



**19 NOVEMBER 2025
BRUSSELS**

CONCEPT NOTE

With Russia's threat looming over the continent and uncertainty surrounding the long-term U.S. commitment to the transatlantic alliance, Europe has embarked on an ambitious yet challenging path of rearmament. At their most recent summit in The Hague, NATO allies raised the Alliance's defence investment pledge to an unprecedented 5% of GDP, marking the definitive end of the post-Cold War peace dividend.

Much of this effort is unfolding at the national level, with many European countries launching substantial procurement drives to acquire tanks, ammunition, fighter jets, and other military equipment. At the same time, the European Union has taken significant steps to support its member states in meeting their defence spending goals. Key initiatives include the White Paper on European Defence and the ReArm Europe Plan / Readiness 2030, which aim to mobilize €800 billion in defence investments while allowing for greater fiscal flexibility. Additionally, the newly introduced Security Action for Europe (SAFE) instrument is designed to provide financial assistance to member states that commit to jointly procuring enhanced military capabilities.

The burden now lies with European leaders to ensure the defence debate focuses on capabilities, not just spending levels. High defence budgets do not automatically translate into high warfighting capacity. We need tanks and artillery, but we also need to ensure they are interoperable with modern technologies like drones, AI and directed energy weapons. In defence budgets, the costliest items are things we have we don't need or won't use. Stockpiling equipment that is likely to become obsolete within a few years may inflate defence budgets on paper, but it does little to enhance real military readiness.

What Europe needs is not just more kit, but more production capacity, smarter acquisition strategies and simpler rules for defence technology certification and standardization. To this end, NATO's new Rapid Adoption Action Plan was approved at the Hague Summit, marking a key step toward accelerating technological integration. In parallel, several national defence strategies—such as those recently released by the UK and France explicitly prioritise streamlining and speeding up the adoption of emerging technologies.

Crucially, military procurement must open to smaller players, startups and SMEs innovating on the cutting edge of defence. Although they are at the forefront of battlefield innovation, many of these companies are unable to participate in national tenders due to limited internal resources and bureaucratic barriers.

Europe must also do more to engage with Ukraine’s defence industry, particularly its startups. Often inaccurately described as operating on a “shoestring,” these companies are producing battlefield-tested technologies that, in many cases, outperform far more expensive Western systems. They are not just low-cost alternatives. They represent the frontline of modern military innovation.

To address these challenges and discuss solutions how Europe can be not only fast but also smart, the European Policy Centre is convening the European Defence Innovation Dialogue, a gathering of policymakers, experts, representatives from the defence industry, SMEs, startups, and the financial sector to explore how to accelerate and scale up defence innovation across all domains.

AGENDA

Morning roundtable discussion (closed door & invitation-only)

09:00 – 11:00	<p>Session I: <i>Transforming European defence through European research: creating an ‘EDF 2.0’ fit-for-purpose: taking stock of the current situation</i></p> <p>(in cooperation with Aalborg University)</p> <p>Moderator: Paul Taylor, Senior Visiting Fellow at the European Policy Centre</p>
11:00 – 11:30	Coffee break
11:30 – 12:30	<p>Session II: <i>Transforming European defence through European research: creating an ‘EDF 2.0’ fit-for-purpose</i></p> <p>(in cooperation with Aalborg University)</p> <p>Moderator: Chris Kremidas-Courtney, Senior Visiting Fellow at the European Policy Centre</p>
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch

Afternoon (open to the public)

