



Invest to lead: Building competitiveness, security and strategic capacity

European View
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Europe is confronted today by a series of geopolitical shocks that are shaking the certainties on which the continent has long relied. Russia's war against Ukraine and aggressive policy towards its neighbours, the downgrading of Europe in the list of US priorities and intensifying global economic competition have exposed Europe's vulnerabilities and reminded Europeans of a simple truth: sovereignty requires capability. Europe's future, its capacity to lead and to take its destiny into its own hands instead of being an object in the hands of other more assertive powers, will depend on its ability to generate power, speed and scale. The articles in this issue of the *European View* explore some of the strategic sectors in which Europe must strengthen this capacity.

The starting point is defence. If you cannot defend yourself, you cannot defend your interests either, and you will be subject to the whims of more powerful actors. For decades, Europe outsourced much of its security to the US. Today, it has become clear that we can no longer rely on others and we must become stronger ourselves. We need to develop the European pillar of NATO, integrate Ukraine and its combat experience and military innovation as an important element of Europe's continental defence, create a true European Defence Union and develop the robust defence industry needed to underpin our defence capabilities.

Space has become equally strategic. From communications to climate monitoring, and from defence to economic resilience, access to space has become an essential domain to boost Europe's competitiveness, security and autonomy. Europe must expand its

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infrastructure and capabilities in this area while ensuring pragmatic cooperation with its allies to fill the remaining gaps.

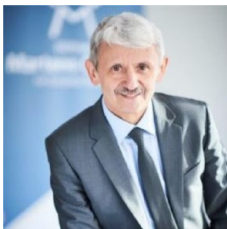
The same logic applies to artificial intelligence. The goal should not be the proliferation of new initiatives and regulations, but rather a clear prioritisation of our ambitions: identifying the few strategic sectors that Europe cannot afford to outsource, those in which European firms are still able to compete and those for which the most realistic path is to manage our dependence by maintaining relationships with trusted partners.

Several articles focus on the resources and supply chains that underpin economic resilience. Batteries are essential to Europe's energy transition and industrial future; agriculture remains a cornerstone of food security, territorial cohesion and strategic resilience; and the complexity of the pharmaceutical supply chain is a reminder that excessive external dependence can create vulnerabilities in times of crisis. In each case, the challenge is not achieving autarky but finding a more intelligent balance between openness and resilience, aimed at safeguarding our critical interests.

Finally, the matter of enlargement highlights that European power is not only about internal capabilities. As the previous issue of the *European View* largely demonstrated, the integration of candidate countries could strengthen Europe's economic weight, resilience and geopolitical influence. Enlargement should therefore be seen not only as a normative project but also as a strategic investment in Europe's future.

These contributions address only some of the sectors that will shape Europe's capacity to remain competitive, prosperous and sovereign. The challenge is much broader. This is precisely why the Wilfried Martens Centre has launched a new long-term project, The European Power Project: An Agenda for a Sovereign Europe, in an ongoing effort to identify the reforms and investments needed to allow Europe to thrive in a more contested world in the fields of defence, technology, energy, the economy, decision-making capacity, demography, culture and identity. The aim is not to provide definitive answers, but to stimulate a debate about how Europe can remain the steward of its own destiny.

Author biography



Mikuláš Dzurinda is president of the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies and a former prime minister of Slovakia (1998–2006). He has also held the positions of minister of transport and minister for foreign affairs.