

EUROPEAN UNION MILITARY COMMITTEE [EUMC]
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EU MILITARY FORUM

— EUMC XXV —



25 YEARS OF EXPERTISE
AND MILITARY ADVICE

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FOREWORD

THE CHAIR OF THE EU MILITARY COMMITTEE

This edition of the *EU Military Forum* is a special one. It marks the 25th anniversary of the European Union Military Committee (EUMC) a milestone that invites both reflection and renewed commitment. Over the past quarter century, the EUMC has been the European Union's senior military body, providing professional military advice and direction to the political level while supporting the development of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy.

Anniversaries are an opportunity to recognise the people and institutions that have made this progress possible. I would therefore like to acknowledge the many Chiefs of Defence, Military Representatives, officers and staff who have served within the EUMC structures since its establishment. Their professionalism and dedication have ensured that the Committee remains a trusted source of military advice within the EU system.

In particular, I would like to recognise the work of the EU Military Staff (EUMS) and the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC). Their expertise and professionalism provide the operational backbone of the EU's military engagement. Their efforts ensure that political ambition can be translated into practical planning and effective command and control.

Equally important are those serving in EU missions and operations around the world. Whether in advisory roles,



GENERAL SEÁN CLANCY
CHAIR EU MILITARY COMMITTEE

training missions, maritime operations, or other forms of engagement, these personnel represent the European Union at the operational edge. Their commitment, skill, and resilience demonstrate the EU's determination to contribute to international peace and stability.

As we mark this anniversary, we must also pause to remember those who have lost their lives in service during EU missions and operations. Their sacrifice reminds us that security is never abstract. It is secured through the courage, professionalism and commitment of individuals who serve in demanding environments far from home. Their memory continues to inspire our work and our sense of responsibility.

Our gratitude also extends to the many partner states that contribute to EU missions and operations.

Their participation underscores the collaborative nature of modern security efforts and highlights the value of strong international partnerships. Together, we demonstrate that security challenges are best addressed collectively.

The past six months have certainly not been quiet in the geopolitical and grand strategic arena. Europe and its partners face a security environment characterised by persistent conflict, increasing strategic competition, and complex transnational threats. In this context, cooperation between institutions and organisations is more important than ever.

A key element of this cooperation remains the close relationship between the European Union and NATO. Each organisation operates within its own competencies, yet our efforts are mutually reinforcing. Through close collaboration and complementarity and

guided by the principle of the single set of forces, we ensure that stronger European defence contributes to a stronger Alliance and a more resilient Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

Within the European Union itself, the effectiveness of our collective efforts depends on the strength of cooperation between the military and political levels. The EUMC exists first and foremost to support the political leadership of the European Union with clear, professional military advice.

In this regard, I would like to express my appreciation for the leadership provided by the High Representative/ Vice-President, the European External Action Service (EEAS), and the Political and Security Committee (PSC). Their guidance and strategic direction are essential in shaping the EU's security and defence agenda. The close and constructive dialogue between the political and military levels remains one of the great strengths of the EU's decision-making process.

At the same time, it is encouraging to see how other EU institutions are now engaging with security and defence issues more actively than ever before. The European Commission and the European Parliament are increasingly central actors in the development of Europe's defence readiness, industrial capacity, and resilience. Their growing involvement reflects a broader recognition that security and defence are truly European responsibilities requiring a comprehensive, whole-of-Union approach.

In this evolving institutional landscape, the EUMC stands ready to contribute the military perspective, drawing upon the collective expertise of the Member States' Chiefs of Defence and the analytical depth of the EU Military Staff. Our role is to ensure that military realities, operational considerations and professional

expertise remain firmly integrated into the EU's decision-making processes.

Over the past months, the EUMC has been actively engaged in addressing the most pressing challenges facing the EU while also looking ahead to longer-term developments. Balancing the urgent with the important is a familiar task for military leaders. Strategic foresight must accompany crisis management if we are to remain effective in a rapidly evolving security environment.

My Cabinet has also been working intensively to implement the vision that I outlined at the start of my tenure. Achieving this requires close coordination across many actors within the EU system and beyond. In this regard, I am particularly pleased that the work of the Chair and the EUMC has been strengthened by the appointment of Deputy Chair Lieutenant General Enrico Barduani and his team. Their arrival has added valuable experience and perspective, expanding the scope and capacity of the EUMC at a crucial time.

Beyond the institutional framework, I would also like to acknowledge the important contribution made by academic institutions, research centres, and think tanks that engage regularly with the EUMC and the EUMS. These organisations play a vital role in enriching the debate on European security and defence.

Their engagement provides critical analysis, fresh ideas and valuable academic rigour to our discussions. As the voice of the Chiefs of Defence and supported by the military expertise of the EU Military Staff, the EUMC benefits greatly from these exchanges. Scholars and analysts, many of them from non-military backgrounds, often bring perspectives that challenge our assumptions and broaden the debate. As the quote erroneously attributed to Aristotle notes, "*It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain*

a thought without accepting it." Such exchanges are essential in ensuring that our strategic thinking remains open, rigorous and intellectually honest.

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the EUMC, it is worth recalling the world in which the Committee was established. At the beginning of the century, the strategic landscape appeared very different. Great power competition seemed limited, and the focus of many security efforts was on crisis management and regional stability operations.

Since then, the trajectory of the EU's security and defence engagement has seen both peaks and troughs. Today, however, we are clearly living in a far more challenging strategic environment.

We face difficult *known knowns*, the threats and risks that are already visible and demand sustained attention. At the same time, we must anticipate the effects of *known unknowns*, developments whose precise consequences remain uncertain. And as recent events have demonstrated, the international system can still produce *unknown unknowns* capable of generating sudden strategic shocks.

In such circumstances, the role of the EUMC remains vital. By bringing together the collective expertise of the Member States and providing clear military advice to the political leadership, the EUMC helps ensure that the European Union remains a credible and capable security actor.

Twenty-five years after its creation, the mission of the EUMC remains unchanged: to support the EU, its Member States, and its partners in strengthening peace, security and stability. With unity, professionalism and determination, the EU's military community will continue to adapt and deliver in the years ahead. "*Ní neart go cur le chéile*" there is no strength without unity. ★

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR



COLONEL FIACRA KEYES
STRATCOM CEUMC

Dear Readers,

On this occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the EU Military Committee, it is a great privilege to present this semesters' edition of the EU Military Forum. While the overall theme for this issue is *twenty-five years of the EUMC*, we have decided to include a look back on our maritime operations, an up-to-date report on EUMAM Mozambique and a view of the Western Balkans. Diverse, for sure, but also an opportunity for reflection on what has been achieved over the last twenty-five years. In this way, we find ourselves reflecting on the transformative journey that has shaped defence collaboration across the continent. Over the past quarter-century, the EUMC has served as a pivotal platform for addressing military strategies, fostering joint military advice, and thereby enhancing the collective security of EU member states.

This milestone represents not only a celebration of past achievements but also a recommitment to innovation and cooperation in the ever evolving and fraught geopolitical landscape of global security. The EUMC has been instrumental in facilitating dialogue amongst military leaders, policymakers,

and experts, and its influence on shaping European defence policy cannot be understated. Throughout its history, the EUMC has contributed significantly to the formation of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), enhancing the EU's capacity to respond to conflicts and crises both within and beyond its borders. It has also played a vital role in deepening ties with NATO, ensuring that challenges are met with a unified approach.

As the geopolitical landscape becomes strategically more fraught, it is worth looking back to our inception on 22 January 2001. I am indebted to General (Retd) Gustav Hägglund, for taking the time to compile his thoughts on the first three years of the EUMC. His very honest and frank recollection reveals to us the advances that the Military inputs into CSDP has made over the last quarter of a century. This submission is complimented by a refreshing look forward at the future of EU military CSDP endeavours penned by Dr Jan Joel-Andersson, EUISS. With a focus on early CSDP commitments we segway to the Western Balkans with thought

provoking articles by Lt Gen Kundid, Armed Forces of Croatia and Dr Bojana Zorić EUISS. Maritime Operations also focus here, and a Mission wrap up on EUMAM Mozambique is provided by Commodore César Correia.

Our previous edition covered EU-NATO complementarity. With this I am very pleased to introduce an article submitted by our the recently appointed Deputy Chair of the EUMC, Lt Gen Enrico Barduani, on his experiences as COMKFOR. This builds on our coverage of the Western Balkans. General M.A.J. Carignan, Chief of the Defence Staff, Canada has also contributed an article this semester also highlighting the relationship as an EU partner. This edition is diverse and contains many more topics which will whet your appetite. As always, the publication is only possible by the contributions of our Senior Military Leaders, Analysts and Academics. I hope you take the time to engage with the subject matter discussed and that it stimulates some deeper considerations within the space and domains we serve. Thank you again to all our contributors and thank you, for supporting the EU Military Forum. ★

EUROPEAN CRISES' MANAGEMENT AND DEFENCE

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

The EUMC was established on 9 April 2001 by Council Decision which also appointed me as Chairman of the new EU organ. A lot of preliminary work had been carried out in the Interim Military Body where the CHODs of the Member States had, for example, approved the TOR for EUMC and elected its chairman. The EUMS was beginning its work. The table was set for our work to create the tools needed for EU humanitarian, rescue and crisis management operations, the so-called Petersberg tasks.

CHALLENGES

The main challenge was consensus that was required in all substantial decisions. I had to transform from commander to consensus builder. It was quite a learning process!

Consensus was only to be achieved through understanding the objectives and fears of the Member States involved in the process. My most important advisers were, of course, the MILREPs with whom I consulted frequently. The decisions were, however, taken in the Member States' capitals. Therefore, I found it not only polite but very useful to visit the Member States and later also the candidate countries. During these visits I had the opportunity to get to know the CHODs and their desires concerning EUMC work ahead. I was frequently received by the Defense Ministers as well, which broadened my understanding of political aspects influencing our work. It turned out that France and the UK were the main goalkeepers; for France, EU autonomy was the number one objective, for the UK, safeguarding transatlantic ties. Maneuvering was possible only between these pillars.



GENERAL GUSTAV HÄGGLUND
CHAIR EUMC 2001-2004

Political aspects were as well aired in the PSC. Chaired by the Presidency PSC was kind of a political umbrella to EUMC through which our reports, initiatives and proposals went to the Council. I participated twice a week in the PSC meetings sitting as an expert next to the chairman, whom I met privately in addition once a week.

At that time SG/HR Javier Solana was director and spokesman of ESDP, whereas the European Commission had little influence. In addition, EUMS belonged administratively to his secretariat. With the DGEUMS I met him on Wednesdays, reported on proceedings and open questions and got often useful comments particularly on political matters.

Coordination with NATO was vital since duplication was to be avoided by EU using NATO assets in its operations in accordance with the Berlin plus agreement. Personal contacts and mutual appreciation facilitated cooperation. NATOMC chairman Harald Kujat had asked me to apply for CEUMC and felt, I guess, a certain responsibility for my success in the work. We co-chaired NATOMC-EUMC meetings every two months. SACEUR Joe Ralston was an old hunting friend of mine since he – as deputy chairman of JCS – visited

Finland. I asked one of the NATO CHODS who the power broker is in NATO, the Secretary General, the Council President, SACEUR or who? The US ambassador replied after a while. So, I established a very useful contact to the ambassador, Nicholas Burns by inviting him for breakfast to my home. He came with the US ambassador to the EU, who also turned out to be a useful contact.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Our primary task was to achieve the Helsinki Headline Goal according to which the Union should be able to deploy within 60 days 60 000 soldiers for one year in Petersberg operations. The Member States were requested to earmark forces for such operations. Within less than a year, units numbering over 100 000 soldiers were earmarked. Member States also earmarked four headquarters, which were able to lead corps level operations. A small operational cell and a SITCENT were established in EUMS.

The functioning of all these measures and preparations had to be tested in real operations. A small NATO operation moderated the situation in FYROM. This could be handed over to the EU as a learning tool to gain experience in setting up an operation, running and



implementing Berlin+. The CHODS, however, considered a handover unpractical since the operation was running smoothly in NATO command. When I informed Solana of the outcome of the meeting, he was very disappointed with the EUMC and with me as Chairman. He was, however, able to push through the handover in the EU and NATO councils. The operation became a very useful learning experience for the EU. With Berlin+ it was very top heavy: six flag officers in the chain of command of 350 moderators.

Ituri province in Eastern Congo provided an opportunity for a much more challenging operation. The situation there was chaotic, with child soldiers moving freely around the greater Ituri area. Originally it was planned as a UN mandated French operation but was executed as an EU operation with France providing the biggest contingent. The US had promised air transport for the French operation, but it withdrew its support when the operation was transferred to the EU. All in the US were obviously not supportive of the EU entering the military field. The autonomous EU operation with 2000 soldiers pacified the province in three months and then handed the area over to a UN peacekeeping force. This operation stood as a model for us when we initiated the creation of a rapid reaction force: it should be 1500 men

strong, deployable in two weeks for a limited period of time, during which a force for permanent deployment could be summoned. The EU council concluded in June 2003 that the tools for crisis management operations had been created and operational readiness achieved.

We prepared the takeover of the US led operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

One question was the role of the US contingent that was difficult to include in EU-forces. Ralston warned me of any solution without US participation. USA spent one billion dollars a year on intelligence in Bosnia – where would the EU find a corresponding amount for intelligence.

MY FAILURE

Common defence was not on the EUMC agenda. It was, though, mentioned in the Maastricht Treaty as one possible development. I felt it should be explored. Without military means to its defence, the EU would never be accepted as a serious actor in international affairs.

The two most substantial arguments against EU defence are the avoidance of duplication with NATO and the maintenance of transatlantic ties. Any solution must address both.

My recipe was a two pillar NATO – with the EU as one pillar and the US as the other. The Washington Treaty would remain unchanged. Each pillar would

EUMC Meeting 2004. (© EU Council)

have responsibility over its area and support the other if need arises. NATO European structures would be handed over to the EU. The US would maintain the nuclear umbrella but otherwise withdraw its forces from Europe as soon as the EU created capabilities substituting US specific capabilities, particularly in C4I and missile defence.

I discussed my idea with many people, whose opinion I appreciated and aired it in speeches and memos. Nobody could deny the rationale of my proposal but – unfortunately – it was not followed because of three reasons, I assume:

- Firstly, after the disappearance of the common enemy 1991 NATO had become a useful US foreign policy tool for extending its sphere of influence eastward, for keeping EU states on a security policy leash and crisis management fig leaf for US interventions.
- Secondly, economic gains for European countries of outsourcing their defence to the US
- Thirdly, the EU unanimity requirement in foreign and security policy prevented timely response to upcoming crises. Adequate reaction would require decision making by majority – qualified if appropriate.



*Presenting honours to the OP Comdr of Operation Concordia, Admiral Rainer Feist.
(© EU Council 2003)*

Perhaps my proposal would now be implemented when the importance of common defence has risen finally on the EU agenda. The godfathers of this positive change are the twins, Mr. Putin and Mr. Trump with their hostility towards the EU. The US is leaving European defence to Europeans, building a Fortress America of the Western Hemisphere and concentrating on competition with China. Autonomous defence is likely to evolve from an option to a necessity for the EU.

Possible Russian conventional military challenges can be countered if the EU gets its defence in order; remember that the EU has

- three times more citizens
- eight times more money and
- twice as many soldiers now in arms than Russia.

Operational autonomy is within reach if deficiencies in C4I and missile defence are addressed firmly. It will not happen overnight but well in a few years. We clearly have the resources for a credible conventional defence. What about nuclear weapons?

Britain and France together have about 500 nukes mainly in submarines

which gives them a credible second-strike capability to protect their citizens against nuclear blackmailing. These countries seem prepared to extend their umbrella to cover the European states. USA has also over 200 nuclear warheads with delivery aircraft deployed in Europe, where they are likely to remain as part of US global deterrence. For their protection the US is likely to keep C4I and missile defence in Europe at least until the Europeans have developed their own capabilities in those fields.

Other Americans can easily be replaced by Europeans. There are already thousands of Europeans in NATO command structures, some more would not be difficult to find. SACEUR can easily be replaced with a European general. But who will take the political lead? There are two possibilities: the EU and the Coalition of the Willing.

EU would be the natural alternative. It has all the necessary institutions ready: council, parliament, commission, military committee and staff. The difficulty rests with decision making; it is paralyzed as long as foreign and security policy

requires consensus. If this weakness is not corrected a coalition of the willing, is the solution. It would include Britain and Norway which is good. NATO's structures could be transferred to the coalition and non-coalition members left outside as the handover of Norfolk and Naples headquarters indicate.

My three years as CEUMC were very rewarding. We felt that we were involved in important work. We were creating something completely new. The momentum was there, and the process was quite dynamic. Everybody did their best to overcome obstacles and accomplish the tasks. It required a lot of persuasion and compromise. We fulfilled our task which is the best reward for dedicated people. The EU got a crisis management capacity. Common defense did not advance, but it was not in our mandate, it was only my private initiative. I hope this will be included in EUMC's mandate soon since it will never advance without your support. I wish you all the best and success in your important work improving EUs joint capabilities to defend itself. ★

THE FUTURE OF EU MILITARY CSDP MISSIONS AND OPERATIONS*

For more than 20 years, the EU has deployed troops beyond its borders. Currently, some 4000 military and civilian personnel are deployed by the EU in Europe, Africa and Asia. The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has always been about capabilities but also missions and operations to project power and protect EU interests around the world. But what has been the impact of these missions and operations? And what is the future of the EU as a strategic actor? At a time when the use of military power is surging around the world, the EU is faced with challenging policy choices and trade-offs, on where and how to act, as it takes on a larger role in security and defence. To help clarify these choices, this article presents three possible alternatives for future EU military CSDP missions and operations:

1. Europe first;
2. Protecting the commons; and
3. Back to the future.

ASSESSMENT AND IMPACT.

EU military CSDP missions and operations have made a difference. Operation *Artemis* saved lives in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2003 and Operation *Althea* has provided stability in Bosnia-Herzegovina since 2004, while Operation *Atalanta* has contributed to deterring pirates off the Horn of Africa since 2008. In November 2022, the EU swiftly launched a Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM) in support of Ukraine which has now trained some ninety thousand Ukrainian troops. And in February 2024, the European Union launched Operation *Aspides*, sending naval vessels under EU flag to protect shipping in the Red Sea and northwest



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Indian Ocean in response to Houthi attacks from Yemen. However, the record is less clear in other cases. In the Sahel, the EU spent hundreds of million euros on civil and military missions over the past ten years, training some 30 000 members of the security forces and 18 000 soldiers but with little positive effect.

The EU's CSDP missions and operations are assessed through a regular reporting mechanism and in comprehensive Strategic Reviews by the Political and Security Committee (PSC). A key question in these official EU assessments is how a mission or operation measures up against its mandate, but also on technical and administrative efficiency (e.g. how many troops trained, how much budget spent, etc). Assessments by outside experts tend to focus more on the strategic impact on reducing conflict. What constitutes success can therefore be difficult to agree on. Regardless of the approach, it should be recalled that EU missions are often mandated to implement technical tasks, such as training or capacity building, but

sometimes in countries where there is little willingness on the part of the host government to improve oversight and build professional armed forces. This is even more the case when others offer cooperation on more attractive terms. For example, in Mali, the Central African Republic (CAR), Libya and Sudan the governments turned to Russia's Wagner Group for help in fighting rebel groups, personal protection and to ensure regime stability with little concern for accountability or human rights, leading the EU to suspend security cooperation. EU missions and operations can sometimes overlap with bilateral efforts of Member States and other organisations which can also complicate matters in generating forces and resources in the EU, and on the ground in partner countries.

Nevertheless, EU military CSDP missions and operations have often been assessed as having an impact, albeit limited due to constraints such as lack of resources and unfilled vacancies; high turnover of staff; and in training missions, lack of follow-up

and too few instructors with necessary language skills. National caveats, risk aversion, lack of coordination with other EU programmes, poor strategic communication, and restrictions on providing arms and equipment have not helped either.

Maybe if EU missions and operations were larger and better resourced, the results would be better. The European Peace Facility (EPF) and the willingness to now fund arms could make the EU's offering more appealing. But vast resources were spent by Western powers on security and training of local armies in Iraq and Afghanistan to little effect. The Iraqi army's collapse in the face of the Islamic State in 2014-2015 came three years after the US and coalition forces had spent eight years and at least \$25 billion in training and equipment. The equally spectacular disintegration of the Afghan army in 2021 despite 20 years and \$90 billion of international support show that time and money are not deciding factors. In fact, several studies even suggest that foreign military training contributes to instability, insecurity and coups, although others disagree. In any case, massive amounts of donated military equipment were lost in Iraq and Afghanistan and are now fuelling conflicts in other parts of the world. In much of the literature, it is unclear how much lasting impact foreign military training, security sector assistance (SSA) and security sector reform (SSR) missions really have.

FUTURE MILITARY CSDP OPERATIONS.

Given the mixed record and lessons learned from EU military CSDP missions and operations over the past 20 years, what is their future? With no end in sight to Russia's war against Ukraine, or the wars and conflicts in the Middle East, across Africa and in East Asia, the EU needs to stay globally engaged. But with limited resources, choices must be made on where and how the EU should act. In the following section, three alternatives for future EU military CSDP are discussed.

EUROPE FIRST.

