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EUROPE: WHAT DEFENCE?

ARCHIVIO DISARMO RESEARCH REPORT

ON THE INITIATIVE
OF *MARCO TARQUINIO*
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May 2026

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Research Report

Rome, April 2026
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Europe: what defence?

Acronyms

AI = Artificial Intelligence
AICS = Armored Infantry Combat Systems
ASAP = Act in Support of Ammunition Production
CCW = Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons
CFSP = Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP = Common Security and Defence Policy
DEF = Defending European Facility
DIB = Defence Industrial Base
ECPC = European Civil Peace Corps
EDA = European Defence Agency
EDAP = European Defence Action Plan
EDC = European Defence Community
EDF = European Defence Fund
EDIDP = European Defence Industrial Development Programme
EDIP = European Defence Industry Programme
EDIRPA = European Defence Industry Reinforcement through Common Procurement Act
EDIS = European Defence Industrial Strategy
EDTIB = European Defence Technological and Industrial Base
EEAS = Europe External Action Service
EIB = European Investment Banck
EPF = European Peace Facility
ESS = European Security Strategy
EUCCS = European Critical Communication System
EUGS = European Union Global Strategy
FCAS = Future Combat Air System
GCAP = Global Combat Air Programme
GDP = Gross Domestic Product
IRIS = Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite
LAWS = Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems
LRMV = Leonardo Rheinmetall Military Vehicles
MBT = Main Battle Tank
NPT = Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
PADR = Preparatory Action on Defence Research
R&D = Research and Development
SADM = Small Anti Drone Missile
SAFE = Security Action for Europe

SME = Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TEU = Treaty on European Union
TPNW = Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
WEU = Western European Union
WU = Western Union

Introduction

In an international context marked by the highest level of turbulence recorded since the end of the Second World War, the European Union (EU) can no longer avoid setting itself the objective of a common defence. While there is broad agreement, at least in principle, on the urgency of addressing this issue, the existing divergences concern *how* the function of defending our society should be carried out. That is, if a future European defence should (as conservatives maintain) be designed along the lines of the most traditional *realpolitik*. Alternatively, the EU – by reconnecting with its relatively brief yet significant history of innovation and integration – may prove capable of bringing into the challenging strategic arena those values of peace, justice, and security that it has professed, and to a non-negligible extent realised, within its own borders.

In this regard, the following question can no longer be postponed: is it possible to envisage a European security policy, and thus the implementation of its corresponding defence instrument, that is not founded solely upon the force of arms?

What is not at issue here is the right to defend oneself against aggression, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in virtually all the constitutions of European countries, beginning with the Italian one. The question concerns the possibility of overcoming the exclusivity of the logic and practice of arms, by incorporating and developing, in the analysis of strategic situations and in the adoption of measures to address them, the potential of innovative approaches and instruments.

Regarding the commitment to diplomatic solutions for conflicts and to the containment of aggressive policies, it should be emphasised that disarmament has often been subject to a caricatured interpretation. Pacifism and nonviolence do not imply surrender in the face of an aggressor; rather, they entail the prevention of conflict through dialogue, diplomacy, and agreed disarmament measures. Since this alone may not suffice, and in certain conflict situations does not suffice, both armed and unarmed forms of resistance exist.

This Report devotes three chapters to a critical examination of defence as traditionally understood and of its evolution in parallel with European integration in the post-war period, as well as to the economic and financial aspects associated with it and the attitudes that such a development inspires among Europeans. The fourth chapter, by contrast, analyses an alternative concept of common defence, which both integrates and modifies the traditional one, insofar as it overcomes not only the national and intergovernmental vision of the Union, but also the absolutisation of military power that is currently imposed as the sole paradigm to be followed[1].

The analyses conducted and the proposals formulated or implied in this Report are grounded in the principles of Game Theory (Axelrod, 1984), whose indispensable condition is *reciprocity* in the moves made by us and by the adversary. Reciprocity, in turn, admits only one partial exception: the willingness to take the *first* step, in the expectation that the other will take the *second*.

Translated into the current rush to rearm, which is increasingly dominating the thinking of an increasing number of political leaders, when we speak of arms control or peace, we are not referring to symbolic unilateral acts that Europe should undertake blindly; rather, we are referring to the reactivation of forums for dialogue among countries divided by differences and conflicts. These may be 'old' forums to be revitalised, such as the United Nations (with a reformed Security Council) or the OSCE, but they could also be entirely new forums to be created *ex novo* – clearly not on the basis of unilateral or privately driven initiatives (such as Trump's proposed 'Board of Peace' for Gaza), but within a multilateral framework and in accordance with international law. Within these forums, the EU should speak to both allies and adversaries, rather than allowing others to speak about us and about conflicts for which we are the first to pay the price, moreover in our absence (as occurred during the four years of war in Ukraine).

At present, virtually no one advocates passivity or acquiescence in the face of increasingly virulent international crises. The inspiration behind this Report is not an invitation for European governance – and in particular for the European Parliament, as its most accountable democratically elected body – to remain defenceless. Nor is it an invitation to abandon the idea of a European defence, to yield to adverse circumstances, or to capitulate in the face of military threats. Indeed, there are cases in which threats are real, not merely mechanical projections of *worst-case* scenarios in strategic thinking, nor simple propaganda by major powers seeking to preserve, expand, and arbitrarily manage their own power.

Those who criticise pacifism often lack an accurate understanding of it. They are unfamiliar with both the practice and, even more so, the theory of informed pacifism and pragmatic nonviolence. Alongside the historical achievements and personal testimonies of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela, there exists a tradition of thought and a body of substantive proposals within a political perspective developed over the past fifty years, ranging from the Norwegian social

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[1] For a discussion of traditional military defence approached from a federalist perspective, see the proposal for a '28th European Army', introduced by German social democracy (SPD-Bundestagsfraktion, AG Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik, 2020). Regarding a possible institutional framework, see the proposal to revive the European Defence Community (EDC) put forward by Fabbrini (2026).

scientist Johan Galtung (1983) to the Italian Member of the European Parliament Alexander Langer (1994), and including the American diplomat Joseph Montville (Davidson and Montville, 1981).

According to this tradition of theory and practice of a realistic nonviolence, governments (still national today, and tomorrow hopefully representing a Europe united by a federal bond) have the right and duty to protect society, but by seeking to enhance not its capacity for threat, but rather what Galtung terms its ‘level of invulnerability’. As shown in Chapter 4, this entails working towards the implementation of the project of *transarmament* – that is, a fair and rational redistribution of a ‘defensive’ defence (Galtung, 1984) – with the aim of safeguarding and protecting both one’s own country and Europe as a whole. Within *transarmament*, traditional military defence and institutional diplomacy are complemented by the instruments of social deterrence along two lines: internally, the training of citizens in nonviolent resistance; externally, grassroots diplomacy in the management of crises. Thus, ‘two arms’: a military arm and a civilian arm (Tarquinio, 2025), for as long as – reasonably – it will remain necessary to defend peace and security.

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Abstract Chapter 1

Chapter 1 analyses the evolution of the European Union's security and defence policy, highlighting a trajectory characterised by both significant progress and persistent structural limitations. From its origins in the post-war period to the more recent developments outlined in the Global Strategy (2016) and the Strategic Compass (2022), a latent tension emerges between the EU's aspiration for strategic autonomy and the reluctance of Member States to undertake the transfers of sovereignty required to move towards a genuine framework of common European defence. The Maastricht (1992), Amsterdam (1997), and Lisbon (2007) treaties strengthened the legal and institutional framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), without, however, overcoming the Union's structural constraints, including dependence on NATO, strongly intergovernmental governance, and industrial fragmentation.

In recent years, the EU has launched several initiatives aimed at strengthening the Defence Industrial Base and promoting joint investment. Nevertheless, the approach underpinning the ReArm Europe/Readiness 2030 plan remains largely traditional, insofar as only a limited portion supports common industrial projects, while most initiatives undertaken by Member States continue to follow an intergovernmental logic: defence strategies remain nationally defined, expenditure decisions are taken on a state-by-state basis, and industrial policy continues to prioritise national 'champions' of production. Although the proposals advanced in the Niinistö, Letta, and Draghi reports emphasise the need to integrate the military, civilian, industrial, and technological dimensions, ultimately moving towards a single European defence market, these recommendations have not yet been translated into operational policies. Significant challenges therefore persist, including industrial fragmentation, limited cooperation in procurement, dependence on external suppliers, and insufficient common investment. These issues are particularly critical in a context marked by the economic and financial pressures generated by ongoing conflicts.

1. Evolution and prospects of European defence policy

1.1. The origins of common European defence

The Common Security and Defence Policy constitute the institutional and regulatory framework through which the European Union seeks to develop an autonomous role in the fields of security and defence. Nevertheless, despite more than seventy years of progressive institutionalisation of the European project, common defence remains characterised by unresolved tensions, including the capacity for coordination among Member States (which has increased over time) and the capacity for unified decision-making (which remains limited).

This chapter reconstructs the principal legal and political milestones that, beginning with the Maastricht Treaty, gave rise to the current configuration of the Common Security and Defence Policy, culminating in the adoption in 2022 of the so-called 'Strategic Compass'[1] (EEAS, 2022). The historical reconstruction of the key phases of European defence is intended to illustrate how – despite the evolution of European instruments and the growing political awareness of the EU – the notion of strategic and military autonomy remains, to this day, a debated and highly controversial concept.

The project of a common European defence dates to the post-war period when, with the Treaty of Brussels of 1948, the Western Union (WU) was established[2]. In 1954, following the collapse of the proposed European Defence Community (EDC) due to opposition from the French Parliament, the WU evolved into the Western European Union (WEU)[3]. The latter represented the first attempt to create an intergovernmental organisation aimed at promoting European cooperation in the fields of security, defence, foreign policy, and arms control (DAE, 2018). Despite the marginal role later assumed by the WEU following the institutional development of the European Union, its function was subsequently revived as an embryonic framework for a common European defence policy.

1.2. The Maastricht Treaty and the development of the CFSP

With the end of the Cold War, the emergence of the first conflicts in the former Soviet sphere of influence and, above all, the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia,

[1] For an overview, see Appendix: *Chronology of Common European Defence* (see below, p. 125).
[2] Composed of Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.
[3] In addition to the five members of the WU, the WEU also included Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain.

the idea of a common European response to security crises returned to the forefront.

The Treaty on European Union (TEU, also known as the Maastricht Treaty) of 1992 established the European Union (EU), defining its three political pillars: 1) the European Communities; 2) the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP); and 3) cooperation among EU governments in the fields of justice and internal affairs[4]. Among the most important innovations introduced by the TEU was the creation of the foundations for economic and monetary union, the adoption of the euro as a single currency, and the introduction of the concept of European citizenship (EUR-Lex, 2018).

The TEU represented a historic turning point: for the first time, security and defence were recognised as areas of EU action. With specific reference to the CFSP, it aims to safeguard the Union's common values, fundamental interests and independence; to strengthen its security; to preserve peace in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter; to promote international cooperation; to develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law; and to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms (EUR-Lex, 2018).

In the field of defence, the TEU provides for a process comprising 'the framing of a [...] policy, which might in time lead to a common defence'. In this framework, the TEU entrusted the Western European Union (WEU) with the task of 'elaborate and implement decisions and actions of the [EU] which have defence implications'. At the same time, efforts to strengthen the WEU focused on the possible creation of European military units and the establishment of a European armament's agency (Official Journal of the European Union, 1992).

The Declaration on the WEU, annexed to the TEU, reaffirmed the role of the WEU as a means of strengthening the European pillar of NATO. The relationship between the two organisations was characterised by subordination: coordination among WEU Member States was aimed at 'introducing joint positions' within the Atlantic Alliance, which remained the preferred forum for consultation on security and defence matters (Official Journal of the European Union, 1992).

The confederal nature of the EU and the reliance on unanimity hampered the effectiveness of the European defence project, rendering the CFSP an uncertain instrument lacking operational autonomy. Intergovernmental governance and dependence on NATO prevented the creation of a unified command structure and common armed forces, keeping European defence within a largely programmatic

[4] The third pillar encompassed activities related to public order and security. It established rules and controls governing the EU's external borders, as well as procedures and instruments for combating terrorism, organised crime, drug trafficking, and international fraud. It also coordinated judicial cooperation in criminal and civil matters, established the European Police Office (Europol), monitored illegal immigration, and developed a common asylum policy (EUR-Lex, 2018).

dimension. Despite these limitations, the TEU laid the legal and political foundations for the development of European defence, initiating the debate on the need for shared strategic sovereignty.

1.3. From CFSP to CSDP: the Maastricht treaty reforms

Following the shortcomings that emerged under the TEU, the EU embarked on a reform process aimed at strengthening the instruments of defence and security policy. The first step was the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997, which expanded the operational scope of the emerging European defence framework through the introduction of the so-called ‘Petersberg tasks’[5] and provided for the possibility of making military units available to the WEU, the EU, and NATO by Member States (Di Camillo *et al.*, 2012). These instruments represented an initial attempt to build a European intervention capability, albeit still on a voluntary basis rather than within a structured common defence framework.

A decisive turning point for European defence occurred in 1998 with the Franco-British summit in Saint-Malo, where France and the United Kingdom agreed on the need for the EU to be able to act ‘with credible military forces’ and to possess strategic planning tools and intelligence capabilities, particularly ‘in cases where NATO as a whole is not engaged’. Moreover, the summit established that the EU should be supported by a strong and competitive European defence industry (FCOUK, 2008).

In parallel with the attempt to equip the EU with a Constitution (which ultimately failed in 2005), the concept of a European Armaments and Military Research Agency was introduced, with the task of coordinating Member States’ efforts in procurement, research, development, and production in the field of defence. In 2004, the European Defence Agency (EDA) was established, with responsibilities including the development of military capabilities, the promotion of industrial cooperation, and the enhancement of the competitiveness of the European defence equipment market. The EDA also plays a key role in supporting research, technological innovation, and the development of a European Defence Industrial Base (Markowski and Wylie, 2007).

