

2025

EUROMIL SURVEY RESULTS

THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN DEFENCE II



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PARTICIPANTS

Participants (in alphabetical order)	Country
ACMP-CGPM	Belgium
AFMP and MARVER	The Netherlands
ANS	Portugal
AOFA	Portugal
AP	Portugal
ASSODIPRO	Italy
AUME	Spain
DBwV	Germany
PDFORRA	Ireland
PFEARFU	Greece
RACO	Ireland
SAMO	Sweden
SOVCG	Montenegro

INTRODUCTION

Today's rapidly evolving geopolitical environment is defined by the convergence of traditional and emerging security threats. Advancing European defence has never been more urgent or higher on the political agenda. The European Commission has multiple times stressed that it will work towards building the European Defence Union (EDU). The 2025 European Commission [work program](#) underlines the need of building a true EDU with a strong defence industry, an enhanced defence readiness, while also strengthening Europe's crisis preparedness.

Over the past decade, we have witnessed a series of significant EU initiatives aiming at strengthening European defence and enhancing the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Since the publication of the EU Global Strategy in 2016, and most recently with the release of the [EU White Paper on Defence Readiness 2030](#) and the Preparedness Union Strategy in 2025, the European Union has taken substantial steps forward. Key milestones include the activation of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the launch of the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), the adoption of the Strategic Compass, progress on Military Mobility, and the establishment of the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (EU RDC). These efforts also reflect a broader approach, linking traditional defence priorities with emerging challenges such as climate change, highlighted by the European Commission's [Climate-Security Nexus](#), and the promotion of gender equality in defence, as outlined in the [Strategic Compass](#).

In recent years, the Strategic Compass has driven important progress within the CSDP framework, notably through the creation of the EU RDC and the organisation of the first-ever live EU military exercises (MILEX-23, MILEX-24, and MILEX-25). These developments mark a pivotal step towards deeper operational cooperation, with common training and joint exercises among EU member states fostering a shared strategic culture. Ultimately, these efforts aim to enhance Europe's collective resilience, preparedness, and defence readiness.

Besides, creating a strong European defence industry is essential given that after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, European states' defence stockpiles have emptied and therefore there is an extensive need to ramp up production, strengthen the European defence industrial and technological base and be able to continue providing for Ukraine. Hence, the EU has adopted various measures in this regard such as Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), European defence industry reinforcement through common procurement act (EDIRPA), European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP), the White Paper. On the latter, it is important to underscore that the **it did not placed sufficient emphasis on the role and needs of military personnel, an essential factor in achieving true defence readiness within the next five years**. European Armed Forces are facing critical challenges in recruitment and retention. Unless these issues are addressed collectively, and best practices and lessons learned are effectively shared among Member States, the ambition for a capable and responsive European defence will fall short.

INTRODUCTION

Without the men and women in uniform, even the most well-designed initiatives risk becoming empty frameworks. The [Niinistö Report](#) also underlines the need *to attract younger generations to careers in defence, security, and emergency response, targeted incentives should be developed in collaboration with trade unions and employers' organizations*. Similarly, EPC's "[Quick march! Ten steps for a European defence surge](#)" states that Europe is suffering from a shortage of willing enlisted soldiers for European armed forces, while also acknowledging that defence needs a whole-of-society approach by engaging employers, trade unions, educators and civil society. Moreover, the EU in its [Preparedness Union Strategy](#) presents a whole-of-society approach, and EUROMIL positively [noted](#) that the strategy puts strong emphasis on the availability and mobility of skilled personnel during crises. Despite that the publication of the White Paper and the Preparedness Union Strategy marks an important moment in the EU's defence evolution, more work is needed to move towards EDU.

The EU must ensure that it does not overlook its most valuable asset: its people, their Citizens in Uniform. **Hence, with this survey, EUROMIL aims to take its members' stances into a wider European debate for security and defence, and to make sure that the voices of military personnel are heard.** The momentum is now to act decisively and ensure that Europe develops robust defence capabilities, and making the Armed Forces a fair workplace that is fit for the future.

Through this survey, EUROMIL brings forward essential insights that contribute to shaping the future direction of European defence. The findings address key areas such as the desired scope and structure of EDU, the reception of the EU White Paper on Defence Readiness by military associations and trade unions, and the necessary steps to place recruitment and retention firmly on the EU agenda. The survey also addresses the need for stronger synergies between European defence and social policies, and offers insights into the impact and future development of the EU RDC. It identifies areas where EU-NATO cooperation should be enhanced and gathers views on the current debate surrounding the scope and application of [Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union](#), the mutual assistance clause. Respondents also reflect on institutional developments such as the appointment of the EU's first Defence Commissioner, SEDE becoming a fully-fledged European Parliament committee, and the importance of deepening partnerships within CSDP. Finally, the survey captures an overall assessment of EU defence initiatives, highlighting whether these are perceived as timely and coherent, or if fragmentation still persists.

The current report also serves as an update of the latest [EUROMIL survey on the future of European Defence in 2022](#).

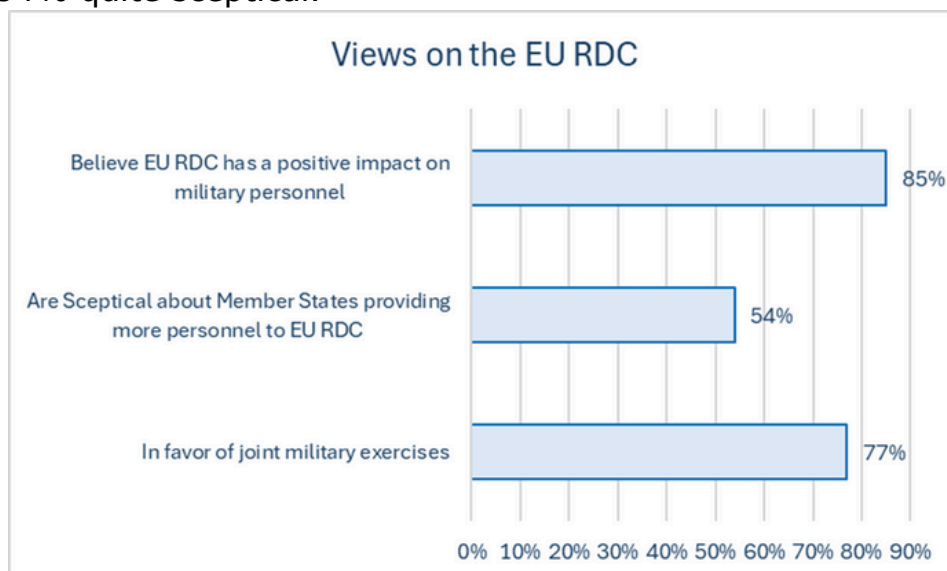
MAIN RESULTS

To begin with, participants provided their views on essential elements that should support the development of EDU. Three main priorities emerged:

- **92.3%** of the respondents emphasised that the [2016 European Parliament Resolution on the “European Defence Union”](#) should serve as the primary foundation for this effort. More specifically, the resolution, in §12, *calls on the Member States to particularly recognise the right of military personnel to form and join professional associations or trade unions and involve them in a regular social dialogue with the authorities; invites the European Council to take concrete steps towards the harmonisation and standardisation of the European armed forces, in order to facilitate the cooperation of armed forces personnel under the umbrella of a new European Defence Union.*
- **76.9%** of the participants believe that having a common strategic/military culture among EU Member States and partner countries is essential and can also lead to a change in military mentality to adapt in new generations' perspectives.
- **69.2%** of the participating members support joint defence industry procurement programs, as the ReArm EU plan.

Other elements were also widely supported, with 61.5% of the respondents backing efforts to strengthen EU's resilience and preparedness by developing robust reserve forces and following the Finish model of total defence. Despite that having more joint military exercises was positively perceived (77%), especially under frameworks like PESCO or the EU RDC, they represent a priority for building EDU for half of the participants.

According to the Strategic Compass, the purpose of the EU RDC is to allow the EU to swiftly deploy up to 5000 troops for crisis management, stabilisation and evacuation missions outside the EU. Regarding whether the EU RDC should gradually expand in size and be used within the EU for crisis management or emergency situations, the majority of participants responded positively. However, on whether the Member States would be willing to commit more personnel in the initiative, 23% of the participants are negative and 54% quite sceptical.



MAIN RESULTS

Moreover, on whether the EU RDC has a positive impact for military personnel the majority of the responses are confident but underline the need to be handled appropriately to avoid any negative implications or have the same outcome as the EU Battlegroups. Overall, there is a noticeable increase in support for the EU RDC compared to EUROMIL's 2022 survey, in which only 35% of participants viewed the tool as important for military needs.

Looking ahead, participants identified key areas where EU-NATO cooperation should be reinforced. Addressing hybrid threats emerged as a top priority, consistent with the findings of the 2022 EUROMIL survey. Other priority areas include strengthening collaboration on military mobility, emerging and disruptive technologies, cybersecurity, and climate change.

To continue, participants viewed the omission of military personnel issues in the White Paper on Defence Readiness 2030, particularly the ongoing personnel shortages in European Armed Forces, as a major shortcoming. The vast majority of the respondents underline that the military is facing significant personnel shortages, leading to excessive workloads and increased pressure on staff. To ensure sustainability and readiness, urgent attention must be given to improving working conditions and strengthening recruitment and retention strategies. The absence of these issues in the White Paper highlight a critical gap, as it overlooks the human resource challenges, such as aging forces, skill shortages, and private sector competition. Consequently, the White Paper neglects issues directly impacting the operational effectiveness of European Armed Forces.

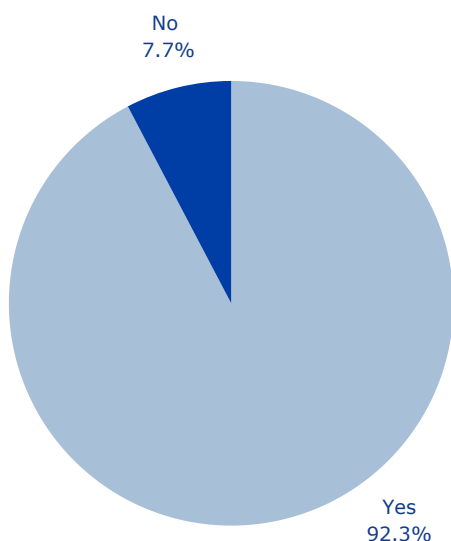
Addressing the challenges of low recruitment and retention rates in the military is a crucial step in the making of EDU. Thus, military associations and trade unions participating in this survey have put forward concrete proposals to strengthen the Armed Forces and ensure their long-term sustainability. First and foremost, it is essential for recruitment and retention to be recognized as strategic priority at both the national and European level. Most participants also emphasized the importance of **strong engagement with military associations and trade unions to better understand the realities on the ground**. Closer cooperation among member states to exchange experiences and best practises can further support the development of effective and coordinated solutions. In addition, public awareness campaigns are needed to promote military careers and attract a more diverse range of candidates. Modernizing working conditions and aligning them with broader labour standards is also essential to improve retention. Above all, political will is key. Building a credible EDU requires recognizing that soldiers are citizens in uniform. A resilient defence structure must rest not only on technology and capabilities but also on valuing, supporting, and empowering the people who serve.

MAIN RESULTS

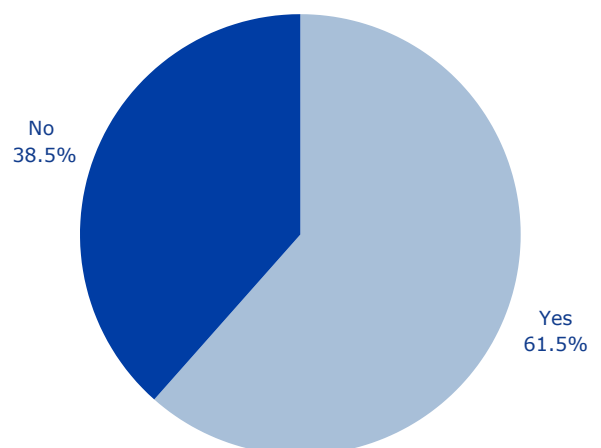
Moreover, there is strong consensus among respondents that greater integration of social considerations into EU defence policy is not only beneficial but essential. While significant developments are taking place in both defence (such as the White Paper, ReArm, PESCO, the Preparedness Union Strategy) and social policy (such as the Union of Skills, the Quality jobs roadmap), the **lack of synergies between these sectors is seen as a missed opportunity**. Participants stress that defence and social policy are inherently connected, military personnel are directly impacted by employment quality, skills development, and work-life balance. Integration could improve recruitment, retention, morale, and the overall effectiveness of EU defence strategies. Proposals include establishing formal cooperation mechanisms, aligning social and defence objectives through joint action plans, and ensuring meaningful participation from trade unions, professional associations, and civil society. However, many caution that without genuine political will, such integration risks remaining a proposal rather than a reality.