In this scenario, the EU and its Member States remain focused on supporting Ukraine but also stabilising the Eastern neighbourhood, including the Western Balkans. EU military CSDP missions and operations are primarily to support EU candidate and partnership countries. Building on the widely supported EUMAM Ukraine in which 24 Member States and Norway provide military training to Ukrainian troops, future missions could include military training and capacity building for Moldova and Georgia, and perhaps Armenia and Azerbaijan. The continuing support for Operation *Althea* after more than 20 years in Bosnia-Herzegovina shows the commitment of the EU Member States to military CSDP missions in Europe and the Eastern neighbourhood.

The EU may have to be ready to assume a larger role in stabilising peace and security in the post-Soviet space. The political buy-in and ownership of EU Member States and of the partner countries in the Eastern neighbourhood for EU CSDP missions and operations is key in this alternative and can be expected to remain high. Depending on the future political direction of the United States, and NATO, the EU may have to be ready to assume a larger role in stabilising peace and security in the post-Soviet space. Moldova and Georgia are both candidate countries of the Union and in the event of armed aggression against them, the EU would have to act. The current CSDP Missions in Georgia, Moldova and Armenia are civilian but could in the future be complemented by military ones.

PROTECTING THE GLOBAL COMMONS.

In the second scenario, the EU and its Member States continue to support Ukraine 'for as long as it takes' but with the maritime domain increasingly contested, EU military CSDP shifts from training missions to naval operations protecting global trade routes and

undersea infrastructure on which Europe's and the global economy rely. The EU is committed to enhance the maritime security of the Union and its Member States, including by exercises with partners and naval visits. In line with the Strategic Compass, the EU adopted a revised Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) in 2023. This strategy aims to strengthen the EU's ability to respond to threats in the maritime domain and protect its interests at sea. While not all EU Member States are coastal states, all depend on Europe having access to open sea routes and seabed infrastructure.

Following the Maritime Strategy and building on Operations *Aspides*, *Atalanta* and *Irini* as well as the Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) in the Gulf of Guinea and northwest Indian Ocean, the EU can provide significant added value in the maritime domain. Demand for EU naval presence around the world is growing and existing areas of operations can be complemented by new activities in the Indo-Pacific. EU-supported logistical bases or maritime hubs in key ports from the Red Sea to the Strait of Malacca could also be contemplated to facilitate permanent European naval presence in the Indian Ocean and beyond.

BACK TO THE FUTURE.

In the third scenario, the EU and its Member States stay true to the ambition in the Strategic Compass to be able to respond to imminent threats or quickly react to crises outside the Union. In this scenario, the Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC) will be at the centre of future military CSDP operations, giving the Union the means to swiftly deploy up to 5 000 troops with the necessary strategic enablers. Since May 2025, the EU RDC is operational, including command & control functions, flexible decision-making arrangements, and an extended scope of common costs.

In this future, the focus of EU military CSDP is shifting back from advising,

training and capacity-building missions to crisis management and peace support operations at scale. During the early years of the ESDP/CSDP, EU Member States provided soldiers and resources for robust military interventions far away from Europe (e.g. 3 700 in EUFOR Chad/CAR; 1 800 in Operation *Artemis* in DRC). These operations were often in support of larger UN efforts, but an increasingly paralysed UN Security Council means that the EU may have to shoulder a larger role for conflict management on its own. And that could require the EU to intervene in more than one place at the same time.

CONCLUSION.

To be able to respond early and forcefully to external conflicts and crises is a strategic priority for the EU. The launch of Operation *Aspides* in 2024 and the training of nearly 100 000 soldiers in EUMAM

Ukraine since 2022 show that the Union can respond when needed. However, the disappointing results of several EU military CSDP training and capacity-building endeavours in the Sahel also demonstrate the challenges in crafting missions that can deliver lasting impact.

This article has outlined three alternative scenarios for future military CSDP missions and operations. These alternatives are not mutually exclusive but can help in focusing the discussion on what role the EU can and should play as a security provider in an unstable world. Each alternative has its merits. Nevertheless, with Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine continuing unabated and given the lessons learned from more than 20 years of military CSDP missions and operations, the ‘Europe first’ alternative emerges as the most likely and preferred option. But given Europe’s reliance on seaborne trade and

seabed infrastructure, the EU should also take on greater responsibility for protecting the global commons at sea. This does not mean that there will be no European military engagement in other parts of the globe. After all, EU Member States are engaged through the UN, NATO, ad-hoc coalitions, and in bilateral military and SSA/SSR missions in many places around the world. However, for the EU, a combination of Europe-focused missions and maritime operations would not only defend Union values and interests but also contribute to international security and the common good.

*This article is a revised and abridged version of Jan Joel Andersson’s *Into the breach! EU military CSDP missions and operations*, EUISS Brief no 3, 7 March 2024 ([Into the breach! EU military CSDP missions and operations | European Union Institute for Security Studies](#))

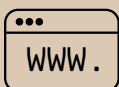
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EUMC AT 25: STRATEGIC COHERENCE IN AN ERA OF CONSEQUENCE

Europe has entered an era of strategic consequence. The return of high-intensity war to the European continent, persistent instability in the wider neighbourhood, the proliferation of hybrid, cyber and information threats, and intensifying systemic geopolitical competition have fundamentally reshaped the European Union's security environment. The assumptions that guided European security thinking in the post-Cold War era are no longer valid.

This "Era of Consequences" marks the end of a period in international politics characterised by relative peaceful coexistence and reduced geopolitical tensions, during which many states deprioritised security concerns and redirected attention and resources toward other policy areas. The repercussions of this shift are now emerging, producing significant disruptions and increasingly destabilising outcomes.

Within this framework, the European Union must expand its role beyond traditional economic integration. In response to a growing number of security challenges, the EU has increasingly assumed a stronger geopolitical role. This shift has involved strengthening defence cooperation, investing in strategic autonomy, reinforcing international partnerships, and coordinating collective responses to emerging threats. As a result, the EU is evolving toward a more assertive and strategic actor, seeking to safeguard security, stability, and democratic values both within Europe and in the wider international system.

The central question facing the EU today is therefore no longer whether it must assume greater responsibility



LIEUTENANT GENERAL EMMANOUEL THEODOROU
CHIEF OF THE NATIONAL GUARD OF THE
REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

for its security. Recent events have already settled that debate. The real challenge is whether Europe can act with coherence, credibility and sustained strategic resolve, inspiring a sense of shared purpose among policymakers and military leaders. In this new reality, the European Union Military Committee (EUMC) marks twenty-five years of service to the Union.

Established in January 2001, the EUMC was entrusted with a clear mandate: to provide unfettered military advice and recommendations on all military matters to the Political and Security Committee and to ensure that the Union's emerging security and defence structures remained firmly grounded in operational reality. From the outset, its role was institutional: to bridge political ambition with military feasibility and ensure that the Union's evolving security structures possessed operational credibility. Over the past quarter-century, however, the EUMC has gradually evolved from a coordinating military forum into a central pillar of European defence coherence.

Since their establishment, the first EU-led Missions and Operations demonstrated that the Union could translate political will into operational

action. The establishment of the European Defence Agency strengthened cooperation in capability development and defence cooperation. The Treaty of Lisbon consolidated the Common Security and Defence Policy, while later initiatives such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and the European Defence Fund reinforced integration, interoperability and coordination of the defence industry across the Union.

These developments were not isolated milestones. Taken together, they represent incremental yet decisive steps toward a more coherent European defence posture. Yet, strategic credibility is not measured solely through institutional structures. It is tested in moments of consequence. The adoption of the Strategic Compass in March 2022 provided the Union with an agreed roadmap by its Heads of State to strengthen defence readiness, enhance rapid-deployment capacity, reinforce resilience across domains, and improve the Union's ability to anticipate and respond to crises. Only weeks earlier, the Russian invasion of Ukraine had profoundly altered Europe's threat perception. What had long been

described as instability evolved into a strategic rupture. Defence expenditure increased across Europe, military assistance mechanisms were activated, and coordination among Member States intensified.

Within this volatile environment, the role of the EUMC has expanded and remains crucial and more

critical than ever. Today, its functions extend beyond overseeing missions or serving in a traditional advisory role to include strategic foresight, capability coherence, and preparedness planning. Its core function remains to ensure that political guidance is translated into realistic and deployable military instruments. It fills the gap between the current force posture and the evolving level of ambition. In a contested international environment characterised by unpredictability, escalation risks and rapid technological evolution, the alignment between political ambition and military capability is indispensable.

Equally important is the Committee's role as a forum of communication and trust among Chiefs of Defence. Strategic coherence cannot be imposed through institutional mechanisms alone, nor does it emerge automatically. It must be cultivated through sustained dialogue, professional candour, and mutual understanding among military leaders

responsible for their nations' security. Over the past twenty-five years, the EUMC has facilitated precisely this convergence of perspectives. In doing so, it has strengthened not only operational coordination but also the Union's emerging strategic culture. Strategic autonomy must be understood within this broader context.

Strategic autonomy does not imply isolation. Rather, it reflects responsibility: the ability to act decisively when required, while remaining firmly anchored in collaborative partnerships and alliances. In this respect, the transatlantic bond remains indispensable for strategic coherence and collective security. A stronger European defence does not compete with NATO; it reinforces it. The European Union's collaboration with NATO is not optional; it is foundational. A more capable European Union contributes directly to mutual defence, effective deterrence and collective security. Credibility, however, requires more than political declarations.

It requires readiness, resilience, depth of industrial capacity, and the ability to operate across the full spectrum of crisis response — from prevention, stabilisation and capacity-building to high-intensity operations. While the war in Ukraine has profoundly reshaped Europe's eastern flank security

landscape, the developing dynamics in the southern neighbourhood underline that European security is indivisible. The recent escalation between the United States and Israel on one side and Iran on the other, together with Iran's response and the wider regional repercussions, highlights how rapidly crises beyond Europe's borders can affect the Union's security. The Eastern Mediterranean illustrates this reality with particular clarity.

As a strategic crossroads between Europe, the Middle East and Africa, the region comprises vast energy reserves and corridors and has the potential to alter geopolitics by rendering the EU energy supply chain secure and resilient, through a network of pipelines. Unfortunately, the region's new reality entails contested navigation upon critical maritime routes, migratory pressure, and regional security dynamics. Instability in this region directly affects the European Union's internal security, economic resilience, and strategic supply chains.

EU Maritime Operations, Advisory / Training Missions and capacity-building initiatives demonstrate the Union's sustained engagement in this strategic region, ensuring a 360-degree approach. For Member States situated along the Union's external borders, geography brings both responsibility and vulnerability.



Lieutenant General Emmanouel Theodorou has been serving as the Chief of the National Guard of the Republic of Cyprus since October 2025. A graduate of the Hellenic Army Academy, he has held senior command and staff appointments in operational planning, training and force readiness, including command of the Hellenic Force in Cyprus (ELDYK) and key leadership positions within the Hellenic Army General Staff and the Hellenic Higher Military Command of Interior and Islands (ASDEN). Throughout his career, he has focused on enhancing operational preparedness, interoperability and regional security cooperation within the broader European and Eastern Mediterranean security environment.

The Eastern Mediterranean is not Europe's periphery; it is one of its strategic centres of gravity.

In this environment, the EUMC, within the framework of its advisory role, could play an essential role in ensuring that the respective military assessments integrate both immediate operational contingencies and long-term strategic implications. Its deliberations help transform geographic diversity into collective strategic coherence.

No Member State — regardless of size — can address these challenges alone, underscoring the importance of collective effort and shared responsibility to inspire commitment among policy makers and military leaders. In this context, the solidarity and mutual assistance principles enshrined in Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union gain renewed relevance, reminding us that Member States must be prepared to support one another in the face of serious external threats that may directly affect European stability and security.

In this collective effort, the contribution of smaller Member States, especially those situated closer to that area, remains particularly significant. Geography, operational reliability and political consistency are often on par with purely quantitative metrics. The Union's strength derives not solely from scale, but from the willingness of all its Member States to assume responsibility, contribute capabilities and uphold shared principles within a coherent strategic framework. Unity remains one of Europe's most effective force multipliers.

Looking ahead, it is certain that the near future will require significant investment in defence, sustained implementation and increased strategic consolidation of defined ambitions.

The Rapid Deployment Capacity is one of the tools that will ensure operational credibility. Defence industrial cooperation must evolve into scalable production, technological innovation and resilient supply chains.

Investments in emerging and disruptive technologies — including quantum technologies, artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, cyber capabilities and space-based assets — must be integrated into force planning and operational concepts.

The future battlefield will be multi-domain, increasingly data-driven, technologically accelerated, and will need a combined and joint Integrated approach. Europe's defence posture must therefore combine industrial competitiveness with operational adaptability. Achieving strategic coherence in this field requires close coordination between political institutions, military authorities and the European defence technological and industrial base. Military mobility will remain a critical enabler of deterrence through speed, flexibility and preparedness. Logistics, infrastructure and the ability to move forces rapidly across the European continent are no longer technical considerations; they are required strategic enablers.

At the same time, resilience against hybrid threats — including cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns and attacks on critical infrastructure — must remain central to strategic defence planning. Political-military cohesion is equally essential. Strategic documents provide direction, but military advice ensures realism and feasibility. The EUMC operates precisely at this intersection, ensuring that ambition remains achievable and that capability development serves clearly defined strategic objectives.

Twenty-five years after its establishment, the European Union Military Committee represents far more than an institutional milestone. It embodies Europe's gradual emergence as a more capable and responsible security actor within a rapidly evolving international order. Security cannot be improvised. It requires continuity, investment, foresight and unity of effort.

The coming decade will test not the Union's ambition — but its coherence.

Coherence between Member States, between political will and military capability, between regional realities and collective strategy, and, last but not least, between technological innovation and operational doctrine. If the first twenty-five years were defined by institutional development and operational learning, the next twenty-five will be defined by strategic implementation and sustained credibility.

Looking ahead, Europe's security environment will likely remain characterised by systemic geopolitical rivalry, rapid technological change, demographic shifts, environmental pressures, and persistent instability. The European Union's ability to navigate these complexities will depend on its capacity to anticipate rather than react, to deter rather than merely respond, and to act collectively with unity rather than individually.

Through sound military advice, strengthened interoperability, reinforced readiness, and sustained dialogue that fosters trust and solidarity among Chiefs of Defence, the EUMC will continue to play a central role in the Union's efforts to maintain and enhance its credibility as a security provider and strategic actor. Because ultimately, Europe's effective security rests on three fundamental pillars: shared strategic understanding, credible military capability, and unity of effort among Member States. The European Union Military Committee reflects this simple but powerful truth.

In an era defined by geopolitical rivalry, technological disruption, and persistent strategic uncertainty and instability, capability, preparedness and cohesion are more important than ever. For Europe, strategic coherence is no longer an aspiration. It is a necessity.

For the European Union, and for its Member States, the choice is clear: strategic coherence must translate into sustained capability and collective resolve. ★

FROM BLANK CANVAS TO STRATEGIC PARTNER: THE EU MILITARY COMMITTEE AT 25

When the European Union Military Committee (EUMC) first convened on 22 January 2001, it did so in an environment defined more by caution than confidence. The European Union was still grappling with the failures and strategic lessons of the Balkan wars, NATO remained the undisputed guarantor of European defence, and the notion of an autonomous European military role remained problematic, sensitive and strategically underdeveloped. The EUMC's creation was therefore less a declaration of high ambition than a pragmatic response to necessity: a basic mechanism to ensure that emerging EU security policies were at least informed by professional military advice.

Twenty-five years later, the EUMC occupies a markedly different position within the European security architecture. It has evolved from a nascent advisory forum into a central point of military sense-making within the EU system. It neither commands forces nor competes with NATO, yet it increasingly shapes how political ambition is translated into military reality. In the context of war in Europe, acute geopolitical tension, and ever widening fractures in the transatlantic relationship, the EUMC today finds itself operating at the precise intersection of politics, strategy, and military credibility.



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This anniversary therefore invites more than commemoration. It offers an opportunity to critically examine how the EUMC has developed from a blank institutional canvas into a credible strategic interlocutor; how it has navigated cycles of ambition, inertia, and crisis; and how it may yet shape the future of European defence—particularly at the prospect of the Europeanisation of NATO and the EU's own evolving role as a security actor.

INCEPTION: DESIGNING MILITARY ADVICE WITHOUT COMMAND.

The EUMC was established as part of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Its mandate was deliberately narrow: to provide military advice and recommendations to the

Political and Security Committee (PSC), and to exercise military direction over the EU Military Staff. This reflected a carefully calibrated political compromise. Member States recognised the need for collective military expertise at EU level, but remained unwilling to cede operational control, to undermine sovereign authority or to shadow structures operation within NATO.

Structurally, the EUMC mirrored this compromise. Composed of national Chiefs of Defence (or their permanent military representatives), it operated strictly by consensus. Its authority derived not from hierarchy but from collective legitimacy. In practice, this ensured that national perspectives remained central while creating a forum for strategic socialisation among Europe's senior military leadership to

parallel that which had long existed at the ministerial and diplomatic/official levels within CFSP and CSDP.

Early milestones quickly tested this model. The 2002 EU–NATO Declaration on security and defence clarified the terms of coexistence between the two organisations, while the EU’s first military operations—Operation Concordia in North Macedonia and Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2003—provided initial proof that the EU could deploy forces under shared political control. For the EUMC, these operations were less about operational command and more about institutional credibility: ensuring that political aspirations were grounded in military feasibility and served as ‘proof of concept’.

EARLY OPERATIONS: LIMITS EXPOSED.

The EU’s initial military engagements were intentionally modest. Operation Concordia relied on NATO assets under the Berlin Plus arrangements, reinforcing yet again North Alliance primacy while allowing the EU to gain some operational experience. Operation Artemis, by contrast, demonstrated the EU’s capacity to conduct a short, autonomous military operation under a lead-nation framework.

These early missions established important precedents. They showed that EU military action was possible but also highlighted its structural constraints. The EUMC could advise, coordinate, and assess—but it could not compel. Political cohesion remained the decisive variable.

Throughout the early 2000s, institutional development continued at pace. The establishment of the European Defence Agency in 2004, the launch of EUSEC RD Congo, and the first EU military exercise (MILEX 05) reflected growing confidence. Exercises such as MILEX 05 and MILEX 09 tested the activation of EU Operational

Headquarters and clarified command-and-control arrangements. They also exposed enduring limitations: the absence of standing command structures and the persistent reluctance of Member States to move beyond ad hoc solutions.

For the EUMC, this period reinforced a core function that remains relevant today: managing expectations. Its role was not to generate ambition, but to ensure that ambition remained tethered to military reality.

CONSOLIDATION WITHOUT DEPLOYMENT: THE PARADOX OF THE 2010S.

The Treaty of Lisbon in 2007 provided formal recognition and legal grounding for the CSDP, but it did not fundamentally alter the EUMC’s mandate. What it did offer was institutional consolidation. As the EU’s security agenda broadened to include maritime security, training missions, and crisis management beyond Europe, the EUMC’s workload and visibility increased.

Operations such as Atalanta demonstrated the EU’s ability to sustain long-term military engagement. Training missions in Somalia and Mali reinforced the EU’s role as a provider of security capacity rather than a traditional war-fighting actor. Yet the 2010s were also marked by a persistent paradox: while defence cooperation deepened on paper, operational ambition remained constrained.

Initiatives such as Pooling and Sharing, the Framework Nation Concept, and later Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) reflected genuine if incremental and sometimes disjointed progress in capability development. Military mobility emerged as a strategic enabler, and discussions on hybrid threats and cyber security gained prominence. However, the EU Battlegroups—initially cited as a flagship rapid response

capability—were never deployed and became something of an anticlimax. Political caution repeatedly trumped military readiness.

For the EUMC, this period was characterised by frustration as much as progress. It was increasingly clear that the EU possessed some of the key mechanisms to act, but rarely the political will to do so. The Committee found itself advising from within a widening gap between declared ambition and operational reality.

FROM REACTION TO ANTICIPATION: THE GLOBAL STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC COMPASS.

The publication of the EU Global Strategy in 2016 marked something of a turning point. For the first time, the EU articulated a more explicit vision of its role as a security actor, including the concept of strategic autonomy. This shift was further consolidated through the Strategic Compass process, initiated in 2021 and adopted in 2022, which further acknowledged the Union’s deteriorating strategic environment.

The Strategic Compass represented a qualitative change in how military advice was integrated into EU policymaking. The EUMC was now deeply involved in collective threat assessment, capability prioritisation, and readiness planning. This went well beyond mission-specific advice and into the realm of strategic foresight.

Crucially, the process also fostered greater convergence among national military perspectives. Regular meetings of Chiefs of Defence became forums not only for coordination but for shared strategic interpretation. While consensus remained essential, the quality and depth of discussion evolved. Socialisation deepened. The EUMC was no longer simply reacting to political decisions; it was helping to shape the strategic environment in which those decisions were made.

CASE STUDY: UKRAINE AND THE EUMC AS STRATEGIC SYNCHRONISER.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 constituted the most profound strategic shock to European security since World War II. For the EUMC, it was also a defining test of relevance.

The EU's response was unprecedented in both scope and speed. Political alignment was rapid, defence spending increased dramatically across Member States, and the European Peace Facility was creatively mobilised to support Ukraine militarily. The Strategic Compass was adopted amid crisis rather than as an abstract planning exercise.

From this the EUMC emerged as a critical strategic synchroniser. It still did not command forces or direct operations, yet it played a central role in aligning national military assessments, identifying capability gaps, and stress-testing political initiatives against military reality. It supported coherence across multiple lines of effort: training missions, equipment provision, readiness implications, and longer-term force development.