In 2006, the EDA published its long-term ‘Vision’ for European defence capabilities. In this document, the Agency emphasised the need to adapt to new warfare paradigms. According to the ‘Vision’, the traditional military approach

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[5] Under the designation ‘Petersberg tasks’, the WEU Member States declared their willingness to make available military units for: humanitarian and evacuation missions; conflict prevention and peacekeeping missions; combat force missions for crisis management, including peace-making operations; joint actions in the field of disarmament; military advisory and assistance missions; and post-conflict stabilisation operations (EUR-Lex, 2025).

should be replaced by a holistic model in which the use of force is integrated with political and informational instruments and adapted to hybrid and unpredictable threats[6]. Key features of future European armed forces include synergy, operational agility, capability selectivity, and sustainability, particularly in logistical terms. The document also underlined the urgency of a common industrial policy to counter the sector's decline by promoting shared investment and advanced technologies[7] (EDA, 2006).

The final stage of the TEU reform process is represented by the Lisbon Treaty of 2009, which streamlined the governance of European defence and led to the emergence of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The Treaty introduced two key clauses: the solidarity clause, which provides for joint EU action in the event of a terrorist attack or disaster in a Member State; and the mutual assistance clause, which obliges Member States to assist one another in the event of armed aggression, thereby invoking the principle of collective defence. In addition, the Treaty strengthened European integration through two instruments: enhanced cooperation, allowing groups of Member States to move forward more rapidly in specific policy areas, and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), aimed at strengthening the military capabilities of those Member States meeting higher defence criteria (Di Camillo *et al.*, 2012).

Overall, the TEU reforms contributed to building a more articulated and autonomous European defence structure, shifting the emphasis from purely intergovernmental coordination towards a more advanced integration framework. However, these advances have not yet resulted in a fully-fledged common EU defence capability, partly due to Member States' reluctance to cede sovereignty in this field, and partly due to the EU's continued political and strategic dependence on NATO and the United States. While strengthening Europe's operational and technological potential, the CSDP remains conditioned by the willingness and effective coordination capacity of Member States, factors that both enable and constrain the development of an autonomous common defence.

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[6] In this context, the 'Vision' emphasises that 'increasingly, defence will need to draw from the broadening flood of civil technological progress', integrating it into its own strategies and operational capabilities, namely dual-use technologies (EDA, 2006).

[7] In this regard, it is worth highlighting the adoption of the so-called 'Defence Package' (2007) by the European Commission. This initiative aimed to enhance the competitiveness of the defence industrial sector by limiting the applicability of Article 296 of the EC Treaty (which provided an exemption from internal market rules for cases involving essential national security interests), while introducing an alternative regulatory framework that considers the specificities of the defence sector. The initiative comprised two proposals: the first concerned public procurement (goods and services) and the simplification of intra-Community transfers of military equipment and materiel; the second focused on strengthening market competitiveness and the defence industry (Di Camillo and Gasparini, 2007).

1.4. From the EU Global Strategy to the Strategic Compass: contemporary developments

With the Lisbon Treaty, the EU reformed the institutional framework of the CSDP. The role of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy was strengthened, as it combined the functions of Chair of the Foreign Affairs Council and Vice-President of the European Commission, becoming the operational cornerstone of the CSDP. In this new institutional context, in 2016 High Representative *Federica Mogherini* presented the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS). This initiative coincided with the onset of a critical phase for international relations and for the EU. The Russian annexation of Crimea, the ongoing civil war in Syria, and the announcement of Brexit all highlighted the need for a more ambitious and coherent approach to European defence (Council of the European Union, 2025).

The EUGS highlights the pressure exerted by emerging risks – terrorism, hybrid threats, economic instability, climate change, and energy insecurity – on European stability. Accordingly, an ‘appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy’ is deemed essential to enable the EU to promote peace within and beyond its borders. In this framework, the EUGS stresses the need to strengthen cooperation in defence, cybersecurity, counterterrorism, and energy security, in close coordination with NATO. According to the Strategy, European defence must be based on a strong and competitive industrial base, which is a key condition for ensuring operational and decision-making autonomy (EEAS, 2016).

The EUGS reaffirms that defence remains a matter of national sovereignty but calls on Member States to cooperate ‘as the norm’. Intelligence sharing, interoperability, and coordination of industrial and research efforts are essential to address strategic gaps. It also proposes the introduction of an annual review process of national defence expenditure plans, coordinated at EU level in dialogue with NATO, to foster convergence and strategic coherence (EEAS, 2016).

In this context, the EDA plays a central role as a link between Member States and the European Commission, supporting the integration of military capabilities and promoting collective progress through periodic assessments. The EUGS further emphasises that a competitive European defence industrial base must include the active participation of SMEs, leveraging technological innovation and EU budgetary resources. This is considered essential not only for economic growth, but above all for the EU’s strategic autonomy and the credibility of the CSDP (EEAS, 2016).

These developments underpin the formulation of the so-called ‘Strategic Compass’, adopted by the Council of the European Union in 2022. Unlike the EUGS, the Compass stems from an intergovernmental process led by Member States. It was adopted in a context marked by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, described as ‘a tectonic shift in European history', which reinforced the urgency of defining a unified and concrete vision for European defence policy over the next 5-10 years (Council of the European Union, 2022).

The Strategic Compass is structured around four pillars:

1. 'Act', which sets the objective of creating by 2025 an EU rapid deployment capacity of at least 5,000 troops across the three conventional domains (air, land, and sea). It is based on the principle of a 'single set of forces' and on the readiness of European armed forces;
2. 'Secure', aimed at strengthening the EU's resilience against emerging threats, particularly in the cyber and space domains, promoting safe and sustainable use of these domains for citizens, businesses, and institutions;
3. 'Invest', which stresses the need for a substantial and coordinated increase in defence spending, with a significant share allocated to addressing critical capability gaps. This approach seeks to promote economies of scale, interoperability, and the avoidance of duplication, making use of existing instruments such as the European Defence Fund[8];
4. 'Partner', which reaffirms the importance of cooperation with allies and international organisations sharing common values and priorities, including the United States, the United Kingdom, the United Nations, NATO, the OSCE, Japan, and the African Union, thereby strengthening the multilateral dimension of European defence (Council of the European Union, 2022).

The Compass strongly emphasises the need for an innovative, resilient, and competitive defence and technological industrial base, seen as essential for strengthening European defence capabilities and supporting sustainable economic recovery. Investment in dual-use technologies, the reduction of fragmentation, and the integration of supply chains are identified as strategic tools to address global competition and consolidate EU autonomy (Council of the European Union, 2022).

In conclusion, the evolution of European defence from Maastricht to the Strategic Compass reveals a slow but steady consolidation of the EU's institutional, operational, and industrial capabilities. Despite persistent obstacles related to national sovereignty and dependence on NATO, the Union shows an increasing willingness to assume a more autonomous and credible role in global security.

[8] The Strategic Compass reiterates that 'an innovative, competitive and resilient European Defence Technological and Industrial Base, which guarantees security of supply and cutting-edge technologies is more important than ever and key for employment, trade, investment, security and research in the EU. The European defence sector can also contribute to growth and the sustainable economic recovery following the pandemic. We have to ensure that it can fully and rapidly benefit from civil innovation cycles and remove existing obstacles. We will also invest in dual-use technologies' (Council of the European Union, 2022).

However, the translation of political commitments into concrete implementation remains a crucial challenge.

1.5. Institutional and financial developments in European defence (2020-2022)

In the period 2020-2022, the EU underwent a phase of redefinition of its role in the field of defence. This process was accelerated by the deterioration of the international context, particularly the Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. The debate progressively shifted from a cooperative and voluntary logic among Member States towards one of greater EU autonomy, through the creation of financial and industrial instruments aimed at strengthening military readiness and resilience.

Regulation (EU) 2021/697, which established the European Defence Fund (EDF), marked a turning point in a political process that had begun with the EUGS (2016). In his 2016 State of the Union Address, then-President of the European Commission *Jean-Claude Juncker* first proposed the establishment of a European fund dedicated to research and development of European defence capabilities (European Commission, 2016). This proposal was subsequently formalised in the European Defence Action Plan (EDAP). The EDAP provides for 'the joint acquisition, development and retentions by Member States of the full-spectrum of land, air, space and maritime capabilities', so that 'the European defence industrial base is able to meet Europe's current and future security needs' (EUR-Lex, 2016). The EDAP is structured around three complementary pillars: 1) 'launching a European Defence Fund'; 2) 'fostering investments in defence supply chains'; and 3) 'reinforcing the single market for defence' (EUR-Lex, 2016).

Building on the EDAP guidelines, the EU launched an initial phase of financial instruments dedicated to defence. For the 2017-2020 period, 'two main support programmes have been set up using funds already available in the EU budget' (Senato della Repubblica, 2020, p.39). The first was the Preparatory Action on Defence Research (PADR), with a financial envelope of EUR 90 million; the second was the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP), with a budget of EUR 500 million, aimed at the 'development [of defence industrial] projects' (Senato della Repubblica, 2020, pp. 39-40).

In this context, the European Commission proposed for the 2021–2027 period the creation of 'a more structured instrument with greater resources [in the form of] a European Defence Fund, financed under the new Multiannual Financial Framework' (Senato della Repubblica, 2020, pp. 39-40).

This led to the adoption of Regulation (EU) 2021/697, which formally established the EDF, marking the definitive shift towards a more structured model of common European defence (Official Journal of the European Union, 2021b).

Under Regulation 2021/697, a share of the EU budget was allocated to research and development in common military technologies, with the aim of reducing industrial fragmentation and fostering cooperation among Member States. Article 4 of the Regulation set the Fund's financial envelope for 2021-2027 at EUR 7.953 billion in current prices divided into EUR 2.651 billion for research and EUR 5.302 billion for development projects (Official Journal of the European Union, 2021b).

Between 2021 and 2024, the EU invested EUR 4 billion in collaborative defence research and development projects (European Commission, 2025b). These were distributed across a broad range of technologies, including cyber defence enhancement and the development of European-designed autonomous weapons systems, such as the Eurodrone (European Commission, 2023).

In parallel with the implementation of the EDF, the Heads of State and Government adopted the so-called Versailles Declaration (European Council, 2022). In this statement, European leaders affirmed the need to assume 'more responsibility for the security [of the EU and to reduce its] dependencies', as well as to 'invest more and better in defence', considering the military and industrial gaps revealed by the outbreak of the war in Ukraine (European Council, 2022).

Within this framework, the proposal for a European Defence Industry Reinforcement through Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA) was introduced. Presented in July 2022, EDIRPA highlighted 'the need for European support for [EU] procurement processes' (EUR-Lex, 2022).

In December 2022, the Council of the EU confirmed the structure of EDIRPA and its financial allocation. In its official communication, the Council stated that 'a strong and competitive defence industry is the backbone of any nation's defence capacity' and that EDIRPA enables the European industry 'to anticipate production capacity in order to secure essential supplies' for Member States (Council of the European Union, 2022b).

The decision confirmed a budget of EUR 300 million, allocated to support joint procurement projects with at least 70% of the value financed by Member States or associated countries, to reduce external dependencies and strengthen the European Defence Industrial Base (Council of the European Union, 2022b). The instrument was formalised through Regulation (EU) 2023/2418 (Official Journal of the European Union, 2023). Overall, EDIRPA paved the way for the next phase of European defence integration, characterised, from 2023 onwards, by an unprecedented intensification of joint initiatives in the industrial, military and financial domains (EUR-Lex, 2022).

1.6. Institutional and industrial developments in European defence (2023-2025)

Between 2023 and 2025, the EU launched an unprecedented political and industrial cycle aimed at enhancing collective response capabilities considering the return of open warfare in Europe.

In parallel, the industrial dimension has taken on a central role. The European Commission has stressed that a strong EU defence industry is a fundamental prerequisite 'to achieve defence readiness', reinforcing not only military capabilities and the industrial base on which the Union and Member States rely, but also contributing directly to the strengthening of NATO. In this perspective, the Commission affirms that 'investing more, better, and together will increase the EU defence readiness only if the increased investments resulting from larger national budgets benefit the Union's defence industry' (EUR-Lex, 2024a).

Considering the current configuration, European defence presents three structural challenges: persistent dependence on external suppliers (primarily the United States), insufficient cooperation among Member States, and the fragmentation of the defence industrial sector. These weaknesses are particularly evident in procurement dynamics: between the beginning of the war in Ukraine in February 2022 and June of the following year, '78% of defence acquisitions by EU Member States were made from outside the EU'[9]. At the same time, in 2022 'only 18% of total equipment spending was devoted to EU collaborative defence equipment procurement' (EUR-Lex, 2024a). In this context, the Commission argues that the European defence industry must invest in new capabilities and be prepared for a shift towards a 'war economy model'.

These weaknesses are further confirmed by the structure of the internal defence market. Between 2017 and 2023, it 'has grown by 64%, while defence trade between Member States has only marginally increased and it now represents only 15% of the total value of the EU defence market'. Against this imbalance, the Commission stresses the need to reverse the trend, calling on Member States to ensure that 'by 2030, the value of intra-EU defence trade represents at least 35%' (EUR-Lex, 2024a).

A key milestone in the redefinition of European priorities is represented by the European Peace Facility (EPF). Established in 2021 as an off-budget instrument of the Council of the European Union, the EPF is designed to support external military and defence actions of the Union. Since 2022, it has become one of the main channels through which Member States have provided military assistance to Ukraine (European Council, 2025).

The intensive use of the EPF has highlighted, on the one hand, the Union's ability to act in a relatively rapid and coordinated manner; on the other hand, it has

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[9] With a share of the United States alone amounting to 63% (EUR-Lex, 2024a).

exposed the structural limitations of the European defence system, particularly with regard to stock availability, industrial production capacity, and the time required to replenish national reserves (Official Journal of the European Union, 2021a). In quantitative terms, between 2022 and 2024 the EU mobilised EUR 6.1 billion under the EPF and, in March 2024, decided to increase its financial ceiling by a further EUR 5 billion, bringing the total to EUR 11.1 billion (European Council, 2025).