Regarding the recent institutional developments and debate on exploring a wider scope of application for TEU article 42.7, the mutual assistance clause, the respondents expressed diverse views. 61.5% of the participating associations are viewing article 42.7 TEU positively, while 38.5% are not in favour of a wider implementation of the mutual assistance clause. On the other hand, a vast majority (92.3%) of the respondents view the first ever European Commissioner for Defence and Space, and SEDE becoming a fully fledged committee in the European Parliament positively.

Does your organisation perceive as a positive development the first ever European Defence Commissioner and the development of SEDE as a full committee in the European Parliament?



Would you agree for a wider scope and stronger implementation of the Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU)?



MAIN RESULTS

Similarly, the participants expressed support for more opportunities and channels for cooperation with partner countries regarding CSDP.

To summarize, over the past decade, the EU has made notable steps in developing its defence framework through initiatives such as the EU Global Strategy, PESCO, CARD, EDF, Strategic Compass, and more recent proposals like the White Paper. These efforts reflect growing ambition and recognition of the need for a stronger European defence posture. However, a significant number of participants view progress as slow, fragmented, and insufficient. While funding tools and frameworks exist, the gap between policy ambition and concrete implementation remains wide. Criticisms highlight persistent national fragmentation, lack of strategic enablers, and limited attention to the human dimension, particularly military careers, pay, recruitment, and morale.

Many stress that without faster, more united action and political will, these initiatives risk remaining bureaucratic exercises with limited impact. The momentum generated by geopolitical uncertainty and shifting global alliances offers a critical window of opportunity to move from discussion to decisive action, and to build a more integrated European defence structure and making the Armed Forces more robust, resilient and interoperable.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

AACMP-CGPM, Belgium

For ACMP-CGPM the EDU should be based on:

- A common strategic/military culture among EU Member States and partner countries that can also lead to a change in military mentality to adapt in new generations' perspectives.
- Joint defence industry procurement programs (e.g., as announced in the ReArm EU plan).
- Building up the resilience and preparedness of the EU, an EDU should also focus on strong reserve forces and a kind of Finish model of total defence.

As the White Paper did not include issues affecting military personnel, ACMP-CGPM states that recruitment and retention are typical issues that touch on the administrative, financial and social status of military personnel. And thus they represent issues of how states organize their armies. In essence it is about the sovereignty issue: as long as the vast majority of EU Member States want to decide completely autonomously about (among other things) the organization of their own armies, there will never be a true EDU. And consequently, there will be no convergence of the statutes of the different armies. Besides, only through strong **political will** policies affecting military personnel can be included not the European planning. According to ACMP-CGPM, incorporating social considerations into EU defence policies is essential but also based upon the political will of the Member States.

While the development of the European defence industry is focused on addressing urgent needs and supporting Ukraine, long-term innovation and the strengthening of the European Defence Industrial and Technological Base remain crucial. However, there is scepticism by ACMP-CGPM about expanding EU-led military initiatives such as joint exercises or the EU RDC. The association views the EU RDC as lacking substance and question its effectiveness. There is little support for increasing its size, deploying it within the EU, or expecting Member States to commit more personnel, with critics by ACMP-CGPM are describing the initiative as an empty concept unlikely to deliver tangible benefits for military personnel.

An increased EU-NATO cooperation is seen positively and should focus on military mobility, emerging and disruptive technologies, cyber security, and climate security and defence. Despite a decade of EU defence initiatives, ranging from strategic frameworks to industrial policies, ACMP-CGPM argues that progress remains superficial, marked by the proliferation of tools and processes but lacking in substantive capability. There is strong scepticism toward expanding the scope of Article 42.7 TEU and the establishment of new EU defence structures such as the European Defence Commissioner or SEDE as a full committee. Critics contend that without concrete investments in essential strategic enablers, such as C4ISR, strategic transport, cyber capabilities, and maritime and aerial defence systems, a genuine EDU will remain an empty shell rather than a functional reality.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

AFMP and MARVER, The Netherlands

EDU for AFMP and MARVER should:

- Have a common strategic/military culture among EU Member States and partner countries that can also lead to a change in military mentality to adapt in new generations' perspectives.
- Have joint defence industry procurement programs (e.g., as announced in the ReArm EU plan).
- Conduct frequent joint live military exercises (e.g., MILEX-23, MILEX-24 under the EU RDC).
- Be based on the 2016 European Parliament Resolution on the “European Defence Union”, Member States should recognise the right of military personnel to form and join professional associations or trade unions and involve them in a regular social dialogue with the authorities, while also taking concrete steps towards the harmonisation and standardisation of the European Armed Forces.
- Build up the resilience and preparedness of the EU, an EDU should also focus on strong reserve forces and a kind of Finish model of total defence.

The fact that the White Paper did not include considerations for shortages of skilled personnel in the defence forces has negative implications. AFMP and MARVER stress that due to a shortage in personnel, the military is already stretching its capability to perform regular and extra duties, causing high workload and putting extra pressure on personnel. Therefore, close attention must be paid to working conditions and legal rights. **Recruitment and retention is of the utmost importance for the Armed Forces in order to enhance sustainability and minimizing the physical, mental, and emotional strain that military personnel may experience during training, preparation, or standby periods.** Moreover, AFMP and MARVER suggest that considerations on how to get society involved and motivated on such discussions is essential. National unions can stress the importance of recruitment and retention to their Ministries of Defence (MODs) and EUROMIL can put this subject on the agenda of the EU. A potential topic for debate is whether MoDs should adopt more flexible recruitment standards that are tailored to the specific requirements of different military roles. For example, the physical criteria for positions in Host Nation Support (HNS) or administrative functions may reasonably differ from those required for combat roles, reflecting the distinct nature and demands of each job.

Another important aspect that could potentially positively enhance the discussions around recruitment and retention, is creating more synergies between European defence policies and the social ones. More joint exercises carried out by European structures as PESCO or the EU RDC can also contribute positively to the development of common European defence. Especially regarding the EU RDC, AFMP and MARVER support the gradual grow in size of the force and its ability to be used inside the EU for crisis management and emergency situations.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

On whether Member States would be willing to provide military personnel to the force, AFMP and MARVER state that the Netherlands has not yet made a decision on committing more personnel. A decision will probably also depend on the foreseen future expansion of the Dutch Armed Forces and priorities regarding tasks and deployments. Overall, AFMP and MARVER believe that EU RDC has a positive impact on military personnel; EU national working together means they can protect their personnel and citizens more efficiently and show strength to external aggressors. This will enhance motivation and confidence for EU RDC personnel.