14:00 – 14:30	<p>Welcome & Fireside chat:</p> <p>Michalis Ketselidis, EU Senior Expert, Defence Industry and Space, SG, European Commission</p> <p>Moderator: Fabian Zuleeg, CEO and Chief Economist at the European Policy Centre</p>
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14:30 – 15:30	<p>Panel debate 1: <i>Driving defence innovation: mobilising venture capital, simplifying procurement, engaging Ukraine</i></p> <p>Description: The panel will examine how Europe can accelerate defence innovation by enhancing rapid integration of new technologies within its armed forces, and by mobilising venture capital to support early-stage defence innovators and small and medium sized enterprises in developing and scaling promising solutions. It will explore how procurement processes, certification and testing processes environment can be simplified. The discussion will also consider how to strengthen Europe’s engagement with Ukraine’s defence sector, which has demonstrated a rapid innovation cycle and notable advances in drone technology, yet continues to face limited access to finance, domestic trade restrictions, and complex regulations across Europe.</p> <p>Guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can European armed forces speed up the testing, certification and deployment of new defence technologies without compromising safety or interoperability? • What financial instruments or incentives can help mobilise European venture capital to support early-stage defence innovators and small and medium sized enterprises? • Which reforms in procurement and regulatory frameworks would most effectively remove barriers to the swift adoption of innovative defence solutions? • What lessons can Europe draw from Ukraine’s rapid innovation cycle and advances in drone technology to strengthen its own defence innovation ecosystem? • How can Europe reduce financial and regulatory obstacles to closer collaboration and integration of Ukraine’s defence and innovations into the European market? <p>Moderator: Maria Martisiute, Policy Analyst at the European Policy Centre</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mikolaj Firlej, Co-founder and General Partner at Expeditions Fund • Kateryna Mykhalko, Director-General at Tech Force in Ukraine (TFUA)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claudio Palestini, Head, Innovation and Technology Adoption at NATO • Christian Grønnerød, Chief of Procurement Division at NATO Support and Procurement Agency • Mustafa Nayyem, former Deputy Minister of Infrastructure of Ukraine • Nathalie Guichard, Director for Research, Technology & Innovation at the European Defence Agency (EDA)
<p>15:30 – 16:30</p>	<p>Panel debate 2: How can the EU navigate the maritime threats of tomorrow?</p> <p>(in cooperation with SEA Europe)</p> <p>Description: The debate will examine how Europe can close its naval capability gaps in the face of the growing Russian threat while strengthening its technological edge. It will consider how the EU, NATO and their member states can refine their policies to address a deteriorating maritime security environment in Europe and beyond marked by drone-enabled area-denial operations and attacks on undersea critical infrastructure, through the introduction of new technologies such as unmanned systems and sensors, the adoption of modular ship designs, and the digital integration of naval assets and systems.</p> <p>The discussion will also touch on how the forthcoming EU Industrial Maritime Strategy can advance these objectives and how the EU, NATO and their member states, together with the naval shipbuilding industry and other relevant stakeholders can enhance cooperation, drive naval innovation, and strengthen European power projection in the maritime environment.</p> <p>Guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to fill capability gaps in the naval domain at the European level and prepare for the emerging maritime threats? • What priorities and investments in emerging and disruptive technology in the maritime domain are needed to ensure European technological superiority? • How should the upcoming EU Industrial Maritime Strategy balance the need to build new capabilities with the need to innovate? • What are the gaps in EU/NATO policies? What elements should a new EU Maritime security strategy include?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to further incentivize collaborative development of capabilities in the naval domain between EU member states? <p>Moderator: Iana Maisuradze, Policy Analyst at the European Policy Centre</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rear Admiral (Ret.) Torben Mikkelsen, Senior Consultant, Danish National Defence Technology Centre (NFC) • Davide Cucino, Chairman, SEA Naval • Giovanni Cremonini, Deputy Head of Division Maritime Security, EEAS • Ionela Maria Ciolan, Research Officer, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies • Mihai Chihaiia, Policy Analyst, European Policy Centre
16:30 – 17:30	<p>Panel debate 3: <i>Reinforcing Europe’s air defences in a new era of threats</i></p> <p>Description: The war in Ukraine has ushered in a new era of threats marked by mass precision attacks using unmanned systems, including kamikaze drones and long-range missiles. The recent incursion of Russian drones into Polish airspace has highlighted the challenge of relying on high end NATO assets such as fifth generation fighter jets or costly air defence systems like Patriot to counter this threat on a sustainable basis. Exploring the goal of securing European airspace through the creation of a multilayered air defence system, the debate will assess how integrate new air defence solutions such as directed energy weapons, more powerful jammers, lasers, counter-drone systems and other lower cost options within NATO’s air defence architecture and will draw lessons from Ukraine’s defence.</p> <p>Guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which new technologies, such as directed energy weapons, advanced jammers, lasers and counter-drone systems, show the greatest potential for rapid integration into NATO’s air defence architecture? • How can NATO balance and integrate the use of high-end assets with more affordable air defence options?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What key operational lessons can NATO learn from Ukraine’s continuous defence against Russian air strikes? • How can NATO, the EU and member states improve coordination and burden-sharing to ensure a resilient, multi-layered air defence network across Europe? <p>Moderator: Chris Kremidas-Courtney, Senior Visiting Fellow at the European Policy Centre</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brigadier General (Ret.) Ole Kværno, Director, Danish Centre for Defence Robotics and Autonomy • Andrii Syvushenko, MITS Capital • Vadym Prystaiko, Head of Mission of Ukraine to NATO (2017-2019), former Minister of foreign affairs of Ukraine (2019-2020)
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Partners



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Venue

European Policy Centre, Rue du Trône 14, 1000 Brussels