One of the EUMC's most important contributions lay in managing second-order effects. As Member States drew down their equipment stocks to support Ukraine, the Committee provided a collective forum to assess risks to national and European readiness. It helped reconcile short-term political imperatives with longer-term defence planning—a task that required candour, credibility, and – above all – a deep level of mutual trust which the EUMC had built.

Perhaps most significantly, the Ukraine crisis demonstrated the value of proactive military advice. This was not merely solicited in formal settings; it was actively socialised into the political system. This proactive posture, strongly associated with recent Chairs,

reflects an institutional maturation: an understanding that delayed military advice is often disregarded advice.

TRANSATLANTIC TENSIONS AND THE EUROPEANISATION OF NATO.

The war in Ukraine has also sharpened questions about the future of the transatlantic relationship. While NATO ostensibly remains the cornerstone of collective defence for many, debates around burden-sharing, political reliability, alliance credibility and European responsibility have escalated dramatically.

This evolving context has direct implications for the EUMC. As NATO potentially becomes more operationally European—through force contributions, readiness models, and regional defence plans—the need for a coherent, strategic forum to articulate a distinct and coherent European military voice increases. The EUMC is uniquely positioned to provide it.

This does not imply duplication or competition with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Rather, it suggests complementarity. The EUMC offers a forum in which European military perspectives can be consolidated before being projected into NATO structures, enhancing consistency and reducing fragmentation.

In this sense, the EUMC's relevance may grow not despite NATO, but because of it. As alliance dynamics evolve, the EU's ability to organise and articulate credible military advice becomes an asset rather than a liability or a challenge.

LEADERSHIP, INSTITUTIONAL CONFIDENCE, AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT.

The EUMC's evolution has been shaped not only by events but by leadership. Over eight Chairs, the Committee has developed an institutional personality: cautious but confident, consensus-

driven yet increasingly assertive.

Recent Chairs have demonstrated a greater willingness to engage the political space, recognising that military advice must create a space for itself alongside the diplomatic, economic, and normative arguments. This does not represent politicisation of the military function, but professional adaptation to a more complex decision-making environment.

The EUMC today understands that influence lies not in formal authority but in timing, credibility, and collective ownership. Its effectiveness depends less on what it can compel than on what it can convincingly argue.

LOOKING FORWARD.

At 25, the EUMC stands at a strategic inflection point. It will not become a European General Staff. Member States will retain command authority, and NATO will yet remain key to collective defence. Yet to describe the EUMC as merely advisory risks understating its strategic significance. The EUMC is becoming the EU's primary arena for military sense-making.

In an era defined by strategic shock, compressed timelines, and political volatility, the ability to swiftly generate shared, credible and coherent military understanding is foundational to any ambition to deploy joint military forces. The EUMC's greatest contribution over the next decade may therefore lie not in what it commands, but in what it prevents: unrealistic ambition, strategic incoherence, and the temptation to substitute political rhetoric for military reality.

From blank canvas to strategic partner, the EUMC has already outgrown its original conception. The question for the next 25 years is not whether it will acquire formal power, but whether Europe is prepared to fully use—and politically accept—the military wisdom it has finally learned to organise. ★

GIVING EUROPE A MILITARY VOICE: 25 YEARS OF THE EU MILITARY COMMITTEE

25 YEARS OF THE EUMC: A PILLAR OF EUROPEAN DEFENCE.

At the dawn of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, the European Union (EU) was confronted with the need to assume a greater role in security and defence on the international stage. In response to this “hour of Europe”, and in order to match political ambition with effective instruments, the evolving context demanded a rapid strengthening of the institutional framework with new security and defence structures capable of meeting the growing expectations placed on the EU as a reliable and capable security actor.

Twenty-five years later, Europe once again finds itself at a turning point. The return of high-intensity warfare, growing instability in neighbouring regions, and the rise of hybrid threats have pushed security and defence to the top of the strategic agenda for both the Union and its Member States. The uncertainty of the international system has triggered a paradigm shift about how the EU intends to act, plan, and deliver security. In this renewed strategic responsibility, credibility increasingly depends on the ability to translate political intent into effective military options. For a quarter of a century, the EU Military Committee (EUMC), as the highest military body within the Council, has fulfilled precisely this role, serving as the essential link between the political and the operational levels of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

Established in 2001, the EUMC was conceived to ensure that political



GEN. LUCIANO PORTOLANO
ITALIAN CHIEF OF DEFENCE

“The Union’s credibility now hinges not on political declarations, but on its ability to turn them into real military options. This is where the EUMC becomes indispensable.”

control and strategic direction under the CSDP are consistently supported by sound military advice. By bringing together the Chiefs of Defence of all EU Member States, the EUMC has created a unique forum where national military perspectives are collectively assessed and translated into agreed recommendations to support EU decision-making. Through this process – anchored in the experience and guidance of the 27 Chiefs of Defence, the Chairman of the EUMC (CEUMC), and the work of the dedicated Working Groups – the Committee has progressively affirmed itself as the military voice of the Union and a key hub for strategic military thinking in Brussels. In this role, the EUMC serves as a trusted nexus between the EU’s political decision-making bodies and the EU strategic-military level, fostering convergence among Member States, strengthening

mutual trust, and ensuring continuity between political direction and the execution of military missions and operations.

25 YEARS OF EVOLUTION: GOVERNANCE, RESULTS AND LESSONS LEARNED.

Over time, the role of the EUMC has evolved in parallel with the growing centrality of security and defence within the Union’s priorities. The convergence of multiple security challenges over the past decade has evolved CSDP into an increasingly vital component of the EU’s ability to safeguard its interests and values and support stability in its neighbourhood. In this context, strategic autonomy – understood as the Union’s capacity to act and react in the face of crises, in complementarity with NATO, in cooperation with partners, or autonomously when necessary – has

“As security challenges multiply, the EUMC has become a central driver of the EU’s military credibility - turning political ambition into concrete capabilities and ensuring the Union can act decisively when crises erupt.”

remained a core objective for the EU. In pursuing this goal, credible military resolve has become more vital than ever, prompting deliberate efforts to strengthen the governance of the EU’s military arm in line with political priorities identified by the Member States.

This evolution has required more than political ambition alone. It has demanded the development of practical military deliverables and the strengthening and adaptation of military structures to ensure that the CSDP can act rapidly and robustly when needed. In this regard, the Strategic Compass marked an important step forward by linking political ambition with concrete military objectives, including enhanced readiness and improved interoperability. It reflects a shared recognition among Member States that credible military capabilities are essential for effective crisis management, deterrence, and defence, and that such capabilities must be developed in a coherent and coordinated manner at EU level, drawing from and in synergy with NATO capability requirements.

Throughout this process, the EUMC has acted as a key enabler in supporting the implementation of the military deliverables of the Strategic Compass. By providing continuous military advice and guidance, it has helped translate strategic objectives into tangible outcomes, including the conceptualization and operationalisation of the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (EU-RDC) framework, which has now reached full operational capability (FOC).

THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY: A MORE CENTRAL EUMC IN A CHANGING EUROPE.

The progressive strengthening of the EU’s military governance has also been

reflected in the development of its institutional architecture, under the guidance of the EUMC. The most recent example is the activation of the Deputy CEUMC position, which illustrates the increasingly structured governance of the EU’s military dimension, led by the EUMC and aimed at establishing effective mechanisms for military planning and coordination.

A key milestone in this process has been the establishment and gradual consolidation of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), supported by the EU Military Staff (EUMS). The MPCC has significantly enhanced the Union’s capacity to plan and conduct military missions in a more robust, responsive, and sustainable manner. Acting as the permanent EU Headquarters (HQ) for non-executive military missions and taking on growing responsibility for exercises and operational planning, the MPCC represents a tangible strengthening of the EU’s Command and Control structure. It is also expected to serve as the EU-RDC’s preferred Operational Headquarters (OHQ), reflecting the growing maturity of the EU’s military governance and its ability to support more demanding operational tasks.

CSDP MISSIONS AND OPERATIONS: EVOLUTION AND OPERATIONAL IMPACT.

Missions and operations have long represented the primary instrument of CSDP projection beyond EU borders. They have consistently demonstrated the Union’s commitment and its growing capacity to assume responsibilities in support of global security. Over time, they have evolved, adapted, and expanded in both geographical scope and range of activities, while introducing novel and streamlined instruments,

including those of a financial nature. Today, they operate in increasingly complex environments, addressing maritime security, training and advisory activities, and the strengthening of partner countries’ capabilities, with a growing emphasis on civil–military cooperation, particularly within the Union’s neighbourhood.

In line with its mandate, the EUMC has effectively directed and overseen the planning and conduct of military missions and operations since 2003. By closely following the political decision-making process – from planning, to launch, to proper execution – the EUMC ensures that political decisions are translated into realistic and impactful military action, thereby enhancing operational effectiveness on the ground. The speed and coherence with which the EUMC supported the recent launch of Operation ASPIDES in the North-Western Indian Ocean stand as clear evidence of its ability to enable timely and decisive EU action in response to urgent security challenges. Similarly, the launch of the Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine) represents a further example of a resilient and effective EU response.

Historically, Italy has consistently supported a more assertive EU role in transatlantic security and in strengthening the ‘European pillar’ of NATO. It has long affirmed itself as one of the leading contributors to EU missions and operations, demonstrating operational capability and a strong commitment to the implementation of CSDP. Italy has done so by providing assets, expertise, and leadership across multiple domains, responding to the growing need to prevent and manage crises beyond EU borders. Its position as a top contributor reflects a strong alignment between national

“Regional initiatives like DECI demonstrate how structured cooperation can elevate regional stability, turning shared training and interoperability into tangible strategic advantages for the EU.”

priorities and European strategic interests, including with regard to key areas of projection, notably the “Wider Mediterranean”, where it has traditionally promoted security and stability in the neighboring regions.

To this end, Italy has continued to invest in strengthening military cooperation, enhancing interoperability, and promoting partnerships with other EU Member States, candidate countries, and key partners, acting as a point of convergence for regional security efforts. Initiatives such as the Defence Cooperation Initiative (DECI) and the Multinational Land Forces (MLF), in which Italy plays a leading role, have significantly contributed to promoting regional cooperation and reinforcing stability and security in the Western Balkans, thereby safeguarding EU strategic interests in the Region. Likewise, the systematic integration of the expertise and best practices developed within these initiatives into the EU framework has enhanced preparedness, military interoperability, and overall force readiness, acting as a genuine force multiplier in both EU and multinational initiatives ways.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES: A MORE INTEGRATED, OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC EUMC.

The European Union continues to confront significant strategic challenges that require sustained and coherent direction and guidance from the EUMC. The return of large-scale conflict to the European continent, coupled with the spread of crises and instability across multiple regions, has profoundly reshaped the Union’s security environment. In this context, strengthening readiness and rapid response has become a critical

priority, as the credibility of EU action increasingly depends on the ability to generate forces, deploy them swiftly, and sustain operations in contested and unpredictable settings.

Meeting these demands requires not only adequate military capabilities but also enhanced mobility, resilient logistics, effective pre-positioning of assets, and decision-making processes capable of supporting timely and decisive action.

At the same time, renewed attention to collective defence - including the operationalisation of the Mutual Assistance Clause under Article 42(7) TEU - calls for clearer roles, shared procedures, improved interoperability, and coherent capability development, all pursued in full complementarity with NATO’s defence and deterrence posture.

Looking ahead, the EUMC is increasingly called upon to act as a catalyst for the development of a common European strategic Defence culture, a role that will grow in importance as EU military instruments become more complex and expectations rise. To fulfil this role, the Military Committee must be supported by an adequate and coherent military Command and Control structure that enables the expression of a single military voice within EU institutions and towards the political level. At the same time, future challenges highlight the need for strategic reflection to enhance mission and operation effectiveness, particularly in light of Euro-Atlantic developments. From this perspective, strengthening the EUMC and leveraging its guidance to reinforce the EUMS, the MPCC, and the wider EU military architecture will be crucial to ensure that political ambition is underpinned by credible and sustainable military capabilities. A more capable EU in

security and defence will not only enhance the Union’s ability to act but will also contribute positively to global and transatlantic security, in full complementarity with NATO, which remains the cornerstone of collective defence for those EU Member States that are part of the Alliance.

TOWARD SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND STRATEGIC AMBITIONS.

Twenty-five years after its establishment, the EUMC stands as a central pillar of the Union’s security and defence architecture. Born out of the need to support political responsibility with credible military guidance, the EUMC has evolved alongside the EU’s growing role as an international security actor. Today, it continues to ensure that political priorities are translated into viable, operationally sound military options while maintaining coherence across EU military activities. In doing so, it contributes directly to the credibility and effectiveness of the CSDP and to the Union’s ability to protect its citizens, strategic interests and values, while enabling a solid strategic autonomy.

As the European Union faces persistent instability, the proliferation of new conflicts, and rising expectations regarding its role as a security provider, the ability to align ambition with capacities will remain essential. Readiness, rapid response, and effective decision-making will continue to be decisive factors. In this balance between political responsibility and military realism, the EUMC will remain a crucial player – favouring convergence among Member States, supporting operational credibility, and anchoring European Security and Defence as a shared responsibility and strategic purpose. ★

THE CSDP: A KEY PILLAR OF SECURITY AND DEFENCE READINESS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

South-Eastern Europe, usually known as the Western Balkans in modern European Union parlance, has been a strategically significant but sensitive security area on the continent for decades. The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the European Union is crucial in promoting security, stability, and effective governance in the areas immediately around the EU. The Western Balkans, which include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia – often referred to as the Western Balkans Six (WB6) – occupy a particularly strategic position among them.

Following the wars of the 1990s and the ongoing challenges of transitioning towards stable institutions and security systems, the European Union has employed the CSDP as a crucial framework for promoting stability and enhancing security cooperation in the region. Over the years, the EU has strengthened regional stability and developed security institutions through a variety of defence cooperation initiatives, capacity-building programmes, and civilian and military operations.

At the same time, the area is still characterised by complicated political and security issues in addition to the post-conflict legacy. The United States of America, China, Russia, and the European Union are among the major global actors that have placed the Western Balkans increasingly in the greater context of geopolitical rivalry in recent years. Maintaining stability, strengthening the resilience of security institutions, and consolidating the



LIEUTENANT GENERAL TIHOMIR KUNDID IS THE CURRENT CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF OF THE ARMED FORCES OF CROATIA (CHOD), HAVING ASSUMED THE POSITION ON MARCH 8, 2024.

ambition to join the EU remain top priorities.

The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy will continue to be an important instrument for maintaining a secure and stable environment in the Western Balkans in the new geopolitical environment, which is characterised by growing security challenges in the European neighbourhood. By taking part in EU missions and operations, capacity-building programmes, and other forms of defence cooperation, countries in the region can further strengthen their defence capabilities, enhance interoperability with the forces of EU Member States, and contribute to the resilience and overall security architecture of the region. In this context, aligning with the common policies of the European Union, such as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), is an essential element and prerequisite to deepening cooperation and strengthening mutual trust.

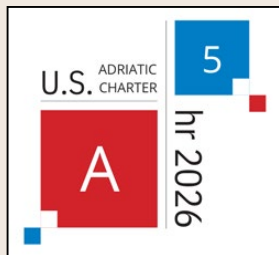
CROATIA IN THE EU'S SECURITY ENGAGEMENT

As a member of the European Union since 2013 and NATO since 2009, Croatia holds a strategically important position in South-eastern Europe. Its security and defence policy has been shaped by many years of experience in developing a national defence system and active participation in international missions and operations. In this context, Croatia sees the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) as a crucial framework for strengthening security and stability in the Western Balkans.

The Croatian Armed Forces actively contribute to international security efforts, with regional defence cooperation having a key role. Croatia is developing intensive bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the Western Balkan nations to improve their defence capabilities, develop interoperability and raise the professional standard of their

armed forces. Through existing forms of cooperation, Croatia is also attempting to bring new EU defence-related trends and initiatives closer to partner countries, providing the region with specific insights and, where feasible, the opportunity for progressive involvement.

The cooperation includes joint training and educational activities, the sharing of experience gained in international operations, and assistance in building the institutional and operational capacities of partner nations' defence and security sectors.



A particularly important framework for regional military cooperation is the US-Adriatic Charter (A5), which enabled members of the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia to join the Croatian contingent in the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. It is an example of practical operational interoperability and joint contribution to international security efforts.

The military education and training system also plays a major role toward improving the capacities of partner nations. Through the Croatian Defence Academy (CDA), the International Military Operations Training Centre, the Foreign Language Centre, and various study programmes at the Dr Franjo Tuđman Defence and Security University and the University of Zagreb, Croatia regularly offers officers and non-commissioned officers from the region opportunities for education and professional development. These programmes strengthen interoperability, professional competencies, and long-term partnership relations between the armed forces of the Western Balkan nations.



Trilateral Declaration CHOD's meeting (© MoD Albania)

This cooperation is reflected in the number Western Balkan nations personnel currently enrolled in Croatian military education programmes: currently at Croatian Defence Academy we have 15 cadets from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 4 cadets from Montenegro and 4 cadets from Kosovo; that are completing their 4-year military education completely free of charge. Also, it is worth noting that at all levels of Professional Military Education courses and schools for officers and non-commissioned officers we currently educate 8 representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 10 officers from Montenegro, 7 from Kosovo and 6 from Northern Macedonia.

The Joint Declaration on Defence Cooperation between Albania, Croatia, and Kosovo serves as an example of further improving regional cooperation by aiming to enhance regional security, promote interoperability, and expand defence capabilities. These programmes support South-eastern Europe's stability and support larger EU and NATO efforts that strengthen the region's security and resilience.

THE WESTERN BALKANS AND EU SECURITY INTERESTS.

The Western Balkans was one of the key catalysts for the development of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Early EU initiatives in the region laid the foundations for crisis management and post-conflict stabilisation, including the development of early warning mechanisms and capacities for civil-military coordination. Today, the EU maintains a permanent presence in the region through civilian and military missions, including EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has been operating since 2004, and EULEX Kosovo, the EU's largest civilian mission with executive powers to uphold the rule of law. By enhancing crisis management capabilities and putting EU norms into practice, these missions offer vital support to the stability and security institutions of the area.

While NATO remains the dominant defence actor in the region – for instance, through the KFOR Mission in Kosovo – the EU's role complements the Alliance's efforts by providing a political-defence dimension that is aligned with the objectives of European integration. The Western Balkans are both a security risk

and an opportunity for the EU: a stable region lowers the possibility of conflict spillover to member states, improves border management, and advances the EU's larger enlargement goals.

Global geopolitical shifts further highlight the importance of EU engagement in the region. The war in Ukraine and Moscow's growing influence also affects the Western Balkans, where Russia seeks to exploit political divisions and tensions. One of the longest-lasting security issues is the tension between Kosovo and Serbia. Belgrade's refusal to acknowledge Kosovo's independence has long impeded regional military cooperation and integration into the EU, and it has periodically resulted in sporadic unrest, especially in ethnically mixed areas. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, political fragmentation between the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska poses a structural security risk; secessionist rhetoric and external influences from various powers could destabilise governance and require an international response.

Like the rest of Europe, the region also faces hybrid threats, mostly from Russia, such as cyberattacks, disinformation, and penetration into vital infrastructure. These hybrid challenges, according to analysts, are among the most serious risks to EU security in the Western Balkans, and they emphasise the necessity of a concerted civil-military-political response.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE CSDP.

The EU's involvement in the Western Balkans under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) faces several enduring challenges despite significant achievements, especially in the military-defence and security context:

- **Political fragmentation and slow reforms** within the countries of the region make it difficult to develop stable defence capacities and a coordinated security environment.

- **The lack of a common vision and strategic culture within the EU**, including challenges in rapid responsiveness, sometimes limits the ability of the CSDP to respond efficiently and cooperatively in crisis situations.
- **Variations in capabilities and interoperability among EU member states** may hinder the speed and effectiveness of military and civilian responses in the region.
- **Competing international influences** are testing the EU's ability to maintain its normative and strategic presence and to prevent destabilisation of the region.
- **Regional security risks**, including corruption, organised crime, unresolved territorial disputes, and tensions between Kosovo and Serbia, continue to seriously threaten regional stability.
- **Hybrid threats**, such as disinformation, cyberattacks, and threats to vital infrastructure, further complicate the security context and call for an integrated civil-military approach.

These challenges highlight the need to strengthen coordination, interoperability

and strategic coherence among EU missions and member states so that the CSDP can effectively support the stability and security of the Western Balkans.

THE FUTURE OF EU SECURITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE WESTERN BALKANS – A MILITARY-DEFENCE FOCUS.

Looking ahead, the EU faces the challenge of strengthening its presence within the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) while retaining the legitimacy of the enlargement agenda. A key priority will be integrating military-defence cooperation with reform processes in the countries of the region in order to build a lasting capability to respond to security threats and support stability.

The development of **training programmes, resilience building, and rapid response to hybrid threats**, such as cyberattacks, disinformation and cross-border security challenges, are essential for the expansion of CSDP capacities. Strengthening the interoperability of local armed forces and their inclusion in joint exercises and missions will enable the EU to react effectively in crisis situations and contribute to the long-term stability of the region.

The Western Balkans remain a priority region for European security, as confirmed by the EU Strategic Compass



Trilateral Declaration meeting. (© MoD Albania 2026)



RSOM in A-5 Exercise (© OSRH / V. Jovanovac 2025).

for 2022. The EU continues to focus on strengthening local defence capabilities, fostering cross-border cooperation, and ensuring that the countries in the region adhere to European security and defence standards. This approach enables the EU to **retain an operational presence and respond to security challenges, and promote stability**, thus laying a strong foundation for the further convergence of the Western Balkan countries towards European integration.