EU-NATO cooperation should also increase in matters as military mobility, hybrid threats, emerging and disruptive technologies, cyber security, and climate security and defence. AFMP and MARVER also positively view the debate around the wider scope and stronger implementation EU's mutual assistance clause, while also welcomed the creation of the position of European Commissioner for Defence and the development of SEDE into a fully-fledged committee. Despite the plethora of European defence initiatives and policies, AFMP and MARVER highlight that progress could and should be swifter. Nonetheless, given the need for consensus among all Member States, decisions are already being taken as quickly as the political context allows.

ANS, Portugal

Following ANS, EDU should be guided by the 2016 European Parliament Resolution, that – among other elements – states that Member States should recognise the right of military personnel to form and join professional associations or trade unions and involve them in a regular social dialogue with the authorities, while also taking concrete steps towards the harmonisation and standardisation of the European Armed Forces.

Moreover, as the White Paper fails to address issues directly affecting military personnel, ANS argues that it has generated disappointment. By omitting any reference to the need to make military careers more attractive, the document reflects a lack of recognition that achieving its stated goals is only possible with **motivated and well-supported members of the Armed Forces**. Hence, ANS proposes targeted outreach programs to engage recent graduates and trainees, showcasing the roles, responsibilities, and opportunities within the Armed Forces. Efforts must also focus on modernizing military infrastructure and equipment, raising salaries, guaranteeing access to free healthcare, preserving full pension rights, and maintaining stable career progression without raising the retirement age.

Similarly, it is essential to create more synergies between EU defence policies and social ones. In other words, without the integration of representatives and defenders of social policies such as professional associations, trade unions, EUROMIL, civil society educators and employers it will be difficult to incorporate social considerations into EU defence policy.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

ANS positively views EU common military exercises, and the development of the EU RDC. However, on whether the Member States will be willing to commit more personnel to the force, there are doubts especially considering that the lack of staff can be used as an excuse to limit their engagement. The association also argues that for military personnel, the EU RDC has a positive impact, especially considering experience and knowledge exchange. Another positive development regarding the EU RDC is the fact that the EU – through the European Peace Facility (EPF) - covers parts of the costs.

The association also supports closer EU-NATO cooperation in areas as military mobility, hybrid threats, and climate security and defence. Moreover, ANS is in favour of a wider scope and stronger implementation of the EU's mutual assistance clause, while also perceives positively the first ever European Defence Commissioner and the development of SEDE as a fully-fledged committee. Considering the various defence developments at the European level from the past decade, with intensifying efforts since the adoption of the Strategic Compass, ANS states that the EU is moving forward at the right time, but the Member States remain fragmented and it remains essential to put the theory into practice.

AOFA, Portugal

AOFA supports EDU and believes that the following elements should be at its core:

- A common strategic/military culture among EU Member States and partner countries that can also lead to a change in military mentality to adapt in new generations' perspectives.
- Joint defence industry procurement programs (e.g., as announced in the ReArm EU plan).
- Frequent joint live military exercises (e.g., MILEX-23, MILEX-24 under the EU RDC).
- Based on the 2016 European Parliament Resolution on the “European Defence Union”, Member States should recognise the right of military personnel to form and join professional associations or trade unions and involve them in a regular social dialogue with the authorities, while also taking concrete steps towards the harmonisation and standardisation of the European Armed Forces.

The White Paper focuses on enhancing defence capabilities, technological advancements, and industrial cooperation. AOFA underlines that while these are undoubtedly important developments, the lack of focus on the human element might create a disconnect between strategic goals and operational realities. Besides, the omission of recruitment and retention issues in the White Paper could have significant implications for military personnel. By not addressing key human resource challenges such as skill shortages, competition with the private sector and aging personnel, effective solutions cannot be developed. Recruitment and retention are critical for maintaining robust and capable Armed Forces, especially in the face of increasing security challenges.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

This gap might lead to concerns among military personnel about the sustainability of their roles and the support they receive. Without a comprehensive, 360-degree approach, the EU's collective efforts risk being weakened at the national level.

According to AOFA, to enhance a wider European debate on recruitment and retention in the making of EDU, six essential elements are required: policy integration, stakeholder engagement, public awareness campaigns, cross national collaboration, research and innovation, incentives and support. To analyse more, recruitment and retention should be explicitly included in key policy documents like the White Paper for European Defence Readiness. This would ensure that the issue is recognized as a priority at the EU level. Public awareness campaigns, workshops and panel discussions on the issue of recruitment and retention would promote effective solutions. The EU should also encourage the Member States to share best practices and collaborate on recruitment strategies. Lastly, AOFA underlines that it is also essential to improve working conditions, social protection, and mental health support for military personnel. Fair compensation and benefits are crucial for retention.

To continue, AOFA also supports greater integration of social considerations into EU defence policies. **Defence and social policies are inherently interconnected, as the people serving in the Armed Forces are directly impacted by social issues such as employment quality, skills development, and work-life balance.** Incorporating social policies ensures that military personnel are supported in their roles, improving retention and morale. Policies like the Quality Jobs Roadmap could enhance job satisfaction and workplace conditions for members of the Armed Forces. Moreover, the initiative Union of Skills could have been leveraged to address skill shortages in the Armed Forces, enabling better recruitment and preparation for emerging defence challenges. Overall, establishing formal mechanisms for collaboration between defence and social policymakers, enhancing cross-sectoral dialogue and aligning social and defence objectives, where possible, are essential steps towards a wider EU comprehensive approach.

The association also supports more joint exercises under a European framework, for example through PESCO or the EU RDC. On the latter, AOFA is in favour of an EU RDC that gradually grows in size and could be used inside the EU for crisis management and emergency situations. On whether EU Member States would be willing to commit more personnel in the EU RDC, the association expresses some reservations.

On the question how the association perceives the EU RDC, AOFA states that the outcome of the force on military personnel is multifaceted and largely dependent on how the initiative is integrated into existing defence frameworks. If adequately funded and implemented with consideration for social and personnel-related factors, the EU RDC could have a balanced or even positive effect.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

On the positive side, **it may enhance preparedness by offering new training opportunities and strengthening operational readiness.** It could also open up diverse career pathways through increased mobility within EU-led missions and contribute to more predictable working conditions by promoting unified standards across Member States. However, concerns remain regarding possible negative outcomes, such as increased stress from frequent deployments, imbalances in Member State contributions, and the risk that prioritizing the EU RDC could detract from addressing longstanding issues like recruitment, retention, and overall working conditions.

AOFA supports closer EU-NATO cooperation on military mobility, hybrid threats, emerging and disruptive technologies, cyber security, climate security and defence. Regarding EU's debate around a wider scope and stronger implementation of Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the mutual assistance clause, the association perceives it positively. Similarly, it welcomes the first ever European Defence Commissioner, and the development of SEDE as a fully-fledged committee.

