

# EUROMIL Wednesday Q&A series

## 3 Questions on European Defence



**Hannah NEUMANN**

*Member of the European Parliament*

*Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance*

**Developing European defence has never been more urgent or higher on the political agenda. President von der Leyen has made the pursuit of a European Defence Union a priority for her second term. What, in your view, are the main barriers slowing down deeper defence cooperation?**

Right now, everybody in the member states pays lip service to European sovereignty, but when it comes to concrete decisions, national interests still come first. European defence will only work if we do it together - and if member states are willing to eventually transfer new competencies to the European level.

Germany is a prime example. The new chancellor Friedrich Merz never misses a chance to talk the European talk, but doesn't want to walk the European walk — for instance, when he sets out to turn the Bundeswehr into the strongest conventional army in Europe. That's not integration, that's competition, and we can't afford it. The Commission's recent White Paper on Defence was an opportunity to offer a long-term roadmap for joint defence, but it pulled its punches where it matters most. It avoids addressing national preferences and still assumes that we can continue to work with the U.S. as a reliable partner.

SAFE offers another cautionary tale. The Commission presented a solid proposal centred around joint procurement. Then, the Council spent two months turning it upside down. They stripped the Commission of decision-making power, scrapped bi-annual reporting, made unilateral procurement eligible under the instrument, and undermined the buy-European principle that's supposed to strengthen our own industry. The message was loud and clear: give us the money and leave us alone.

We don't lack instruments or ideas. No matter how much money we throw at the problem, it's only going to go away if we fundamentally change the structures - **towards truly European ones**. Let's talk about how we best spend our money together - before we engage in a competitive race over who spends most.



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#### How to collectively tackle such challenges?

By leveraging the European benefits: If we procure together, prices go down. If we distribute raw materials strategically, we will be able to produce what we need most. If we distribute equipment based on security needs and not on national egoisms, we will all be safer.

Not all 27 may join in from day one. That moment may never come. But those who understand that the only way to get real European sovereignty, and save a ton of money in the process, is to do it together, need to lead by example. If ten countries are ready to go ahead with real cooperation—on planning, procurement, industry—then let's go. **PESCO, EDA, we have plenty of frameworks and institutions that can already lead the way. With time, and especially if larger member states are involved, this can grow into something truly European.**

Germany, with its new special fund, could take up such a leading role — by using that money to lift up its European partners and thinking about Germany's contribution to joint European defence, rather than paying extra and driving up prices for everyone.

**With the publication of the White Paper on Defence Readiness 2030 and the EU's increased focus on preparedness since the publication of the Preparedness Union Strategy, how do you see the European Parliament's role evolving in shaping and overseeing EU defence policy, especially now that SEDE has become a fully-fledged committee?**

SEDE is finally a fully-fledged committee — and that's a good step — but, so far, we only have one legislative file. On SAFE, Parliament was sidelined completely. The White Paper doesn't give us any role either, and the Preparedness Strategy clearly states that it's not going to touch any national competencies. Without actual legislation that involves parliament, not much is going to change.

No one is going to give parliament more powers - if we don't fight for them ourselves. And the past years have clearly shown: **For European Defence, we need a European debate about defence. And parliament is the place to lead that debate.** And we need to be involved beyond initial negotiations. One info session per year isn't enough. Parliament needs to have a say throughout the policy implementation — for instance, through a clear monitoring and oversight role or by making sure that the common key capability gaps are actually prioritised over national pet projects.

National parliaments decide over national defence investments. But who decides over and checks European defence investments, especially those channelled through funds and off-budget facilities?



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Here we need to really step up our game. For sure, these billions can no longer be distributed behind closed doors in the Council or the Commission, as we have seen with the European Peace Facility.

But it would be too easy to point fingers only at the Council and the Commission. Too many political groups in parliament act more nationalistic than the Council itself. If we have MEPs working to undermine parliamentary participation at every opportunity, we have a problem. It is our job to make Europeans and our allies in Ukraine as safe as possible. And we can only do this if we combine the fiscal power, human resources, diplomatic skills and military and industrial capabilities of our 500 million strong Europe.