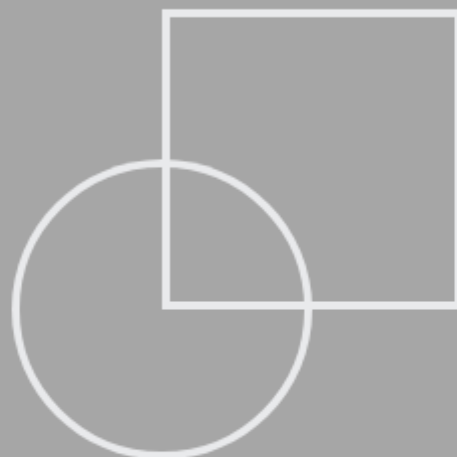# The Fine Memo 3

LA LIGNE FINE

Institut

Post-Europeanism
Understanding Europe's strategic adaptation to the return from war

Introduction — Why talk about post-Europeanism?

Since the outbreak of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, Europe has been facing a strategic upheaval on a scale not seen since the end of the Cold War. This conflict has not only put high-intensity warfare back at the heart of the continent; It also revealed the structural limits of the European project as it had gradually been built since the 1990s.

For more than three decades, European security has been based on a set of implicit assumptions: the enduring pacification of the continent, the integrating force of law and commerce, the belief in interdependence as a guarantee of stability, and the implicit delegation of strategic security to the United States. The war in Ukraine has put an end to these certainties. It has shown that military power, deterrence, the defence industry and the ability to last over time remain central determinants of security.

It is in this context that what can be described as **post-Europeanism** emerges: not a break with Europe, but a **strategic adaptation** of the European framework to the realities of the contemporary world.

Definition — What is post-Europeanism?

Post-Europeanism refers to a phase of strategic maturity of the European project in which integration is no longer seen as an ideological or automatic end, but as one instrument among others in the service of the continent's security, power and resilience.

It is based on a simple idea: Europe can no longer think of itself solely as a normative and economic project, detached from the balance of power. It must now assume that security is based first and foremost on concrete capabilities, rapid political decisions and a clear-eyed acceptance of the differences between Member States.

Post-Europeanism is therefore neither anti-Europeanism nor a return to nationalism. On the contrary, it is an attempt to preserve the essence of the European project by adapting it to a degraded strategic environment, marked by conflict, coercion and power competition.

What post-Europeanism is not

It is essential to dispel any ambiguity: post-Europeanism does not mean abandoning the European Union, calling into question the single market, or rejecting multilateralism. Nor is it a renunciation of European values or solidarity between Member States.

What post-Europeanism calls into question is not Europe as such, but the illusion that gradual integration alone would be enough to guarantee the continent's security. It acknowledges the fact that certain areas, first and foremost defence and deterrence, remain deeply linked to national sovereignty and the political choices of States.

The structural causes of the emergence of post-Europeanism

The emergence of post-Europeanism can be explained first and foremost by the brutal return of inter-state war in Europe. The Ukrainian conflict has demonstrated that European conventional deterrence is insufficient, that ammunition stockpiles are unsuitable for a protracted conflict, and that industrial capabilities are too fragmented to sustain a long-term war effort.

It can also be explained by the political fragmentation of the European Union. Perceptions of the Russian threat vary greatly between member states, especially between the east and west of the continent. Strategic cultures, national democratic constraints and political priorities now make a uniform approach to security illusory.

Finally, post-Europeanism is the product of the exhaustion of the European normative paradigm. While law, regulation and standards remain essential assets, they are proving

insufficient in the face of powers that fully assume a coercive strategy. Without a credible deterrent capability, the norm becomes vulnerable.

The pillars of post-Europeanism

The first pillar of post-Europeanism is the rediscovered centrality of states. They remain the ultimate actors in strategic decision-making, military engagement and democratic accountability. Post-Europeanism does not abolish national sovereignty; it organizes it in a more realistic cooperative framework.

The second pillar lies in the assumed use of voluntary coalitions. European security is now progressing through flexible formats, enhanced cooperation and ad hoc partnerships, based on the will and capacity of States to act. This model makes it possible to avoid institutional blockages without calling into question the political unity of the continent.

The third pillar is the pragmatic articulation between the European Union, NATO and the States. NATO is regaining operational centrality in terms of deterrence and collective defence, the European Union is playing a key role in the industrial, financial and resilience fields, while states are taking responsibility for decision-making and commitment. None of these levels is sufficient on its own; It is their complementarity that is the basis of strategic credibility.

Finally, post-Europeanism favours credibility over symbolism. Defence and security policies are judged on the basis of their real effectiveness, their budgetary sustainability and their democratic acceptability, and not solely on their declarative value.

Post-Europeanism seen from France

France occupies a unique position in this post-European framework. As the only nuclear power in the European Union, with a complete army and an autonomous strategic culture, it is called upon to play the role of an architect-power rather than a tutelary power.

In this logic, France is not seeking to Europeanise its nuclear deterrent, which remains strictly national, but to contribute de facto to a European collective shield based on robust conventional capabilities, integrated air defence, cyber defence and the resilience of societies.

Post-Europeanism thus allows France to fully assume its strategic responsibility while being part of a dynamic of enhanced cooperation with its most committed partners.

The democratic challenges of post-Europeanism

One of the major contributions of post-Europeanism is to put the democratic question back at the heart of the strategy. Sustainable security cannot be imposed from above; it requires the support of the societies. This implies a clear pedagogy of the threat, transparent strategic communication and a constant effort to link geopolitical issues to the daily lives of citizens.

Post-Europeanism thus recognises that democracy is not an obstacle to security, but one of its essential conditions for sustainability.

Conclusion — A Europe that has entered the strategic age

Post-Europeanism marks neither the end of political Europe nor a renunciation of the European project. On the contrary, it constitutes a necessary evolution, dictated by the return of war, coercion and power relations.

By accepting the plurality of trajectories, the centrality of states and the need for effective coalitions, Europe is giving itself the means to act, to deter and to last. Post-Europeanism is thus less a rupture than a passage to strategic adulthood.