The operational and industrial challenges emerging from the EPF experience have contributed to making it urgent to adopt measures aimed at strengthening European production capacity, including Regulation (EU) 2023/1525 on supporting ammunition production (ASAP). With a financial envelope of EUR 500 million, the Regulation aims to 'reinforce the competitiveness and resilience of the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) in the field of ammunition and missiles' (Official Journal of the European Union, 2023a). It is noted that current manufacturing capacity does not ensure the secure and timely delivery of defence products; therefore, measures are supported to increase production capacity and reduce delivery times[10]. ASAP represents a significant policy precedent, as it constitutes the first instance of EU direct intervention in ammunition production, an area traditionally under Member States' control.

In March 2024, the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) was published, through which the EU established a framework aimed at structurally strengthening industrial capacity, stressing the urgency of moving from emergency responses to long-term planning. This shift is based on the assessment that the EU does not possess a sufficiently advanced industrial apparatus to address high-intensity conflict scenarios. To strengthen the EU's response capacity, the document calls for 'a resilient and responsive DTIB' and the adoption of a 'war-preparedness economy' (EUR-Lex, 2024b). At the same time, the strategy aims to strengthen the security of supply chains and reduce external dependencies by promoting an industrial base capable of ensuring continuity and reliability even in times of crisis.

It was in this context that the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) was launched on 5 March 2024. With a planned budget of EUR 1.5 billion until 2027, the EDIP is designed to build on 'the experience gained under EU Regulations 2023/2418 and 2023/1525' and extend their approach within a more structured and long-term framework[11].

[10] From an ethical and legal perspective, 'actions related to the production of lethal autonomous weapons without the possibility of meaningful human control' are excluded from funding (Official Journal of the European Union, 2023a).

[11] Alongside industrial and capacity-building measures, the EDIP incorporates ethical and legal constraints and conditions. The Regulation stipulates, in fact, that 'actions related to defence common procurement of goods or services, which are prohibited by applicable international law, shall not be eligible for support from the Programme' and that 'lethal autonomous weapons without the possibility of for meaningful human control' are specifically excluded (EUR-Lex, 2024b).

In 2025, the process of reorganising and strengthening European defence took a further step forward with the publication of the White Paper on European Defence. The document introduces the ReArm Europe/Readiness 2030 plan, a strategic framework aimed at strengthening European defence capabilities through increased investment in defence. The aim is to develop the necessary military capabilities and achieve a level of military readiness capable of credibly deterring potential armed aggression.

The strategy outlined is complex and is structured around various pillars, designed to address gaps in defensive capabilities and ensure the readiness of European armed forces. The objective is to create an integrated system capable of countering a wide range of threats, including hypersonic missiles and drones, and to modernise advanced artillery systems. Furthermore, to address gaps in strategic reserves of ammunition, delivery systems and related components, and to ensure a rapid response capability in the event of conflict, the plan provides for the development of advanced surveillance systems, such as drones and anti-drone systems, as well as the improvement of military mobility through the creation of an infrastructure network enabling the rapid movement of troops and equipment across EU territory (European Commission, 2025a).

To support this transformation, the plan proposes a funding framework based on five pillars.

1. The first pillar involves the creation of a dedicated financial instrument, the Security Action for Europe (SAFE), with a budget of EUR 150 billion. This instrument will be used to fund joint procurement among Member States for priority defence capabilities – ammunition, Artificial Intelligence and air defence systems – thereby strengthening industrial cooperation in the defence sector.
2. The second pillar concerns the activation of the national safeguard clause of the Stability and Growth Pact, which will allow Member States to increase defence spending. Thanks to this measure, they will be able to mobilise additional defence expenditure of up to 1.5% of GDP. Based on projections, defence investment 'could reach at least EUR 800 billion over the next four years, including the expenditure financed by the EUR 150 billion from SAFE, which will be automatically eligible under the national escape clauses' (European Commission, 2025a).
3. The third pillar aims to make existing EU financial instruments more flexible, allowing for greater investment in defence. National, regional and local authorities will therefore be able to voluntarily reallocate funds towards emerging priorities, including the strengthening of defence and security capabilities.
4. The fourth pillar concerns the use of cohesion policy funds to finance defence and security-related investments, as well as the expansion of the role of the

European Investment Bank (EIB), which is to double ‘its annual investments to EUR 2 billion to fund strategic projects’ (European Commission, 2025a).

5. Finally, the fifth pillar involves the mobilisation of private capital. As public investment is insufficient, the EU must attract private investment through the Savings and Investment Union. European businesses – including small and medium-sized enterprises and mid-cap companies – must benefit from ‘better access to capital, including guarantee instruments for de-risking investments, to bring their solutions to industrial scale and to drive the industrial ramp-up that Europe needs’ (European Commission, 2025a).

The White Paper highlights the need to revitalise the EDTIB, which is currently fragmented and unable to rapidly produce systems and equipment in adequate quantities. To address this challenge, it is necessary to aggregate defence demand through cooperation between Member States, as already trialled with the EDIRPA programme. It is envisaged that at least 40% of equipment will be procured collaboratively, thereby promoting mass production and innovation[12].

To achieve this, the Defence Readiness Roadmap for 2030 was presented in 2025, translating the White Paper into clear objectives, key milestones and indicators for monitoring progress. The roadmap is divided into three main areas. The first concerns addressing military capability shortfalls, ensuring that the EU possesses the full range of assets across all domains (land, air, space and maritime) necessary to defend its borders. The objectives include closing capability gaps by 2030, increasing the share of joint procurement to 35% and achieving the target of allocating at least 55% of defence investment to the procurement of equipment from the EDTIB (EUR-Lex, 2025a).

The second area concerns the implementation of ‘European readiness initiatives’, with massive and coordinated investment in ‘pan-European cooperation to address critical capability gaps’ (EUR-Lex, 2025a). Priority initiatives include ‘the European Anti-Drone Defence Initiative, Eastern Border Shield, the European Air Shield and the European Space Shield’ (EUR-Lex, 2025a). he third area focuses on ‘cross-cutting enablers’, namely the improvements needed in the areas of mobility, the market and funding, to support defence readiness efforts.

[12] Furthermore, the strategy aims to strengthen investment in research and development, with a focus on emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (European Commission, 2025). For an in-depth analysis of the state of Artificial Intelligence in the military sector and the prospects for regulation at national, European and international levels, see Archivio Disarmo, 2025.

1.7. 'Individual' proposals for a common European defence

At the request of the President of the European Commission, on 20 March 2024, the then President of Finland, *Sauli Niinistö*, presented the report *Safer Together: Strengthening Europe's Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness*.

At the core of the report is the idea that defence represents an essential pillar of the EU's overall security. Niinistö introduces the concept of Single Security, according to which a threat to the sovereignty or territorial integrity of a Member State automatically affects the EU. Security, therefore, can be neither fragmented nor confined within national borders, but takes on an intrinsically collective dimension (European Commission, 2024b).

To address the most serious threats – including the possibility of external armed aggression – the EU must adopt a 'robust all-hazards, whole-ofgovernment and whole-of-society approach', aimed at preparedness and readiness, fully integrating both the military and civilian dimensions. The entire framework of the Report revolves around building 'comprehensive preparedness', necessary to ensure that the EU and its Member States can continue to function under any circumstances (European Commission, 2024b).

The Niinistö Report highlights how the current inventory of European military capabilities still has serious gaps, a legacy of decades of under-investment and decisions taken almost exclusively at national level. To address these vulnerabilities, a series of strategic priorities is proposed, aimed at strengthening both the operational and industrial dimensions of European defence. In this context, the need to redefine a common level of ambition through a future White Paper on the future of European Defence is emphasised, updating the EU's current political-military objective based on scenarios involving large-scale, multi-domain and protracted conflicts (European Commission, 2024b).

Equally essential is the full implementation of EDIS and the related EDIP programme, indispensable tools for aggregating demand, supporting industrial development and facilitating joint procurement, thereby ensuring security of supply in crisis situations. The Report also highlights the urgency of developing long-term European projects in the fields of air defence, missile defence and cyber defence, which are considered crucial to the EU's ability to sustain conflicts that 'may last years' (European Commission, 2024b). At the same time, the Niinistö Report reiterates the need to move towards a single European defence market, removing barriers to cross-border cooperation and enhancing the competitiveness of European industry. Finally, as the current level of resources is insufficient to meet emerging needs, the creation of a Defending Europe Facility (DEF) is proposed, encompassing industrial instruments and dual-use technologies.

The Report emphasises that European defence capability cannot rely solely on traditional military structures, but that a model based on the integration of the civil and military spheres is necessary, fully harnessing the potential of dual-use technologies and infrastructure. Military Mobility is cited as a prime example of dual-use policy, as it simultaneously strengthens civilian resilience and the armed forces' rapid deployment capability[13] (European Commission, 2024b).

The strengthening of European defence also carries significant political and strategic value *vis-à-vis* allies. The EU must demonstrate that it can assume an increasing share of responsibility for its own security. Whilst recognising NATO as the cornerstone of European defence, the Report emphasises that an attack on an EU – and NATO – Member State would also directly involve the Union. Consequently, it is recommended that the EU-NATO relationship be strengthened, including through the establishment of an emergency protocol to facilitate the rapid exchange of information in the event of serious crises (European Commission, 2024b).

In the wake of this redefinition of the concept of security and the Union's strategic responsibilities, the debate broadened further in April 2024 with the report presented by *Enrico Letta*, commissioned by the European Council and the European Commission. The report, *Much more than a market – Speed, Security, Solidarity. Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU citizens*, is a strategic contribution aimed at revitalising and reforming the European Single Market considering the profound geopolitical transformations that have taken place in recent years. The aim is to provide operational guidance for the future work programmes of the European institutions (European Council, 2024).

The Report starts from a basic premise: the single market, as conceived to date, is no longer sufficient to cope with a world characterised by instability and fragmentation. The war in Ukraine represents a historic watershed that has shaken the foundations of the European project and necessitated a fundamental review of its strategic priorities (European Council, 2024).

Letta argues that 'security must be addressed in a comprehensive dimension and must influence energy policies as well as financial policies, cyber threats, choices regarding infrastructure, connectivity, space, health and technology'. This new definition of security – the Report argues – 'will inevitably have repercussions on all aspects of the economy and citizens' lives. Therefore, it is essential to strike a

[13] This approach also includes the strengthening of autonomous and secure communication systems such as the European Critical Communication System (EUCCS) and the EU Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite (IRIS), which are essential for connecting civil and military authorities in crisis situations and ensuring full interoperability with defence systems (European Commission, 2024b).

balance with fundamental individual rights, re-establishing Europe as a leader in the regulation of new technological advances' (European Council, 2024).

Perhaps the most innovative element of the document concerns the role of defence, which is included among the European strategic assets for which the European dimension must progressively take precedence over the national one. Defence, energy, communications and finance had initially been excluded from the single market integration process, as they were linked to state sovereignty. Today, however, those national markets, designed to 'protect domestic industries', represent, according to Letta, a 'major brake to growth and innovation in sectors where global competition and strategic considerations call for swiftly moving to a European scale' (European Council, 2024).

Whilst acknowledging that the full application of the rules typical of the single market in the defence sector 'is currently impossible', the Report identifies progress towards a European common market as a strategic objective (European Council, 2024). This approach is driven by the structural weaknesses of the EDTIB: significant fragmentation along national lines, with duplication of programmes and platforms; a significant reliance on non-EU suppliers; and fragmented demand, still dominated by national procurement and the protection of respective industrial bases. According to the Report, this combination constitutes a 'major and costly handicap' that hinders economies of scale, interoperability and the security of the continent (European Council, 2024).

From these assumptions stems the need to move towards a genuine common defence market, capable of progressively integrating both supply and demand. By 2030, the objective is that 'at least 40% of defence procurement should be collaborative between Member States, with intra-EU trade accounting for at least 35% of the market. Furthermore, over 50% of national defence budgets must be allocated to European procurement, with a target of 60% by 2035' (European Council, 2024).

Letta warns that simply continuing with past policies 'is inconceivable'. For this reason, the Report proposes a combination of innovative financial instruments: a more proactive role for the EIB, through the adaptation of its lending policy and a review of the definition of dual-use goods; the issuance of common debt instruments, capable of rapidly mobilising substantial resources and supporting collaborative projects; and the possible creation of a Defence Support Line allowing Member States to access loans of up to 2% of GDP (European Council, 2024).

It is within this framework – in which security becomes both a strategic priority and an economic variable – that *Mario Draghi*'s contribution is situated. The Report on the Future of European Competitiveness was presented on 9 September 2024 and offers an even clearer understanding of the link between competitiveness, strategic autonomy and European defence capabilities[14]. The document pursues a dual objective: to boost productivity and strengthen common security, considered an essential prerequisite for preserving the EU's manufacturing and technological leadership (European Commission, 2024a).

Draghi identifies three key areas for action: narrowing the innovation gap with China and the United States; lowering energy prices by accelerating decarbonisation through a joint plan for competitiveness and the green transition; and strengthening common security to address an unstable geopolitical context by reducing strategic dependencies on third countries (European Commission, 2024a).

The central conclusion of the Report is that, despite having solid structural foundations, the EU has experienced insufficient growth in recent decades, driven primarily by a slowdown in productivity. Draghi describes the increase in productivity as a veritable 'existential challenge for the EU' (European Commission, 2024a). With reference to the defence sector, the author emphasises how the long-standing reliance on the 'US umbrella' has contributed not only to a reduction in European spending but also to the defence industry's loss of capacity to anticipate future demand, resulting in a weakening of the production base (EDA, 2025). The Report therefore offers a detailed assessment of the sector's main shortcomings.

