategic Autonomy

Another major trajectory is the evolution of strategic autonomy from an abstract concept into a more practical policy agenda. Before the Ukraine war, strategic autonomy was primarily associated with economic resilience, technological sovereignty, and reducing external dependencies. Europe sought to strengthen semiconductor production, secure supply chains, regulate digital platforms, and reduce vulnerabilities linked to critical technologies.

Since the outbreak of the Ukraine war, however, the concept has expanded significantly into defence and security. Discussions increasingly focus on military readiness, defence industrial production, ammunition stockpiling, procurement coordination, and collective preparedness. The June meetings suggest that Europe is gradually attempting to translate strategic ambition into institutional and operational capability.

At the same time, the limits of European strategic autonomy remain evident. NATO continues to serve as the cornerstone of collective defence, while the United States remains indispensable in areas such as intelligence, deterrence, strategic lift, and advanced military capabilities. Significantly, Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union, the EU's mutual defence clause, stipulates that commitments in this area "shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation," which, for its members, "remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation." In other words, the EU's own founding treaty recognises that European defence autonomy operates within, rather than independently of, the transatlantic security architecture.

A second constraint lies within Europe itself. Ambitions for strategic autonomy continue to be hampered by the fragmentation of Europe's defence industrial base and persistent disagreements among member states. The repeated delays and industrial disputes surrounding the Franco-German Future Combat Air System, including disagreements over the next-generation engine, illustrate how national interests can impede the very capability development on which strategic autonomy depends.

Diversification of Partnerships

A third major trend is Europe's diversification of external partnerships. Europe's growing engagement with partners across the Indo-Pacific, Africa, and Latin America reflects a broader strategy of reducing vulnerabilities and expanding strategic options. This approach is driven by several considerations. First, Europe seeks to reduce excessive dependence on China in critical sectors. Second, it aims to build more resilient supply chains. Third, it increasingly recognises the importance of partnerships beyond the traditional transatlantic framework. Rather than replacing existing partnerships, Europe appears to be pursuing a strategy of diversification and hedging in an increasingly uncertain international environment.

The 11th EU-Republic of Korea Summit held on 10 June in Brussels exemplified this trend. On the surface, the summit focused on trade, digital cooperation, supply chains, technology, economic security, and defence cooperation. More broadly, it underscored Europe's growing preference for partnerships with technologically advanced, economically dynamic, and politically like-minded countries. South Korea fits this description well.

The summit also reinforced Europe's emphasis on diversification, resilience, and de-risking, rather than outright decoupling. 'Beyond our borders, we must keep diversifying our trade ties. Less reliance means more resilience,' Commissioner von der Leyen tweeted after her meeting with Business Europe. Partnerships with countries such as South Korea enable Europe to diversify supply chains, deepen technological cooperation, and strengthen economic security.

The summit also highlights Europe's growing interest in the Indo-Pacific. Developments in Asia are no longer viewed as distant issues but as factors that directly influence European prosperity and security. This represents a significant departure from the more regionally focused outlook that characterised European policy for much of the post-Cold War era. 'When the international rules-based order is under attack, when aggressive neighbours threaten regional stability, we can count on South Korea as a trusted friend and partner,' Kallas tweeted after the summit.

Continuity and Change Since March and April

When compared to the March and April European Council meetings, the June meeting reveals substantial continuity but also an important shift in emphasis. The core priorities, whether Ukraine, defence, strategic autonomy, energy security, or external partnerships, have remained remarkably consistent. What has changed is the emphasis on implementation. The March and April meetings largely established political priorities and identified challenges. By June, discussions increasingly

revolved around practical questions of defence production, sanctions enforcement, competitiveness, energy diversification, and partnership-building.

The Europe-India Strategic Convergence

Europe is currently undergoing a significant transition, shifting from policy deliberation to concrete implementation in areas such as defense preparedness, energy security, and supply chain diversification. As the continent seeks to reduce strategic vulnerabilities and build economic resilience, it is increasingly prioritizing partnerships with trusted international actors.

India has emerged as a key partner in this realignment. Europe's recognition of India's growing influence was underscored by EAM Jaishankar's participation in the Gymnich meeting of EU Foreign Ministers on 27-28 May in Cyprus, signaling a shift in perspective where India is now viewed as a vital strategic actor capable of shaping global security and governance, rather than merely a market.

This deepening relationship is underpinned by a shared commitment to maintaining a multipolar international order and preserving strategic flexibility. Both sides are advancing cooperation across technology, clean energy, and maritime security, while expediting the formal signature of the recently concluded Free Trade Agreement and advancing complementary investment arrangements. As Commission President von der Leyen recently affirmed, this momentum includes an accelerated focus on bolstering defense ties and advancing connectivity through the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor.

The central question for the upcoming months will not be whether Europe wishes to realise its strategic ambitions. Instead, it will be whether the continent can successfully develop the capabilities, partnerships, and political cohesion necessary to translate those ambitions into sustained strategic influence.



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