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HOW THE EUROPEAN WHITE PAPER OF DEFENSE CAN RESHAPE DEFENSE POLICIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract:

Due to current existing risks and threats the European Union has taken a major leap in terms of closing defense strategic capability gaps. It means to do so by record allocations for the European defense industry while also accelerating the transformation of the entire landscape of defense. For many European nations, defense planning and policies through capabilities development have meant the solitary use of the NATO Defense Planning Process. By analyzing, the European White Paper of Defense it is the aim of this paper to try and analyze how the EU's defense strategy will match NATO's agenda and how far can an organization like the European Union develop defense driven objectives that correlate with the needs of its member states.

Key words: defense industry, defense expenditures, defense policies, defense marketplace

1. Introduction

The European Defense White Paper – Readiness 2030 represents a milestone in the EU's strategic planning doctrine. This step further deepens the efforts that the European Union has made on defense policies, starting in 2016 with the Common Security Defense Policy. However, unlike previous documents focused primarily on capability development or industrial policy, this White Paper integrates geopolitical, operational, technological and financial dimensions into a coherent strategic narrative.

The need for such a document is fundamental, as it emerges in a moment of profound systemic instability, marked by the erosion of the post–Cold War security order, the resurgence of great-power competition, and the intensification of hybrid and non-linear conflict dynamics. Because of this, Europe's decision to develop the Re-ARM program, an integrated European response to a completely new set of risks and threats is a welcomed one. [1]

In the following chapters, we want to further contextualize the desired effects that can be highlighted from the new White Paper of Defense in order to understand ways ahead for European countries, be it they are part of the European Union or NATO.

2. Strategic Context of European Defense

The strategic context shaping EU defense policy starting with 2025 and continuing to 2035 and beyond is defined by acknowledging overlapping and mutually reinforcing crises. The biggest is the Russian Federation full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This illegal invasion represents the most consequential war on the European continent since 1945, challenging core assumptions of the



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European security architecture. Simultaneously, China’s rise and development on several critical economic unique domains, US strategic and political rebalancing, and the militarization of space, permanent cyber escalation, irregular migration flows, and the destabilization of neighboring regions increase the overall volatility of the European environment. [4]

The White Paper came as a need for the EU to re-conceptualize its understanding of the deterrence concept, as well as further develop its resilience and collective action within a multidimensional threat ecosystem that is further evolving. In this chapter we are going to further breakdown the main areas of interest in terms of where EU security can be improved. [8]

2.1. Evolution of the EU Defence Framework

EU defense policy has evolved from declaratory ambitions in the CSDP to actual, institutionalized mechanisms that are going to be put into motion to further strengthen European cooperation in the field of security and defense. . The Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) was indeed the first document at European level dedicated to defense policies but it was followed by other initiatives like PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) , EDF (European Defense Fund) and CARD (Coordinated Annual Review on Defense). [9] All of these represent incremental but transformative steps that have lead the European Union to further increase its defense ambition and posture. [3]

A critical step was the full scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2022 February 2022. The post invasion convergence among member states has accelerated defense coordination, joint procurement and operational interoperability. [10]

As it can be seen in **Figure 1** starting with 2022 the willingness of member states to spend more on defense has increased significantly and for the first time in a long number of years, the European states of NATO have started to become a bigger contributor to defense through their national expenditures, that started evolving beyond the 2% threshold.

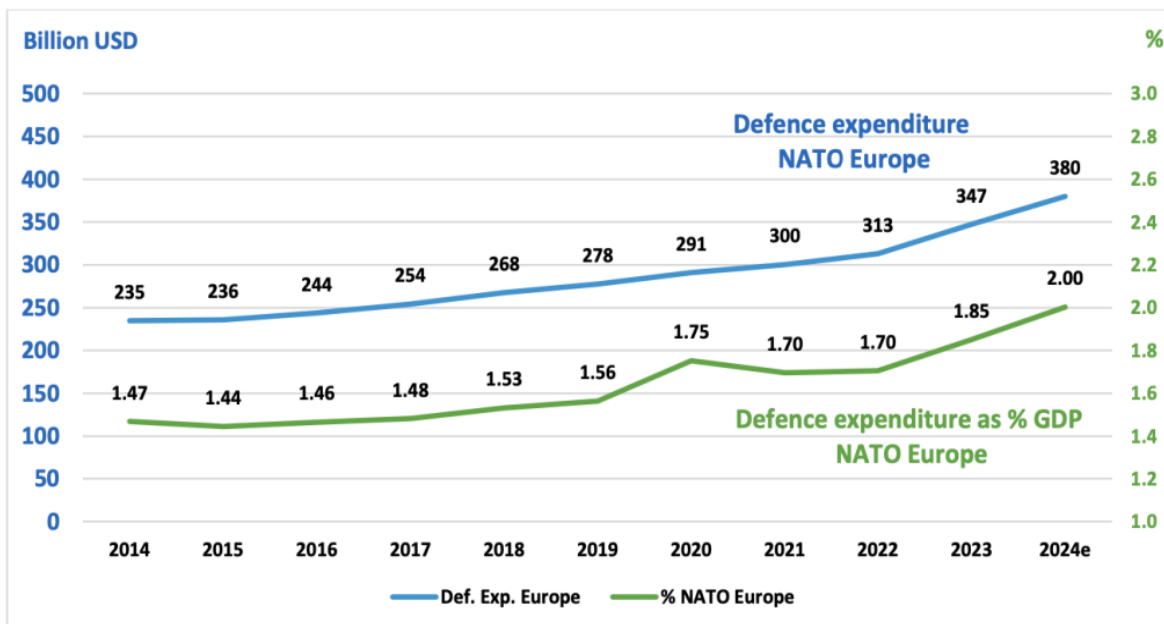


Fig.1 (Defense expenditures for NATO countries 2014-2024) [11]

2.2. Multidimensional Threat Landscape

While the financing of defense has started to exist after 2022, the legislative premises around the actual investments in defense needed to be created. The development of the White Paper of



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Defense meant to first understand what are the actual risks and threats for security and defense at European level. In this context, it become obvious that the threat landscape confronting the EU is unprecedented in its simultaneity and complexity.[3] Conventional military threats coexist with hybrid operations, disinformation campaigns, cyber intrusions, terrorism, economic coercion and space-based hostile actions.