The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) remains a key instrument for advancing security and

stability in the Western Balkans. Through missions such as **EUFOR Althea** and **EULEX Kosovo**, the EU not only supports peacekeeping efforts but also enhances the states' capacity to manage crises, build defence resilience and conform to European security standards.

Sustainable progress depends on consistent political and operational will from the EU and the regional countries, as well as the ability to integrate military and civilian instruments into a cohesive strategy. To ensure a stable, democratic, and security-resilient environment, it is crucial to strengthen the synergy between the CSDP and the European

enlargement objectives.

A stable neighbourhood that is clearly on the European path and fully embraces the Union's policies and values is of strategic significance to both the EU and Croatia. Such an environment enables the EU to effectively balance enlargement and **CSDP engagement** in the region, while Croatia provides practical support by contributing to the preservation of a secure environment, military-defence cooperation, and capacity-building. The Union's ability to incorporate the Western Balkan states into its security and defence orbit will remain a crucial test of Europe's strategic cohesiveness in a turbulent geopolitical environment. ★

THE EU NEEDS A STRONGER MILITARY VOICE

I remember those first weeks in October 2017 when I had just become the Netherlands Chief of Defence. I was sitting in my office behind a desk that was still admirably clean, when suddenly the Chief of the Army came in with a pained look on his face. He had bad news: he was not going to be able to deliver a capability for the EU Battlegroups by the agreed date of 01 January 2018. The Dutch government had agreed to supply troops, but because of personnel and materiel shortages and a lack of training, we simply were not going to be able to deliver on that promise. Hearing this news made me feel uncomfortable and guilty about our state of affairs. In the military you learn to always take responsibility and stay true to your word. We were clearly not able to do that. Therefore, I figured I had no other option but to go to my counterparts in the EU as soon as possible and inform them about the impending gap. For this I had the full support of the Minister of Defence. The best we could do was to share the timeframe in which we were planning to make up for this shortfall. That would at least give the others the opportunity to see if they could somehow jump in and fill the gap. If they could not, we could at least make a risk assessment together of what would happen if the gap was left entirely or partly unfilled.

My confession was met with silence around the table of the EU Military Committee in Brussels. I thought I spotted a few raised eyebrows, but I couldn't quite make out what they meant. During the break it turned out that the eyebrows were raised not out of disappointment, but out of surprise that



ADMIRAL (RET.) ROB BAUER
CHAIR OF THE NATO MILITARY COMMITTEE (2021-2025)
NETHERLANDS CHIEF OF DEFENCE (2017-2021)

I was honest enough to openly confess to everyone that we were falling short. One of the Chiefs of Defence even called it 'inspiring'... This was of course the world upside down. Here I was, falling short, and I was getting complimented for being honest about it.

In order to understand this anecdote, it helps to know that at the time Europe was mainly focused on crisis management. Our operations were almost entirely plannable and controllable. So if a nation didn't live up to its promises, we would either ask others to step in or we would dial down our level of ambition. When you're fighting wars of choice, you have the luxury of making that choice. In collective defence, you do not. Every time a nation breaks a promise that is related to collective defence, it takes a risk not just to its own security but also to the security of others. At NATO we are acutely aware of that. That is why it is a consensus-based organization. We move together or we don't move at all. And the risk of losing the connection between political ambition and military reality is minimized by putting military advice at the heart of political decision-making.

Any decision by the North Atlantic Council with military implications has to be preceded by unfettered military advice from the NATO Military Committee. That means that the Allied Chiefs of Defence (either directly or through their Military Representatives) are always offered a chance to weigh in.

In the EU on the other hand, the Military Committee is the platform for military consultation and cooperation between the EU Member States in the field of conflict prevention and crisis management. The assumption here is that the EU doesn't have a role to play in collective defence. My thesis is that it does. But in a different way than NATO. When it comes to organising and employing the military tools we need for our collective defence, NATO is indisputably the only organisation that can do this. But when it comes to providing economic and regulatory tools for our collective defence, the EU has a crucial role to play. It is my view that the EUMC is currently too far removed from the political decision-making process on these matters. When asked (!) the EUMC advises the Political and Security Committee, which in turn advises the

European Council & Council of the EU. And there are of course channels of communication with the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European Defence Agency and the Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space of the European Commission. But a channel of communication is different from an institutionalised role and mandate to provide unfettered military advice, solicited or unsolicited.

The two most pressing challenges in European defence are the insufficient production capacity of the European defence industry and the lack of military mobility, and yet the EU Chiefs of Defence do not have a direct role in advising the EU's political leadership on how to tackle this. Not a day goes by that we don't hear or read about the need for a stronger Europe. "Europe needs to beef up its defence". "European armed forces need to act autonomously." There is a myriad of articles by policy makers and journalists on setting up alternative command structures and even creating a European army. Ask any of the European Chiefs of Defence, and they will all tell you that these ambitions are futile. The real solutions come from combining NATO's command structure, standardisation and exercise schedule with – as Commissioner Kūbičius recently put it – European scale, European coordination, European law, and European money.

I fully support the statement made by the Chair of the EUMC General Sean Clancy at the European Policy Centre in February 2026: "The EUMC is bridging the gap between political ambition and military credibility. We need to drive forward the military implementation of ReArm Europe Plan. And our biggest task now is: delivery."

I strongly believe that in order to make sure the European Union actually delivers on this plan, we need to create a stronger institutional role for the EU

Military Committee. They are uniquely placed to advise on the HOW. As the Danish Chief of Defence stated in a previous edition of this magazine: "If we fail to consider the 'How', we might be wedged between very high ambitions and a rather slow and ineffective performance."

I am not worried about the positions of the Chiefs of Defence as such. They are more than able and capable to make sure that the political level in their capital gets the advice it needs. But what I am worried about, is that on an EU level this advice is not getting the attention and weight it deserves. It is impossible to overstate the value of the collective input of 27 Chiefs of Defence. Without it, the EU cannot effectively position its regulatory power, industrial policy, financial tools and resilience measures to defend its strategic military interests.

As fraught as the situation is, this is also a moment of immense opportunity. It is no secret that Europe's defence industries are highly fragmented. There are approximately 178 different major weapons systems being produced in Europe, versus 30 in the United States. If European armed forces can achieve more joint procurement, more standardisation and more combined certification, we have created an incredible opportunity to get rid of our fragmentation and make ourselves much more effective on the battlefield. If the EU can encourage nations to produce the same phone chargers, then surely, we can all find a way to encourage nations to produce the same 155-millimetre artillery shells. We have decades of experience and a global reach that none of our adversaries do. But in order to do that, we must allow the military end user to directly influence the political decisions on this.

I have all the faith in the world that European governments and industries have what it takes to turn the current system around. But we have to act quickly, because Europe is facing an

existential fight. We cannot afford to look around the table and confess that we didn't deliver on a promise that was made. Good intentions need to be combined with unfettered expertise in order to realise credible and effective execution, because our adversaries will take advantage of every gap and weakness that is out there. We live in an era of ever growing global conflict, and our institutional structure needs to reflect that. The military level and the political level in the EU need to be as close as humanly possible. Not only do they need to trust each other, they must constantly exchange information and ideas on how to counter the threats that face us, now and in the future. As I have experienced myself as Chief of Defence and as Chair of the NATO Military Committee: it can be difficult to find the right balance in the relationship between the top military and the top political level. You need to be able to anticipate exactly when and what major decisions need to be taken. And then combine military expertise with political oversight to achieve joint strategic leadership.

As it stands, 96 percent of EU citizens are being protected by the NATO shield. And NATO will continue to do so. But it urgently needs the EU to play a role in collective defence as well. The best way to do this, is to elevate the EU's military voice in the political decision-making process. Defence budgets are up and new defence related initiatives are sprouting faster than flowers in spring, but if the EU loses its connection with the military end-user, all this money and energy will not make Europe stronger. Increasing the production capacity of European defence industries and accelerating military mobility are key strategic military interests of the European Union and a key part of NATO's collective defence. Elevating the role of the EUMC will ensure that the stars in the EU flag and the compass in the NATO flag work together to keep safe the 450 million citizens that live on EU soil. ★

THE EU'S CSDP IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: **KEEPING THE PEACE, PREPARING FOR WHAT COMES NEXT**

The Western Balkans matter to Europe. The region was not only the Union's first testing ground for crisis management, but the birthplace of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). In 2003, the Union deployed its first-ever CSDP mission, the EU Police Mission (EUPM) in Bosnia and Herzegovina to stabilise post-conflict institutions and professionalise local law enforcement after the wars of the 1990s. For the EU, it marked a strategic shift from crisis bystander to security provider. Since then, six CSDP missions and operations have been launched in the region. Today, only two remain: civilian and police mission EULEX Kosovo and the military operation EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The 2003 European Security Strategy was unequivocal: the credibility of EU foreign policy depended on consolidating stability in the neighbourhood. Two decades later, that assessment remains valid. Russia's war against Ukraine and intensifying geopolitical competition have reinforced the region's strategic salience. Disinformation campaigns, cyber operations and malign influence, driven primarily by Russia, alongside other state and non-state actors, have become more systematic and strategically calibrated, reflecting the broader shift toward low-threshold confrontation across Europe.

To this day, **the Western Balkans is the one theatre where the EU retains comparative advantage:** political leverage through integration, sustained diplomatic engagement, and an embedded security presence. The region is more stable than at the turn of the century. Several countries



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have anchored themselves in Euro-Atlantic structures: Slovenia and Croatia are EU and NATO members; Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia have joined NATO, while all Western Balkan countries continue along the path toward EU membership. The trajectory since the 1990s is one of measurable progress.

Yet **stability is not self-sustaining.** The region remains burdened by the unresolved legacies of the past – contested statehood, unsettled bilateral disputes and fragile political environments. Institutional resilience is uneven, while internal polarisation and external interference continue to test governance structures across several countries. The Western Balkans are safer than two decades ago, but the continued deployment of CSDP missions in the region underscores a structural reality: security is maintained – not assumed.

SECURITY MAINTAINED, FRAGILITY ENDURING

Although the Western Balkans have not witnessed a return to the large-scale violence of the 1990s, the absence of war should not be mistaken for full

consolidation. The CSDP missions have been more than symbolic expressions of EU engagement. They have operated as instruments of deterrence, reassurance and capacity-building, anchoring stability where political consolidation remains incomplete.

Launched in 2004, EUFOR Althea remains the EU's largest military operation. It took over from NATO Stabilisation Force (SFOR) and operates under the Berlin Plus framework. The mission holds an executive mandate: it oversees the military implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement (1995) and contributes to a safe and secure environment, while supporting the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina through training and capacity-building. EUFOR Althea currently fields close to 2,100 personnel from 24 contributing nations, including 18 EU member states and six non-EU partners (Albania, Chile, Moldova, North Macedonia, Switzerland, and Türkiye). Several countries also contribute formed units, including infantry companies, an air-mobile company, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) units, and other support elements (IISS

Military Balance 2026). EULEX, deployed in 2008, is the EU's largest rule-of-law mission. Its mandate combines monitoring, mentoring and advisory functions with limited executive powers in cases involving organised crime, corruption and serious inter-ethnic offences.

The stabilisation project led by the EU and its allies has succeeded in contributing to prevention of renewed armed conflict and embedding basic security guarantees. Yet the deeper transformation of post-conflict societies – institutional, economic and political – is incomplete. The Western Balkans remain economically fragile. Average GDP per capita stands below 40% of the EU average, reflecting limited convergence. Labour markets face additional strain: according to World Bank estimates, labour force participation remains below 55%, and demographic decline is accelerating. The working-age population is projected to shrink by nearly 20% by 2050, with a potential shortfall of around 190,000 workers within the next five years if current trends persist.

State structures have been rebuilt, but not fully consolidated; governance frameworks exist, but democratic resilience is uneven. Freedom House's Nations in Transit classifies all Western Balkan countries as transitional or hybrid regimes. Persistent deficiencies in civil liberties, judicial independence, media freedom and executive accountability intersect with recurring political volatility across the region. This is reflected in developments such as secessionist rhetoric in Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina, sustained nationwide protests in Serbia since November 2024 demanding rule of law and government accountability, and anti-government demonstrations in Albania in early 2026 over governance practices. In such environments, structural weaknesses can become vectors of renewed instability, particularly when combined with external pressures or domestic political mobilisation.

DETERRENCE AND CONSOLIDATION: THE EU-NATO EQUATION

The EU's CSDP engagement in the Western Balkans has never operated in isolation. From the outset, it has been embedded in a broader Euro-Atlantic security framework. In 1999, after NATO's air campaign Operation Allied Force concluded the Kosovo crisis, the EU had not yet developed the defence structures needed to plan or conduct military operations independently. Since then, **NATO has maintained a sustained presence in the region, operating alongside – and increasingly in coordination with – the EU.**

In EUFOR Althea, NATO remains structurally embedded through the Berlin Plus framework, which enables the EU to rely on NATO's established planning structures, command architecture and selected military assets when conducting the operation. In practice, it means that Althea benefits from NATO's operational expertise, secure intelligence channels and agreed procedures for accessing Alliance capabilities. The mission is EU-led politically, but its military backbone is closely linked to NATO's infrastructure.

In Kosovo, security is structured through a three-tier response mechanism. The Kosovo Police act as the first responder across the entire territory. EULEX serves as the second responder. Through its Formed Police Unit (FPU), EULEX provides operational backup to the Kosovo Police, particularly in public order situations. The unit maintains standby capability for rapid deployment, participates in joint exercises, and conducts regular patrols to monitor the security environment. KFOR, NATO's peacekeeping force, constitutes the third and final layer, mandated to ensure a safe and secure environment and to intervene in cases of serious escalation.

Despite this layered structure, EULEX's role remains primarily supportive and institutional rather than coercive. The ultimate guarantor of stability is KFOR.

This became evident during the unrest in May 2023, when confrontations in northern Kosovo left around 30 KFOR soldiers injured. In that instance, it was NATO's that absorbed the escalation and stabilised the situation, demonstrating where operational deterrence ultimately resides.

These operational realities reflect a broader structural dynamic. EU missions are deeply embedded in the region's institutional transformation, yet their effectiveness depends on a wider security framework in which NATO supplies deterrence and rapid-response capability. EU-NATO cooperation in the Western Balkans is therefore not simply a matter of political coordination; it is a functional necessity. The EU consolidates governance and rule-of-law structures, while NATO underwrites hard security.

This arrangement, however, now unfolds in a more demanding strategic environment. Since 2022, hard power has reasserted itself in European security dynamics. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, renewed uncertainty in transatlantic relations, and intensified debates over burden-sharing have sharpened expectations that Europe assume greater responsibility within NATO. The EU has responded with Europe's rearmament cycle and sharpened focus on Defence Readiness 2030, as well as other initiatives aimed at expanding industrial capacity and reinforcing the European pillar of the Alliance.

Yet strategic ambition requires credible capability. In volatile theatres such as the Western Balkans, where deterrence remains central to stability, institutional engagement alone cannot guarantee credibility. Governance reform and rule-of-law consolidation are necessary, but insufficient if not backed by deployable military capacity. **The EU's role as a security actor in the region – and beyond – remains constrained by limited hard power.** Without aligning its political engagement with credible force, the Union risks being



perceived as normatively assertive but strategically dependent.

WHEN EXTERNAL STABILISATION MEETS LOCAL POLITICS

The EU's strategic approach to the Western Balkans has long rested on a dual objective: maintaining peace and stability while advancing the region's EU integration. CSDP missions have been a central instrument in this effort, designed to manage crises and support institutional reforms while the accession process addressed the deeper structural drivers of instability. While these efforts have helped prevent renewed conflict and supported important reforms, their transformative impact has remained limited.

This outcome cannot be attributed solely to the design of EU policy or the scope of international engagement. CSDP missions operate in environments where local ownership of reforms is uneven and often contested. In both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, local political dynamics, ethnic divisions and competing external influences create a complex operating environment for EU missions. EULEX Kosovo and EUFOR Althea have contributed to

confidence-building, security provision and alignment with EU standards, yet their effectiveness ultimately depends on the willingness of domestic actors to translate external support into sustained political and institutional change. Where that commitment is limited, progress remains incremental.

The result is a stabilisation framework that has prevented escalation but has not fully addressed underlying vulnerabilities. Ethnic tensions, governance deficiencies and corruption continue to challenge democratic consolidation and institutional resilience. In such conditions, local ownership – while essential for sustainability – can also reinforce the status quo when domestic incentives favour limited reform. Without stronger local commitment to reform, stabilisation efforts risk sustaining a fragile equilibrium rather than delivering durable democratic consolidation.

STABILITY AS STRATEGIC BANDWIDTH

At a time when European defence planning is increasingly focused on high-intensity deterrence, the continued deployment of EUFOR Althea and EULEX

HR/VP Kaja Kallas Visits EUFOR ALTHEA Headquarters, Camp BUTMIR, Sarajevo. (© European Union 2025.)

Kosovo underscores that stabilisation requirements in parts of the Western Balkans persist, across both hard-security and governance domains. Strategically, the equation is straightforward: **the more self-sustaining security and rule-of-law structures become in the region, the less the EU will need to rely on military and civilian missions**, freeing political attention, capabilities and resources for collective defence and force readiness elsewhere.

In this sense, consolidation in the Western Balkans is not peripheral to Europe's security and readiness agenda; it is a prerequisite for it. Local stability generates European strategic bandwidth. **Reducing the stabilisation burden in the region therefore constitutes a direct contribution to European security.** By securing stability at home, the Western Balkans can enable the Union to focus its strategic planning and military capabilities where the threat is most acute – and demonstrate their capacity to act as credible partners and future members of the Union. ★



The EUMC

is responsible for providing the PSC with military advice and recommendations on all military matters within the EU. It exercises military direction of all military activities within the EU framework.

2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013

EUMC Missions



2003



2003



2004



2004



2008



2008



2010

General Gustav Hägglund
(Finland)

Term:
3 June 2001
- **9 April 2004**



General Henri Bentégeat
(France)

Term:
6 November 2006
- **6 November 2009**



General Patrick de Rousiers
(France)

Term:
6 November 2012
- **6 November 2015**



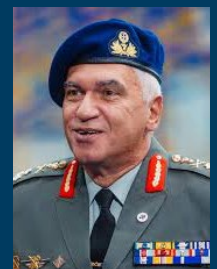
General Rolando Mosca Moschini
(Italy)

Term:
9 April 2004
- **6 November 2006**



General Håkan Syrén
(Sweden)

Term:
6 November 2009
- **6 November 2012**



General Michail Kostarakos
(Greece)

Term:
6 November 2015
- **6 November 2018**

The Chair of the EUMC

ensures that EU political decisions in security and defence are underpinned by coherent, professional military advice and strategic direction.



2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025 2026



2013



2015



2016



2020



2021



2022



2023



2024

General Claudio Graziano
(Italy)

Term:
6 November 2018
- **16 May 2022**



General Seán Clancy
(Ireland)

Term:
1 June 2025
- **present (2026)**



General Robert Brieger
(Austria)

Term:
16 May 2022
- **1 June 2025**

Current Mission & Operation footprint

As of 2025, official EU data show that 21 CSDP missions and operations are ongoing, including:

- 12 civilian missions
- 8 military missions or operations
- 1 civilian-military initiative

This operational footprint spans multiple regions:

- Eastern Europe and the Caucasus
- The Mediterranean and Middle East
- Africa (Sahel, Horn of Africa, Central Africa)

While military missions tend to be fewer in number than civilian ones, their duration, logistical complexity, and mandate weight often render them strategically significant.

MEMBER STATES' EXPERIENCE IN CSDP OPERATIONS AND MISSIONS: **SPAIN IN OPERATION ATALANTA**

Rota, 1 March 2026. When the European Union Naval Force Operation ATALANTA was formally launched at the end of 2008, the western Indian Ocean—particularly the waters off the coast of Somalia—was experiencing one of the most severe piracy crises in modern maritime history. Armed groups operating from the Somali coast were hijacking commercial vessels with alarming frequency, holding crews hostage for ransom and seriously disrupting one of the world's most important shipping lanes. At the peak of the crisis in 2011, pirates held up to 736 seafarer's captive and controlled as many as 32 hijacked ships. The scale and audacity of these attacks threatened not only international trade but also the delivery of humanitarian aid to some of the most vulnerable populations on the planet.

In response to repeated calls from the international community, the United Nations Security Council adopted multiple resolutions authorising coordinated action against piracy. The



COMMANDER MARCOS LOPEZ MARTINEZ ESP NAVY
MILITARY ASSISTANT TO THE SPANISH MILITARY
REPRESENTATIVE. THIS ARTICLE WAS PRODUCED
BY THE STAFF OF EUNAVFOR ATALANTA OHQ.

European Union seized the momentum to launch its very first naval military operation under the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Operation ATALANTA was born with a clear mandate: to deter, disrupt and repress acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea in accordance with international law.

Over the past seventeen years, ATALANTA has proven to be one of the most enduring and adaptable CSDP operations, continuously evolved in

response to shifting threats, changing political priorities and new operational requirements. Its Area of Operation has been adjusted; new executive and non-executive tasks have been added; and a significant diplomatic dimension has been developed, positioning ATALANTA as a central instrument of the European Union's external action in the Horn of Africa and the western Indian Ocean. Despite these adaptations, the operation's core tasks have remained constant: to suppress piracy and ensure the safe passage of vulnerable shipping - above all the vessels chartered by the World Food Programme (WFP) that deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance to millions of people.