Overall, The EU's defence initiatives over the past decade represent significant progress in enhancing European security and defence cooperation. However, there are valid criticisms suggesting that the developments remain slow, fragmented, and sometimes misaligned with urgent priorities. AOFA stresses that the EU has made notable progress in strengthening its defence capabilities through initiatives such as PESCO and CARD, which foster collaboration and integrated planning among Member States. Funding instruments like the EDF, ASAP, and EDIRPA further support the development of Europe's defence industrial base and innovation. The Strategic Compass provides a clear roadmap for addressing emerging threats, complemented by advancements in Military Mobility and an increasing emphasis on sustainability and climate-security considerations, which underscore a commitment to long-term resilience. However, challenges persist; Fragmentation among Member States, slow implementation of strategic plans, and occasional misalignment between long-term priorities and immediate operational needs, such as recruitment, retention, and readiness, continue to limit effectiveness. While the EU is moving in the right direction, **enhancing coordination, accelerating delivery, and prioritizing the human dimension of defence will be crucial to achieving more impactful and sustainable outcomes.**

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

AP, Portugal

According to AP, building EDU should focus on:

- A common strategic/military culture among EU Member States and partner countries that can also lead to a change in military mentality to adapt in new generations' perspectives.
- Based on the 2016 European Parliament Resolution on the “European Defence Union”, Member States should recognise the right of military personnel to form and join professional associations or trade unions and involve them in a regular social dialogue with the authorities, while also taking concrete steps towards the harmonisation and standardisation of the European Armed Forces.

According to AP, the fact that the White Paper does not address the challenges faced by European Armed Forces, regarding recruitment and retention, is seen negatively. In Portugal, the current military personnel stands at approximately 23,000, whereas the target should be around 32,000. As the EU works towards the future of its defence, **neglecting this issue is a mistake, and it will not be through this approach that we can truly envision a sustainable future for European defence.**

AP also states that it is essential to involve military associations and unions in discussions across Europe. As those on the ground, engaging daily with comrades, are acutely aware of the challenges and have the experience to offer practical solutions. Improving career conditions, enhancing salary recognition, especially for enlisted ranks, are crucial and impactful measures to address the personnel shortage effectively. On the need for integration between EU defence and social policy, AP advocates for all sectors to be aligned to improve the conditions for military personnel, particularly regarding social and career aspects within the Armed Forces. However, AP sees with scepticism the EU common military exercises, as well as the expanding in size and scope of the EU RDC. The association also believes, that there is also little willingness among Member States to commit more personnel to the initiative.

EU and NATO cooperation should mostly focus on emerging and disruptive technologies. Moreover, the wider debate around the scope and implementation of the EU's mutual assistance clause is not viewed positively by AP. On the other hand, the association welcomes the first ever European Defence Commissioner and the development of SEDE into a fully-fledged committee. Furthermore, according to AP, the current trajectory in the security and defence area does not fully reflect the principles enshrined in the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic. The association stated that it is witnessing a growing emphasis on military engagement, with the paradoxical aim of achieving peace. As representative of military personnel, AP supports that the fundamental responsibility is to contribute to the promotion of peace. Increased military expenditure alone will not lead to a more just and secure world.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

Over the past decade, the European Union has launched a number of important initiatives in the field of defence, including the EU Global Strategy, PESCO, CARD, EDF, the Strategic Compass, and most recently the White Paper on Defence. While these developments mark progress, it remains essential to ensure that such efforts are matched by a strong commitment to the social dimension of defence, particularly the recognition and fair remuneration of military personnel. In Portugal, enlisted members of the Armed Forces often carry out critical responsibilities while receiving the lowest levels of compensation. Addressing this imbalance is key to ensuring operational effectiveness and long-term sustainability.

Overall, AP reaffirms its unwavering support for peace, wherever it is needed. The association stands in solidarity with both the Ukrainian and Palestinian people, and emphasizes the importance of consistent and principled responses to all humanitarian crises. It expresses concern that while significant financial resources are being allocated to defence, equal attention must be paid to promoting peace and addressing root causes of conflict. As both military personnel and citizens, members of the association advocate for a world built on freedom, dignity, and equality for all.

ASSODIPRO, Italy

ASSODIPRO believes that EDU should:

- Have a common strategic/military culture among EU Member States and partner countries that can also lead to a change in military mentality to adapt in new generations' perspectives.
- Be based on the 2016 European Parliament Resolution on the “European Defence Union”, Member States should recognise the right of military personnel to form and join professional associations or trade unions and involve them in a regular social dialogue with the authorities, while also taking concrete steps towards the harmonisation and standardisation of the European Armed Forces.
- Build up the resilience and preparedness of the EU, an EDU should also focus on strong reserve forces and a kind of Finish model of total defence.

According to ASSODIPRO, the fact that the White Paper neglected matters affecting military personnel signifies a lack of protection for the members of the Armed Forces, that could also lead to waste of resources. Challenges related to recruitment and retention are often driven by disparities in salaries and economic conditions, underscoring the need for stronger engagement from national parliaments and governments in shaping a more effective defence policy. Moreover, it is vital to create more synergies between EU defence and social policies, to have a more comprehensive overview of the defence sector. ASSODIPRO also believes that more EU common exercises have positive impact, while the EU RDC should grow in size and be used inside the EU for crisis manage and emergency situations, if needed.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

Hence, it is essential that the EU provides sufficient incentives to the Member States to commit more personnel to the initiative. Cooperation with NATO should also be enhanced and focus on hybrid and cyber threats. ASSODIPRO also agrees with a wider scope and stronger implementation of the EU's mutual assistance clause, and welcomes the appointment of the first ever European Defence Commissioner and the development of SEDE into a fully-fledged Committee. Moreover, the EU should enhance channels of cooperation with partner states in CSDP. Lastly, ASSODIPRO argues that **the various EU defence developments remain slow, fragmented and often not focused on what is really needed.**

AUME, Spain

AUME advocates for an EDU that includes the following elements:

- A common strategic/military culture among EU Member States and partner countries that can also lead to a change in military mentality to adapt in new generations' perspectives.
- Joint defence industry procurement programs (e.g., as announced in the ReArm EU plan).
- Frequent joint live military exercises (e.g., MILEX-23, MILEX-24 under the EU RDC).
- Based on the 2016 European Parliament Resolution on the "European Defence Union", Member States should recognise the right of military personnel to form and join professional associations or trade unions and involve them in a regular social dialogue with the authorities, while also taking concrete steps towards the harmonisation and standardisation of the European Armed Forces.

