

# **European Council conclusions on European defence, 6 March 2025**

## **II. EUROPEAN DEFENCE**

1. Recalling the Versailles Declaration of March 2022 and the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, the European Council stresses that Europe must become more sovereign, more responsible for its own defence and better equipped to act and deal autonomously with immediate and future challenges and threats with a 360° approach. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its repercussions for European and global security in a changing environment constitute an existential challenge for the European Union.

2. In this context, the European Union will accelerate the mobilisation of the necessary instruments and financing in order to bolster the security of the European Union and the protection of our citizens. In doing so, the Union will reinforce its overall defence readiness, reduce its strategic dependencies, address its critical capability gaps and strengthen the European defence technological and industrial base accordingly across the Union so that it is in a position to better supply equipment in the quantities and at the accelerated pace needed. This will also contribute to boosting European industrial and technological competitiveness.

3. Building on its previous conclusions and in line with the respective competences conferred by the Treaties, and in light of the recent letter by the President of the Commission, the European Council stresses the need to continue to substantially increase expenditure on Europe's security and defence, and:

a) welcomes the intention of the Commission to recommend to the Council the activation, in a coordinated manner, of the national escape clause under the Stability and Growth Pact as an immediate measure, and calls on the Commission to explore further measures, taking into account the views of the Council, while ensuring debt sustainability, to facilitate significant defence spending at national level in all Member States;

b) calls on the Commission to propose additional funding sources for defence at EU level, including by means of additional possibilities and incentives offered to all Member States, on the basis of the principles of objectivity, non-discrimination and equal treatment of Member States, in the use of their current allocations under the relevant EU funding programmes, and to swiftly present relevant proposals;

- c) takes note of the intention of the Commission to put forward a proposal for a new EU instrument to provide Member States with loans backed by the EU budget of up to EUR 150 billion, and invites the Council to examine this proposal as a matter of urgency;
- d) welcomes the recent letter by the President of the European Investment Bank Group and the plans therein to step up its support for Europe's security and defence industry while safeguarding its operations and financing capacity, and calls on the Board of Governors of the European Investment Bank (EIB) to urgently continue to adapt the EIB's practices for lending to the defence industry, notably by re-evaluating the list of excluded activities and by increasing the volume of available funding in the field of security and defence;
- e) underlines the importance of mobilising private financing for the defence industry and invites the Commission to consider measures in this regard, including by signalling to private investors the importance of the defence industry for Europe at large;
- f) identifies the following first list of priority areas for action at EU level in the field of capabilities taking into account the lessons learned from the war in Ukraine, in accordance with the work already done in the framework of the European Defence Agency and in full coherence with NATO: air and missile defence; artillery systems, including deep precision strike capabilities; missiles and ammunition; drones and anti-drone systems; strategic enablers, including in relation to space and critical infrastructure protection; military mobility; cyber; artificial intelligence and electronic warfare;
- g) underlines that the defence of all EU land, air and maritime borders contribute to the security of Europe as a whole, in particular as regards the EU's eastern border, considering the threats posed by Russia and Belarus;
- h) in addition, considering the threats on the rest of the EU borders, stresses the importance of their defence;
- i) stresses the importance of more systematic aggregation of demand, harmonisation of requirements and joint procurement with the aim of reducing overall costs, ensuring standardisation and interoperability and offering European industry, including SMEs and mid-caps, greater predictability, as well as contributing to a well-functioning market for the defence industry that would better mobilise private and public investments and ensure cross-border access to defence supply chains;
- j) invites the European Defence Agency, with the High Representative, the Commission and Member States, to swiftly review the appropriate processes to that end;
- k) invites the co-legislators to conclude the negotiations on the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) as soon as possible;

l) underlines the importance of continued support for research, innovation and development through the European Defence Fund;

m) calls on the Commission and the co-legislators to swiftly take work forward on simplifying the legal and administrative framework, in particular for public procurement, industry cooperation, permitting and reporting requirements, in order to address all obstacles and bottlenecks hindering a rapid ramping up of the defence industry, including for SMEs and mid-caps. In this context, the European Council invites the Commission to prioritise a defence-specific simplification omnibus.

4. The European Council also recalls that a stronger and more capable European Union in the field of security and defence will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and is complementary to NATO, which remains, for those States that are members of it, the foundation of their collective defence. It invites the Member States that are also NATO allies to coordinate ahead of the NATO Summit in June 2025. The European Council underlines the importance of working together with like-minded non-EU partners.

5. The above is without prejudice to the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States, and takes into account the security and defence interests of all Member States, in accordance with the Treaties.

6. The European Council looks forward to the White Paper on the Future of European Defence, including further elements and options therein that aim to substantially boost financing for European defence and to strengthen the European defence technological and industrial base.

7. The European Council will revert to this issue at its March and June meetings.