



## POLICY POSITION

# Strengthening Security and Defence at a Time of Geopolitical Instability

## INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape, marked by the return of war in Europe, complex security challenges and global uncertainties, there is an imperative need for a robust, fully-fledged European Defence Union (EDU). Such a union would serve as a cornerstone for enhancing the security and defence capabilities of the European Union (EU)'s Member States. An effective security and defence policy can only be the result of democratic choices and must be based on an overall common foreign policy strategy that requires true political integration and efficient decision-making mechanisms. By consolidating efforts and resources, the EU can effectively address emerging threats, bolster its strategic resilience, and foster greater cohesion among its Member States.

## ENHANCING JOINT MILITARY CAPABILITIES AND OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The European Defence Union (EDU) should stand as a testament to the EU's commitment to enhancing its strategic resilience and collective defence capabilities and underscore the EU's commitment to regional stability and security, exemplified through continued support for Ukraine. As the EDU evolves, it is imperative to strike a delicate balance between political considerations and operational effectiveness in its

decision-making process while ensuring coherence and unity among Member States. At the heart of the EDU lies political integration and the pursuit of shared strategic objectives. The success of the EDU lies in the unwavering political will of the Member States to align their defence policies and priorities. This entails fostering a common understanding of threats and challenges, as well as a shared vision for collective defence. Regular consultations and dialogue among Member States, facilitated through the guidelines as described in the Strategic Compass and, for example, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), would be crucial for promoting consensus-building and strategic alignment.

The EDU should prioritise the development of joint military capabilities and the establishment of a common operational framework under the EU umbrella. Participating in joint development and procurement programmes would allow Member States to enhance their military capabilities without incurring prohibitive costs. A unified European army would not only bolster collective security but also promote operational efficiency and strategic coherence across the continent. Importantly, it would be significantly more cost effective, as it would be more economical for Member States to act collectively in terms of procurement,

maintenance, and logistical support, rather than handling these matters individually. By pooling resources and leveraging economies of scale, the EDU can facilitate access to cutting-edge technology and equipment, thereby enhancing interoperability and effectiveness in joint operations.

Emphasising interoperability is essential for ensuring seamless integration of forces and systems across Member States, enabling effective joint operations and maximising the utility of defence assets. In the context of the EDU, it is also crucial to address emerging threats such as hybrid warfare and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI). Hybrid warfare tactics, which combine conventional military methods with unconventional strategies like cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, and economic coercion, pose significant challenges to European security that need to be addressed.

## **ADVANCING STRATEGIC RESILIENCE THROUGH COOPERATION**

A fundamental objective of the EDU is to deepen cooperation and enhance the EU's strategic resilience in defence matters. By advocating for joint procurements and collaborative defence initiatives, the EDU seeks to reduce reliance on external actors and strengthen the EU's ability to act independently in defence matters.

The EU's cornerstone efforts in interoperability, to promote cohesion among diverse defence forces, are important. However, the EDU needs interchangeable armed forces from Member States and standardisation of production and equipment. Through investments in interoperability-enhancing measures, such as standardised procedures and joint training exercises, the EDU would promote effective joint operations and ensure that Member States can seamlessly integrate their defence capabilities.

Coherence and unity among Member States are essential for the success of the EDU. This necessitates a common perception and understanding of threats, which can be achieved through comprehensive threat analyses and intelligence-sharing mechanisms. Effective communication, consensus-building, and a shared commitment to common security objectives are vital for fostering coherence and unity among Member States. Additionally, the EDU should prioritise decision-making processes that involve the four main EU institutions and that accommodate the diverse interests and concerns of all Member States while prioritising collective security objectives over national considerations. By fostering a sense of shared responsibility and solidarity, the EDU can ensure that Member States remain united in their pursuit of common defence goals.



## INTEGRATING EXISTING FRAMEWORKS AND STRATEGIC VISIONS

The EDU represents a crucial step towards enhancing the collective defence capabilities of the EU and its Member States. Its structure should be designed to seamlessly integrate existing defence and security frameworks within the EU, while also aligning closely with strategic visions and operational capabilities.

The Strategic Compass serves as a guiding framework for the EU's security and defence enhancements. The EDU should closely align with its priorities, emphasising the increasing strategic resilience, joint development and procurement, maintaining strong partnerships, and expanding capabilities into new domains. By incorporating these principles, the EDU would contribute to the objectives outlined in the Strategic Compass.

