

Public-Private Dialogue series

A New Era in European Defence: Setting Ambitions and Building Capabilities

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“If not now, then when?” The ongoing war in Ukraine underscores the urgent need for the EU to take concrete actions to counter threats coming from its neighbourhood and beyond. It is clearer than ever how the EU needs to take greater responsibility for its own defence and decide on the level of ambition for its defence policy. Critical discussions should address whether the ambition lies at the EU level or a broader European level, particularly in relation to nuclear capabilities. Nevertheless, the outmost priority in the short and long run remains investing and building military capabilities.

Countries need to continue investing in defence and increase the bottom line of spending, since 2% of GDP and create a coherent framework of cooperation with NATO in order to maximise the efforts undertaken. In this perspective, the EU must address and foster relations with the new administration in Washington proving its commitment and intentions to step up their efforts in defence.

The upcoming White Paper on the Future of European Defence will be a pivotal document, emphasising balanced priorities beyond industrial considerations. The document should align financial resources, innovation, achievable goals, mutual dependencies between member states and partners, and the overall European defence and security strategy that will shape the continent in the upcoming years.



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The European Commission appoints a Commissioner for Defence and Space

Which is the first challenge Kubilius and Kallas should address to build Von der Leyen's "European Defence Union"?

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| | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| Fragmented defence market | 25% |
| Insufficient budget in defence | 24% |
| Capitals lack political will | 26% |
| EU-NATO cooperation | 26% |

117 votes • Poll closed

In the poll below, we asked GLOBSEC's audience and participants of the Dialogue to identify which is the most crucial challenge for the new EU's leadership. There has been a balanced response rate; however, there is a clear awareness that the lack of political will (26%) and, more significantly, the absence of a unified defence strategy play a major role in hindering the

development of a coherent approach. Another important challenge will be the coordination with NATO (26%) and the attempts to make this relationship more effective.

Policy takeaways

EU Defence Ambition and Strategy

- The White Paper on the Future of European Defence will serve as a guiding document to prepare the EU for most extreme military contingencies. The EU should act as a provider of its own security by making the most of its strengths, aligning Member States' agendas and commitments, and translating political will into concrete actions and investments.
- While the basic ambition should include the ability to defend its territory and provide capabilities that ensure security within the region, the EU should help its Member States build their capabilities by putting all available resources to enhance their forces, equipment and commands.
- The time is ripe to establish a common EU defence policy that transcends national interests. A unified approach will ensure that Europe is prepared for challenges without relying excessively on external actors.

Role of the Institutions

- The European Commission should introduce legislation to eliminate licensing barriers, find the best way to make procurement work, adjust regulations to support the defence industry, and lead reforms to standardise and strengthen military capabilities across the EU.
- At the same time, the Commission needs to be careful and focus on effective initiatives and close non-performing projects. The goal should be to address critical gaps and expand capacities.
- The European Council should add topics of European defence to their agenda. Moreover, the White Paper should be discussed in the Council of the EU, to align Member States' objectives.

EU-NATO Cooperation

- The EU's defence initiatives must respect NATO's primary role in transatlantic security, yet they should focus on strengthening Europe's capacity to act independently if necessary. The EU's ambition should be to complement NATO, not compete with it.
- The collaboration between the EU and NATO needs to be strengthened, mainly in relation to information exchange, ensuring aligned agendas
- A strong EU defence reinforces the Alliance and demonstrates Europe's commitment to burden-sharing. It is crucial to find ways to keep the US engaged in the Old Continent.

Financial Commitments

- Member States should increase their defence spending towards 3% of GDP to meet growing requirements and address capability gaps.
- It is imperative that the EU identifies significant additional financial resources to boost defence, including mechanisms to guarantee long-term funding to support industrial development and innovation.
- The EU should prioritise investments in critical capabilities, research, and development to ensure the defence industry's competitiveness.

Support for Ukraine and Long-Term Resilience

- The military, financial and diplomatic support for Ukraine needs to be maintained to put Ukraine in a position of strength for potential negotiations on the resolution of the war.
- Since the end of the war in Ukraine will not make the Russian aggression disappear and eliminate the long-term security threats, the EU needs to prepare for sustained conflict with Russia.

Capabilities Building

- Long-term planning should go beyond addressing immediate gaps, focusing on broader infrastructure, operational needs, and future capabilities to ensure Europe remains secure and resilient in a rapidly changing threat landscape.
- Unified defence spending streamlined joint procurement, and investments in innovative technologies are vital to establishing Europe as a capable and credible defence actor.

Looking ahead: next steps for the EU Commission...

- The upcoming term of the EU Commission provides an opportunity to generate truly interoperable capabilities, strengthen partnerships, and establish the EU as a capable and independent defence actor.
- By focusing on logistics, innovation, and industrial capacity, the EU can create a sustainable defence framework that addresses both immediate needs and long-term goals.
- The rapid growth of China's material capabilities and shifting global power dynamics underscore the urgency of strengthening Europe's defence infrastructure. Addressing these challenges requires a clear-eyed focus on innovation, increased defence spending, and collective action.