Given that the White Paper excluded military personnel and the issues they face, AUME underscores that it signifies a lack of common vision towards issues that all European countries are facing, low recruitment and retention in the armed forces being one of them. The association elaborates that if the EU is moving towards EDU, there is an urgent need for a coherent and well-defined policy and strategic framework for managing human resources in European Armed Forces, which is critical in maintaining operational strength and readiness. Besides, it is critical to integrate the social pillar into defence policies for achieving common approaches for military personnel that would be part of the EDU. Hence, AUME also views positively common exercises such as under PESCO or the EU RDC. Furthermore, an EU RDC that would gradually grow in size and could be used inside the EU for crisis management and emergency situation is viewed positively as well. According to AUME, there should also be a tendency towards policies that would encourage military personnel to participate at the EU RDC. But, it is questionable whether Member States would be willing to commit more personnel to the initiative, especially given differences in national interests. In alignment with the broadly pro-European sentiment within Spanish society, AUME supports the participation of Spanish military personnel in the structures of a future EDU, **viewing it as a development that would positively contribute to the advancement of their professional careers.**

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

EU cooperation with NATO should also intensify in domains as military mobility, hybrid threats, emerging and disruptive technologies, cyber security, and climate security and defence. AUME also supports a wider scope and stronger implementation of the EU's mutual assistance clause, Article 42.7 of TEU, while it also perceives positively the first-ever European Defence Commissioner and the transition of SEDE into a fully-fledged committee. The association also states that the EU should increase its cooperation with partner countries regarding CSDP to enhance multilateralism.

Over the past decade, the EU has launched numerous defence initiatives, including the EU Global Strategy, PESCO, CARD, EDF, the Climate Security Nexus, the Strategic Compass, Military Mobility, and various industrial policies such as ASAP, EDIRPA, and EDIP, and most recently the White Paper, and the Preparedness Strategy. Consequently, AUME states that despite this progress, the EU continues to face challenges in advancing a unified defence posture. A core obstacle remains the absence of a clearly defined collective identity, as strong national identities persist among Member States. Lastly, AUME stresses that the current moment of geopolitical uncertainty presents a valuable opportunity to shape joint military personnel policies as a foundation for a shared military culture within a future European army. To ensure that the interests of military personnel are heard at the European level, AUME underlines that EUROMIL must remain strong and unified. In this context, the active engagement of its member associations is essential to advancing this key objective for the military profession across Europe.

DBwV, Germany

For DBwV an EDU should:

- Have a common strategic/military culture among EU Member States and partner countries that can also lead to a change in military mentality to adapt in new generations' perspectives.
- Have joint defence industry procurement programs (e.g., as announced in the ReArm EU plan); Frequent joint live military exercises (e.g., MILEX-23, MILEX-24 under the EU RDC).
- Be based on the 2016 European Parliament Resolution on the "European Defence Union", Member States should recognise the right of military personnel to form and join professional associations or trade unions and involve them in a regular social dialogue with the authorities, while also taking concrete steps towards the harmonisation and standardisation of the European Armed Forces.
- Build up the resilience and preparedness of the EU, an EDU should also focus on strong reserve forces and a kind of Finish model of total defence.

Given that the White Paper neglected the issue of understaffed military forces, the association stresses that the military needs qualified personnel to be efficient and effective.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

Without the sufficient number of personnel in the military, the Armed Forces will not function properly and to their full potential and hence security and defence will be at risk.

To include such matters in the European discussion, it is essential to build constructive dialogue, and acknowledge the challenges and opportunities related to the perception of the military across the EU. While the military's role and image may vary across different regions and cultures, it is crucial to address concerns about its perceived brutality and address any misperceptions. At the same time, it is equally important to emphasise the positive aspects of the military lifestyle, such as camaraderie and fairness, and to promote a more balanced and accurate understanding of its contributions. DBwV underlines that it is vital to recognise that the military is made up of citizens in uniform, and that their salary, work-life balance, gender equality and safety are all issues that must be addressed. Then, also the debate on conscription can begin on a solid basis. Consequently, DBwV argues that European policies on defence and social affairs should be more aligned.

To continue joint EU exercises are perceived positively, as well as the EU RDC. Regarding widening the scope of use of the force to inside the EU for crisis management and emergency situations, DBwV suggests that a clear definition of crisis should be given and focus on pandemics and natural disasters. Whether Member States would be willing to commit a larger number of personnel to the EU RDC, DBwV states that the situation would need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, as it depends on the country and the specific circumstances. While it remains too early to fully assess the impact of this instrument on military personnel, the DBwV remains hopeful that it will have a positive impact.

An enhanced EU-NATO cooperation is also essential and needs to focus on military mobility, hybrid threats, emerging and disruptive technologies, cybersecurity, climate security and defence, and overall on the collective defence of the allies. DBwV also perceives positively the debate around the wider scope and stronger implementation of the EU's article 42.7 TEU, the mutual assistance clause. Similarly, the organisation views positively the appointment of the first ever European Defence Commissioner and the development of SEDE into a fully-fledged committee.

Over the past decade, the EU has made a series of important advancements in the field of defence, and while these steps mark progress, they were long overdue and only gained real momentum amid growing uncertainty about the reliability of the transatlantic partner. According to DBwV, this has served as a wake-up call, highlighting the urgency of collective action. However, these efforts remain insufficient. For many years, Europe benefited from peace and stability, and only now is there a broader recognition of the need to be better prepared.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

It is evident that greater unity and more decisive measures are essential to ensure the EU's readiness and resilience in an increasingly complex security environment.

PDFORRA, Ireland

PDFORRA underlines that EDU should be composed of the following elements:

- Joint defence industry procurement programs (e.g., as announced in the ReArm EU plan).
- Frequent joint live military exercises (e.g., MILEX-23, MILEX-24 under the EU RDC).
- Based on the 2016 European Parliament Resolution on the "European Defence Union", Member States should recognise the right of military personnel to form and join professional associations or trade unions and involve them in a regular social dialogue with the authorities, while also taking concrete steps towards the harmonisation and standardisation of the European Armed Forces.
- Building up the resilience and preparedness of the EU, an EDU should also focus on strong reserve forces and a kind of Finish model of total defence.

The White Paper on European Defence Readiness 2030, does not touch upon issues affecting military personnel, as the low levels of recruitment and retention. According to PDFORRA, such situation sends the wrong message to prospective candidates for military service. In order to enhance the wider debate on recruitment and retention in the making of the EDU, the association underlines that MEPs should raise the matter at the European level. Moreover, **creating a common military culture, would strengthen the sense of European identity among military personnel. Another example could be European initiatives to reward Armed Forces personnel.**

At the European level, we are witnessing a significant expansion of defence-related policies, with several key initiatives, such as the White Paper, the upcoming PESCO review, the Preparedness Union Strategy. Likewise, numerous developments are advancing in the social sphere, including the Union of Skills, the Roadmap on Women's Rights, and the forthcoming Quality Jobs Roadmap. However, there is little or not at all synergy between these sectors, something that PDFORRA considers essential.

