



PES Presidency Declaration “Stepping up efforts for European Security and Defence”

Adopted on 20/03/2025

The European Union has been a beacon of peace and cooperation since its creation. While we continue to uphold the role of the EU as a peace actor, as a continuity to the debate that started back in the 1950s with the European Defence Community, it is high time to address the evolving challenges of the 21st century and to reshape our approach on security and defence. Internal challenges and external threats have intensified in recent years and pose an existential threat to the European continent, especially since Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine, and amid instability in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean. In light of this, and the actions of the Trump administration, the EU urgently needs to reassess its strategy for maintaining peace and enhancing its collective security, built on solidarity and shared solutions.

The extraordinary European Council convened by President António Costa on the 6th of March and later on 20th of March are crucial opportunities for Europe to act. Socialists and Democrats have done remarkable work to shape the EU CSDP, especially through the work of our leaders and our past High Representatives. The European Commission has taken initiatives that include the defence package “REARM Europe” recently presented by President von der Leyen, and the White Paper on the Future of European Defence. Now the scope must be broadened to answer our common security and defence needs with further development at European level.

As we move forward, it is essential to remember that security and defence are not ends in themselves, but must always be instrumental to diplomacy, policy making and multilateral dialogue. Preserving peace, freedom and well-being of our citizens remain our top priorities. This is why we believe that the overarching objective should be to address the multidimensional nature of security to ensure Europe remains safe and prosperous, to support our allies and to increase its deterrence towards other actors who might undermine it. By working collectively and upholding peace, our shared values and common interests, we can build a safer, more just, and prosperous Europe. In light of this, European Socialists and Democrats want to develop a new and effective European Defence Union based on the following principles.

1. Strengthen our Common Security and Defence Policy

- Our defence strategy must be comprehensive, encompassing diplomatic work, the defence of a rules-based international order and respect for international law. We reiterate our commitment to work in close collaboration with the United Nations and other international organisations as well as through strong bilateral relations and renewed cooperation with third countries. Defence cooperation must equally be aligned to other goals such as sustainable development, reduction



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of inequalities, or the reinforcement of public services and welfare states that contribute to overall resilience. We cannot in any case compromise social and economic justice in the pursuit of our necessary and legitimate goals in the field of defence, as they are not competing dimensions, but mutually complementary.

- We must further develop the EU's crisis preparedness through an encompassing strategy that addresses EU's security – including cyber, economic, space, environmental, energy (including protection of under-sea infrastructures), political, social and military security. This strategy should include frequent threat assessments, crisis management mechanism, early warning measures, improved information and intelligence sharing and coordination of best practices across Member States, to ensure that the EU has a robust defence against all threats. Europe must mobilise and strengthen its capacity to defend itself, while respecting the neutrality of some Member States.
- From a structural coordination and cooperation perspective this includes strengthening EU coordination at different levels – European, member state, and NATO level – to ensure the security and defence strategy is implemented effectively.
- We underline the need for continuing to operationalise Article 42(7) TEU on mutual assistance, ensuring full solidarity among Member States, especially those whose geographical position leaves them directly exposed to imminent threats and challenges.
- The EU needs a roadmap to close the capability gap, restore deterrence, and enable autonomous action, along with a plan to finance these vital transformations in its capacity to act. Europe must invest in its ability to defend itself and protect its citizens, not only through defence efforts at national level but also with a sustainable EU-wide solution. This solution should also include our partners in Europe such as the UK, Norway, Iceland and Switzerland.
- In the long term, the EU Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) must move towards an integrated command and unified structure of national forces for EU civil and military operations, with Member States that are willing. The above is without prejudice to the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States.
- The EU must look into measures to improve collaborative efforts to combat hybrid threats, cyberattacks, and disinformation campaigns that threaten democratic institutions and societal stability. Social media outlets operating in Europe must be regulated to prevent the spread of disinformation and interference in elections and political life as outlined in the Digital Services Act, ensuring that Europe's digital security, democratic and political life, is robust. Moreover, exploiting migrants as a weapon at the EU's external borders is unacceptable.
- To improve the EU's coordination, assertiveness and effectiveness, we also need to review the EU architecture and move towards more majority decision on certain foreign policy matters and targeted treaty changes.
- As Socialists and Democrats, we will continue to cooperate with other political forces that share this common objective and are in favour of a "*coalition of the willing*" to move forward in the development of CSDP. Unity among pro-democratic forces in Europe is essential, especially with the rise of far-right and populist reactionary forces worldwide.
- Effective cooperation between the EU and NATO is essential, but there is also a critical need to strengthen the European pillar within NATO to effectively tackle common security challenges. While NATO and the United States remain critical defence partners for the EU, there is a growing recognition for the EU to develop the capacity to act more autonomously within the NATO framework and beyond. Such an approach would also lead to the EU taking more responsibility

for its defence, which in turn, would contribute to the EU's wider objective of enhancing Europe's strategic autonomy.