Since its launch, ATALANTA has benefited from broad political and operational support across the European Union. Nearly all Member States have contributed in some form, while several non-EU partner countries have also participated. Within this wide contribution, a small number of nations have consistently provided the largest share of assets, personnel and



ATALANTA Armada, (© ATALANTA 2026)



ATALANTA Armada, (© ATALANTA 2026)

leadership. Among them, Spain stands out as a key contributor in terms of both scale and continuity.

SPAIN'S DECISIVE AND SUSTAINED ROLE IN ATALANTA.

The incidents of piracy that happened until 2008 had a significant impact on European society, being particularly hard on Spain. The hijacking of the Spanish-owned fishing vessel PLAYA DE BAKIO in April 2008, off the coast of Somalia, became a national shock. The crew of 26 was held hostage for six weeks; the incident received intense media coverage and generated widespread public concern. Similar attacks on other European-flagged vessels followed, reinforcing the perception that piracy in the western Indian Ocean was no longer a distant problem but a direct threat to European citizens, economies and humanitarian commitments.

It was against this background that Spain emerged as one of the early supporters of a European naval response. On 21 January 2009, the Spanish Congress authorised the

deployment of military forces to the newly established operation. Only two days later, on 23 January 2009, the Council of Ministers formally approved Spain's participation. Remarkably, that same day the frigate ESPS VICTORIA (F-82) set sail for the Area of Operation - the first Spanish warship to join ATALANTA.

Since that emblematic departure, Spain has maintained an exceptionally high level of engagement. Nowadays, the country contributes approximately 80% of the Operation's total deployed resources, a figure that includes both surface crewmembers and headquarters personnel. The sustained provision of highly capable F-80 class frigates has been particularly significant. These warships regularly patrol the Gulf of Aden and the western Indian Ocean, escorting WFP vessels, deterring pirate activity and responding to incidents at sea.

In March 2019, Spain assumed an even more prominent role when the Operation Headquarters (OHQ) was relocated from Northwood (United Kingdom) to the Rota Naval Base



following the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union. Spain now provides up to 50% of the OHQ staff and bears the principal responsibility for hosting and supporting the headquarters infrastructure. This move marked a historic milestone: for the first time, Spain assumed strategic command of a European Union military operation.

The Operation Commander's responsibilities carries substantial political and operational weight. The ATALANTA Commander receives direct strategic guidance from the Political and Security Committee (PSC) and maintains close and regular contact with the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU Military Committee (EUMC) and the EU Military Staff (EUMS). Balancing these high-level political responsibilities with the practical demands of force



ATALANTA escorting WFP vessel.
(© ATALANTA 2026)

employment requires a comprehensive strategic perspective - a commitment that Spain has fulfilled with distinction since 2019.

At the same time, the Operation Commander leads operational and tactical direction over all forces deployed in the area. It should be noted that these forces are commanded by a Force Headquarters, which is embarked on the flagship of the Operation and is led by an Admiral acting as Force Commander. This command is assumed on a rotating basis every four months by Italy, Portugal, and also Spain.

NAVIGATING COMPLEX AND CHALLENGING SEAS.

The geographical scope of Operation ATALANTA encompasses one of the most strategically sensitive maritime regions on the World. The Gulf of Aden and the western Indian Ocean serve as vital arteries of global trade: approximately 80% of world commerce travels by sea, and this corridor is among the busiest and most congested anywhere. Daily, roughly 100 merchant vessels register their movements with the Maritime Security Centre Indian Ocean (MSCIO), the information-sharing hub established by ATALANTA.

Operating in this environment is far from straightforward. The region is characterised by a highly intricate geostrategic landscape involving numerous state and non-state actors, many of whom pursue competing agendas. Political and strategic

tensions are commonplace. Maritime security threats have evolved over time: while large-scale Somali piracy has been dramatically reduced thanks to ATALANTA and complementary international efforts, other dangers persist. Organised criminal networks continue to engage in drug trafficking; illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing undermines coastal livelihoods; and, more recently, Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb Strait have introduced a new layer of risk.

Spain's long and intensive involvement in ATALANTA has therefore provided invaluable operational experience in a demanding multinational and multi-threat environment. At the EU level, this experience has deepened collective understanding of the responsibilities that come with leadership in maritime security. It has strengthened the Union's ability to coordinate international efforts, offer credible diplomatic support and serve as a reliable partner for countries in the region.

At the operational and tactical level, ATALANTA allows participating forces unique and highly valuable training opportunities. The Operation conducts a wide range of real missions and multinational exercises on a regular basis. These activities - ranging from routine escorts to responses to actual piracy incidents - require accurate

planning, detailed coordination and synchronized execution under pressure. For crews and staff, these experiences represent some of the most demanding and rewarding training opportunities available.

From a financial perspective, participation in ATALANTA also generates tangible benefits for contributing nations. Regarding Spain, the European Union reimburses the operating costs of the F-80 class frigates that have been deployed almost continuously since early 2009.

ATALANTA 2.0

The evolution of ATALANTA over the last 17 years can be summarised in four key milestones: ATALANTA's role to fill the strategic gap for the European Union in the western Indian Ocean; the cooperation network to disrupt piracy in the region; the modernisation of the MSCIO; and synchronisation with EU operations and missions in the area. The successes and goals achieved by ATALANTA to date have demonstrated not only its effectiveness but also its unique role in the architecture of maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean. By keeping piracy under control, **ATALANTA's most important value is to help fill the gap for the European Union and Member States** in terms of presence, activity, impact and commitment in the region, going beyond naval diplomacy.

Focusing on the response to a piracy



LMCB exercise DORALEH 2.(© ATALANTA 2026).



case, the recent incident involving the MV HELLAS APHRODITE illustrates in detail **the cooperation, relationships, support and common procedures built up over the years**. Somali maritime police forces, UK Maritime Trade Office, Combined Maritime Force units, the Indian Navy, the Seychelles Armed Forces, as well as EEAS Iran desk and EU Delegation in Somalia, all played a decisive role in the successful resolution of the incident. and ATALANTA played a crucial role in leading and coordinating all actions from the Operational headquarters.

With regard to ATALANTA's relationship with the shipping industry, **the modernised Maritime Security Centre Indian Ocean (MSCIO)** and its website has been a fundamental development, resulting in a key tool for accessing accurate, comprehensive and timely information. The new MSCIO functionalities, together with the annual Industry Strategic Meeting (ISM) and Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) forum, have taken the ATALANTA-Maritime Industry relationship to a new level. Finally, the evolution of ATALANTA has

also involved the improvement and updating of **joint action with other operations and missions in the region**. In particular, it is worth highlighting the integral approach in the Horn of Africa carried out in conjunction with the sister missions EU Capacity Building Mission in Somalia (EUCAP SOM) and EU Training Mission in Somalia (EUTM SOM), as well as the European Union delegations and the EU High Representative in the Horn of Africa. This effort, which covers the political, economic and military spheres, is unique in the area and is only implemented by the European Union. Added to this are the synergies achieved with Operation ASPIDES, which harmonises the EU's efforts for maritime security in the western Indian Ocean.

Operation ATALANTA stands as a powerful demonstration of the European Union's willingness and ability to respond decisively to a global security challenge identified by the United Nations. When the piracy crisis threatened international shipping and humanitarian aid lines in the 2000s, EU Member States, as Spain, did not hesitate to act. Beyond its contributions in personnel and means, Spain's hosting

ATALANTA Armada, (© ATALANTA 2026)

of the Operation Headquarters in Rota since 2019 and its assumption of command have placed the nation at the strategic heart of the Operation.

Throughout these years, ATALANTA has proven remarkably resilient and adaptable. It has successfully navigated a constantly shifting threat environment and an increasingly complex geostrategic context, evolving into an indispensable military and diplomatic instrument for the European Union in the Indian Ocean. As a demanding framework for the planning and execution of real, high-risk international operations, ATALANTA has allowed the EU - with Spain playing the leading role - to affirm its leadership, build operational credibility and consolidate its reputation as a capable and reliable maritime security provider in some of the most challenging waters on earth.

Together we have achieved an extraordinary success, which continues to protect lives, safeguard trade routes and uphold the rules-based international law of the sea. ★

THE "SEA AHEAD": PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S MARITIME SECURITY OPERATIONS.

This article explores the evolution of the European Union's maritime security operations from 2008 to 2025, analysing the four naval missions launched under the Common Security and Defence Policy. Beginning with Operation Atalanta's counter-piracy mandate in the Horn of Africa, the EU gradually expanded its naval capabilities through Operation Sophia's migration management efforts, Operation Irini's enforcement of the arms embargo, and Operation Aspides' defensive stance in the Red Sea. Each mission reflects unique operational challenges, varying member-state participation, and institutional learning processes. The analysis shows how the EU has developed adaptable command structures, legal frameworks, and tactical approaches while navigating complex political dynamics among member states, ultimately establishing itself as a credible maritime security actor in an increasingly volatile geopolitical environment.

Since 2008, the European Union (EU) has built a unique maritime security profile through four naval missions (Atalanta, Sophia, Irini, and Aspides) carried out under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Starting as responses to complex crises ranging from Somali piracy to human smuggling, arms embargo enforcement, and disruption of seaborne trade, these missions have grown in scope and complexity. This article explores their mandates, operational challenges, member state contributions, and the lessons learned that continue to influence European maritime security



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strategy in an increasingly volatile geopolitical environment.

OPERATION ATALANTA.

Somali piracy had long been a pressing security concern for regional actors, but it quickly rose higher on political agendas after the April 2008 hijacking of the French yacht "Le Ponant", which strengthened the resolve to intensify efforts against piracy. The adoption of Security Council resolution 1816 on 02 June 2008 marked the end of the legal process for the Union's counter-piracy efforts off the coast of Somalia. In the following weeks, extensive diplomatic, military, and political talks among member states and institutions resulted in the creation of the EU Coordination Cell, based in Brussels and led by the Spanish Navy. Ultimately, the first EU maritime security operation, EUNAVFOR Somalia "Atalanta", was launched on 08 December 2008.

The operational headquarters (OHQ) and the Maritime Security Centre-Horn of Africa (MSCHOA), responsible for

regional information-sharing, were both situated at the British military base of Northwood, outside London. While the British armed forces led the mission from land, they never deployed a single asset. Between 2009 and 2016, the Northwood base also hosted NATO's sister mission, Operation Ocean Shield. This concomitance allowed both EU and NATO personnel to work side by side in conducting their respective missions, thereby informally cooperating to address Somali piracy.

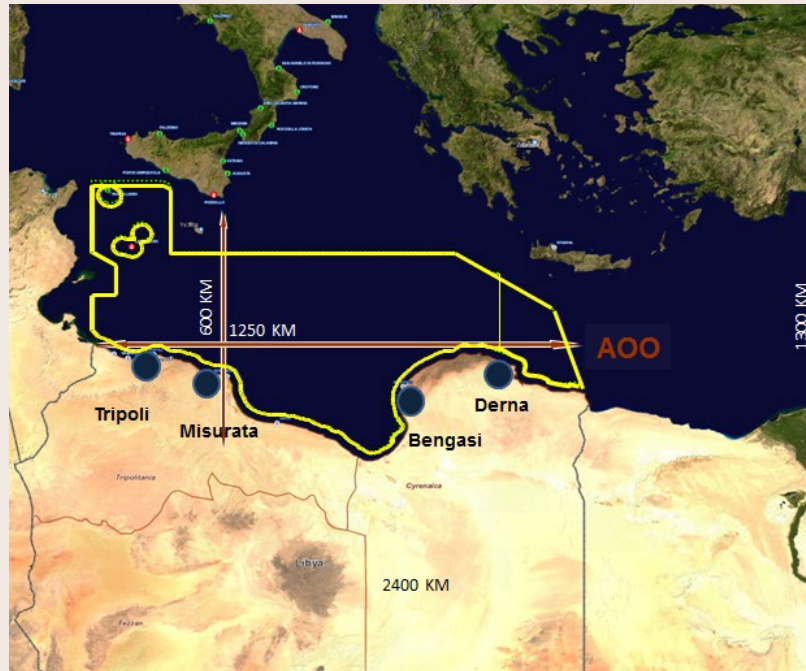
The first operational commander at sea was Commodore Antonios Papaioannou of the Greek Navy. After deploying three frigates and one patrol aircraft between 2009 and 2011, Greece faced a severe economic crisis, which compelled it to withdraw its assets. Besides Greece, France, Italy, and Spain were the initial operational contributors to the missions, each deploying one frigate in the first trimester of 2009. Overall, Atalanta remains, to date, the most widely

supported naval mission ever launched within the CSDP framework, with all member states participating at some point, either by sending personnel to the OHQ or by deploying ships and aircraft.

Following Brexit, the EU Council decided in July 2018 to relocate Operation Atalanta's OHQ from Northwood to Rota, Andalucía, following a joint French Spanish bid and a separate Italian bid, with Spain seeking greater strategic influence and being considered technically capable of hosting the mission. The relocation allowed Spain to lead the operation from 2018 to 2020, and as of January 2026, Spain remains the sole contributing nation with the flagship "Victoria" and a helicopter.

Initially envisioned as a twelve-month mission, Atalanta remains active, making it the longest EU naval operation, and is scheduled for review in December 2026. The EU's success in Somalia results from its comprehensive strategy, which has expanded Operation Atalanta's mandate beyond piracy to include broader maritime security. It also combines information-sharing initiatives with military and civilian capacity-building missions to bolster regional governance and stability. This evolution illustrates the EU's gradual shift from reactive counter-piracy operations towards what is known as the Union's "integrated approach to the Horn of Africa".

Atalanta also set an example of "first times" in maritime security operations, with both non-member states and candidates participating operationally. Firstly, the Norwegian "Fridtjof Nansen" frigate was the first-ever non-EU asset deployed for a trimester in 2009. Secondly, Croatia's ongoing contributions to Operation Atalanta, firstly as an EU candidate country and subsequently as a fully-fledged member in 2013, made it the first state to support the mission at both stages of accession, demonstrating the EU's positive influence in aligning partners with its security and defence objectives policies. Thirdly, other non-EU partners



Area of operation. (© EUNAVFOR 2017.)

(Colombia, Montenegro, New Zealand, Serbia, South Korea, and Ukraine) participated for the first time in a CSDP naval mission, contributing personnel, liaison officers, or naval assets, signalling the EU's growing attractiveness as a maritime security provider beyond its borders.

OPERATION SOPHIA.

On 22 June 2015, the EU launched its first maritime security operation in the Mediterranean Sea, "to prevent human tragedies resulting from smuggling people across the Mediterranean". Five days later, the Italian Navy, which hosted it at the OHQ in Rome, had already deployed its flagship, "Cavour". Originally named EUNAVFOR MED, in September 2015, the then-High Representative and Vice President (HR/VP), Federica Mogherini, proposed renaming it Sophia after a Syrian baby was born on board the German vessel "Schleswig-Holstein" during a search-and-rescue operation on 22 August 2015. The mandate was to "identify, capture and dispose of vessels [...] used or suspected of being used by migrant smugglers or traffickers". A total of four phases were included in the operational plan. The first phase, which involved gathering information on the "modus operandi" of human smugglers

to identify, seize vessels, and arrest the smugglers, took place between 22 June and 6 October 2015, reaching full capacity on 27 July. The second phase focused on identifying, inspecting, and seizing the smugglers' boats. Ultimately, the planned third and fourth phases, which would have involved neutralising smuggling infrastructure and entering Libyan waters, were never executed due to the lack of a UN mandate and Libya's refusal to grant authorisation access.

As with Atalanta, several non-executive tasks were also added to Sophia's mandate. In June 2015, the Council expanded the mission to include non-executive tasks such as capacity-building, leading to a 2016 "Memorandum of understanding" that enabled high-seas training for the Libyan naval forces. Over 330 personnel were trained by the German and Italian navies between October 2016 and November 2017, significantly enhancing their preparedness and aiding in the rescue of more than 50,000 migrants. The enforcement of the arms embargo and the prevention of oil smuggling were respectively introduced in 2016 and 2017, under relevant United Nations resolutions. These mandate extensions gradually evolved Sophia from a small counter-smuggling operation into a wider

maritime security mission with regional stabilisation objectives.

In contrast to Atalanta, only a limited number of member states participated operationally in Sophia, reflecting both the political sensitivity of migration and divergent national threat perceptions, with Italy, Germany, Spain, and France emerging as the most visible contributors. Sophia was also the first and only CSDP naval mission in which the UK Royal Navy has ever deployed assets, namely the "HMS Richmond" in 2016 and the "HMS Diamond" in 2017.

Operation Sophia marked another unexpected first time for the Irish Naval Service. A total of three ships (LÉ Niamh, Beckett and Joyce) supported the mandate of Sophia between 2017 and 2018. These deployments represented a significant shift for Ireland, whose naval forces had traditionally been confined to fisheries protection within national waters.

Operation Sophia quickly became politicised, especially in Italy, where opposition parties framed it as a "pull-factor" for irregular migration, despite the mission never having a search-and-rescue mandate. In Britain, the House of Lords, writing after the Brexit referendum and in a notably Eurosceptic climate, labelled Sophia as "the impossible mission", recognising intelligence gains but criticising the lack of access to Libyan territorial waters. The mission's politicisation peaked after the 2018 Italian general elections, when the Five Star Movement and the League formed a government that rejected Sophia's disembarkation arrangements, adopted restrictive migration policies, and progressively withdrew Italian assets. Once the Italian Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini, called for the ports' closure, the then-German Minister of Defence, Ursula von der Leyen, argued that there was a clear attempt to sabotage the mission. When Germany withdrew from the mission, with no more naval assets at disposal, the operational commander, Admiral



Enrico Credendino, deemed the mission concluded, naming that moment "Sophia asciutta", and, one year later, the mission was ceased.

OPERATION IRINI.

On 19 January 2020, German Chancellor Merkel hosted the "Berlin Conference" to discuss a ceasefire in Libya. This diplomatic initiative laid the groundwork for several policies, including the imposition of an arms embargo. On 17 February 2020, the Council confirmed its willingness to launch the third naval mission. On 31 March 2020, Operation Irini was established to enforce the United Nations' arms embargo on Libya. The speed of Irini's launch reflected both the political urgency surrounding the Libyan conflict and the EU's accumulated institutional experience from previous naval missions in the Mediterranean.

Italy was the sole applicant to host the OHQ, as it possessed both operational competence and regional knowledge, having commanded Sophia from 2015 to 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic initially limited participation to Italy alone, with one frigate and three aircraft, due to lockdowns, with other states only joining after 2021. Despite the Commander's call for more

The European Union's naval forces observe a suspected ship as part of Operation Irini in March 2021. (© EUNAVFOR 2021.)

assets, Irini still inspected over 1,600 ships and transmitted eighteen special reports to the UN in 2020-2021, though contributions weakened again after 2021 before peaking in 2023 with four frigates and six patrol aircraft. In 2024, participation decreased slightly, with Greece and Italy each providing a frigate and aircraft, and France, Luxembourg, and Poland contributing aircraft on a rotational basis. In 2025, the mission was commanded at sea by the Greek Navy, the sole operational contributor, together with Italy.

Like its predecessors, additional tasks were included in subsequent extensions, such as, for instance, the "implementation of UN measures to prevent the illicit export of petroleum from Libya, the development of capacities and training of the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy, and the disruption of the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks". These mandate expansions progressively aligned Irini with the EU's comprehensive approach to maritime security. The mission is still active and

will be reviewed by the Political and Security Committee by March 2027.

OPERATION ASPIDES.

Operation Aspides, launched on 19 February 2024, represents the EU's response to Houthi attacks disrupting Red Sea shipping routes, carrying around 22% of global seaborne trade, since October 2023. Following the US-led Operation Prosperity Guardian in December 2023, the EU initially debated extending the mandate of Operation Atalanta before political disagreements led to a new mission. UNSC Resolution 2722, adopted in January 2024, provided the crucial legal framework by condemning Houthi attacks and calling for international responses to threats against freedom of navigation.

Aspides operates under a "defensive" mandate encompassing three core tasks: protecting commercial vessels against attacks, accompanying ships to deter attacks, and ensuring maritime situational awareness. The operational area spans from the Red Sea through the Arabian Gulf to the northwestern Indian Ocean, thus mirroring Atalanta's geographic scope. Greece has been hosting the OHQ at Larissa Air Force Base, while Italy provided the mission's first force commander at sea until June 2024, followed by the Dutch and Greek navies.

In conclusion, this mission synthesises lessons from seventeen years of previous CSDP operations.



The UK Royal Navy's "HMS Diamond" and "HMS Enterprise" patrol the Central Mediterranean Sea as part of EUNAVFOR MED "Sophia". (© EUNAVFOR 2018)

Firstly, from Atalanta, Aspides adopted flexible command structures, aerial reconnaissance capabilities, and the importance of securing critical trade routes. Secondly, Sophia's experience navigating politically contentious mandates informed Aspides' carefully crafted "defensive" positioning to minimise intra-EU disputes. Thirdly, Irini demonstrated the necessity of robust legal frameworks and diplomatic engagement. Ultimately, this synthesis creates a legally robust, politically cautious, and operationally proactive mission reflecting the EU's evolution

towards resilient maritime security governance in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape environment.