On the financial and technological front, despite the increases recorded in recent years, the Report highlights that in 2024 only 13 EU Member States reached the 2% of GDP target for defence spending, as required by the commitments made within NATO (EDA, 2025). In the same year, European expenditure on defence research and development increased by 20% to reach EUR 13 billion, a level that remains modest compared to the United States, which invested EUR 138 billion in the same sector in 2024 (EDA, 2025). Joint European investment also remains limited to around EUR 1 billion per year, a threshold insufficient to support highly complex technologies (drones, hypersonic missiles and artificial intelligence systems), resulting overall in a situation that is 'not sufficiently focused on innovation' (EDA, 2025).

From an industrial perspective, the fragmentation of the EDTIB continues to be an obstacle to competitiveness. The heterogeneity of equipment leads to operational inefficiencies and limits standardisation. Cooperation in procurement also remains insufficient: in 2022, the level of collaborative procurement stood at 18%, far below the European benchmark of 35% (European Commission, 2024a).

To address these shortcomings and mobilise the approximately EUR 500 billion required over the next decade, the Report proposes a more systematic use of joint debt issuance, following the NextGenerationEU model, to support joint

[14] For the full text of Mario Draghi's Report on the Future of European Competitiveness, see European Commission, 2024a.

procurement and strengthen research and innovation in the defence sector. The aim is to transform a currently fragmented system into an integrated, autonomous and competitive European industrial capacity, in line with the EU's new growth strategy.

1.8. Comments on Chapter 2

The evolution of European defence policy has been a long and complex process, characterised by significant progress but also by persistent structural limitations. From its origins in the post-war period, with the creation of the UO and the attempt at the EDC, up to the most recent developments outlined by the Global Strategy and the Strategic Compass, it is clear that the construction of a common defence has been driven by a constant tension between the EU's desire for strategic autonomy and resistance from Member States to ceding significant portions of their sovereignty. The Treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam and Lisbon have progressively provided a more defined legal and institutional framework, introducing planning instruments, joint missions, solidarity clauses and permanent structured cooperation, which have made it possible to strengthen the operational capacity of the CSDP. However, political and strategic dependence on NATO, intergovernmental management and industrial fragmentation have continued to limit the effectiveness and full autonomy of European defence.

Over the past decade, there has been an intensification of initiatives aimed at addressing the EU's operational and industrial shortcomings, through measures designed to strengthen the industrial and technological base, encourage joint investment and ensure the resilience of supply chains. Plans such as ReaArm Europe/Readiness 2030 also highlight that Europe's ability to respond adequately to crises is primarily a political issue, which has yet to resolve the dilemma between prioritising the federal approach of supporting joint industrial projects, or the intergovernmental approach of allowing each Member State to stake everything on its own national 'champions'. In this context, the Reports – named after their authors as the *Niinistö*, *Letta* and *Draghi* reports – call for the integration of the military, civil, industrial and technological dimensions, promoting a single defence market capable of fostering interoperability, reducing external dependencies and consolidating European strategic autonomy. At present, however, they remain above all authoritative cultural documents.

Significant challenges remain, such as the fragmentation of the sector's industrial and technological base, limited cooperation in the procurement and production of armaments, dependence on external suppliers, and insufficient joint investment by international standards. The transformation of European defence requires a coordinated effort by Member States, translating political ambitions into operational capabilities and structured industrial and financial instruments capable of ensuring resilience and readiness in the face of new crisis scenarios. The consolidation of these capabilities is also fundamental, even from the more traditional perspective of the EU's collective security and its credibility as an autonomous strategic actor on the international stage.

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Abstract Chapter 2

Chapter 2 highlights the economic, financial, and industrial dynamics of European defence. These dynamics appear to be embedded within a transition towards an increasingly ‘pre-war’ economy, characterised by limited fiscal room for manoeuvre. In this context, the ‘guns versus butter’ dilemma takes the form of a structural constraint: the synchronised increase in military budgets after 2022 has been accompanied by a crowding-out effect on welfare expenditure items (healthcare, social protection, and education), as well as by levels of public debt that constrain the capacity of Member States.

At the same time, the EU Defence Industrial Base appears as a fragmented system undergoing a process of re-nationalisation, in which the experiences of trans-European industrial groups (Airbus, KNDS, MBDA) are losing centrality in favour of *national industrial champions* (one or more leading firms in the armaments sector). The gap with the United States defence industry remains significant, and European strategic autonomy still appears subordinated to transatlantic support. At the industrial level, recent expansion appears to be driven primarily by demand linked to the conventional war in Ukraine. Meanwhile, the aerospace sector shows signs of stagnation, whereas the land systems sector (relatively more traditional in nature) has recorded significant growth, particularly in Germany and Poland.

2. Economic, financial and industrial aspects

2.1. Financial policies

2.1.1. Options and implications for public finance in the EU 27

The analysis of recent public expenditure dynamics in EU Member States reveals a macroeconomic shift in national budgets. In this context, the existence of a link between warfare and welfare is incontrovertible (Obinger and Schmitt, 2011). This relationship is largely encapsulated by the expression 'guns versus butter' (journalistically known as 'butter or guns'), which posits that a marginal increase in military expenditure (guns) entails a corresponding opportunity cost measurable in terms of foregone civilian welfare (butter) (Samuelson *et al.*, 2019).

The literature on this subject is divided into three main strands. On the one hand, some scholars argue that military expenditure is in no way correlated with welfare spending (Clayton, 1976; Domke *et al.*, 1983). Others maintain that military spending stimulates national growth through the creation of infrastructure, services, and employment opportunities (Binkin and Eitelberg, 2011). A third perspective, emerging from the 1960s onwards, emphasises that military expenditure generates crowding-out effects on welfare (Russett, 1969). These studies demonstrate that military spending entails a trade-off with social welfare (education, healthcare, social protection), thereby increasing inequality (Deger, 1986; Mintz, 1989; Caruso and Biscione, 2022).

This section analyses public expenditure in EU Member States[1] by examining the existence (or otherwise) of a butter-versus-guns relationship. Specifically, it considers Eurostat time series data (1995-2023) on defence expenditure[2] and welfare spending (education[3], social protection[4], healthcare[5]) as a share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) across the 27 EU Member States. A further layer of analysis

[1] The public expenditure data for the 27 EU Member States do not include the United Kingdom.

[2] Defence expenditure reported by Eurostat consist of military defence, civil defence, foreign military aid, research and development (R&D) defence, and other defence-related items not classified elsewhere.

[3] Education expenditure reported by Eurostat consists of pre-primary and primary education, secondary education, post-secondary non-tertiary education, tertiary education, education not definable by level, subsidiary services to education, research and development (R&D) education, and other education-related items not classified elsewhere.

[4] Social protection expenditure reported by Eurostat consists of sickness and disability, old age, survivors, family and children, unemployment, housing, social exclusion, research and development (R&D) social protection, and other social protection-related items not classified elsewhere.

[5] Healthcare expenditure reported by Eurostat consists of medical products, appliances and equipment, outpatient services, hospital services, public health services, research and development (R&D) health, and other health-related items not classified elsewhere.

is provided by the time series (1995-2023) on the public debt-to-GDP ratio of the 27 EU countries. For some of them – namely Greece in the most extreme case, but also France, Italy, and Spain – this variable is particularly relevant insofar as the stock of public debt, having become unsustainable, has necessitated cuts in public service expenditure (Leão *et al.*, 2026).

Moreover, regarding public expenditure allocation, a key feature of contemporary research lies in its shift in focus from *how much* is spent to *how* it is spent (Mintz, 1989). Initiatives such as the EU Global Strategy (2016), the European Defence Fund (2017), the Strategic Compass (2022), the ReArm Europe/Readiness 2030 Plan (2025), as well as commitments made within NATO, have reshaped the EU expenditure paradigm. Milestones in this process include the Newport Summit (Wales, 2014)[6] and The Hague Summit (Netherlands, 2025). Following the former, NATO Member States agreed to allocate 20% of defence expenditure to military equipment (NATO, 2014). In The Hague, where Allies committed to allocating 5% of GDP to defence expenditure by 2035, it was further decided that 1.5% of GDP should be devoted to the protection of critical infrastructure, defend networks, ensuring 'civil preparedness and resilience', and strengthening the Defence Industrial Base (NATO, 2025).

All this implies that EU NATO Member States are (and will be) required to reconfigure the composition of the defence macro-category, to the detriment of personnel expenditure – which currently remains the largest budgetary item within the Alliance (NATO, 2025) – n favour of strengthening the defence industry, developing infrastructure, and investing in research and development (R&D) of advanced weapons systems (missile defence systems, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, etc.). This transformation is in tension with two other major transitions that EU institutions must confront: the demographic transition, driven by population ageing, and the climate transition (Green Deal).

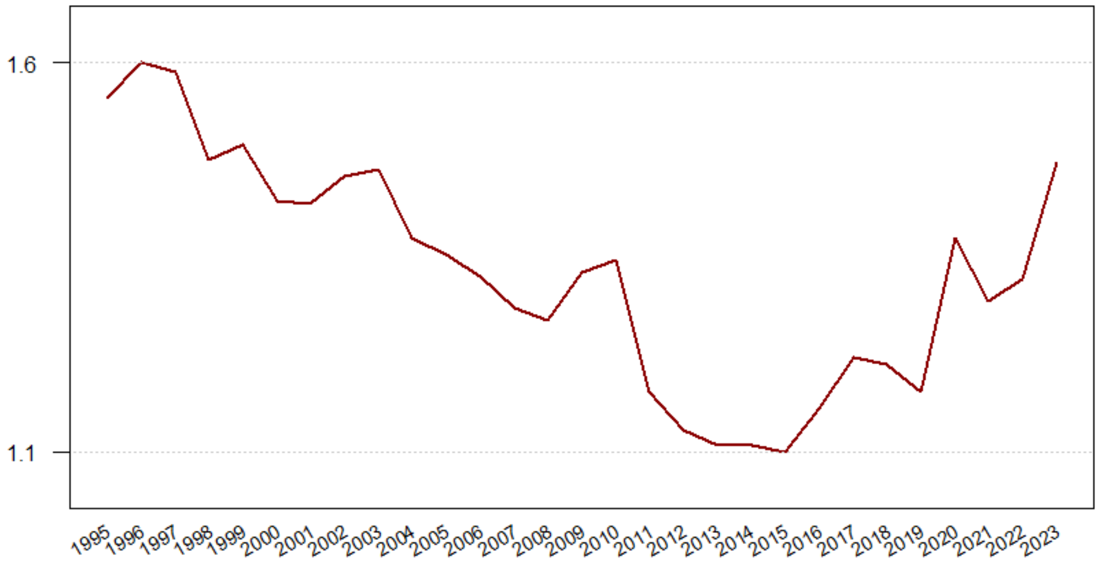
The imperative set by ReArm Europe/Readiness 2030 pushes the EU towards a 'pre-war' economy, in which the decision regarding a potential trade-off is no longer treated as a political choice, but as a constraint imposed by the narrow fiscal space resulting from the European sovereign debt crisis (Lane, 2012; Konatar *et al.*, 2025).

In particular, the evolution of the military burden, namely, the share of GDP allocated to military expenditure (Liang *et al.*, 2025), reveals three distinct spending phases. Over the two decades 1995-2015, the 27 EU Member States on average pursued a policy of structural disarmament, benefiting from the so-called peace

[6] Following the Newport Summit, NATO Member States agreed to allocate 2% of GDP to defence expenditure by 2024 (NATO, 2014).

dividend[7] following the end of the Cold War (Gowa, 2011). This enabled a gradual reduction in defence budgets to finance the expansion of welfare-related expenditure items such as healthcare and, to some extent, social protection (see below) (Chan, 1995). During this period (1995-2015), the only exceptions were increases observed following the Iraq War (2003) and the 2008-2009 financial crisis (see Fig. 2.1). In the latter case, the increase can be explained by the contraction of GDP, which – through the decline in output – mechanically raised the share allocated to defence. In the subsequent years (post-2010), as the economy recovered, military expenditure declined again, reaching in 2015 the historical low of the EU 27 average (1.1% of GDP).

Fig. 2.1 Defence Expenditure as a % of GDP: EU 27 average, 1995-2023



Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurostat data.

The downward trajectory encountered a first interruption following the Russian annexation of Crimea and the Newport Summit (2014-2015). These events halted the reduction in defence expenditure, triggering a – albeit partial – reversal in the EU average trend, without however returning to the levels observed in the 1990s[8]. As in the case of the financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic (2020) also led to a sudden increase in EU 27 defence expenditure, which – following the recovery in production in 2021 – subsequently declined again (see Fig. 2.1).

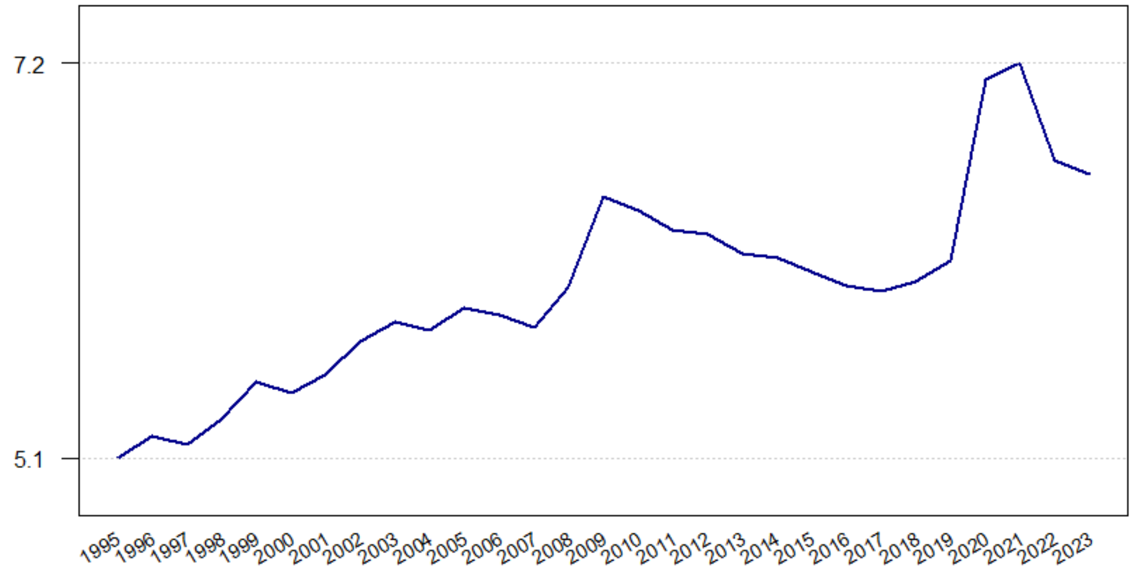
As shown in Figure 2.1, it is following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine (2022) that a genuine transformation in EU defence expenditure can be observed, characterised by a synchronised surge in Member States' military budgets. From a

[7] The literature defines the peace dividend as the amount of public funds made available for non-military expenditure because of reductions in defence budgets following the end of a conflict (Rockoff, 1998).

