



**SECURITY AND DEFENCE PARTNERSHIP
BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND
THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA**

1. The European Union (EU) and the Republic of North Macedonia (hereinafter North Macedonia) face an increasingly challenging security environment in Europe, inter alia due to Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine, where Russia attempts to challenge unilaterally, by force, the freedom, peace and security in Europe. The EU and North Macedonia stand united in their commitment to uphold and strengthen the international rules based order, in full respect of the principles of the United Nations (UN) Charter.
2. The security and prosperity of the EU and North Macedonia are interconnected and interdependent. These links have geopolitical, economic, and security dimensions, including in areas that go beyond traditional strategic issues, such as cyber and hybrid, space, the resilience of critical infrastructure and economic security. In view of North Macedonia's strategic goal for the EU membership, the cooperation between EU and North Macedonia on peace, security and defence will be further strengthened.
3. Relations between the EU and North Macedonia are based on the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, underpinned by shared values of democracy, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. The EU-North Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Agreement underlines the joint commitment to deepen cooperation of parties in the field of security.
4. The EU recognised North Macedonia's substantial progress and commitment to reforms on its EU path. In view of this, the European Council in March 2020 endorsed the Council's decision to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia. Based on the Council Conclusions of July 2022, the first political intergovernmental conference on accession negotiations with North Macedonia was held in order to present the next steps of the enlargement process after the adoption of the Negotiating

Framework. The meetings of the screening process, including for Chapter 31 “Foreign, security and defence policy”, were completed in December 2023.

5. The EU and North Macedonia have respectively adopted important strategic documents that will guide their security and defence policies for the upcoming years. The EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence adopted in 2022 sets out a clear vision for a more robust EU role in security and defence, with strong tailored partnerships at its core. The Defence Strategy of North Macedonia, adopted in 2020, highlights the importance of collaboration with allies and partners, including the EU, to address transnational challenges.
6. North Macedonia is an important and valuable partner for the EU in the field of peace, security and defence, and an active third state participant in the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), following the signature of the Agreement establishing a framework for the participation of North Macedonia in the EU crisis management operations in 2012. Since 2005, the EU and North Macedonia have in place the Agreement on the security procedures for the exchange of classified information.
7. In the current security environment, the strategic partnership between the EU and NATO is vital for ensuring security in Europe and beyond. For the EU, its strategic partnership with NATO is essential for the Euro-Atlantic security. For North Macedonia, NATO is the cornerstone of its deterrence and defence. North Macedonia is a staunch proponent of advancing EU-NATO cooperation in line with the three Joint Declarations to the benefit of the European and Transatlantic security. By strengthening, deepening and expanding the EU-North Macedonia relations in peace, security and defence, the EU-North Macedonia Security and Defence Partnership will contribute to further strengthening of the mutually beneficial EU-NATO strategic partnership.
8. The EU and North Macedonia seek to seize the momentum to further intensify cooperation to better address shared challenges. The EU and North Macedonia therefore undertake to further develop, deepen and strengthen cooperation and dialogue across the whole range of security and defence issues making use of existing frameworks and exploring new avenues for cooperation in order to further foster their well-established and mutually reinforcing partnership.

General Framework

9. The EU and North Macedonia have decided to establish and implement a tailor-made, mutually beneficial Security and Defence Partnership that will frame their overall cooperation across the security and defence spectrum. This Security and Defence Partnership will be underpinned by a series of dialogues and consultations to provide steering and oversight:

- ◇ Invitation for participation of North Macedonia in relevant meetings organised by the EU devoted to security and defence.
- ◇ Making use of the EU-North Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Council to ensure monitoring of the implementation of the Security and Defence Partnership and provide guidance as appropriate.
- ◇ Establishing the EU-North Macedonia Security and Defence Dialogue at Directors' level, to discuss the broad strategic environment, thematic and geographic security and defence issues, to explore possible cooperation and, as appropriate, to prepare deliverables and ground for discussions at the EU-North Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Council.
- ◇ Exploring the establishment of additional thematic consultations on specific domains of shared interest, allowing the development of close political relations with North Macedonia.

10. The EU and North Macedonia will increase coordination in multilateral fora, including with other like-minded partners in the area of security and defence.

11. As the well-established strategic partnership between the EU and NATO is of critical importance to their security and stability, both the EU and North Macedonia will seek additional opportunities to strengthen, deepen and expand this partnership in the framework or the implementation of the three Joint Declarations on EU-NATO cooperation through further exchanges at working and senior official levels.

Areas of Cooperation

12. In addition to exchanges on security and defence policies and relevant regional security, as well as strategic and geopolitical issues in order to better align each other's policy, the EU and North Macedonia will hold targeted experts' consultations and boost cooperation in the following areas:

EU CSDP missions and operations

13. The EU and North Macedonia will further strengthen and expand their longstanding cooperation in the field of crisis management. North Macedonia will continue its participation in EU CSDP missions and operations. The EU and North Macedonia will continue developing and strengthening North Macedonia's military forces and capabilities, including to consolidate their participation in EU military CSDP missions and operations. This may entail, once decided, North Macedonia's contribution to the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity deployment, as well as participation in EU military exercises, including live ones, as appropriate. The EU and North Macedonia will examine

options for developing North Macedonia's civilian capacities with a view to increase experts' participation in EU civilian CSDP missions.

Support to Ukraine

14. The EU and North Macedonia share the goal of providing support to Ukraine as long as necessary to defend its political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. To that end, the EU and North Macedonia will explore options to streamline joint efforts, including the potential participation of North Macedonia in EU initiatives that aim to increase the defence capacities of Ukraine, in line with the established procedures and EU's institutional framework.