The EU maritime security operations demonstrate an institutional learning curve spanning seventeen years. From Atalanta's successful counter-piracy framework to Sophia's politically contentious migration management, and from Irini's rapid deployment during the pandemic to Aspides' defensive posture in the Red Sea, each mission has provided vital insights into the operational and strategic conduct of naval missions. Despite varying levels of member state participation and periodic political challenges, these operations reflect the EU's growing commitment to maritime security governance. As geopolitical threats evolve, the Union's ability to adapt operational mandates, while maintaining legal legitimacy, remains crucial for protecting European interests at sea. ★



The European Union's naval forces escort a commercial cargo vessel as part of Operation Aspides (© EUNAVFOR 2025)

FROM GENERATION TO REGENERATION: THE EVOLUTION OF THE EU MILITARY ASSISTANCE MISSION IN MOZAMBIQUE.

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the European Union Military Committee (EUMC), the trajectory of our Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) stands at a pivotal juncture. The European Union Military Assistance Mission in Mozambique (EUMAM MOZ) offers a compelling case study of this evolution, a mission that has transitioned from the immediate urgency of force generation to the strategic necessity of institutional regeneration.

As the Mission Force Commander, I have witnessed firsthand the complexities of modern conflict and the adaptability required of European Union (EU) instruments. The story of EUMAM MOZ is not merely about training soldiers; it is about building the nervous system of a sovereign defence force capable of protecting its citizens in a volatile security environment. This article explores our journey from training eleven Quick Reaction Forces (QRFs) to assisting the Mozambican Defence Armed Forces (FADM) in establishing the sustainable command and control architecture necessary for long-term stability.

THE STRATEGIC SHIFT: ADAPTING TO THE OPERATIONAL REALITY.

When the European Union first engaged in Cabo Delgado, the objective was immediate and demanding: to generate forces capable of stemming the tide of a violent insurgency. Under the European Union Training Mission Mozambique (EUTM MOZ), the EU military successfully trained eleven QRFs, six from the Army Commandos and five from the Navy



MISSION FORCE COMMANDER, COMMODORE CÉSAR CORREIA BESIDE THE EMBLEM OF THE EUROPEAN UNION MILITARY ASSISTANCE MISSION IN MOZAMBIQUE.



Live-fire range sessions conducted by members of the Mozambican Defence Armed Forces, under the supervision of the EUMAM MOZ TACP, which assumes an oversight role in the delivery of these courses. (© EUMAM MOZ 2025)

Marines. These units were the "muscle" required to confront an immediate threat. However, as any military leader knows, the generation of force is only the first step, since the true measure of success lies in the capacity to sustain that force.

By late 2024, the security landscape in Northern Mozambique had evolved. The insurgent movements demonstrated a resilience and adaptability that defied conventional suppression. They avoided decisive battles, opting instead for

dispersion and intimidation, utilising forest corridors to project influence and expanded activities southwards into Nampula province, specifically the districts of Eráti and Memba.

Simultaneously, the insurgent forces engaged in "intimidation by presence," occupying villages such as Quissanga not to hold territory, but to psychologically dominate the population and disrupt agricultural livelihoods without firing a shot. Yet, the threat retained its

lethality, with a resurgence in the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and the abduction of children for forced recruitment.

This evolving threat required a corresponding evolution in our support. A training mission focused solely on producing new infantry companies would have been insufficient. The FADM required not just soldiers, but a "brain", a Command and Control (C2) structure capable of analysing shifting threats, and a "backbone", a logistical system capable of projecting force to meet them. This



Live-fire session in Katembe Training Camp delivered by EUMAM MOZ mentors as part of the Train-the-Trainers programme. (© EUMAM MOZ 2025)

reality drove the transition from EUTM to EUMAM in September 2024, marking a decisive shift from executive training to non-executive assistance and advising. **EUMAM MOZ has moved beyond force generation. Our primary goal during this mandate was to assist the FADM in creating the command-and-control structures of the Administrative Command Elements (ACEs) necessary to independently manage the deployment, regeneration, and logistical sustainment of their Quick Reaction Forces (QRFs).**

THE CORE CONCEPT: FROM GENERATION TO REGENERATION.

The flagship initiative of the EUMAM MOZ's current mandate has been the transition to the "Regeneration" model. The operational tempo in Cabo Delgado degrades units rapidly. Equipment wears out, personnel suffer fatigue, and tactical habits degrade under combat stress. Without a structured cycle to rest, refit, and retrain these units, their combat effectiveness drops quickly.

Therefore, our primary strategic objective shifted to assisting the FADM in establishing a sustainable Operational Cycle consisting of four phases: Operations, Regeneration, Training, and Stand-by. The critical innovation was the "Regeneration Katembe" programme, launched in August 2025. This was not merely a training schedule; it was a structural overhaul designed to ensure that units returning from the operational theatre are structurally reorganised, re-equipped, and retrained.

We successfully implemented the "Regeneration Katembe" cycle. This concept ensures that units returning from the operational theatre are not only allowed to rest but also structurally reorganised, reequipped, and retrained, thereby maintaining combat readiness over the long term.

To effectively manage this cycle, EUMAM MOZ proposed the establishment of ACEs. Early assessments indicated that the FADM lacked the intermediate command structures necessary to manage this cycle autonomously. Consequently, the ACE concept represented a significant shift in FADM organisational culture. The implementation strategy transitioned from direct instruction to mentorship, positioning EU advisors alongside FADM officers to draft Job Descriptions (JDs) and Standard Operating Procedures

(SOPs). This approach aimed to create a sustainable doctrine rather than just train personnel.

Although the initial operational design envisioned a distributed model, current resource constraints have dictated a centralised approach. As a result, both strategic and operational functions are currently being developed within MAPUTO. Intended to function as a "centralised brain," this element directs personnel management, logistical refit, and the planning of training cycles.

LOGISTICS: THE ANCHOR OF SUSTAINABILITY.

No operational concept can survive contact with reality without logistics. A significant portion of the Mission's mandate was dedicated to protecting the European Union's support in non-lethal equipment provided through the European Peace Facility (EPF). The FADM have historically struggled with "logistical drag", the challenge to maintain vehicles and manage supply chains effectively in remote operational theatres like Cabo Delgado.

In response, we have focused our advisory efforts on establishing a General Support Unit (UAG) concept. While the physical hub is still in development, the doctrine for "Maintenance Management" and "Supply and Transport" has been integrated into our advisory package. Securing the EU's material support



Group photograph at the conclusion of the 2nd Train-the-Trainers programme provided by EUMAM MOZ mentors at Katembe Training Camp. (© EUMAM MOZ 2025)



Riverine Operations in Maputo Bay: a phase of the Train-the-Trainers programme for the Marines of the Mozambican Defence Armed Forces provided by EUMAM MOZ mentors. (© EUMAM MOZ 2025.)

requires the FADM to adopt a culture of lifecycle management, sustaining its own logistical assets.

A critical component of EUMAM MOZ has been establishing maintenance and supply protocols for EPF-funded equipment. Building FADM’s capacity to maintain its own fleet and logistics chain is the only way to ensure the longevity of European support measures.

THE INTEGRATED APPROACH: WINNING THE HUMAN TERRAIN.

Counter-insurgency is fundamentally a contest for legitimacy. The FADM’s ability to secure Cabo Delgado depends as much on its conduct as its combat power. Consequently, EUMAM MOZ integrates International Humanitarian Law (IHL), International Human Rights Law (IHRL), and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda into the DNA of every training cycle.

This is not a peripheral activity. In a theatre where the adversary actively recruits from marginalised populations and exploits grievances, the conduct of state forces is a strategic variable. We operationalise this through specific Train-the-Trainer (TtT) programmes, creating a cadre of FADM instructors



CIMIC (civil-military) activity carried out at “Missão Santa Isabel”. A morning of games and shared moments between EUMAM MOZ military and civilian personnel and civilian population. (© EUMAM MOZ 2025)

capable of teaching these principles to their own troops.

Furthermore, Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) was elevated from a concept to a capability. EUMAM MOZ assists the FADM in developing a CIMIC doctrine where none existed previously. This includes practical activities, such as support to orphanages in Katembe and health initiatives in MAPUTO, designed to rebuild the bond between the military and the civilian population. The aim is to transform the soldier from a figure of fear into a figure of protection.

We have embedded IHL/IHRL and Gender perspectives into the DNA

of our advising. The fight against insurgency is won not just by tactical victory, but by the conduct of troops and their relationship with the civilian population.

RESILIENCE IN A COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT.

It would be inconsistent to ignore the complex political and social environment in which this mission operates. The mandate period coincided with a time of profound internal tension in Mozambique. The post-election unrest of late 2024 and early 2025, characterised by widespread protests and strikes, placed immense pressure on the state’s security apparatus.

This reality forced EUMAM MOZ to be agile, shifting focus to static advisory roles when field training became impossible. The mission’s ability to keep up the pace during the protests demonstrated the strength of the EU-Mozambique partnership.

The mission successfully navigated severe domestic instability and a shifting threat landscape, proving the resilience of the EU’s non-executive mandate model.

THE WAY AHEAD: SECURING THE INVESTMENT.

As we look towards the future, the transition to full FADM autonomy is not yet complete. The "Regeneration" cycle has been designed but requires validation and is not yet self-sustaining

The FADM operational requirements are still being addressed, mainly in the northern theatre of operations, requiring a robust military footprint. This fact has a direct impact on the availability of military personnel to start the regeneration cycle.

The successes of EUMAM MOZ, namely the establishment of the ACEs, the logistics hub concept, and the cadre of Mozambican trainers, are the foundation. However, to secure the investment made by European citizens, continued engagement is still required. The EU should remain a steady partner,

focusing on the "institutional software" delivered by leadership, logistics processes, and accountability that turns a collection of units into a coherent army.

Logistics is a strategic enabler. The establishment of the General Support Unit and maintenance protocols for EPF equipment are critical steps in preventing the "capability rust" often seen in post-mission scenarios.

EUMAM MOZ has demonstrated that military assistance is most effective when it looks beyond the immediate fight. By shifting our focus to force regeneration after the force generation, we have addressed the critical vulnerability of African security architectures: sustainability. We have helped build the "brain" and the "backbone" of the FADM, not just its "muscle."

The FADM of May 2026 possesses the framework for operational autonomy, with the 'Regeneration' model and the ACE concept providing the strategic direction. However, significant challenges persist. The insurgency remains adaptable, the terrain is unforgiving, and resource constraints are challenging. While today's FADM are structurally more advanced than in 2021, fully implementing these reforms demands sustained time and support.

Delays in implementation and difficulties in staffing the ACEs highlight that the FADM still requires steadfast partnership. Therefore, the extension of the EUMAM MOZ mandate is fully recommendable. It is only through continued, focused pressure and advising on institutional software, leadership, logistics, and accountability that we can ensure that FADM move from a state of dependency to one of enduring resilience.

The Mission's legacy in Mozambique will not be measured by the number of battalions trained, but by the FADM's ability to endure, adapt, and protect its citizens long after our mission concludes. This is the promise of 25 years of the EUMC: a commitment to building partners who can stand on their own. ★



KEY MESSAGES



STRATEGIC EVOLUTION: EUMAM MOZ has moved beyond simple force generation. The primary goal is now assisting the FADM in creating the command-and-control structures necessary to independently manage the deployment, regeneration, and logistical sustainment of their forces.

THE REGENERATION MODEL: The mission successfully implemented the "Regeneration Katembe" cycle. This concept ensures that units returning from the operational theatre are structurally reorganised, re-equipped, and retrained, ensuring combat readiness is maintained over the long term.

LOGISTICS AS A STRATEGIC ENabler: A critical component is establishing maintenance and supply protocols for EPF-funded equipment. Building FADM's capacity to maintain its own fleet and logistics chain (e.g., the General Support Unit) is the only way to ensure the longevity of European support.

HUMAN SECURITY AS A FORCE MULTIPLIER: IHL/IHRL and Gender perspectives are embedded into the DNA of advising. The fight against insurgency is won not just by tactical victory, but by the conduct of troops and their relationship with the civilian population.

ADAPTABILITY AND RESILIENCE: The mission has successfully navigated severe domestic instability and a shifting threat landscape, proving the resilience of the EU's non-executive mandate model.

PARTNERSHIP FOR SOVEREIGNTY: The EU is the primary partner in building the sovereign, long-term institutional capacity of the Mozambican state.

THEN, NOW, AND IN THE FUTURE: COOPERATION, CAPABILITY AND COMMITMENT

Lieutenant General André Denk brings 40 years of military and operational expertise to EDA. He is also the first military officer to lead the Agency. Having served as EDA Deputy Chief Executive since 2023, he oversaw critical initiatives, including joint procurement of 155mm ammunition for Ukraine and stock replenishment across Member States. His prior roles, from Director of Logistics at the EU Military Staff to commanding Germany's Joint School of Logistics, underscore his mastery of multinational operations and strategic planning. His extensive international deployments under EU, UN, and NATO mandates include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan, and Mali; they reflect his deep operational experience in complex multinational missions.

As the European Union Military Committee celebrates its 25th anniversary, I recall my military assignments in the early years of this century. From the conflict in Bosnia to the deserts of Mali, serving under EU, UN and NATO mandates, I witnessed firsthand how rapidly the strategic environment around Europe was changing.

By 2014, Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the turmoil spreading across the Middle East and North Africa shattered many of the assumptions that shaped European security since the end of the Cold War. Today I am witnessing changes in our security once again, this time from Brussels as head of the European Defence Agency (EDA). Europe's security environment is deteriorating in ways few of us could have imagined. The war of aggression waged by Russia against Ukraine combined with geopolitical competition and the erosion of the rules-based international order have forced us to confront a difficult but unavoidable truth: our security can no



LIEUTENANT GENERAL ANDRÉ DENK WAS APPOINTED CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN DEFENCE AGENCY (EDA) IN MAY 2025, HAVING PREVIOUSLY SERVED AS ITS DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE SINCE 2023.

longer be taken for granted.

This is precisely where EDA can help, in close coordination with the EU Military Committee and the EU Military Staff. Our mission is demanding and, given today's world, expanding. We are here to help Member States work together in developing the military capabilities they need, both for their own defence and for the collective security of Europe. EDA is, by design, an intergovernmental body, as defined in the Treaty on European Union and in the Council, decision establishing the Agency. It is steered and funded by the Member States themselves. Our governance reflects this structure. The Agency's Steering Board — composed of the 27 Ministers of Defence — provides political guidance and strategic direction. The board meets regularly at ministerial level, and in additional configurations bringing together national armaments directors, capability directors, and research, technology and innovation directors.

STRATEGIC ADVICE

When I served as Chief of Staff in the EU Training Mission in Mali in 2015 and 2016, I was well aware of the role played by the EU Military Committee. Later, during my service within the EU Military Staff as a director, I attended numerous committee

meetings. Today, in my current role, I have the privilege of informing the EU Military Committee about the Agency's work and progress. By definition, our links with the European Union Military Committee are strong. EDA is, in many respects, a service provider to the Chiefs of Defence. Many of our staff come from military backgrounds.

Others bring extensive experience from roles within national ministries of defence. This combination means that EDA is far from a conventional civilian bureaucracy. It is an organisation built on military expertise, operational understanding and defence policy experience. This relationship has become even more important as Europe's defence cooperation continues to evolve. Over the past five years, the EU Military Committee has played a central role in guiding the trajectory of European defence cooperation. It has provided strategic military advice at a time when the Union's defence ambitions have grown significantly, and when the need for credible military capabilities has become ever more apparent.

STRONGER TOGETHER

For EDA, this evolution has coincided with a period of transformation. The Agency is embarking on a process of strengthening



In conversation with HR/VP. (© EDA 2025.)

itself in response to the call by European leaders in October 2025 for greater support in capability development, joint procurement and innovation. European governments are seeking assistance not only in meeting their national capability targets but also in fulfilling commitments within NATO and in preparing their forces for high-intensity conflict. This means EDA's work is firmly anchored in national priorities, while seeking to go beyond them for the good of the EU.

We are a platform to allow Member States to collaborate directly, exchange expertise and build joint initiatives. A cornerstone of cooperation is the Capability Development Plan (CDP), coordinated by EDA since 2008. Drawing on Member States' contributions, as well as those of the EU Military Committee, EDA and the EU Military Staff tackle short-, mid- and long-term defence challenges. The CDP's aim is clear: to align Member States' planning, reduce fragmentation and encourage collaboration. Through the work of EDA with the EUMS, the 2023 EU Capability Development Priorities identified 22 areas of focus for Member States.

Subsequently, via the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), EDA – in close cooperation with the EUMS – seeks to foster collaboration among Member States by identifying concrete opportunities for cooperation. The National and International Capability

Objectives (NICO), collected and regularly updated by the EUMS, directly feed into both processes and provide a valuable input.

FIVE CORE TASKS

In 2024, Ministers adopted our Long-Term Review, which defines the five core tasks that guide our work today:

1. The first is identifying shared needs and priorities across the EU. Defence planning cannot succeed if every country works in isolation. Through mechanisms such as the CDP and related analysis, we help Member States identify common capability gaps and opportunities for cooperation.
2. The second task concerns collaborative research, technology and innovation. Defence innovation is increasingly essential in an era where technological change is transforming warfare at unprecedented speed. Within EDA, networks such as the Capability Technology Groups bring together experts from governments, industry and academia to translate technologies into operational capabilities.
3. The third task focuses on supporting joint capability development. In practical terms, this means ensuring that European armed forces develop equipment and systems that are interoperable and compatible,

reducing fragmentation and enabling cooperation in operations.

4. Fourth, we help aggregate demand among Member States for joint procurement. Defence equipment is expensive, and fragmentation leads to inefficiencies. By pooling demand, Member States can reduce costs, accelerate production and strengthen Europe's defence industrial base.
5. Finally, we act as an interface between defence and wider EU policies. Many policies developed in civilian domains – from airspace management to environmental regulations – have significant implications for defence. One of our roles is therefore to ensure that the collective voice of Europe's defence ministries is heard when such policies are developed and implemented.

READINESS 2030

The war in Ukraine demonstrated with brutal clarity that high-intensity conflict is not a relic of the past. It also revealed the extent of Europe's capability gaps and the consequences of decades of underinvestment. European leaders have responded by placing defence readiness at the top of the political agenda. The goal articulated in recent policy discussions is ambitious: Europe should achieve a robust level of defence readiness by 2030. This means building sufficient military capacity and deterrence to prevent potential aggression against European territory.

Encouragingly, progress has already been made. EDA defence data shows that spending across the European Union has increased dramatically. In 2024, total defence expenditure reached approximately €343 billion – a 19% increase compared with the previous year. Defence investment alone exceeded €100 billion for the first time. These figures demonstrate a fundamental shift in political priorities. Yet increased national spending, important as it is, will not be sufficient on its own. Without coordination and cooperation, higher spending risks reinforcing

fragmentation rather than solving it. That is why cooperation mechanisms — including those supported by EDA — are so important. They allow Member States to align investments, coordinate capability development and pursue joint procurement where appropriate.

To meet these expectations, EDA is adapting. Our aim is to support the Chiefs of Defence more effectively in the field of capability development. One example of this expanding role is our responsibility as pen holder for the Annual Defence Readiness Report — a task that reflects the growing recognition of EDA’s analytical expertise and coordinating role within the European defence landscape. We are also expanding our work in areas such as joint procurement at the European level.

Initial efforts are already underway in areas where common needs are clear and cooperation can deliver rapid benefits. Projects related to munitions are among the first examples. Similar efforts are progressing in areas such as chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) equipment, where collective procurement and standardisation can significantly strengthen European resilience. In practice, our role within the Agency is to support the Member States in translating these priorities into cooperative projects. We provide the analysis, the coordination structures and, where necessary, the technical expertise required to move from strategic ambition to operational capability.

HEDI: A REAL EUROPEAN INNOVATION HUB

Another important aspect of our work concerns defence innovation. Europe possesses extraordinary technological talent and industrial capability, but historically innovation in defence has been fragmented. The challenge is to bring together innovators, armed forces and decision-makers in a way that accelerates the adoption of new technologies. One example is the operational experimentation campaigns organised under the Hub for European



Autonomous innovation. (© EDA 2025.)

Defence Innovation (HEDI). These initiatives allow emerging technologies — particularly in areas such as autonomous systems — to be tested in realistic operational environments. By bringing together industry, military experts and end users, experimentation campaigns help bridge the gap between laboratory research and practical deployment. Such initiatives demonstrate that Europe can move faster when cooperation is properly organised. They also show the importance of connecting innovators with operational users early in the development process.

SHARED STRENGTH, SHARED SUCCESS

But we must do more. This is a recognition of the fact that the Agency stands at a critical juncture. For many years, defence cooperation progressed slowly because national resources were limited and political appetite was cautious. Today the situation is very different. Investment is increasing, political attention is high, and the need for cooperation is widely recognised. In my view, strengthening the Agency involves four elements:

1. First, we must scale up research and innovation activities so that Europe remains competitive in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, autonomous systems and advanced communications.
2. Second, we must reinforce our role in capability development, ensuring that cooperative projects move beyond initial analysis and into concrete implementation.

3. Third, we must expand our support for joint procurement initiatives, helping Member States translate political commitments into practical acquisition programmes.
4. Finally, the Agency itself must remain fit for purpose — organisationally, financially and strategically — so that it can fulfil its expanding responsibilities.

MORE THAN JUST MONEY

Europe’s security landscape is changing faster than at any time in recent decades. The combination of geopolitical rivalry, technological transformation and the ongoing war in Ukraine has created a strategic environment that demands decisive action. But this challenge also presents an opportunity. Europe has the industrial base, the technological expertise and the political will necessary to build a stronger defence posture. What has sometimes been lacking is the coordination required to translate these strengths into collective capability.