[8] In 1996, the historical peak was recorded at 1.6% of the EU 27 GDP.

structural perspective, this dynamic appears to reflect not merely a cyclical economic fluctuation, but rather a paradigm shift in public resource allocation: Member States have initiated a sharp increase in defence spending within a fiscal architecture that, for two decades, had been designed to reduce it.

Fig. 2.2 Healthcare Expenditure as a % of GDP: EU 27 average, 1995-2023



Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurostat data.

The situation becomes problematic insofar as, considering EU 27 public debt levels (see Fig. 2.5 below), a conflict with social welfare emerges, and with the two main components of the European welfare system: healthcare and social protection. These two functions appear to be relatively inelastic, which can be explained by the high degree of visibility and political sensitivity that characterises healthcare and social protection in the European political arena (see Chapter 3). Within this framework, a reduction in services – particularly for the most vulnerable segments of the population (young people, the elderly, women, migrants, etc.) – risks leading to an erosion of electoral support for those political actors advocating a fiscal consolidation of the European welfare state.

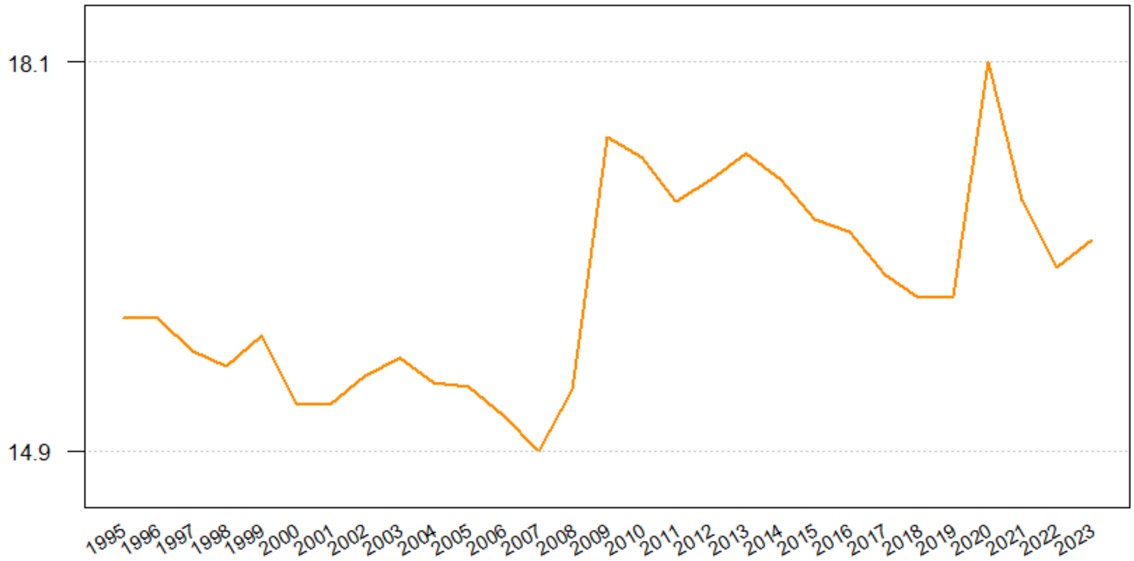
Examining healthcare expenditure in greater detail, the period 1995-2009 was characterised by gradual but steady growth – explainable considering demographic dynamics such as population ageing – across all EU economies (see Fig. 2.2). Despite the sharp increase associated with the 2008-2009[9] financial crisis, in the post-crisis years healthcare expenditure began a downward trajectory, which was interrupted only by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the pandemic emergency pushed healthcare spending to its historical peak in the EU 27 average (7.2% of GDP). In addition to the contraction in global output, this increase is also

[9] Explainable considering the same dynamics hypothesised for defence expenditure.

linked to the economic effort to contain the pandemic and, in part, to rising prices (inflation) for medicines and medical equipment (Bresser-Pereira, 2020). Although the peace dividend resulting from the end of the Cold War was primarily channelled towards healthcare expenditure, following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine this budget item (the only one within the welfare aggregate) experienced a contraction.

Even more complex is the dynamic of social protection expenditure, which is characterised by statistical irregularities (spikes), particularly evident after the watershed years 2008 and 2020 (see Fig. 2.3). These, as in the case of healthcare expenditure, result from a dual economic and social effect: on the one hand, the contraction of output and GDP; on the other, the expansion of spending on an ageing welfare state and on pensions (Rechel *et al.*, 2013).

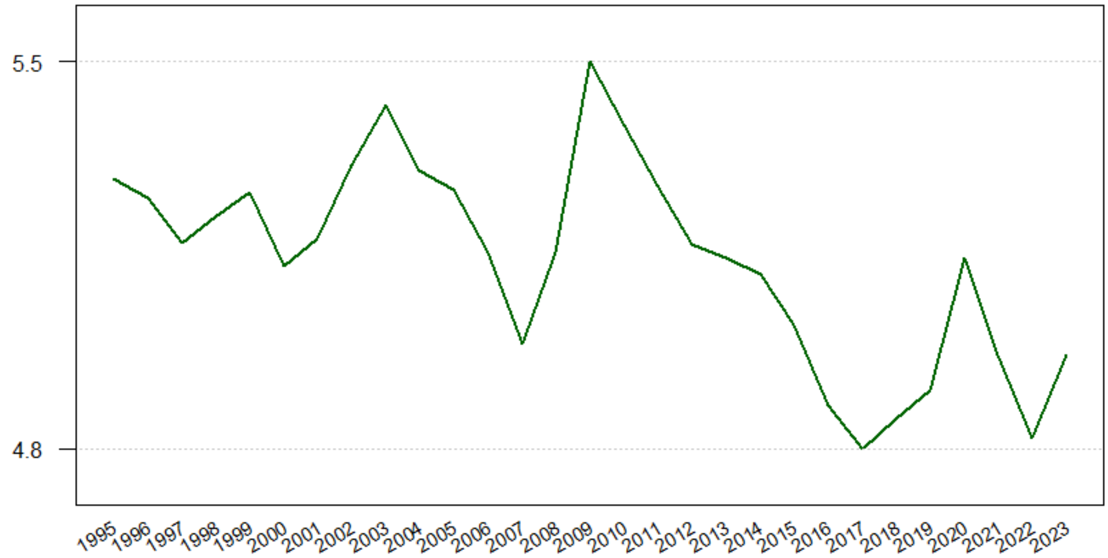
Fig. 2.3 Social Protection Expenditure as a % of GDP: EU 27 average, 1995-2023



Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurostat data.

Unlike healthcare expenditure, social protection spending does not appear to have captured the benefits of the peace dividend following the end of the Cold War. In the period 1995-2007, social expenditure shows a declining phase culminating in its lowest point in 2007 (14.7% of EU 27 GDP). After the recovery in 2008, it also experienced a further period of decline between the two crises (2009-2019). Nevertheless, following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine (2022), it appears to be recovering (see Fig. 2.3), emerging as the welfare budget item least susceptible to crowding-out effects.

Fig. 2.4 Education Expenditure as a % of GDP: EU 27 average, 1995-2023

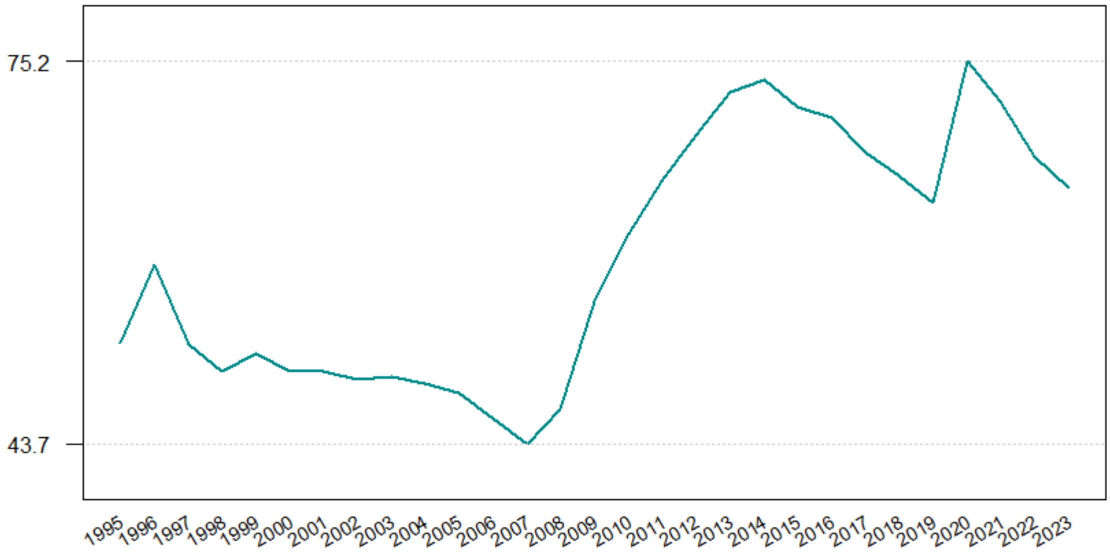


Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurostat data.

Regarding education expenditure, the EU 27 average exhibits a residual nature (relative to the other two main components of European welfare spending), contradicting the political rhetoric surrounding the centrality of human capital (see Fig. 2.4). The volatility of the education-to-GDP ratio highlights the absence of a long-term strategic vision. The consolidation towards a threshold below 5% of GDP illustrates a disinvestment in human capital that systematically subordinates skills development to the pressures of an ageing welfare state. Within this framework, it is evident that population ageing, low fertility rates, and the increasing dependency ratio in the EU (the share of the elderly population relative to the working-age population) have negatively influenced Member States' allocation of resources to education (Lutz *et al.*, 2019).

Following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine (2022), education expenditure – after having almost reached its lowest level in 2017 (4.8% of EU 27 GDP) – recorded a sudden increase, further symptomatic of the volatility of the education-to-GDP ratio and of the lack of a coherent long-term perspective on the part of EU institutions.

Fig. 2.5 Public Debt as a % of GDP: EU 27 average, 1995-2023



Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurostat data.

As regards public debt, its evolution reflects a trajectory in which post-2008 and post-2020 shocks have permanently raised the level of public liabilities. Figure 2.5 (see above) highlights a marked asymmetry: the speed of debt accumulation during crisis phases is not matched by a corresponding capacity for reduction during expansionary cycles. The impact of the financial crisis in the EU 27 is particularly significant, with debt levels – although showing a slight decline in the 2013–2018 period – rising again following the outbreak of the COVID-19[10] pandemic.

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the current trajectory of EU-27 public debt makes a further accumulation of debt to finance European rearmament[11] politically plausible. However, the recent post-2021 decline, far from representing a return to fiscal virtue, appears to be driven by the rapid rise in inflation, which artificially reduces the debt-to-GDP ratio without affecting the nominal stock of liabilities. The shift from a structural low of 43.7% (2007) to a new regime persistently above 70% defines a drastically reduced fiscal space for future exogenous shocks.

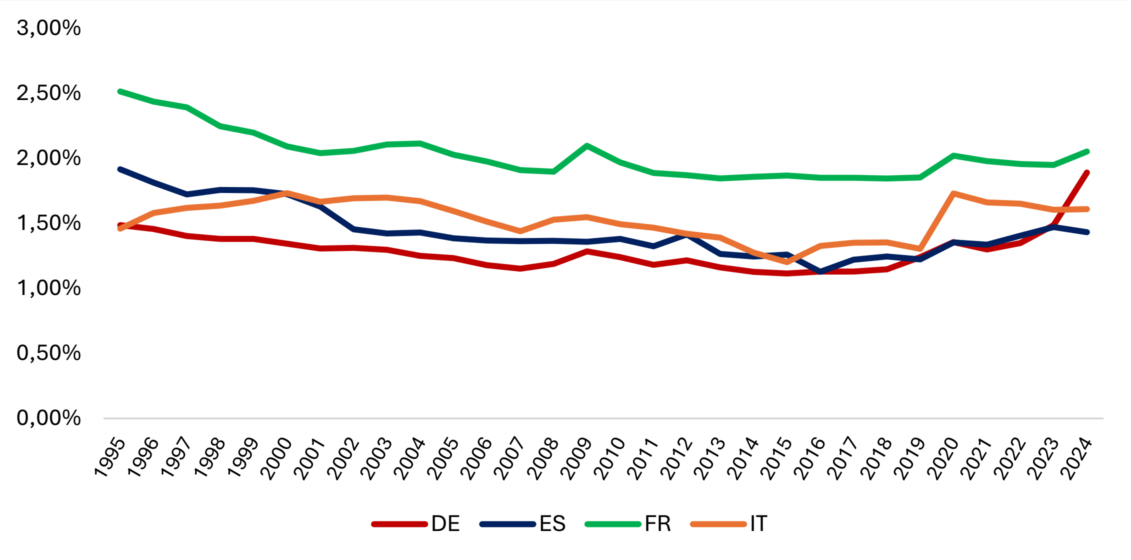
2.1.2. Public expenditure in France, Germany, Italy and Spain

In this context, it is appropriate to refer to the four largest EU economies (France, Germany, Italy, and Spain), whose time series analysis reveals a redefinition of public spending priorities[12]. In line with the EU average, between 1995 and 2014 the

[10] When the historical peak of the EU 27 average is recorded at 75.2% of GDP.
[11] In this context, it is appropriate to refer to SAFE (see section 1.6).
[12] Although the lack of detailed data makes it difficult to apply a single, harmonised definition of defence expenditure, SIPRI data – unlike Eurostat – include all current and capital expenditures

four countries benefited from the peace dividend, allocating modest shares of their budgets to defence, which in some cases fell below 1.5% of GDP, as observed in Germany and Spain (see Fig. 2.6). A particularly illustrative case is France, whose traditionally robust defence spending also followed a downward trajectory, stabilising at slightly above 2% of GDP. This trend towards the downsizing of military expenditure came to a halt in 2014 (the year of the Russian occupation of Crimea), with the emergence of initial geopolitical tensions and the corresponding responses by the North Atlantic Alliance, before recording an upward trend from 2022 onwards.