Integral to the Strategic Compass is the Rapid Deployment Capability (RDC), vital for missions outside the EU. The EDU should leverage the RDC to enhance operational readiness and response capabilities. Joint exercises like MILEX-23 are pivotal for strengthening interoperability and defence capabilities among Member States. Active participation in such exercises fosters cohesion and readiness within the EDU framework. An important aspect that

should not be neglected when establishing a common force: military personnel working, training and deployed under EU command control should enjoy a minimum of common working and social rights.

The EDU also needs to respect the sovereign right of neutral Member States while enabling their participation and contribution to common security and defence objectives. These Member States can take principled geopolitical stances in line with EU foreign policy and contribute significantly to EU common security initiatives, such as PESCO. They can leverage their unique position to serve as preventative actors and mediators within conflicts. By proactively engaging with parties to a conflict, providing good offices for negotiations, and contributing to early warning systems, neutral Member States can help de-escalate tensions and foster peaceful resolutions.

Moreover, the European Peace Facility (EPF) offers financial support for partner countries and covers costs for trainings like those in MILEX-23. Integration with the EPF allows the EDU to access additional resources for joint capability development and procurement. By leveraging the EPF, the EDU would mitigate fragmentation and inefficiencies in defence spending, driving towards greater coherence and effectiveness in European defence initiatives.



Enhanced cooperation and joint procurement are paramount for preventing duplication and ensuring optimal resource utilisation. The EDU should prioritise collaborative investment and development to streamline defence policy and expenditure. This approach would reduce fragmentation within the EU defence landscape and enhance the development of European collective defence capabilities.

## **TREATY CHANGE FOR LONG-TERM PLANNING**

To ensure a robust and sustainable long-term strategic plan for the EDU, Treaty change is imperative. This would include enhancing the ambition of current provisions, such as the EU's mutual defence clause enshrined in Article 42(7) of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU). Moreover, joint procurement and the development of armaments should be financed by the Union through a dedicated budget under the European Parliament's co-decision and scrutiny, while the competences of the European Defence Agency should be adjusted accordingly. What's needed is a multifaceted approach that fully integrates the EDU in the EU institutional framework, dynamic strategic planning, utilisation of EU Treaty provisions, and enhancement of cooperation and interoperability.

Establishing vital institutions within the

framework is crucial. This includes a fully-fledged European Parliament's Committee on Security and Defence (SEDE), an Official Council configuration dedicated to defence issues, the appointment of a dedicated Defence Commissioner responsible for overseeing the EU's internal defence capacities, and the operationalisation of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) for enhanced coordination.

Furthermore, the Strategic Compass should serve as a dynamic, long-term strategic document for the EDU. Regular reviews and updates would ensure alignment with evolving security landscapes, outlining key threats and strategic objectives. This framework should act as a roadmap for key initiatives under the EDU, guiding decision-making and resource allocation.

Leveraging existing structures and EU Treaty provisions is vital for EDU evolution within current confines. All actions in the areas of foreign affairs and security and defence should be co-decided by the European Parliament and the Council based on qualified majority voting (QMV), effectively overcoming the veto powers of single Member States.

## **FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE EU'S DEFENCE COOPERATION WITH PARTNERS**

The shifting geopolitical landscape

presents the EU with both opportunities and challenges as it navigates defence cooperation with partners such as [the UK](#), [the US](#), and others.

In today's complex unstable environment, collaboration among partners is paramount. No single entity can effectively tackle these multifaceted challenges alone. Thus, while striving for greater autonomy in its defence capabilities, the EU should remain committed to cooperating with partners across various domains. Initiatives like PESCO's military mobility exemplify the potential for joint efforts to enhance collective defence capabilities.

Additionally, peacebuilding, multilateral cooperation, soft power and diplomacy remain essential tools for global stability and for achieving our goals. Effective and early conflict prevention and control over arms exports are crucial. The EU should prioritise measures to prevent conflicts through diplomatic channels, conflict resolution mechanisms, and peacekeeping missions. Furthermore, stringent controls over arms exports are essential to prevent the exacerbation of conflicts. By maintaining strict regulations and oversight mechanisms, the EU can contribute more robustly to regional and global stability. It will be important to balance the imperatives of an EDU with ongoing efforts to strengthen the application of existing foreign policy tools, including the deployment of the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions, further

coordination with UN bodies, especially the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), use of economic tools such as sanctions, and diplomacy and support to civil society facing restrictions in third countries.