That is precisely the role EDA seeks to fulfil as Member States’ preferred cooperation platform. In the end, European defence readiness cannot be achieved by any single country acting alone. It requires a shared effort — governments, armed forces, industry, researchers and policymakers working together across national boundaries. The progress made in recent years demonstrates that such cooperation is not only possible but increasingly essential. The EUMC and EDA will be asked to cooperate even more closely. If we continue on this path, Europe can build a defence architecture that is more resilient, more innovative and better prepared for the challenges ahead.

For me, that is the central lesson of this moment. Europe’s security will depend not only on how much we spend, but on how effectively we work together. And in that endeavour, cooperation — practical, sustained and strategic — will remain our most valuable asset. ★



CANADA CALLING. A PERSONAL VIEW

*PHOTOEX with HNLMS Van Amstel (F831) and Hamburg (F220) during OP REASSURANCE in Gothenburg, Sweden, on 18 November 2025.
(© Corporal Annabelle Marcoux, CAF 2025)*

In complex times of great volatility, like the times we are living through right now, no one has all the answers. No single perspective captures every angle. To see the big picture requires the input of many. Collaboration and co-operation are the surest, most reliable tools to navigate challenging waters ahead. This applies to individuals, of course. It also applies to allies – especially allies who share purpose, values, and aspirations. This is why the relationship between Canada and Europe has been and continues to be so meaningful and will take on increasing importance as the EU develops new defence and security initiatives such as Readiness 2030 – in which Canada is playing a part through programs such as Security Action for Europe (SAFE). As we face a worsening global security environment – when Russia’s invasion of Ukraine sees Europe facing the worst threat to its security and stability in



GENERAL M.A.J. CARIGNAN, CMM, MSC, MSM, CD
CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF, CANADA

many decades – the relationship is indispensable for the future. Our modern histories are intertwined and now more than ever we share aspirations for the future. It is encouraging to see how much deeper our ties are becoming, and the momentum with which our partnership is growing.

Canada has long been committed to Europe’s security and stability. This – along with deep and meaningful bonds of family and culture, and a profound

belief in freedom, human dignity, and the rule of law – is why more than 1.5 million Canadians risked everything in two world wars, and in subsequent European operations. Our militaries have shared many exercises and operations over the years since then – notably, in the present context, our Operations REASSURANCE and UNIFIER – and this commitment is as strong today as it has ever been. Indeed, Europe is identified in Canada’s national defence policy,



Tanks from several NATO nations participate in Exercise RESOLUTE WARRIOR under NATO Multinational Battle Group Latvia on November 5, 2025. (© CAF 2025.)

Our North, Strong and Free, as a priority theatre of operations for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). Members of the CAF are proud of our leadership role in NATO's multinational brigade in Latvia, and of our persistent presence in NATO's Standing Naval Forces. Indeed, this persistent presence is representative of our ongoing commitment to a secure and resilient Europe, and of our role in Europe as a reliable Ally, dependable partner, and steadfast friend.

A FUTURE OF DEEPER COLLABORATION...

In a world experiencing renewed geopolitical competition, rapid technological advances, profound societal disruptions, and the destabilizing consequences of climate change, it is through collaboration and cooperation that we find our best hope for passing on to future generations the world of relative peace and prosperity that we were fortunate enough to inherit. And it is in this world that the pace and ambition of our collaboration and cooperation have accelerated, as Canada begins making generational investments into our armed forces – “re-building, re-arming

and re-investing,” in our Prime Minister's words – and European nations are rapidly re-arming as part of the EU's Readiness 2030. Because we find ourselves in a world where hard power – warfighting capability – is the currency that buys a seat at the table. A world where, unfortunately, to cite Thucydides' famous Melian Dialogue, “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”

The complementary strengths that Canada and the EU bring to the table will continue driving deeper cooperation. This accelerated engagement is particularly notable in the areas of defence policy co-ordination, industrial co-operation, and logistics. A prime example of the first is the Security and Defence Partnership (SDP) that Canada and the EU signed last June at the 20th Canada-EU summit. The SDP organises our combined security and defence activities and initiatives under a new, single framework that creates the opportunities for co-operation across a broad array of priority areas. These include Ukraine, crisis management,

military mobility and interoperability, maritime security, and cyber, to name a few. The EU has found success with this sort of framework in the past, with Japan, the Republic of Korea, Albania, Moldova, North Macedonia, Norway, and most recently the United Kingdom. The CAF is very pleased that Canada has become part of this group.

Canada has also deepened our engagement with the European Defence Agency. This set the stage for perhaps the highest-profile example of accelerated Canada-EU collaboration: Canada's inclusion in SAFE. Canada has become the only non-EU member state to have negotiated and signed a bilateral agreement, giving the Canadian defence industry enhanced access to the €150-billion SAFE loan instrument. The opportunities for Canada and Europe to collaborate in joint procurement and innovation, to enhance interoperability, and achieve economies of scale while diversifying defence industrial partnerships and securing supply chains dovetails with Canada's own newly

launched Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS). This effort represents another example of Canada and the EU not only being of like mind and intent but also taking decisive action to meet our new challenges.

The mutual benefits of deeper cooperation between Canada and the EU on matters of defence are vast. Canada's geography, resources, and operational experience align naturally with the EU's scale and institutional capacity, creating a partnership rooted in shared values and practical advantages.

...BASED ON A STRONG FOUNDATION

This partnership is based on a substantial catalogue of already existing, mutually beneficial defence and security collaborations between Canada and the EU.

Canadian military, police, and civilian personnel have participated in multiple EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operations over the years, from the Balkans to the Sahel to the Middle East. Notably, Canada has contributed to the EU Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, supporting post-conflict stabilization and law enforcement reforms and engaged in the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, assisting in judicial and policing efforts.

The EU's political leadership benefits from the sage advice of my fellow Chiefs and Heads of Defence from the EU nations through the EU Military Committee (EUMC), which is commemorating its 25th anniversary. Canada has been engaged with this forum since the beginning, offering whatever advice, expertise, and perspective we can – and our commitment to supporting the work of the EUMC remains steadfast.

Since 2015, the Canada-EU Security and Defence Dialogue has allowed us to share best practices and coordinate policy in a wide range of areas. We have been happy to lend our expertise to several EU defence initiatives coordinated under the umbrella of the



EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) agreement – including current projects related to military mobility and logistics hubs located across Europe. And the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) signed by Canada and the EU in 2016 has strengthened our political, security, and economic ties by enhancing our collaboration on international peace and security, counterterrorism, human rights, nuclear non-proliferation, climate change, and sustainable development. The SPA reinforces the engagement of Canada – and the CAF – with European security frameworks by facilitating joint diplomatic efforts, crisis management cooperation, and defence collaboration.

The CAF has benefited from our participation in EU military exercises, such as Integrated Resolve, while EU nations' participation in Canada's signature Northern operation, Operation NANOOK, has enhanced our ability to work together in an operating environment that is very challenging and of rapidly increasing strategic importance. Over the years we have also worked together on operations to secure peace and stability around the world – from the Balkans to Congo. And we have shared in the important work of NATO, work defending the values we cherish. As a case in point, our people in uniform leading the multinational NATO brigade in Latvia are standing shoulder-to-shoulder along NATO's eastern flank with 13 other nations – including troops from

Lieutenant-General Boivin conducts a visit to the NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU), under Operation UNIFIER, on 28 March 2025. (© CAF 2025.)

nine EU member states. Canada and the EU are also united in support of a free and democratic Ukraine – a bulwark of our security in both Europe and the Euro-Atlantic area.

WHAT CANADA BRINGS TO THE TABLE

First and foremost, for Canada, geography matters. For much of our history, our geography, our “splendid isolation,” has been our greatest defence. Now, in an era of hypersonic weapons and grey-zone hybrid attacks, that is no longer true. Still, our location serves us and our allies well in other ways. The vastness of our territory, fronting on three of the world's oceans, gives the Euro-Atlantic community strategic depth and early-warning advantages. Our northern position and role in North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) provide domain-awareness and other critical capabilities to deter and defeat threats to North America, which also support NATO's deterrence and defence agenda and ensures a secure base from which to deploy forces to Europe in case of crisis or conflict. And we serve as a bridge between our allies and partners in Europe and those in the strategically vital Indo-Pacific Region.



What's on and under all that territory is equally advantageous: our capacity for producing energy and minerals can be a source of substantial support to our allies. And our industrial capacity – set to expand under the new Defence Industrial Strategy – contributes key capabilities, including space, cyber, and training systems, that reinforce European defence modernisation.

Militarily, Canada is a vast reservoir of operational experience and deployable expertise. Our armed forces are among the world's most experienced participants in multinational operations, and their professionalism demonstrate the tremendous insight that comes from decades of combat, stabilisation, and training missions. Our leadership of NATO's Multinational Brigade Latvia and our longstanding work in capacity-building align directly with EU priorities related to readiness and resilience.

WHAT THE EU BRINGS TO THE TABLE

The EU in turn brings scale, mass, and institutional depth to the partnership. Its combined economic, industrial, and demographic weight – exponentially greater than Canada's alone – allow

for sustained investments in defence, resilience, and innovation. And EU institutions, from its Military Planning and Conduct Capability to the European Defence Agency, are structures on which member states can build and amplify collective efforts and initiatives.

The EU also provides a network of like-minded allies. As well, EU frameworks such as the aforementioned PESCO, the European Defence Fund (EDF), and various ad hoc capability coalitions give Canada the opportunity to participate in multinational capability development alongside valued and trusted partners. Canada also appreciates the expansion of the EU's role as a security and defence actor under the Readiness 2030 agenda. The EU's mechanisms for increased defence investments and growing defence industrial footprint are in alignment with Canada's at a time when this is more critical for all of us than ever before.

When I think about the nature of the Canada-EU partnership in security and defence, I am convinced there is real momentum here – and that momentum must be sustained. We cannot risk falling further behind our competitors

Group photo of the Air Task Force (ATF) during Exercise Cobra Warrior 25-2, as part of Operation REASSURANCE, at Royal Air Force (RAF) Station Waddington, United Kingdom, on September 28, 2025. (© CAF 2025.)

and adversaries. Our defence co-operation is now active, expanding, and strategically vital. This momentum reflects not only the pressures of our strategic environment but the strength of our shared purpose. It is a partnership that is no longer aspirational – it is now operational and accelerating. It is co-operation grounded not just in principle, but in practicality. It is a meeting of minds, and unity of intent: we both see security as collective and mutually beneficial. Geopolitical realities make our co-operation necessary; our complementary strengths and deep friendship make it natural.

This momentum is an opportunity to be seized – and because the very real challenges we face are too great to face alone, I am grateful for our capacity to seize it together. The result can be a more secure, resilient and ready Euro-Atlantic community, and the future of peace and prosperity we all want to leave for generations to come. ★

NATO OPERATION "JOINT ENTERPRISE" – KOSOVO FORCE

KFOR AND THE KOSOVO LANDSCAPE

On the night of 13 November 2024, at 3.30 a.m., one month after I took over command of the NATO Kosovo Force (KFOR), one of the most tense moments of my mandate occurred. Months earlier, the Kosovo Police had created counter-mobility obstacles on some secondary roads that cross the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) and the Serbian Armed Forces had decided to remove them at dawn that same day, since they were in Serbia. Although considered by the Pristina authorities to be in Kosovo territory. The problem arose because the obstacles had been installed in one of the more than 250 disputed areas existing along the 352 km of the ABL between Kosovo and Serbia.

It is worth recalling that the ABL was established during the negotiations ending with the signature of the 1999 Military Technical Agreement (MTA) between NATO and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Republic of Serbia. However, the current



LT GEN ENRICO BARDUANI
COMKFOR 2024/2025

Pristina authorities, born from the self-proclaimed independence of 17 February 2008, do not recognise its validity and instead consider the old provincial cadastral line, as their border with Serbia. It is easy to recognise that misunderstandings between the parties can easily occur, risking daily armed confrontation between Serbian army patrols and Kosovo police units. A risk that is contained by the continuous KFOR patrolling activity along the ABL as well as its constant coordination with the Serbian Armed Forces and the Kosovo Police.

In this specific episode, the tension only dissipated around 8 a.m., when, after many of my requests and also interventions by some representatives of the diplomatic corps in Pristina and Belgrade during the night, the Chief of Staff of the Serbian Armed Forces, Gen Milan Mojsilović decided to suspend the activity and the Kosovo Minister of Interior, Xhelal Sveçla stopped the deployment of his police units. At that point, to definitively resolve the issue, I proposed to the Serbian authorities that KFOR would take charge of removing those obstacles with its own combat engineering units entering the Serbian territory. At the same time, I made available the expertise of the Joint Implementation Commission (the KFOR entity responsible for ABL issues) and KFOR combat engineer units to the Kosovo authorities to indicate them the most suitable places in Kosovo territory for the construction of new counter-mobility obstacles and provide area security when work commenced on their construction. My proposal was willingly accepted by both parties.

I reported this event only to point out that, despite 27 years of International Community's presence in



ABL, Counter Mobility Obstacle Survey. © KFOR 2025

Kosovo, the situation is far from being stabilised. My entire year of command was characterised by a succession of episodes that unexpectedly and suddenly raised the tension between the parties, even in the absence of a conventional military threat.

UNSCR 1244 AND SOME OF ITS INCONSISTENCIES

Kosovo has just celebrated its eighteenth year as a sovereign state, but the full normalisation of relations between Pristina and Belgrade remain unresolved. The causes are manifold and are further exacerbated by the nationalist tensions and political rhetoric that characterise that region, on both sides of the ABL.

Like the entire International Community in Kosovo, KFOR operates under UN Security Council Resolution 1244 of 1999 (UNSCR 1244). However, it may be admitted that this Resolution no longer adheres to the reality that has been created on the ground. In fact, the self-proclaimed independence of Kosovo in 2008 has led to certain situations which, although not in open conflict with Resolution 1244 as the International Court of Justice ruled in 2010, partially void its content highlighting some inconsistencies.

The first problem arises from the fact that UNSCR 1244, while contemplating the set up of provisional democratic self-governing institutions, does not foresee the establishment of an independent Kosovo because it is clearly stated -in the Annex 1- that the framework agreement must consider the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Many jurists and lawyers extensively discussed this topic without reaching a shared interpretation, revealing some idiosyncrasies and weakness in UNSCR 1244. The partial international recognition of Kosovo (as of today, 110 recognizers out of 193 UN member states) has further aggravated these inconsistencies: as an example, in UN and NATO official documents it is not allowed to refer to Pristina authorities as

"government of Kosovo" but they must be named as "Institutions in Kosovo".

Another relevant problem concerns the presence of military forces. On the one hand, the Kosovo Police have set up special units that, military in nature and equipped with heavy weapons and armoured vehicles, are devoted to territorial defence rather than stability policing and increasingly operate along the ABL without the necessary coordination with KFOR. On the other hand, the Kosovo Security Forces (KSF), originally established as a multi-ethnic lightly armed corps dedicated to supporting institutions in the event of disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, hazardous materials treatment, and Explosive Ordnance Disposal, are now on the way to an irreversible process of transformation into an Army fit for territorial defence. This military presence seems to fall outside the scope of UNSCR 1244 and is not covered by the MTA.

The UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) is suffering, like the other entities of the International Community in Kosovo, from a weakening of its role. Over time, UNMIK has gradually transferred a large part of its powers and tasks to the authorities in Pristina but still holds some executive powers that are increasingly challenged by the Kosovo government authorities. At the same time, the Belgrade government frequently complains against the Head of Mission and Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, as well as the KFOR Commander (COMKFOR), for an alleged lack of firmness in obliging Pristina to comply with UNSCR 1244.

The severe political crisis and unprecedented demonstrations in Serbia, the troubled political season in Kosovo, Belgrade's interference in the affairs of the Serb-majority Kosovo municipalities and Pristina's unilateral actions with deleterious effects on the life and rights of the Kosovo-Serb population have created a perennial tension, ready to explode suddenly. The weakness of UNSCR 1244 does not help to resolve these issues, on the contrary

it risks further fuelling the claims of the two parties. It is like a fire that is hidden under the ashes: a gust of air is enough for the flames to resume all their vigour.

NATO KOSOVO FORCE (KFOR)

KFOR is currently composed of contributions from 33 nations, including 5 non-NATO countries (Armenia, Austria, Ireland, Moldova, Switzerland), for a total strength of about 5,200 soldiers. This is a tenth of the 50,000 soldiers who entered Kosovo on 12 June 1999 and this clearly indicates that the situation on the ground has improved considerably. Nevertheless, it is worth recalling that, at the end of 2023, following the serious episodes of violence that characterised that year (the clashes in Zubin Potok and Zvecan municipalities, where 93 KFOR soldiers of the Hungarian, Italian, Moldovan, and US contingents were injured; the attack by a Serbian paramilitary group against the Kosovo Police in Banjska), NATO decided to increase KFOR strength by about 1,000 soldiers, in order to allow the Operation to increase its output by doubling the number of patrols along the ABL and quadrupling the control of the territory activities in the Kosovo-Serb majority northern provinces. This was the most significant surge in KFOR's strength since 2004 and has been maintained to this day, given the situation in the region. KFOR is a tactical-level military operation, its operational-level command represented by Allied Joint Force Command Naples (JFC NP), while Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) serves as the military-strategic level command and the North Atlantic Council ensures the political direction and control of the Operation.

Besides **KFOR HQ** located in Camp Film City in Prishtinë/Priština, there are other two main compounds, Camp "Villaggio Italia" in Pejë/Peć, headquarters of the Italy-led **Regional Command West**, and Camp "Bondsteel" in Ferizaj/Ferisović, headquarters of the US-led **Regional Command East**. In addition, across Kosovo there are other bases that allow COMKFOR to



have forces permanently stationed in those areas where KFOR main efforts are focused.

Both Regional Commands have a regiment-level unit consisting of a manoeuvre battalion, a combat service support battalion, and a non-kinetic battalion. The non-kinetic battalions are composed of the Liaison Monitor Teams, present in each of the 38 Kosovo municipalities to promote the development of civil-military cooperation activities, support the KFOR situational awareness and communication campaigns, ensure close liaison with the municipal authorities and the International Organizations (IOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and contribute to improve relationships among communities in their areas of responsibilities.

The COMKFOR has also under his command:

- the Italian-led **Multinational Specialised Unit (MSU)**, composed by Military Police personnel from Italy, Czech Republic and Moldova, that provides the COMKFOR with

a capability for security operation including criminal intelligence, crowd and riots control (CRC), information gathering and assessment. In addition, the MSU has a specific task to control 24/7 the city of Mitrovica within a manoeuvre box including the permanent static presence on the Mitrovica "Austerlitz" Bridge. It is also ready to provide the Kosovo police with specific trainings if requested;

- the Hungarian-led **KFOR Tactical Reserve Force battalion (KTRBN)**, that, other than assuring its reserve role, is also able to provide a wide range of security operations, surveillance, reconnaissance, and other infantry tasks. The unit is also designated to be rapidly deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina to reinforce EUFOR ALTHEA, if directed by the Commander of the Allied Joint Force Command – Naples;
- the Italian-led **Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance battalion (ISRBN)**, that includes a core set of combined organizations

KTRBN Crowd Riot Control Training. © KFOR 2025

and resources (RECCE companies, human intelligence teams, UAVs) that have intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance as their primary function;

- the **Aviation Detachment**, composed of a US Aviation unit (5 transport UH-60 Blackhawks, 3 MEDEVAC UH-60 Blackhawks), the Swiss detachment (2 transport AS532 Cougar), the Croat helicopter (one transport Mi-171Sh), and the Hungarian ISR helicopter (one H145M);
- the **Joint Logistic Support Group (JLSG)**, whose role is to ensure theatre level logistics support and military combat engineering and engineering support to KFOR forces by employing organic Combat Support and Combat Service Support capabilities. Its functions include general engineer support, transportation and recovery, EOD, fuel supply and reception, staging and onward movement;



German ABL Patrol. © KFOR 2025

- The Irish-led **Headquarters Support Group (HSG)**, responsible to provide real life support and protect all KFOR facilities against internal and external threats across the Area of Operations;
- Embedded in the HQ staff, there are a Radio station -**Radio K4**- that broadcast 24/7 pop and rock music, and news resulting the most listened radio in Kosovo, and the editors of the self-produced magazine -**K4YOU**- the only news magazine printed in Kosovo and distributed among schools across the region.

The COMKFOR retains some executive powers in the region, being the final authority for the ABL as well as for the lower airspace over Kosovo (while the control and management of the upper airspace is provided by Hungaro Control, a contracted company by NATO).

The operational output of KFOR has always been of absolute prominence. For example, in my year of command the main tactical achievements were: 29 major prolonged operations, in addition to daily routine operational activities; around 18,000 independent

patrols; approximately 1,000 patrols with the Kosovo Police across Kosovo; around 500 coordinated patrols with the Serbian Armed Forces along the ABL; 24/7 presence on the Mitrovica “Austerlitz” Bridge with two permanent check-points; 6,144 key and senior leaders engagements; 94 Explosive Ordnance Disposals/Unexploded Ordnance incidents; 18 weapons caches finds; hundreds of quick impact civil-military projects (e.g. “family rooms” construction within Police stations to treat the cases of domestic violence and violence against minors in a more comfortable environment; build wells in rural areas; medical equipment donations to hospitals; etc.). In addition, KFOR ensures a collection of data and indicators to draw up quarterly reports which, sent along the chain of command, allow higher HQs to define the effectiveness of the Operation and its possible progression from the current phase of “deterrence presence” to the next one of “minimum presence”.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN KOSOVO

Among its numerous tasks, KFOR is to

provide support to the International Community in Kosovo, ensuring its freedom of movement and, if necessary, security and evacuation. The relations that KFOR maintains with the International Organizations/Agencies are therefore very close and are not limited to these tasks. Indeed, there are many opportunities for discussion and exchange of information, the end of having a shared awareness of the situation.