The decision was therefore to create a multi-domain operational document, based on a complex analysis that shows how adversaries exploit grey-zone tactics, target societal vulnerabilities and leverage technological asymmetries. The document also took into consideration the diffusion of emerging technologies such as AI-enabled kinetic systems, autonomous weapons, bio-threats and quantum capabilities.[6]

2.3. Priority Capability Areas of Readiness 2030

After its conception, the European Commission managed to identify in The White Paper seven critical capability areas requiring accelerated investment:

1. Air and missile defense
2. Artillery systems
3. Ammunition and missiles
4. Drones and counter-drone systems
5. Military mobility
6. Ai, quantum, cyber & electronic warfare
7. Strategic enablers and critical infrastructure protection

All of this critical capability areas mean different levels of investments and acquisition from national states that are willing to develop their capabilities for any one of the priority domains. Looking at the 7 areas in becomes clear that first and foremost there exists a technological gap that can only by filled by using heavily specific investments.

An observation must be made that while direct acquisition is required in order to further increase the modernization of European armies with new equipment, another indirect expenditure will come from the need to improve infrastructure corridors at European level in order to solve the issues with some of the priority area points like military mobility and critical infrastructure protection.

3. Defense Industrial Transformation and the SAFE Mechanism for EU and NON-EU Member States

In regards to the modernization of European armies through the acquisition of new equipment, the plan is to revamp the European defense industry, especially that of EU member states, while collaborating with the industry of other NATO member states like the US and UK.

Europe’s defense industrial base is characterized by fragmentation, underinvestment and duplicative structures. The White Paper’s proposal for a unified defense market and the SAFE (Security Action for Europe) mechanism marks a fundamental shift toward integrated production, cross-border industrial ecosystems and strategic supply-chain resilience. SAFE can be seen as a boost for the European Defense Industry, as 65% of each project financed through the instrument has to use the industry of one of the EU states.

3.1. Defense Financing and Investment Requirements

The European defense funding gap—estimated at over EUR 500 billion by 2030—raises questions of allocation, burden-sharing, and fiscal sustainability. To try to answer the existing



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challenges, there have been many proposals at EU level including using different funding models like national budgets (get to NATO's 5% allocation requirement for defense), EU-level instruments (grants and EU Banks), joint procurement for member states, debt-financed programmers and hybrid public-private structures. Some of these types of funding are already going to be put into action through the Re-ARM Europe Program, using mechanisms like SAFE that are set to replace the previous common funding projects like PESCO.

3.2. Preparing for High-Intensity Conflict Scenarios

Readiness for high-intensity conflict requires robust logistics, rapid mobilization, resilient infrastructure and interoperable command structures. The European Union is already developing its own defense capabilities, establishing peace mission on the European Continent, in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in the African Continent in countries like Central Africa. [5] The potential for emerging conflicts will mean a modified posture for many of the existing capabilities, that could see an enhanced defensive role, once the personnel is deployed in other vulnerable areas around the EU borders.

3.3. Ukraine's Role in the European Security System

Ukraine is positioned as a strategic buffer, industrial partner and frontline defender of the European continent. Its relationship with the EU, especially on defense policies is undeniable. Currently the EU has the possibility of releasing almost 300 billion Russian frozen assets into Ukraine's economy, assets that could also be used to further strengthen Ukraine's deterrence posture.

Another significant element lies in the path to Ukraine's EU ascension as a full member. If that were to happen, Ukraine would fully benefit from the European Union's defense policies as they are described in the 2025 White Paper of Defense. Even without this accession there are multiple structural plans for potential capabilities that would enhance European deterrence through collaboration between Ukraine and the EU.

3.4. Implications for Romania

Romania's geostrategic relevance has significantly increased, given its position on the Eastern Flank and proximity to the Black Sea. For Romania, ReARM Europe and mechanisms like Safe represent an opportunity to develop its national defense industry, readjust and upgrade its defense capabilities while undergoing structural changes in order to build a modern military, a long term process that could take up to 2040.

Romania's willingness to be an integrated part of the new defense concept developed through the White Paper of Defense is visible through the development at national level of the new National Security Strategy () that is supposed to become a guidance document for the Romanian state on many layers that oversee security and defense. One particular chapter is the integration of the SAFE allocations, around 16.5 billion Euros for Romania into defense acquisition projects as well as infrastructure development for military mobility. The A7 and A8 highways that connect the historical regions of Romania with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova are part of this process.

4. Conclusions

The European Defense White Paper marks a major strategic inflection point. It signals a shift for European mindset from a reactive posture to proactive defense planning, from fragmented industrial policies to integrated ecosystems, and from political caution to strategic engagement.



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Several challenges could still emerge in the areas of EU defense governance, capability development, and geopolitical adaptation.

The path that the EU has chosen to take is a complicated by vital one. European autonomy in defense is crucial for securing the continent, enhancing joint efforts, reducing fragmentation and redeveloping the national defense industry become vital steps into what might evolve with future efforts into an integrated and unified European Army. [2]

While this particular concept is still far away from any authentic development, the existence of a White Paper of Defense postulates the clear ambition of EU member states to defend in front of existing and emerging aggressions, representing an intermediate step in a full deterrent capacity.

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