

Since 1999, the EU has been committed to building a common defence policy – with some military clout to back it up. However, despite bold expressions of military ambitions, the EU has set out a series of mostly quite modest aims such as peacekeeping and delivery of humanitarian aid. Since late 2000, Russia has actively discussed cooperation in security matters with the EU, and closely followed EU moves to develop a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). At the seventh Russia-EU summit in May 2001 it was agreed that

“Crisis management in Europe as well as the UN and OSCE matters have been identified as importance areas of co-operation. As the European Union is improving its capacity for conflict prevention... arrangements for strengthened dialogue and co-operation with Russia should lay the necessary ground for possible participation by Russia in EU-led crisis management operations under agreed conditions”.

Russia does not regard the prospect of EU widening with the same suspicion as NATO expansion. And it has given a cautious welcome to EU moves to acquire a military capability. Russia’s 1999 Medium Term Strategy towards the EU expresses the hope that the development of an EU defence identity and military capability could counterbalance or diminish NATO’s role in Europe. In turn, the EU has an interest in having a stable, non-threatening Russia on its borders.

However, September 11 has reignited the US-NATO relationship with Russia while highlighting the fact that EU military forces are highly unlikely to replace NATO and remove the US from involvement in managing European security. While NATO’s first invocation of Article 5 in 52 years showed that the European alliance is now taking on defensive commitments for the US and not just other way around, subsequently Europe and NATO were marginalized in the war only to be called on later for “peacekeeping” duties. In Russia’s eyes, Europe’s position was demoted and Russia and not Europe proved to be a strategic partner of the US. To quote David Calleo the new key relationship is now between “the superpower and the superpower-on-vacation”.⁵⁸

⁵⁸American University NATO conference in Paris, December 2001.