Fig. 2.6 Defence Expenditure as a % of GDP: France, Germany, Italy, Spain, 1995-2024



Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on SIPRI Military Expenditure Database.

Among the four largest EU economies, Italy is the country that has most extensively exploited the contraction in GDP caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, artificially increasing its military burden to up to 1.8% of GDP. Of particular significance is the increase in German defence expenditure following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. This increase – exceeding 2% of GDP – is linked to the Russian threat and to the activation by the German government of the special defence fund of EUR 100 billion (FMD, 2022)[13].

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related to: armed forces, including peacekeeping forces; defence ministries and other government agencies engaged in defence-related projects; paramilitary forces, when considered trained and equipped for military operations; and military space activities. SIPRI's estimate of military aid includes financial contributions, training and operational costs, replacement costs for stocks of military equipment donated to recipients, and payments for the procurement of additional military equipment for the recipient. However, it does not include the estimated value of donated stocks of military equipment. Civil defence and current expenditures related to past military activities – such as veterans' benefits, demobilisation, conversion, and weapons destruction – are excluded (SIPRI, 2026).

[13] On 27 February 2022, in presenting the national budget, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced the allocation of EUR 100 billion to the special defence fund (*Sondervermögen*), with the

In this perspective, the main European economies appear aligned with the EU average trend: increases in defence expenditure (as a share of GDP) do not represent a sporadic fluctuation, but rather the entry of the EU into a strategic readiness economy, which imposes a rearmament process on national budgets[14]. This process, moreover, cannot be redirected without consequences, as it encounters two crucial competing areas: healthcare expenditure and social protection expenditure.

Time series data illustrate the gradual increase in healthcare expenditure up to 2020 across the main European economies (see Fig. 2.7). The expansion of public healthcare is clearly linked to structural (demographic) variables such as population ageing.

In this context, the Italian case is emblematic: irrespective of its institutional characteristics[15], in 1995 Italy recorded the lowest healthcare expenditure share among the four largest EU economies (5% of GDP). From the second half of the 1990s onwards, Italy expanded its healthcare expenditure, becoming – in 2010 – the second highest country in terms of health burden in the EU. Nevertheless, Italian healthcare spending subsequently followed a downward trajectory which, after the brief interruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, brought this budget item back to the lowest level among the major EU economies.

Equally significant is the sharp decline in German healthcare expenditure, which appears symmetrical to the marked increase in defence spending by the authorities in Berlin (see Fig. 2.6). Despite the generalised growth in healthcare expenditure, following the end of the COVID-19 health emergency and the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, healthcare spending began a declining phase common to all four countries, although without returning to the low levels observed in the 1990s (see Fig. 2.7).

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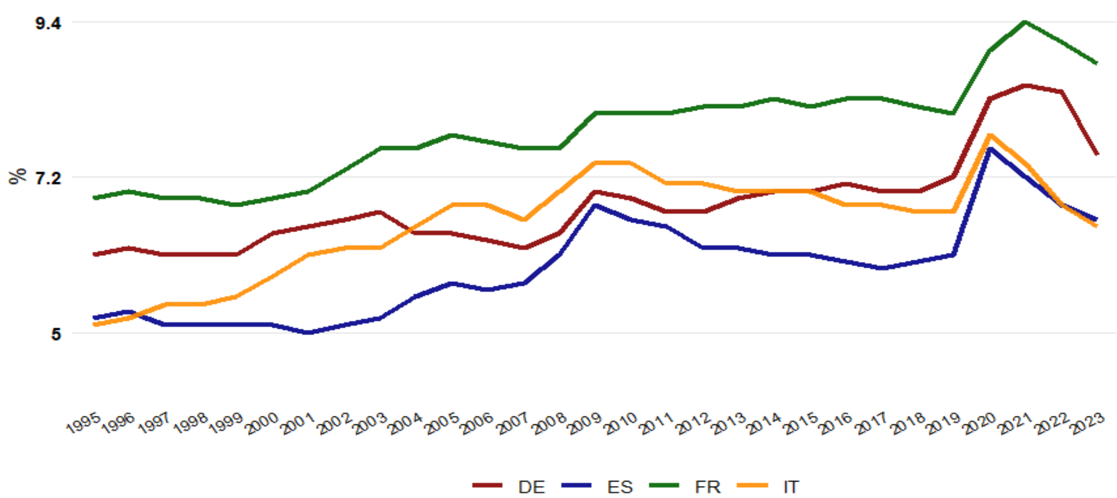
aim of providing the resources necessary for investments and projects of the *Bundeswehr* (equipment, technology, personnel) (FMD, 2022).

[14] In this context, an exception is represented by Spain, which is the only one of the four largest EU economies to have implemented a reduction in defence expenditure starting from 2023 (see Fig. 2.6).

[15] It should be noted that public healthcare expenditure in Italy is predominantly managed by regional administrations.

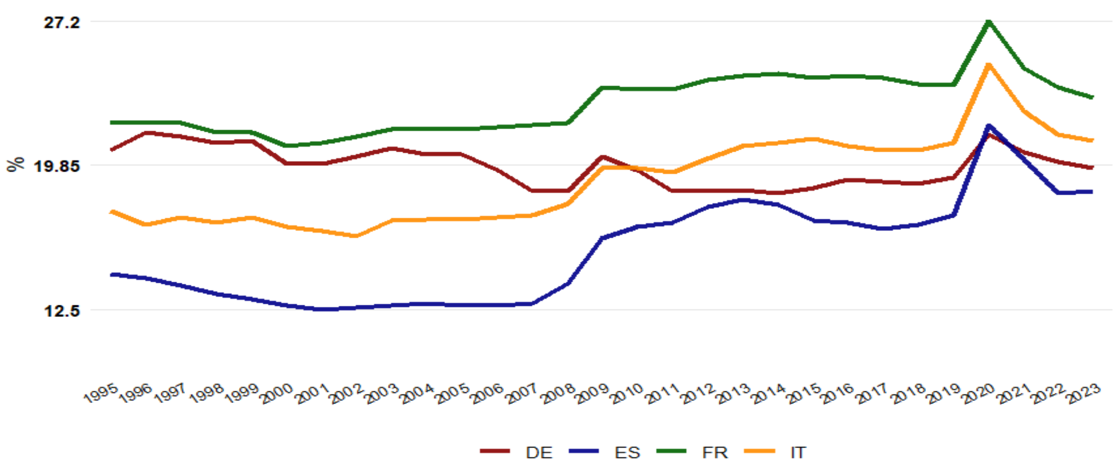
Fig. 2.7 Healthcare Expenditure as a % of GDP: France, Germany, Italy, Spain, 1995-2023



Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurostat data.

The time series relating to social protection expenditure in the four largest EU economies is emblematic of the dual effect produced, on the one hand, by GDP contraction (post-2008 and post-2020) and, on the other, by the expansion of the state as a social 'safety net'. A notable feature is that, at the end of crises, both healthcare and social protection expenditure stabilise at a level which – although subject to a downward adjustment likely to intensify in the face of defence spending as a competing budgetary claim – is never lower than that observed in the 1990s[16].

Fig. 2.8 Social Protection Expenditure as a % of GDP: France, Germany, Italy, Spain, 1995-2023

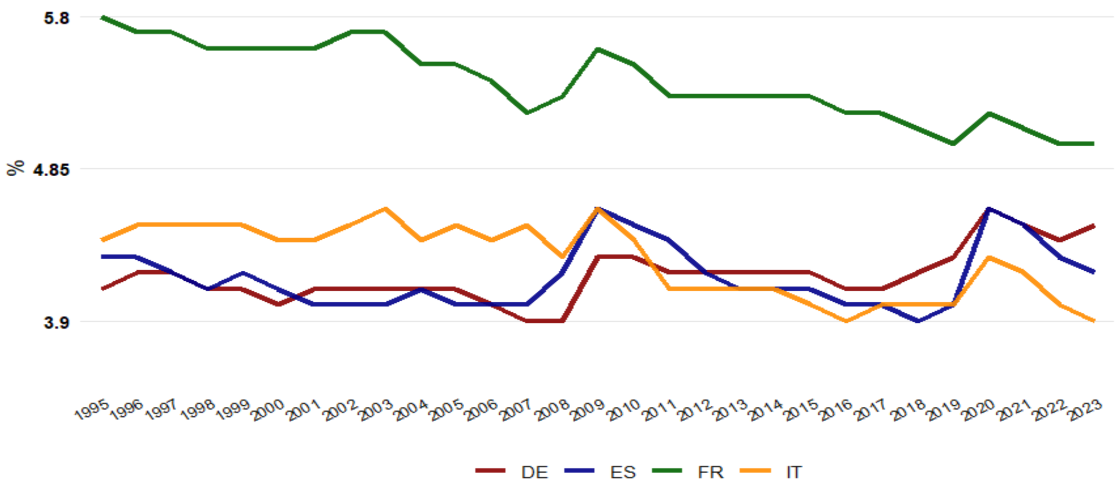


Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurostat data.

[16] In this case, the exception is represented by Germany's social protection expenditure, which – starting from 2010 – falls below the threshold level observed in the 1990s.

Even more significant is the heterogeneity of social protection expenditure policies implemented by France, Germany, Italy, and Spain (see Fig. 2.8). The time series illustrates a shift from a 'protective' model (as in France and Italy, and to a more moderate extent Germany), corresponding to around 24% of GDP, to a relatively more 'individualistic' model (as in Spain, which remains at approximately 18% of GDP), demonstrating that short-term responses to shocks vary according to the institutional architecture of each Member State. Despite the differing social policy approaches adopted by the main EU economies, following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine a common reduction in the social burden emerges across all four countries.

Fig. 2.9 Education Expenditure as a % of GDP: France, Germany, Italy, Spain, 1995-2023



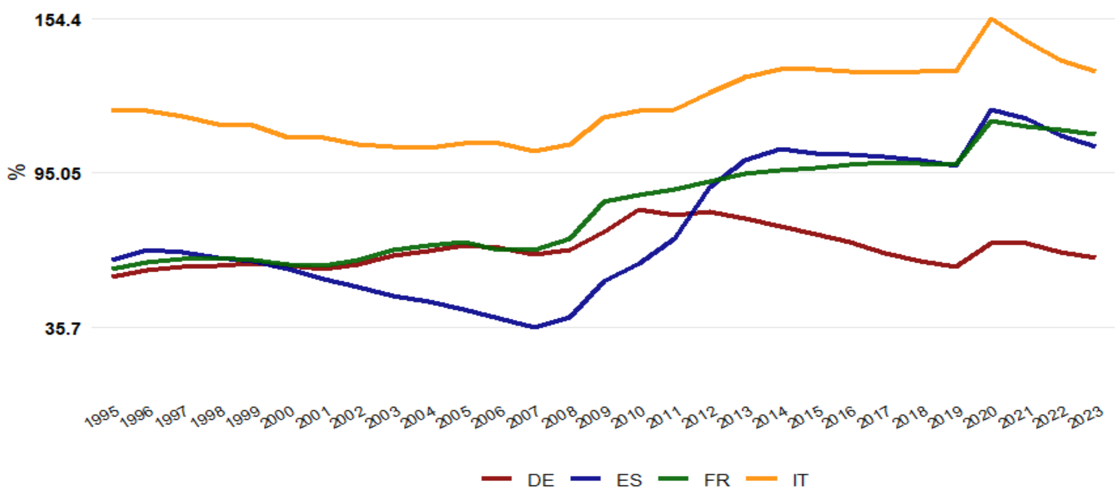
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurostat data.

Unlike healthcare and social protection, the third pillar of welfare – education expenditure – exhibits a pattern of substantial stagnation, if not outright erosion. This is particularly evident in the French case, where spending started from a highly privileged position (see Fig. 2.9). The trajectories of Germany, Italy, and Spain, all averaging below 5% of GDP, effectively frame education as the 'designated victim' of public budget cuts. Compared with healthcare and social protection (two major spending areas characterised by a high degree of political salience), education appears as the most vulnerable sector to crowding-out pressures generated by the rapid emergence of military financing needs within the EU. In this context, Germany constitutes a positive exception, as even after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, German education expenditure resumed growth.

Of further significance, albeit in negative terms, is the sharp decline in Italian education spending, which has moved from being the second highest among major EU economies in the 1990s to the lowest level of investment in education (see Fig.

2.9). Finally, the analysis of the public debt time series of the main European economies highlights the exhaustion of fiscal space within the EU (see Fig. 2.10).

Fig. 2.10 Public Debt as a % of GDP: France, Germany, Italy, Spain, 1995-2023



Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurostat data.