The pursuit of strategic resilience should also be consistent with maintaining strong ties with the US. Efforts to strengthen the EU's defence capabilities can enhance cohesion and synergy in transatlantic defence efforts. The US has expressed bipartisan support for Europe to take more responsibility for its defence, and to that end the EU can rise to the occasion in the context of the close defence collaboration with its transatlantic partners.

The EDU can bolster transatlantic security, and it will enable the EU to collaborate with NATO on various fronts. This includes initiatives such as streamlined defence industry procurement mechanisms, enhanced coordination with the European Defence Agency (EDA), and improvements in military mobility infrastructure and procedures. These collaborative efforts would enhance resilience, interoperability, and rapid response capabilities within the Euro-Atlantic region, in pursuit of the common EU-NATO objectives.

To further strengthen cooperation, the EDU and NATO could focus on harmonising capability development

among Member States; this entails prioritising areas where the EU possesses particular strengths or where NATO faces capability gaps, such as cyber defence and medical support.

Additionally, NATO and the EU share 23 members which have committed to reaching NATO's 2% of GDP spending benchmark, something that also coincides with PESCO's commitment of defence spending and collaborative projects. Such actions reinforce collective defence efforts and strengthen both NATO and the EDU. Furthermore, enhancing coordination on strategic communication efforts would help counter misinformation and present a unified stance on security issues, fostering public support for transatlantic security commitments and strengthening NATO's credibility.

A significant challenge lies in maintaining unity against common threats, particularly from enemies like Russia. Close cooperation with neighbouring states is essential for collective security, with the UK holding particular importance due to its nuclear capabilities and strategic significance.

Enlargement will also serve as a critical tool for promoting geopolitical stability by extending the EU's sphere of influence, fostering democratic values, and encouraging cooperation among neighbouring countries.

## **PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION IN EU DEFENCE**

As the EU pursues strategic resilience and advances its defence industry through several initiatives, such as the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) and the European Defence Industrial Program (EDIP), it is crucial to consider the social impact of these endeavours. These efforts aim to reduce external dependencies in defence capabilities, provide military personnel with the necessary equipment to respond to today's challenges, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and hold significant implications for job creation, employment patterns, and social welfare across the continent.

Social partners can play a pivotal role in ensuring that the social aspects of security and defence remain at the forefront of policy and budgetary discussions by supporting inclusive job opportunities, the promotion of gender equality, and the protection of workers' rights within the defence sector. Moreover, organised civil society can contribute to fostering transparency and accountability in decision-making processes regarding defence investments and procurements, thereby promoting fair distribution of resources and opportunities across Member States.

As the EU progresses towards strategic resilience, it must strike a balance between economic objectives and social





welfare considerations. Investments in defence capabilities should be balanced with other programmes — and especially with social ones such as healthcare and education. Therefore, it is imperative for policymakers to implement measures that ensure equitable distribution of investments and job opportunities across the EU, as well as to establish governance mechanisms that enhance democratic control and accountability within the defence industry and the wider sector. By prioritising social cohesion alongside strategic resilience, the EU can build a stronger, more resilient Union that benefits all its citizens.

## **WANT TO KNOW MORE?**

*Only by working together can we provide common solutions to the challenges Europe faces and ensure that Europeans' ambitions mirror the future work of the European Union. By bringing our member organisations together in our Political Committees, we continuously develop new policy positions and put existing ones to good use. Please visit our website [www.europeanmovement.eu](http://www.europeanmovement.eu) to take a look at our main policy positions that guide our current work and get in touch if you would like to join us or support our work.*



**European  
Movement  
International**

**European Movement International**

[www.europeanmovement.eu](http://www.europeanmovement.eu)

Place du Luxembourg 2

B-1050 Brussels, Belgium

[secretariat@europeanmovement.eu](mailto:secretariat@europeanmovement.eu)



Co-funded by the  
Europe for Citizens Programme  
of the European Union