To continue, the development of the European defence industry is aiming at covering the most urgent needs and support to Ukraine. However, innovation and enhancement of the European Defence Industrial and Technological Base is also essential. Given the development of new technologies in the military domain, the association supports that more exercises should take place under a European framework, as we have already seen with the EU RDC and PESCO. Regarding the EU RDC, PDFORRA supports that the force would gradually grow in size and could be used inside the EU for crisis management or emergency situations. The association also believes that the Member States would be willing to commit more personnel to the EU RDC.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

Overall, it views the creation and development of the force as a positive development, if managed appropriately.

On the matter of a stronger implementation of Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the mutual assistance clause, the association has not taken a formal position at this stage. On other recent developments, as the first-ever European Defence Commissioner and SEDE becoming a fully-fledged Committee, the association has a positive view. On the other hand, despite the various policy developments over the past decade from the EU Global Strategy to the White Paper, PDFORRA believes that Member States did not react on time, and their responses are slow and fragmented.

PFEARFU, Greece

PFEARFU supports that EDU should focus on essential elements as:

- A common strategic/military culture among EU Member States and partner countries that can also lead to a change in military mentality to adapt in new generations' perspectives.
- Joint defence industry procurement programs (e.g., as announced in the ReArm EU plan).
- Frequent joint live military exercises (e.g., MILEX-23, MILEX-24 under the EU RDC); Based on the 2016 European Parliament Resolution on the “European Defence Union”, Member States should recognise the right of military personnel to form and join professional associations or trade unions and involve them in a regular social dialogue with the authorities, while also taking concrete steps towards the harmonisation and standardisation of the European Armed Forces.
- Building up the resilience and preparedness of the EU, an EDU should also focus on strong reserve forces and a kind of Finish model of total defence.

PFEARFU believes that the White Paper’s omission of recruitment and retention is a serious oversight, especially given the crisis in Greece. The association quotes EUROMIL’s President, Emmanuel Jacob, when he [called](#) the White Paper a missed opportunity. While armaments are essential, the future of the Armed Forces depends on addressing issues like low salaries, poor working conditions, and lack of career incentives. **In Greece, resignation rates are alarmingly high, with thousands leaving the military and many avoiding enlistment altogether. Without improving conditions for personnel, we cannot ensure a strong and sustainable defence force.**

On what can be done to address such challenges, PFEARFU believes that enhancing the European debate on recruitment and retention in the context of EDU requires firm joint actions. PFEARFU argues that member associations need to push at the national level, while EUROMIL should lead efforts at the European level to secure political support.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

Policymakers must understand that the human aspect comes first, fair salaries, better working conditions, and career opportunities are key to attracting and keeping military personnel. Political will is essential to tackle these issues, and trade unions play a crucial role in building support and making recruitment and retention a priority. Without focusing on the human dimension, it will be impossible to create a strong and sustainable future for the Armed Forces.

To the public opinion in Greece, many of the recent EU developments in defence and social policy, such as the White Paper, ReArm, and the various roadmaps, are often perceived as empty boxes, lacking tangible actions and meaningful decisions. Greater integration between defence and social policies is undoubtedly needed to bridge the gap between political discussions and real progress. By aligning defence and social policies, the EU can ensure that its strategies are not only comprehensive but also impactful, delivering results that resonate with both citizens and Member States.

Moreover, the association perceives positively military exercises under EU frameworks, as PESCO and the EU RDC. On the latter, PFEARFU believes that the force should gradually grow in size and be used inside the EU for crisis management and emergency situations. It also believes that Member States would likely commit more personnel to the EU RDC if the EU can effectively convince them of its importance and provide clear support for the initiative. Without this effort, the EU RDC risks becoming another “empty box,” much like the EU Battlegroups, which failed due to a lack of political will and practical implementation. Strong political commitment is essential to ensure Member States fully engage with and contribute to this initiative.

To elaborate more, PFEARFU gives its full support to the development of the EU RDC; for the majority of Hellenic military personnel, every joint European initiative is positive and well-accepted. Greece has always faced multiple threats, making the need for reliable partners crucial. The EU RDC represents an opportunity to strengthen collective security and cooperation, which aligns with Greece’s longstanding commitment to EU. Closer EU-NATO cooperation should also be enhanced in areas as military mobility, hybrid threats, emerging and disruptive technologies, and climate security and defence. PFEARFU also views positively the debate around the EU’s mutual assistance clause, and welcomed the first ever EU Defence Commissioner and the development of SEDE to fully fledged committee.

According to PFEARFU, recent EU defence developments, while numerous, are perceived as slow, fragmented, and lacking in practical focus. Despite the abundance of initiatives and discussions, meaningful progress remains limited without concrete action and genuine political will from both the EU and its Member States. **Military personnel and citizens are increasingly demanding real solutions over rhetoric.**

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

Reflecting a Greek perspective, PFEARFU expresses concern over global instability and growing doubts about NATO's reliability, emphasizing the urgent need for the EU to evolve into a credible geopolitical actor. This requires treaty reform, more efficient decision-making, and the establishment of a common and independent European army, without which the Union risks losing relevance amid rising external threats.

RACO Ireland

For RACO, EDU should include the following elements:

- Joint defence industry procurement programs (e.g., as announced in the ReArm EU plan).
- Based on the 2016 European Parliament Resolution on the "European Defence Union", Member States should recognise the right of military personnel to form and join professional associations or trade unions and involve them in a regular social dialogue with the authorities, while also taking concrete steps towards the harmonisation and standardisation of the European Armed Forces.

The White Paper fails to address the critical issues of recruitment and retention within the Armed Forces, despite these concerns being emphasized various stakeholders. From a neutral country's perspective, such as Ireland, the difficulty in reaching a unified and comprehensive position on security and defence within the EU is evident, given that these matters remain primarily national competencies. The complexities of generating, training, equipping, funding, and deploying troops for combat operations, whether for national interests or EU objectives, make it challenging to form a cohesive European stance. For RACO, the focus remains on positive engagement with the Government, recognizing that achieving a unified European perspective in the White Paper was difficult, even amidst growing geopolitical risks and existential threats.

While improving the working conditions of military personnel is a priority, it is equally important to advocate for peace in these uncertain times.