The divergence between debt accumulation policies pursued by France, Spain, and especially Italy (consistently above 100% of GDP) and the policy of fiscal frugality and discipline adopted by Germany[17] is emblematic of the looming debt crisis affecting several Member States. Unable to finance increases in defence expenditure through deficit spending due to the constraints of the Stability and Growth Pact, the level of public debt makes a spending review of budgetary items unavoidable for countries such as France, Italy, and Spain.

[17] The post-2008 and post-2020 peaks constitute exceptions, although they remain consistently below 90% of GDP.

2.2. Industrial policies

2.2.1. The international context

From the perspective of a common defence framework, this section outlines the state of the European Defence Industrial Base (DIB)[18] based on data from the SIPRI Arms Industry Database. It examines military revenues at constant prices of 23 defence companies over the period 2011-2024[19]. The analysis shows that, despite the deterioration in global security conditions, the European DIB has not followed a coherent path of integration at EU level; on the contrary, it has been characterised by a process of re-nationalisation of industrial capabilities, particularly following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

In 2024, estimated real military revenues of the main defence industrial groups in China, the Russian Federation[20], the United States, the United Kingdom[21] and the EU[22] amounted to USD 267.1 billion, recording a relative increase of 33.6% compared to 2015[23] (see Fig. 2.11). The composition of military revenues among the main international actors highlights the hegemony of the US defence industry. With revenues increasing from USD 82.5 billion in 2011 to USD 108.2 billion in 2024 (a relative increase of 31.1%), US defence champions (Lockheed Martin, RTX)[24] show

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[18] The Defence Industrial Base (DIB) constitutes a fundamental element of a state's defence and deterrence policies. It can be defined as the politico-industrial sector that brings together public and private actors engaged in the development and production of military or dual-use technologies. While the terms 'industrial' and 'defence' clarify the relevant political arena, the notion of 'base' is more ambiguous and is used as an umbrella concept encompassing all actors, companies (large groups, small and medium-sized enterprises), laboratories, and public or private research centres linked to the defence industry (Masson *et al.*, 2013; Schütz and Mölling, 2018; Faure, 2025).

[19] See methodological note, p. 67.

[20] With specific reference to Chinese and Russian industrial champions, SIPRI reports data for the period 2015-2024.

[21] Sample composed of BAE Systems and Rolls-Royce.

[22] The EU Defence Industrial Base is estimated by aggregating the real military revenues of France (Naval Group, Thales), Germany (Rheinmetall, ThyssenKrupp), Italy (Fincantieri, Leonardo), Poland (PGZ), Sweden (Saab). In estimating the EU DIB, it should be noted that France is overrepresented, as the SIPRI Arms Industry Database reports four companies over the 2011-2024 period. To obtain homogeneous clusters (both by country and defence segment), Dassault Aviation Group and Safran were excluded. Spanish companies (Navantia) are not included in the EU aggregate due to an incomplete time series (2011-2024). It should be noted that for Navantia data are missing for 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017, while for Czechoslovak Group (Czech Republic) only 2023-2024 data are available. Trans-European groups (Airbus, KNDS, MBDA) were not included to ensure greater comparability with the DIBs of China, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, which consist exclusively of national industrial champions.

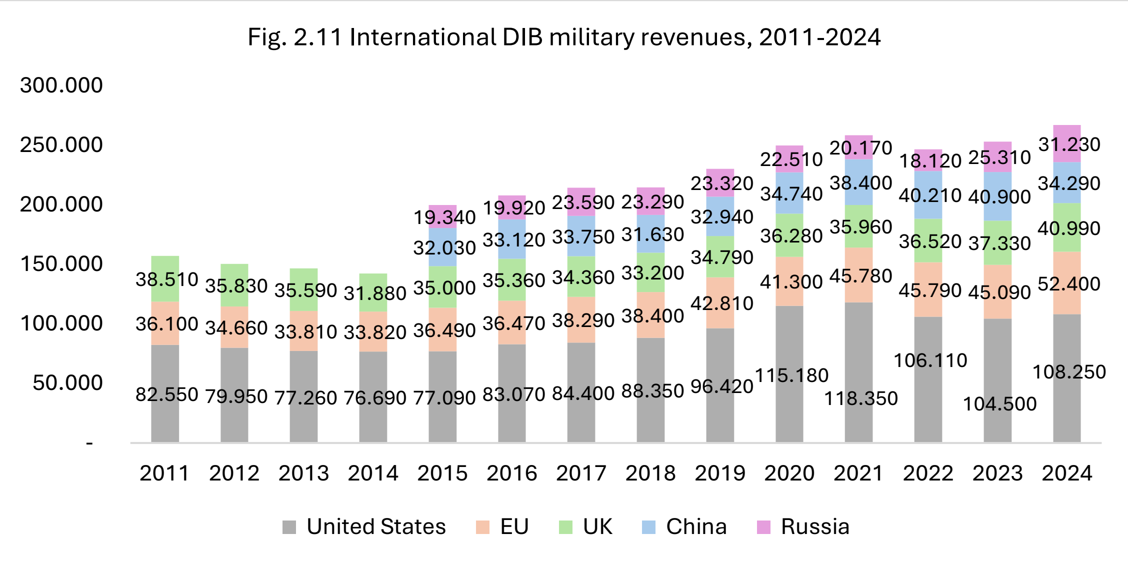
[23] With specific reference to the NATO industrial aggregate (United Kingdom, USA, EU), the absolute increase compared to 2011 amounts to USD 110 billion (a relative increase of 69.9%).

[24] Raytheon until 2019, subsequently Raytheon Technologies (2020-2022), and finally RTX (2023-2024).

steady growth, reflecting domestic demand and a global projection unmatched by other international competitors (see Fig. 2.12).

The absolute gap with the second and third largest industrial conglomerates in terms of military revenues (the United Kingdom and the EU) remains greater than a 2:1 ratio throughout the entire period under analysis, thereby reducing, at least in the short term, expectations of European strategic autonomy in relation to the transatlantic role.

The US industry is followed by the European industry (the United Kingdom and the EU), whose combined military revenues increased by 25.2% between 2011 and 2024. When disaggregating the data between the EU EDIB and that of the United Kingdom, these respectively constitute the second and third largest macro-aggregates in terms of global military revenues. The data illustrate a shift in the balance of power: in 2011, UK defence champions recorded military revenues of USD 38.5 billion, a value higher than that of the entire EU aggregate (USD 36.1 billion). By 2024, this relationship had reversed, with EU military revenues (USD 52.4 billion) surpassing those of the United Kingdom (USD 40.9 billion)[25], recording a relative increase of 45.2%.



Millions of constant 2024 US dollars. Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

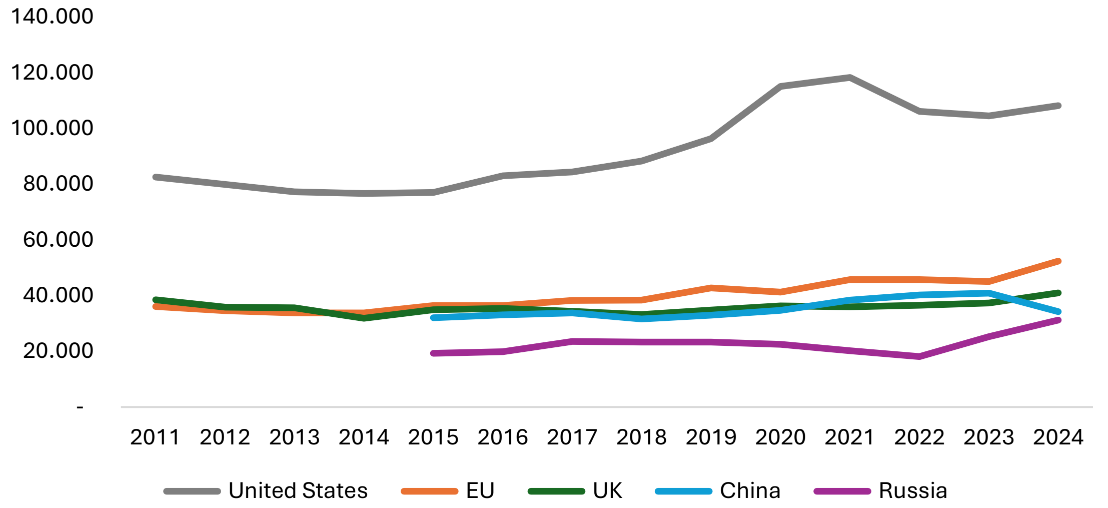
Chinese industrial champions (Avic, Norinco), with military revenues increasing from USD 32 billion in 2015 to USD 34.2 billion in 2024 (a relative increase of 7.1%), represent the true competitors of EU and UK industries. China's near-continuous growth up to 2023 – when it recorded a decline compared to the previous three-year period (2021-2023) – suggests a long-term industrial planning strategy aimed at

[25] Relative increase (2011-2024) +0.6%.

sustaining an assertive posture, particularly in areas of strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific.

Despite the sanction's regime, Russian industrial champions (Rostec, United Shipbuilding Corporation) display remarkable resilience, driven by a war economy. Russia's Defence Industrial Base increased its revenues from USD 19.3 billion in 2015 to USD 31.2 billion in 2024, recording the highest relative growth among the industrial bases of the five main international actors (61.5%). The data confirm a transition to a war economy capable of sustaining industrial production despite isolation from Western markets.

Fig. 2.12 Trends in international DIB military revenues, 2011-2024



Millions of constant 2024 US dollars. Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

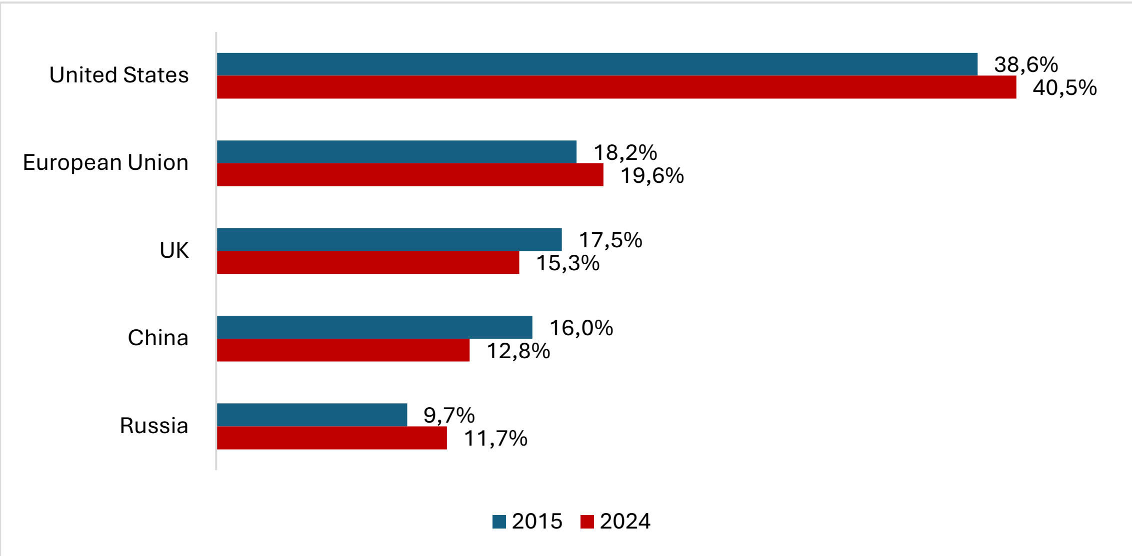
Analysing changes in market shares of the five main international actors within total military revenues, it emerges that the US Defence Industrial Base has not only maintained its dominant position but has also eroded market share from its competitors. Equally significant is the data on the Russian share, which – despite Western sanctions – records a relative increase comparable to that of the US DIB (see Fig. 2.13). This indicates that the economic isolation imposed on Russia by the West has not weakened its industrial base; on the contrary, the transition to a war economy has stimulated production, making the Russian Federation an even more relevant actor in the international arms market.

Although the relative contraction of China's share of revenues appears to challenge narratives of its rise, this must be interpreted with caution. Military revenues in absolute terms continued to grow steadily until 2023, albeit at a slower pace than those of the United States, Russia, and the EU. This contraction suggests that Chinese industry – being neither engaged in direct conflict (as in the case of Russia) nor in large-scale arms supply commitments (as in the case of the United

States and Europe) – is accumulating strategic capacity rather than allocating production resources for immediate use.

The relative decline in China is partly offset by the increase in the EU share, driven not by efficient strategic coordination but rather by exogenous demand linked to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Among the industrial poles 'directly' involved in the conflict, the UK Defence Industrial Base appears to be the most sensitive to market fluctuations. While Russia, the United States, and the EU have expanded industrial output in response to rising demand, the UK defence industry has not captured the same production momentum as its competitors. Aggregate data demonstrate that the international defence market is rewarding systems with surge capacity – such as the United States, Russia, and, to some extent, the EU – that can respond rapidly to demand spikes.

Fig. 2.13 Percentage variation in international DIB military revenues: 2015 vs. 2024



Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

2.2.2. The European context

Despite the EU aggregate showing a positive trend in terms of military revenues, this expansion should not be interpreted as evidence of greater industrial integration. Growth is in fact driven by Member States, to the detriment of trans-European cooperation. In this context, it is necessary to distinguish between national DIB (France, Germany, Italy, Poland[26], Sweden) and trans-European industrial groups, which are not included in the EU aggregate.

[26] SIPRI reports data for Poland (PGZ) for the period 2014-2024. The estimate of the DIB of the remaining Member States was obtained by aggregating data for Sweden (Saab), available up to 2011, and those of PGZ, available from 2014 onwards.