- In addition, it is crucial for the EU to establish additional partnerships beyond EU and NATO frameworks to promote geopolitical stability, crisis preparedness and cooperation on crisis management, and peacebuilding. Enhancing closer ties with the UK, Norway and Iceland but also Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, Japan, South Korea and Latin American countries, as well as international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is essential for the successful implementation of the CSDP, including cooperation through military and civilian crisis management operations. This reduces our dependencies on undemocratic powers and strengthen our alliances as mean for deterrence.
- We believe that Russia and its allies pose the greatest threat to our security and that of EU candidate countries and allies. We reiterate our condemnation of Russia's unprovoked, illegal, and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine. Moreover, we reiterate our unwavering support to the Ukrainian people and Zelenskyy as their elected president. We also believe that the EU and its Member States, together with international partners and NATO allies, must urgently increase military support to Ukraine, enabling it to exercise its legitimate right to self-defence against Russia's war of aggression.

2. Reinforce our Defence Industry

- The evolving geopolitical landscape underlines the imperative to strategically invest in bolstering our own capabilities and to diminish our reliance on external defence suppliers to enhance our strategic autonomy.
- The war of aggression in Ukraine has exposed our dependency on non-EU suppliers. To address this, the harmonisation of military equipment within the EU is crucial for better coordination among Member States, laying the groundwork for a defence single market by reducing barriers to joint production.
- To be a decisive actor on a global scale, the EU's defence must become an integral part of its competitiveness. To do so, it must reassess its industrial posture among global defence companies. This requires: targeted investment and the right incentives for EU defence firms, along simple and transparent administrative procedures to foster growth and innovation, technological advancements and streamlined regulatory processes. But also, a shift towards a unified European defence industrial base through cross-border collaboration and pan-European procurement programmes, prioritising the purchase of European products, and proactive engagement with international partners to expand market share and build strategic alliances. This effort should be fostered and coordinated at EU level; in order to avoid duplications and fragmentations, we need synergies and complementarities of our military supplies.
- While the adoption of the European Defence Industry Program (EDIP) and the implementation of the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act (EDIRPA), the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), as well as European Defence Industry Strategy (EDIS) represent a commendable beginning in bolstering European defence industrial policy, it is imperative to adopt a more assertive approach that focuses on innovation, technology, and reindustrialisation. We support measures that allow a faster and more effective ramp-up in production of defence products in Europe.

- Dual-use technologies can benefit the economy and the well-being of citizens. At the same time, they contribute to strengthening security. In the interest of our citizens, any investments in defence technology should be directed toward such a multi-purpose approach.
- Supporting jobs and industries within Europe is essential to contribute to the EU's strategic autonomy. We must develop our own industrial capabilities through the promotion of common standards and practices within the security and defence industry. Developing a comprehensive workforce development and investing in people, including women, is as important as investing in equipment and infrastructure. Therefore, any investment strategy must include plans to train, upskill, and reskill workers, making the European defence industry a source of high-quality jobs and prosperity.

3. Innovative approaches to finance defence investments

- It is essential to seek common solutions at EU level, among Member States and other European countries, in the way we approach defence financing. We believe that enhancing our defence, security capabilities, and crisis preparedness is essential, and that financing must reflect the new global realities, for our security and our sovereignty.
- We support smarter and better spending coupled with a complete programme for defence in a way that ensures convergence in the planning, procurement and management of capabilities. This includes financial capacity to close the EU's investment gap, reducing inefficiencies by creating economies of scale, and delivering projects with positive spillover effects.
- Therefore, the EU must assess the feasibility and added value of different instruments, including the potential of innovative ones, or sets of instruments, to improve access to public and private finance. In this context, we take note of the Rearm Europe package as only a first step that needs more ambition and to be coupled with a complete programme for a common European defence. Further work will be needed to effectively address immediate challenges and long-term needs.
- Particularly, while recognising that Member States efforts in national financing will be facilitated, it is clear that Member States alone are inadequate to bolster European capabilities against all threats. Joint initiatives and collaborative actions at EU level are essential to address coordination challenges in planning, development, maintenance, and deployment, thereby enhancing European strategic autonomy while guaranteeing the full involvement of the European Parliament. The path to build European security and defence must be subject to careful democratic control.
- Building on the success of our common response to the pandemic crisis, the additional European financial instruments and solutions needed must be built on solidarity, while ensuring a strong commitment in the EU Budget and that all Member States benefit from this investment. In this regard, the EU must develop a European financial instrument to boost investment and capabilities in security and defence through common European debt.
- The progressive approach to European security is not just about arms – it is also about stability, welfare, cooperation and European cohesion. There is no welfare without security, as there is no security without welfare. Therefore, as Socialists and Democrats, we firmly believe that strengthening EU's defence capabilities must not be to the detriment of our commitments to social, territorial and economic convergence or to the expense of other progressive priorities, including cohesion funds. It is in this spirit that we call for a comprehensive investment strategy that addresses both our vulnerabilities in military capabilities and those in our social fabric.

As we strive for a more strategic union around defence, it is crucial to remember that the European Union was founded as a peace initiative. Therefore, our actions are based on the respect of the UN Charter and international law. It is our joint duty as Europeans to maintain this peace mission, both within Europe and globally. For this reason, and in light of the current geopolitical situation, as progressives we must take the lead and mobilise the EU institutions to promote a Global Conference for Peace.