The main international presences are:

- **UNMIK** - Established by the Security Council on 10 June 1999, UNMIK is among the longest-UN missions. Its mandate provides that the Mission helps to ensure conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all Kosovo inhabitants and advancement of regional stability. The Mission’s priorities are focused on promoting inter-community trustbuilding, respect for human rights and rule of law, gender equality and empowerment of women and youth. Subsequently, following the declaration of independence by the Kosovo authorities, the tasks of the Mission

have significantly been modified to focus primarily on the promotion of security, stability and respect for human rights in Kosovo. There are still 15 different UN agencies and offices operating in Kosovo (from the UN Development Programme to the High Commissioner for Human Rights, from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to the International Organization for Migration) that refer to UNMIK HQ, which is based in Pristina and maintains a Regional Office in Mitrovica and an Office of Community Support field presence in Pejë/Peć. In addition, the UN Office in Belgrade plays an important political and diplomatic role and liaises with the political leadership of Serbia. As of today, the mission has a total of 374 personnel, including 356 civilian personnel (112 international staff; 220 national staff; 24 UN Volunteers) and 18 uniformed personnel (8 military observers; 10 United Nations police officers).

- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)** - Set up in 1999, the Mission has its headquarters in Prishtinë/Priština and maintains five regional centres. It runs a wide array of activities in the field of human rights, democratization and public safety with the aim to further develop a democratic and multi-ethnic society in Kosovo, where the rights of all people are respected. With 440 fixed-term staff (76 internationals and 364 locals), the Mission is the OSCE's largest field operation and the only civilian international organization present across Kosovo that closely monitors political, justice, institutional, and security developments. It works towards consolidating core democratic institutions, promoting inter-institutional coordination at central and municipal level, strengthening the role of civil society in democratic

processes, and further developing a democratic and multi-ethnic society in Kosovo.

- NATO Advisory and Liaison Team (NALT)** - In addition to KFOR, NATO also conducts capacity-building initiatives with Kosovo security organisations, but limited to the fields of their original mandate. These activities are run by the NALT, created in 2016 following the merger of two existing entities, the NATO Advisory Team (NAT), and the NATO Liaison and Advisory Team (NLAT). The NALT is hosted and supported by KFOR, but it is a complete separate entity that reports directly to the NAC through the NATO International Staff. Currently, its team is of about 45 military and civilian personnel provided by 13 Allied and partner countries. It provides practical assistance and advice to the security organisations in Kosovo in areas such as logistics, procurement and finance, force development and planning, as well as leadership development.
- Embassies and Liaison Offices** - Currently there are around 30 embassies and 5 liaison offices in Kosovo with whom KFOR has regular relations. Of paramount importance the QUINT, a forum of the ambassador of France, Germany, Italy, UK and USA, which maintains a significant, though increasingly scrutinised, diplomatic role in Kosovo. They regularly meet with Kosovo leadership and political leaders to mediate tension, urges Kosovo to adhere to international standards and rule of law, and support the EU-led dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. They are in close contact and have regular exchanges with the special entity, the QUINT in Belgrade.

Particularly active is the interaction between KFOR and the EU presence in



NAC Meeting at KFOR HQ. © KFOR 2025

Kosovo, composed by the **EU Office and the EU Special Representative (EUSR)**, the **EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue**, and the **EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX)**. KFOR cooperation and collaboration with these entities has always been very intense, especially with EULEX in their respective roles as security responders. In addition, during my mandate two different agreements have been signed respectively with the EUSR and EULEX Head of Mission for better defining KFOR's support to both entities and, referred to EULEX, clarifying different roles and procedures in case of major security accidents.

From 1999 KFOR has undoubtedly played a key role in securing peace, security and stability in Kosovo. In accordance with the last public survey of May 2025, KFOR is still perceived by the majority of Kosovo population (around 90% in both ethnicities, Kosovo-Albanians and Kosovo-Serbs) as the most reliable institution in Kosovo. Over the years, KFOR has proven to have the capacity to deal with serious crises, as March 2004 unrests and May 2023 violent disorders, but in determining the role that KFOR has played in the peace building process it is important to consider that the line between traditional and expanded approaches to peacekeeping is not static and KFOR has always confirmed to be fully tailored and flexible to do it successfully. Unfortunately, there is still a lot to do in the region, and it is not possible to foresee any immediate relevant downsizing of forces in KFOR, which remains a condition-based operation. ★

25 YEARS EUMC: FROM AN ADVISORY FORUM TO A STRATEGIC MILITARY ACTOR

Established on 22 January 2001, the EU Military Committee (EUMC) is the highest military body within the Council. It provides the Political and Security Committee (PSC) with military advice and recommendations on all military matters and exercises military direction of all military activities within the EU.

When General Håkan Syrén initiated a reflection on the role and relevance of the EUMC in 2010, he knew that, beyond legitimate ambition, the sheer existence of this forum of military leaders, representing their Chiefs of Defence, was a success by itself.

The EUMC is the emanation of a decades long European integration process, where institutional progress correlates with geopolitical shocks.

The breakup of former Yugoslavia exposed European unpreparedness to settle conflicts in its neighbourhood in 1992. The 2001 September 11 attacks and the 2003 Iraq war transformed global security policy and raised voices for a more autonomous EU. The 2022 Russian full-scale attack on Ukraine constitutes a direct threat to Europe's fundamental values, creating risks of unprecedented nature to the EU.

But unlike in 1992, the EU's response in 2022 was overwhelming. An extraordinary Council meeting was held on day zero and coercive measures were adopted and cohered across the full spectrum of EU institutions and instruments.

Initiated in Maastricht (1992), Europe's security and defence framework has come to institutional maturity following the Treaty of Lisbon (2009). The EUMC has consistently adapted within that architecture, growing from a foundational advisory body to a strategic actor in EU defence governance. Its



COL PASCAL PÜTZ HAS BEEN THE LUXEMBOURG MILITARY REPRESENTATIVE TO NATO AND THE EU SINCE 2024. HE HAS PREVIOUSLY SERVED AS DEPUTY MILITARY REPRESENTATIVE TO THE EU (2019-2020) AND AS NATIONAL MILITARY REPRESENTATIVE AT SHAPE (2020-2024)

military expertise, institutional resilience and strategic agility make it a natural advisor to the EU's political leadership in times of great power competition, threats against the rules based international order and the emergence of disruptive technologies.

This article illustrates the EUMC's transition from a foundational advisory body in 2001 to a strategic military interface in a more geopolitical EU today. I will present early milestones in a period of institution building under CFSP and ESDP (1992 – 2001). Following its set up, the EUMC shaped its military advisor role to the PSC (2001 – 2009), before entering a period of institutional consolidation and operational integration under the Lisbon Treaty (2009 – 2022). The Russian attack on Ukraine demonstrated the EUMC's institutional resilience and functional adaptability, adjusting to its role as a strategic advisory body to the broader political community in a degrading, global security environment.

NORMATIVE ENVIRONMENT AND INSTITUTION BUILDING

The Treaty of Maastricht (1992) and the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) created the normative environment leading to a

Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) under the Treaty of Lisbon (ToL) in 2009.

Rising instability in Eastern Europe in the early nineties accelerated institutional change. The European Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was formalised in 1992 under the 3-pillar construct of the Maastricht Treaty.

While Maastricht introduced a common defence dimension, it was the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) that led to the creation of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). Precursor to the CSDP, it marked the beginning of the EU's ambition to establish its own, permanent military structures.

The European Council (EC) meetings in Cologne and Helsinki (1999) further solidified the idea of autonomous, European crisis-management structures. While CSDP was formally established under the ToL in 2009 only, the structural foundations for Security and Defence were laid in 2000.

The Nice EC (2000) formally established the Political and Security Committee (PSC), the EU Military Committee (EUMC) and the EU Military Staff (EUMS).

FOUNDATIONAL ADVISORY ROLE

In its formative years, the EUMC contributed to the institutional build-up and functioned primarily as an advisory and consultative body. Supported by the EUMS, its institutional dialogue was centered on the PSC and rather linear by nature, following pre-established, procedural mechanisms.

This period saw the EU's first steps towards operational credibility, with the launch of Operation CONCORDIA and EU DR Congo in 2003 and EUFOR ALTHEA in 2004. The EUMC oversaw the military direction, ensured strategic oversight and provided military advice to the PSC throughout the crisis management planning processes. Building on these experiences, the EU developed the EU Battlegroup concept (2007), developing the Committee's operational culture, driving interoperability and enhancing responsiveness.

Capability development was still primarily driven by MS and a NATO "chasse gardée". The EUMC's role was embryonic and limited to supporting the Headline Goal 2003 process, setting the ambition to deploy up to 60,000 troops for crisis management. The EUMC supported this process by identifying capability requirements and shortfalls, contributing to a more structured defense planning culture.

The creation of the European Defence Agency (EDA) in 2004 complemented the institutional framework, cemented in 2009 by the Lisbon Treaty.

The EUMC beginnings were reactive by nature. The EUMC advice and activities were centered on the PSC agenda. The Committee's work was driven by Member States and prioritised in accordance with the rotating Presidency objectives.

INSTITUTIONAL CONSOLIDATION AND OPERATIONAL INTEGRATION

In 2003, Europe was divided over the US war in Iraq, accelerating the requirement for a single, European foreign policy voice and a more autonomous EU. This



CHODs Family Photo. (© CEUMC 2025)

phase coincided with two waves of enlargement in 2004 and 2007, in parallel with the expansion of global terrorism and rising tensions with Russia.

The 2009 ToL provided the institutional toolbox for the EU to become a more coherent global actor. Establishing the HR/VP function and the European External Action Service (EEAS), the ToL unified diplomacy and crisis management under one single, institutional roof.

The EUMC adapted to this new framework, aligning activities with institutional requirements and adjusting to a deteriorating global security environment. Supported by the EUMS and working closely with the EEAS, the EUMC became the interface between political decision-making and common foreign policy requirements. The so-called "3D" concept translated into the EU's Comprehensive approach (2013), seamlessly integrating the military component into diplomatic and humanitarian efforts.

The Treaty also codified the permanent nature of EU Council Presidencies, adding continuity to European political decision making.

The EU's Global Strategy (2016) recalibrated the EU's focus towards integrated approaches to conflicts and crisis, especially in its southern neighborhood. The rise of EU training missions, such as EUTM Mali (2013), reflects the EUMC's shift towards capacity-building and long-term engagement in areas where the EU's

involvement brought a unique blend of military and diplomatic engagement.

This trend for autonomous EU action was enhanced with the establishment of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) in 2017. Building on Operation ATALANTA (2008), the multiplication of EU naval operations with SOPHIA (2015), IRINI (2020) and ASPIDES (2024), underlines a more ambitious EU, with global outreach beyond the land domain.

Translating operational requirements into capability priorities and collaborative projects (PESCO), the EDA became the institutional anchor for capability development, consistently deepening its cooperation with the EUMC.

The Lisbon Treaty underpinned the EU's global ambition with the establishment of a coherent institutional framework. As part of that holistic architecture, the EUMC has evolved from a consultative body to an institutional interface between political ambition, operational planning and collaborative capability development.



Presidency change around, Poland to Denmark June 2025 ©CEUMC

STRATEGIC ADVISORY BODY IN A WIDER EUROPEAN DEFENCE ENVIRONMENT

The Russian multi-layered aggression against Ukraine since 2022 has shaken the EU to its core. Although the European integration process in defence has come to maturity over the past 35 years, the magnitude and scale of the strategic shock is a stress test for the EU at large. H.E. M. Sauli Niinistö, former President of the Republic of Finland, brings it to the point in his 2024 Report on strengthening the EU's preparedness and readiness, calling for an "overhaul of the way we Europeans see the Union's role in keeping us all secure".



CEUMC Away Days (© CEUMC 2025)

While traditional CSDP is oriented towards out of area, crisis response mission sets, Europe is now exposed to great power competition. New threat scenarios include hybrid activities, foreign information manipulation and interference, foreign information manipulation. Military mobility, defence production, data sovereignty, energy security and technological vulnerabilities are of great concern. Space, Cyber and the Cognitive environment have become contested domains, and their safeguard requires coordinated military and civilian responses.

The centre of gravity in European security dynamics has shifted from crisis response to full spectrum operations. Traditionally PSC centric, Defence is now touching upon a wide variety of Commission owned competence areas.

The EUMC has demonstrated a great level of Institutional agility in adapting to this new environment by making best use of its Terms of Reference (2001). This has mainly been expressed in 3 ways:

Conceptually, the EUMC has shifted from a CSDP, crisis response to a high intensity, territorial defence mindset since the early stages of the Russian aggression. It contributed with regular military assessments, recommended the delivery of military equipment to Ukraine and proposed response options. EUMAM Ukraine has been established in 2022 and has since trained over 85.000 Ukrainian soldiers throughout the EU. Financial aid has been provided through the European Peace Facility (EPF), in accordance with military requirements set by the EUMC.

The EUMC's functional link to the Commission is tied to the HR/VP function and the Commission has a permanent representative at the table during Military Committee deliberations. In 2024, the Defence portfolio of the Commission has been expanded with the nomination of M. Andrius Kubilius as European Commissioner for Defence and Space and Mrs Hadja Lahbib as European Commissioner for Preparedness and Crisis Management.

Since then, the Commission has released a plethora of strategic-level documents. Supported by the Polish and Danish Presidencies, the EUMC has shown proactive engagement across the wider institutional environment by contributing to the Joint White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030 (JWP) and the EU Preparedness Union Strategy (PUS), both dated March 2025. Chairperson, General Seán Clancy, has forwarded the Committee's informal military input to the political leadership by means of a letter to HR/VP, informing political decision making at the highest Council and Commission levels.

In capability development, the EUMC has quickly aligned processes and requirements. Limited to Crisis Response Operations (CRO), the Headline Goal Process (HLGP) does not encompass the broader requirements for the full spectrum of military operations. In April 2025, the EUMC has complemented the HLGP, by introducing the EU MS' national and international capability

objectives (NICO), aligning capability development in the EU with JWP and PUS related requirements. The process has since been operationalized through the establishment of nine Priority Capability Areas (PCA), tying together EU Member States' efforts, EU capability shortfalls and Commission-led financial instruments.

Altogether, these developments mark a shift from CSDP towards a more resilient, industrially grounded, and strategically autonomous EU. While military advice has traditionally been forwarded to PSC on demand, the EUMC has since become a forum for pro-active, cross cutting strategic level dialogue.

The role of the Chairperson as the senior military advisor to the SG/HR on all military matters has grown proportionally with the Commission's rising Defence portfolio.

CSDP has emerged from the failures of the Yugoslav wars in the early nineties. Today, the EU is not bulletproof against external threats, but it has demonstrated institutional cohesion and shock resistance in the aftermath of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The European institutional framework has evolved hand in glove with the international security environment. The Lisbon Treaty laid the foundations for embedding the EU's global ambitions within a more integrated institutional framework and it paved the way for increased interaction between Council bodies and the Commission by establishing the HR/VP as a bridging function.

The EUMC's capacity to adapt over the past 25 years and the Chairperson's institutional agility have allowed the military voice to decant throughout the EU's institutional environment. In the process, the EUMC has evolved from a responsive, task-driven military body to a proactive, institutional actor, connecting strategic requirements, political ambition and military expertise.

In this vein, the EUMC stands ready to contribute to the upcoming European Security Strategy. ★



COUNCIL DECISION
of 22 January 2001
setting up the Military Committee of the European Union

(2001/79/CFSP)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on European Union, in particular Article 28(1) thereof,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, in particular Article 207 thereof,

Recalling Article 25 of the Treaty on European Union,

Whereas:

- (1) In the framework of the strengthening of the common foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and in particular of the common European policy on security and defence provided for in Article 17 of the Treaty on European Union, the European Council meeting in Nice on 7 to 11 December 2000 reached agreement on the establishment of the Military Committee of the European Union, setting out its mission and functions including those of its chairman.
- (2) Following the guidelines of the European Council this Committee should be made ready to start its work,

HAS DECIDED AS FOLLOWS:

Article 1

A Military Committee of the European Union (EUMC) (hereinafter the Committee) composed of the Member States' Chiefs of Defence, represented by their military representatives, is set up.

It will meet at the level of Chiefs of Defence as and when necessary.

Article 2

The mission and functions of the Committee are defined in Annex IV to the Presidency's report approved by the Nice European Council, which is reproduced in the Annex to this Decision.

Article 3

1. The Chairman of the Committee (hereinafter the Chairman) shall be appointed by the Council on the recommendation of the Committee meeting at the level of the Chiefs of Defence.

2. The term of office of the Chairman is three years, unless the Council decides otherwise. His mission and functions are also defined in the above mentioned annex.

Article 4

This Decision shall take effect from the date of its adoption.

Article 5

1. Without prejudice to the provisions of Article 3(1), this Decision shall apply from the date on which the first Chairman is appointed, not later than the date of application of the Decision on the establishment of the Military Staff of the European Union⁽¹⁾ and in principle before the end of June 2001.

2. The Interim Military Body set up by Decision 2000/144/CFSP⁽²⁾ will continue to carry out its tasks until the date at which this Decision applies.

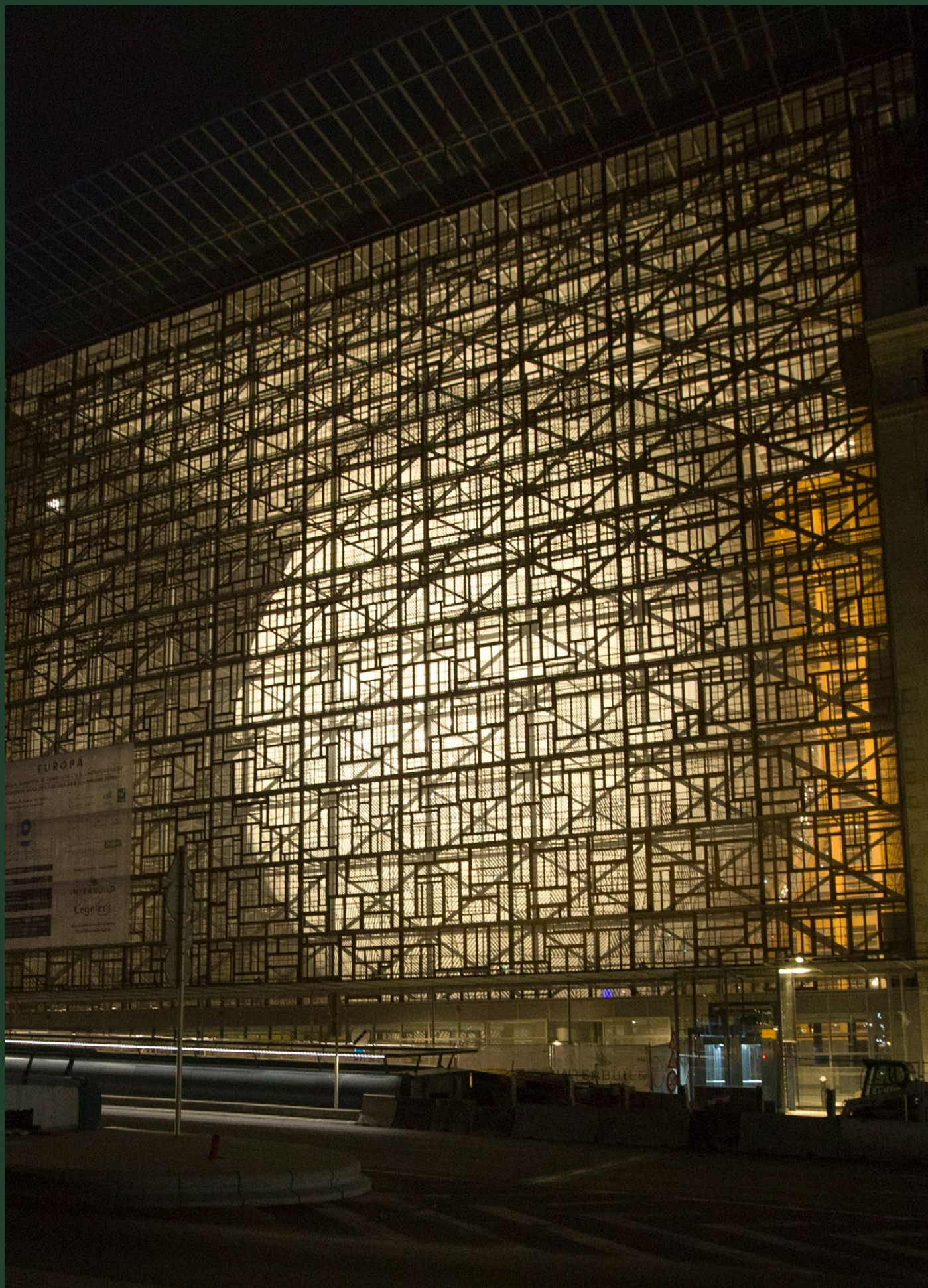
Article 6

This Decision shall be published in the Official Journal.

Done at Brussels, 22 January 2001.

For the Council
The President
A. LINDH

⁽¹⁾ Council Decision 2001/80/CFSP (see page 7 of this Official Journal).
⁽²⁾ Council Decision 2000/144/CFSP of 14 February 2000 setting up the Interim Military Body (O) L 49, 22.2.2000, p. 2).



The Europa, Council of the European Union