Countering hybrid threats

15. The EU and North Macedonia will further deepen cooperation on countering hybrid threats, including the follow-up to the Hybrid Risk Survey completed in 2020, and the implementation of North Macedonia's Strategy for building resilience and countering hybrid threats.
16. The EU and North Macedonia will share best practices in developing strategies, structures and policies, including diplomatic responses to hybrid threats, and will increase cross-participation in exercises as appropriate.

Cyber issues

17. The EU and North Macedonia will deepen the existing cooperation, including by enhancing regular exchanges on the cyber threat landscape, respective policy frameworks and practical cooperative efforts in multilateral fora, including the UN. The EU and North Macedonia will also exchange on tools to prevent, deter and respond to malicious cyber activities, including through diplomatic measures.
18. The EU will further support North Macedonia's efforts to strengthen cyber resilience, including through cyber capacity building and rapid response assistance, where relevant.

Capacity building in security and defence

19. The EU and North Macedonia are cooperating under the European Peace Facility to enhance North Macedonia's national security, stability and resilience in the defence sector. The EU will continue to support the Armed Forces of North Macedonia's efforts to enhance their operational effectiveness and interoperability, and thereby better protect civilians in crises and emergencies.

Strategic communications and countering foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI)

20. The EU and North Macedonia will proactively share information on threat assessments in the disinformation domain through exchanges on FIMI and explore operational cooperation.
21. The EU will further support North Macedonia in building capacities of its institutions to counter FIMI and to increase information resilience of the population.

Non-proliferation and disarmament, conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons (SALW)

22. The EU and North Macedonia will deepen exchanges on non-proliferation, disarmament, conventional arms, and small arms and light weapons, including on the regional Roadmap on small arms and light weapons control in the Western Balkans, and the EU Action Plan on firearms trafficking.

Counterterrorism and preventing/countering violent extremism

23. The EU and North Macedonia will explore opportunities for further cooperation between relevant actors on counterterrorism, prevention and countering violent extremism related matters. This cooperation should be based on an all of society approach and guided by the Joint Action Plan on Counter-terrorism for the Western Balkans and relevant implementing arrangements.

Consultations on relevant defence initiatives, tools and instruments

24. The EU and North Macedonia will consult on their respective defence initiatives, tools and instruments related to security and defence. They will i.a. explore the possibilities and interest for North Macedonia's participation in PESCO projects, in line with the general conditions under which third States could exceptionally be invited to participate in individual PESCO projects, to further intensify cooperation and better address shared challenges. In addition, possibilities for establishing mutually beneficial cooperation between North Macedonia and the European Defence Agency (EDA) will be explored, in line with respective processes.
25. The EU and North Macedonia share that swift, effective and secure movement of military goods and personnel is essential for European security. In line with the Action Plan on Military Mobility 2.0, the EU stands ready to share best practices and lessons learned with regard to the whole-of-government approach, dual-use approach and practical steps to reduce the administrative burden and delays. There is mutual interest in developing and deepening cooperation in the field of military mobility. The two sides will explore the possibility of North Macedonia's participation in EU actions

and initiatives aimed at harmonising and reducing administrative processes and procedures, with a view to achieving the smooth movement of military goods and personnel.

Training and education

26. The EU and North Macedonia will continue cooperation in the field of training and education related to CSDP, including developing cooperation with the European Security and Defence College (ESDC). The activities will include participation in the ESDC activities, organising training and education activities in collaboration with an ESDC Network Member as the ESDC Associate Network Partner (e.g. the Military Academy “General Mihailo Apostolski”).

Integrated border management

27. Building on the existing close cooperation in this area, notably within the EU Action Plan on the Western Balkans and the close engagement with Home Affairs Agencies, the EU and North Macedonia will explore opportunities for further cooperation in the external dimension of integrated border management, including managing irregular migration, fighting transnational organised crime and international trafficking, with a particular focus on trafficking of arms, drugs and cultural property. The EU and North Macedonia will further explore opportunities for cooperation in the context of European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT).

Women, Peace and Security

28. The EU and North Macedonia are committed to the full implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, which consists of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and its follow-up resolutions, and will ensure that gender equality is integrated in their areas of cooperation on security and defence.

29. The EU and North Macedonia will exchange good practices on implementing Women, Peace and Security commitments, and continue close collaboration to ensure gender equality as a political and security related priority and with an aim to reinforce joint responses to current and emerging security and geopolitical shifts.

Protection of cultural heritage in conflict and crisis situations

30. Driven by their mutual values of diversity, inclusion, and the preservation of shared histories, the EU and North Macedonia are committed to join forces, in a collaborative effort, to safeguard cultural heritage, also recognising that crimes related to cultural heritage, especially trafficking in cultural property, represent a threat to their security. Through the partnership, the EU and North Macedonia

will exchange good practices in the field of protection of cultural heritage from preventive measures and emergency response to criminal investigations, technological innovations, sustainable development policies, and international cooperation.

External aspects of economic security

31. The EU and North Macedonia will exchange practices on the external aspects of their respective economic security policies within the context of peace, security and defence, with the aim to address the risks that both face while maintaining and improving a well-functioning international rules-based system to continue to benefit from an open economy.

Way Forward

32. The areas identified in the Security and Defence Partnership will be reviewed regularly in the framework of the EU-North Macedonia Security and Defence Dialogue, taking stock of progress made, giving further impetus, and discussed at the EU-North Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Council with a view to exploring ways to further strengthen and develop the cooperation.
33. The content of the Security and Defence Partnership will be reviewed as appropriate.