RACO also underlines that in Ireland, traditionally military personnel of all ranks remain one of the lowest paid cohorts when compared to other public sector workers. This is due to a low value being placed on military work or skills by Governments or the general public (despite modern advances in warfare), coupled with long working hours (and time away from home) resulting in low rates of hourly pay. Hence, the EU should recognise and value military personnel, the guarantor of national sovereignty and international peace. **In doing so citizens will want to join and stay in the military rather than opting for better paid but similar work in industry or in other areas of the public sector.** On the question regarding creating more synergies between the EU policies that focus on defence and other focusing on social affairs, RACO states that broadening these synergies across the range of sectoral policies could have a positive impact, but it is the lack of priority or even agreement on defence matters which prevents strategic and integrated policies making an impact. Hence if defence gets greater focus should bring greater integration.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

RACO views the prospect of more EU joint exercises positively, but there are concerns about whether Member States would be willing to commit additional military personnel to the EU RDC, despite the initiative's potential to benefit personnel.

EU-NATO collaboration should also enhance in the following areas: military mobility, hybrid threats, cybersecurity, emerging and disruptive technologies, and climate security and defence. The wider scope of article 42.7 TEU, on mutual assistance clause is not viewed positively by RACO. On the other hand, the association welcomes the first ever European Defence Commissioner and the development of SEDE into a fully-fledged Committee. Lastly, given the complex geopolitical environment, RACO believes that the various EU defence initiatives come just in time.

SAMO, Sweden

According to SAMO building a European Defence Union (EDU) should follow elements as:

- A common strategic/military culture among EU Member States and partner countries that can also lead to a change in military mentality to adapt in new generations' perspectives.
- Based on the 2016 European Parliament Resolution on the “European Defence Union”, Member States should recognise the right of military personnel to form and join professional associations or trade unions and involve them in a regular social dialogue with the authorities, while also taking concrete steps towards the harmonisation and standardisation of the European Armed Forces.
- Building up the resilience and preparedness of the EU, an EDU should also focus on strong reserve forces and a kind of Finish model of total defence.

While the White Paper presents a strategic step forward, it notably omits critical issues such as recruitment and retention in the Armed Forces. This exclusion poses a significant risk to the sustainability and operational readiness of European Armed Forces. SAMO supports that retaining skilled personnel requires competitive salaries, dignified working conditions, and recognition of the uniquely demanding nature of military service. Moreover, military personnel should be granted the right to organize in trade unions, and employment conditions should align with those of the broader labour market. Moreover, SAMO underlines that greater integration of social considerations into defence policy is not only desirable but essential for the long-term success of EDU.

SAMO also welcomes more joint exercises under a European but stresses that they should ideally be coordinated through NATO structures. The EU RDC, currently limited to external missions, raises questions about future use within the EU for crisis management. However, SAMO is sceptic about Member States' willingness to commit additional personnel, and the organisation expresses concern about the potential negative impact on personnel, particularly in terms of stress and deployment strain.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

Enhanced EU-NATO cooperation is highly supported by SAMO, especially in areas such as military mobility, hybrid threats, cyber security, and emerging technologies. While proposals for a broader application of Article 42.7 TEU, the mutual assistance clause, are debated, SAMO does not support a wider scope. On the other hand, the establishment of a European Defence Commissioner and the evolution of SEDE into a full parliamentary committee are welcomed as positive institutional developments.

Overall, while the EU and the Member States have intensified their defence ambitions, progress remains fragmented and at times misaligned with the most pressing needs. **SAMO highlights that moving forward, a balanced approach that integrates social policy, prioritizes human factors, and fosters coherent EU-NATO collaboration will be vital to achieving a robust and resilient European defence posture.**

SOVCG, Montenegro

As a partner country, Montenegro views positively the potential development of EDU and SOVCG believes it should be built on the following elements:

- A common strategic/military culture among EU Member States and partner countries that can also lead to a change in military mentality to adapt in new generations' perspectives.
- Joint defence industry procurement programs (e.g., as announced in the ReArm EU plan); Frequent joint live military exercises (e.g., MILEX-23, MILEX-24 under the EU RDC).
- Based on the 2016 European Parliament Resolution on the “European Defence Union”, Member States should recognise the right of military personnel to form and join professional associations or trade unions and involve them in a regular social dialogue with the authorities, while also taking concrete steps towards the harmonisation and standardisation of the European Armed Forces.
- Building up the resilience and preparedness of the EU, an EDU should also focus on strong reserve forces and a kind of Finish model of total defence.

On the fact that the White Paper failed to include considerations for the challenges faced by military personnel, as low recruitment and retention rates, SOVCG stresses that it **reflects a gap in understanding the need for harmonizing the working conditions across EU Armed Forces.** According to SOVCG, by doing so the Armed Forces would become more cohesive and capable, which in turn would enhance the EU's capacities and its relationships with international partners. The associations also stresses that a robust and unified EU Army is crucial for the Union's future security and global standing.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

To enhance the European debate on recruitment and retention within the context of EDU, it is crucial to raise awareness through articles, roundtable discussions, and the effective use of digital platforms, including social media. Disregarding these issues could lead to a decline in the quality of work within the defence sector. Following the same logic, SOVCG supports greater synergies between EU defence policies and social ones.

Moreover, SOVCG supports common EU exercises, and believes in the development of the EU RDC, as well as on the willingness of the Member States to commit more personnel. Such initiatives bring personnel closer together and create a common posture. Cooperation between the EU and NATO should also be intensified in areas as military mobility, hybrid threats, emerging and disruptive technologies, and climate security and defence.

SOVCG also supports a wider scope and stronger implementation of the EU's mutual assistance clause, and welcomes the first ever EU Defence Commissioner and the development of SEDE into a fully-fledged Committee. As a non-EU Member SOVCG **strongly advocates for the increased channels of cooperation between the EU and its partner countries in CSDP.** Lastly, the association believes that EU defence developments remain slow, fragmented and often not focusing on what is truly needed.

CONCLUSION

This survey aimed to capture and amplify the perspectives of military associations and trade unions on European defence. The findings show that while most EU defence initiatives are positively received, there is a clear call for greater efforts to reduce fragmentation, improve interoperability, strengthen cross-sectoral synergies, and place greater focus on military personnel as key enablers of these initiatives. Overall, the results underscore a shared commitment to a more coherent and resilient European defence architecture. As the EU continues to develop its defence initiatives, incorporating the insights of those on the ground will be essential to ensuring both operational effectiveness and long-term resilience. Continued dialogue and engagement with key stakeholders, including military associations and trade unions, will be vital in shaping a defence policy that is not only ambitious but also inclusive, sustainable, and fit for the future.



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