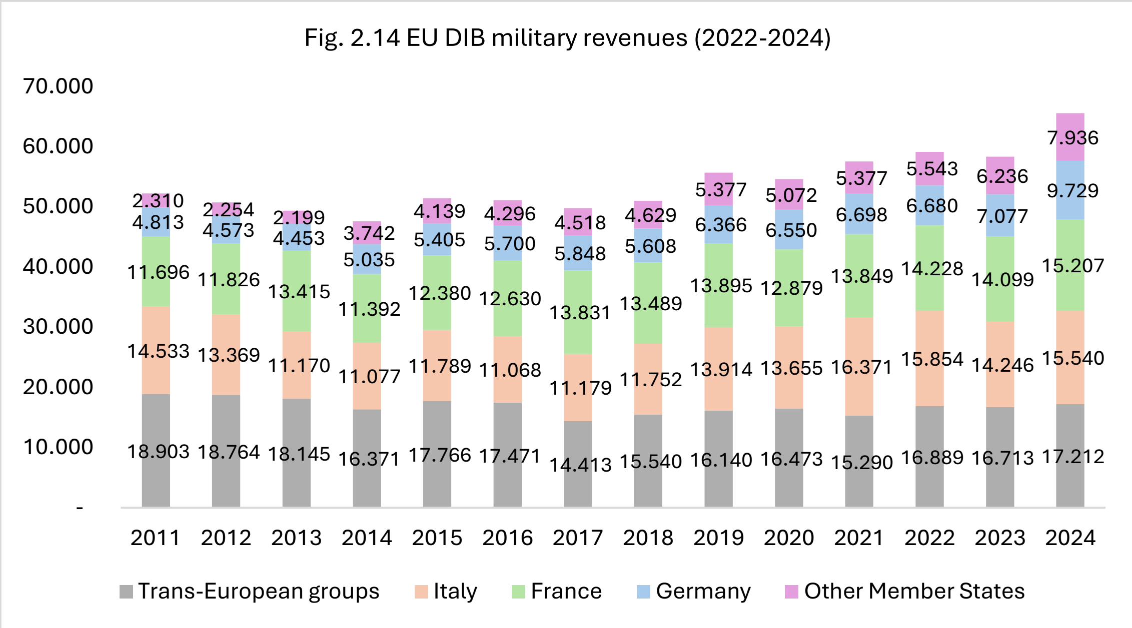
Trans-European companies[27] are regarded as the vector of a common European defence (Hartley, 2019). Although they remain the Union's leading aggregate (see Fig. 2.14), between 2011 and 2024 they recorded a decline in military revenues, falling from EUR 18.9 billion to EUR 17.2 billion (a relative decrease of -8.9%). The growth of the EU aggregate is therefore attributable to the rise of national actors such as Germany and Poland, which represent the most significant statistical outliers. This dynamic confirms the predominantly national nature of rearmament strategies, with the risk of generating internal imbalances within the EU defence market.

With specific reference to the German Defence Industrial Base, military revenues have doubled, increasing from EUR 4.8 billion in 2011 to EUR 9.7 billion in 2024, a relative increase of 102%. This rapid growth of German industry, particularly in the last two years, is linked to the activation of the government's special defence fund. The growth of Poland and Sweden is also significant, with real military revenues rising from EUR 3.7 billion in 2014 to EUR 7.9 billion in 2024, recording the highest relative increase among EU aggregates (+112.1%) (see Fig. 2.15). This expansion further indicates an EU industrial policy centred on Member States, with the risk of entrenching – or even increasing – the current fragmentation of the EU DIB.

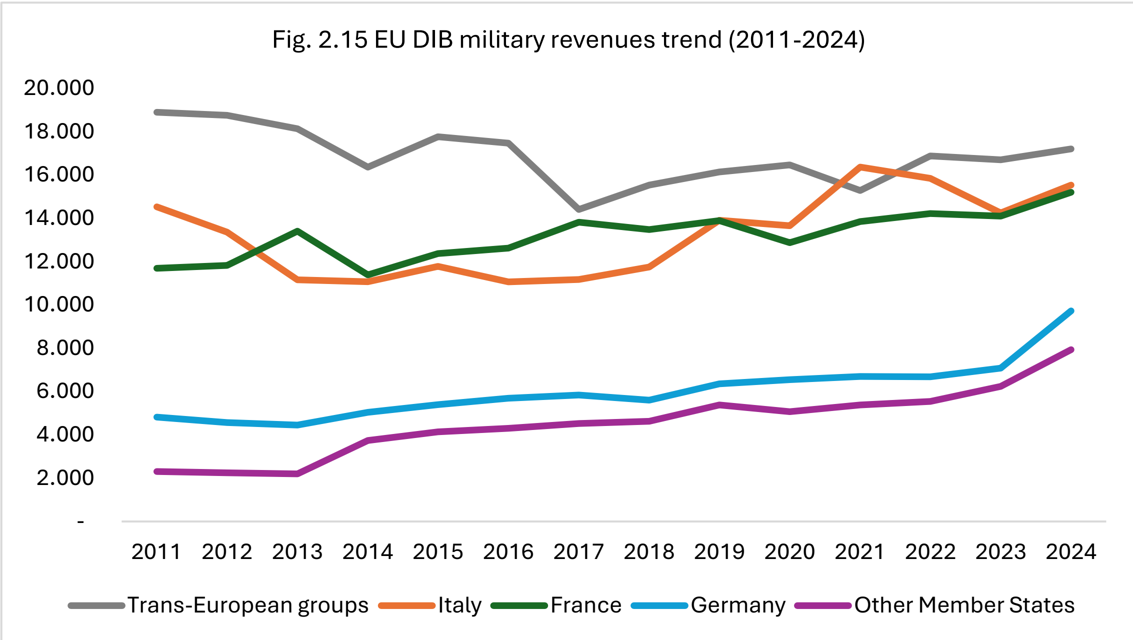
France maintains steady growth, increasing from EUR 11.6 billion in 2011 to EUR 15.2 billion in 2024, a relative increase of 30%. The trajectory of the French Defence Industrial Base reflects a structured and coherent industrial policy, aligned with domestic, European, and global demand.

Despite revenue levels exceeding those of all EU competitors both in 2011 (EUR 14.5 billion) and in 2024 (EUR 15.5 billion), the Italian defence industry shows the greatest difficulty in capitalising on the increase in global demand, with a modest relative increase over the period 2011-2024 of +6.9%.

[27] The trans-European DIB was estimated by aggregating the real military revenues of Airbus and MBDA. MBDA is a joint venture owned by Airbus (37.5%), BAE Systems (37.5%), and Leonardo (25%), and represents Europe's leading missile manufacturer.



Millions of euros at constant 2024 prices. Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

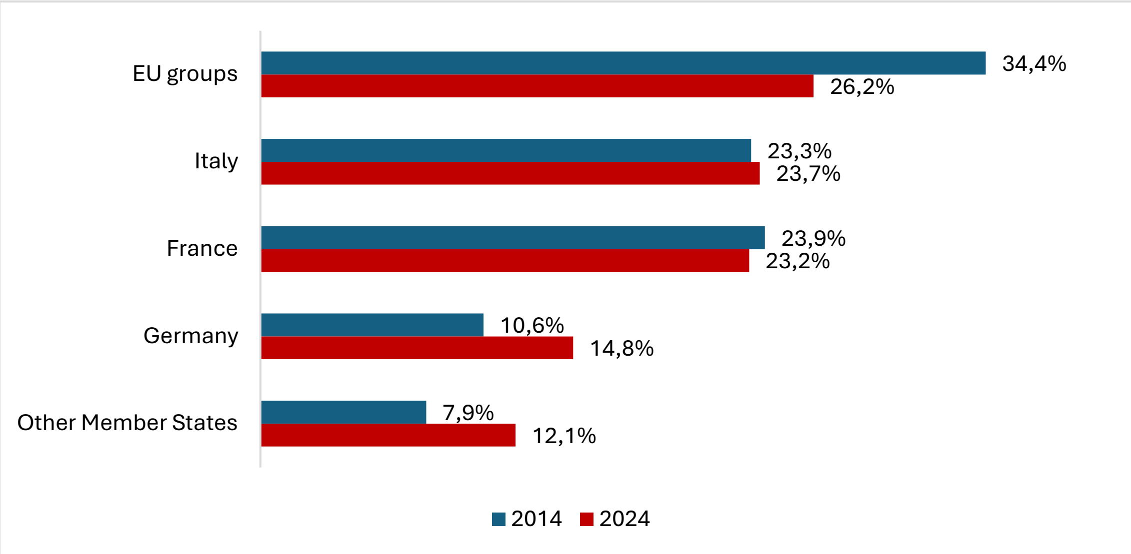


Millions of euros at constant 2024 prices. Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

Analysing changes in national shares of the EU aggregate in military revenues, Figure 2.16 (see above) illustrates a radical reconfiguration of the European defence industry. Between 2014 and 2024, there is a decline in the real revenues of trans-European conglomerates, whose share decreases from 34.4% in 2014 to 26.2% in 2024, converging towards the levels of the national DIB of France and Italy. The data show that the trans-European market share has been eroded by two parallel dynamics: on the one hand, the rise of Germany, which has emerged as the fastest-growing national defence industry, with its relative share increasing from 10.6% (2014) to 14.8% (2024). On the other hand, the fragmentation of the European defence market linked to the emergence of other Member State Defence Industrial Bases (Poland, Sweden), whose combined share increased from 7.9% (2014) to 12.1% (2024).

While France and Italy – despite their long-standing differences (see below) – maintain broadly stable shares of military revenues, the dynamism of the EU Defence Industrial Base is driven by the German rearmament, as well as the non-negligible role of other producers such as Poland and Sweden. It is therefore reasonable to argue that the current increase in European military spending is fostering an industrial policy that, rather than promoting integration (via trans-European groups), strengthens the DIB of individual Member States.

Fig 2.16 Percentage variation in EU DIB military revenues: 2014 vs. 2024



Analysis by Archivio Disarmo on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

2.2.3. European defence domains

With specific reference to European defence domains, there is a strategic gap between the aerospace sector[28], the naval sector[29] and the land system sector[30]. In absolute terms, the aerospace domain constitutes the largest component of the EU Defence Industrial Base, with military revenues amounting to EUR 36 billion in 2024 – four times the level of the naval sector (EUR 9.1 billion) and more than twice that of the land systems sector (EUR 14.2 billion) (see Fig. 2.17). Despite this, the

[28]The EU aerospace DIB was estimated by aggregating the real military revenues of Airbus, Leonardo, and Thales.

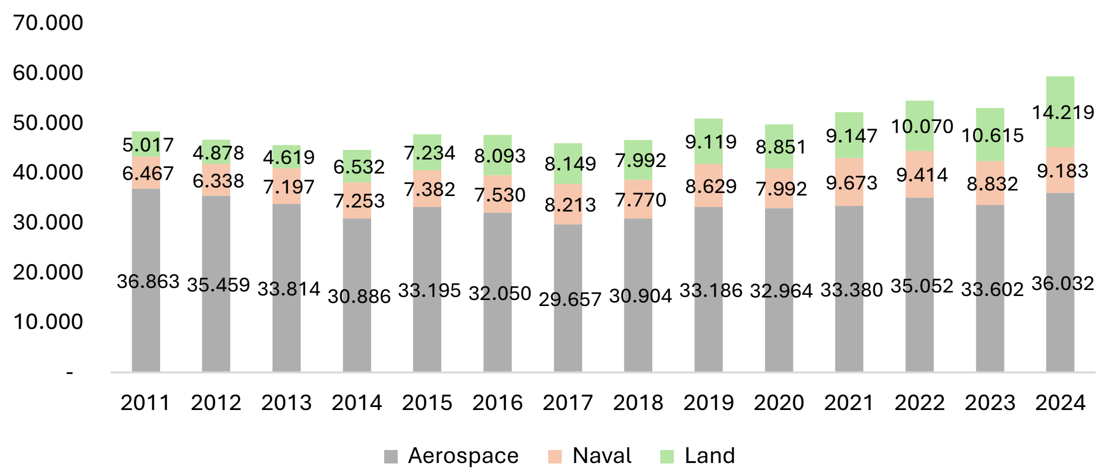
[29] The EU naval DIB was estimated by aggregating the real military revenues of Fincantieri, Naval Group, and ThyssenKrupp.

[30] The EU land DIB was estimated by aggregating the real military revenues of KNDS, PGZ, and Rheinmetall.

aerospace sector – traditionally considered the most technologically intensive domain (Boddy and Lovering, 1986; Carou, 2021) – appears to be losing momentum relative to the responsiveness of the other two sectors.

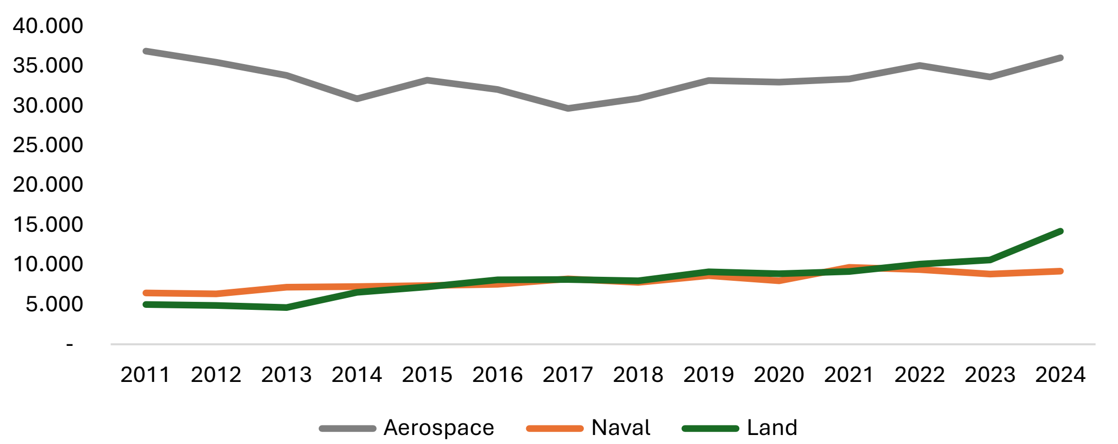
Notwithstanding an institutional discourse focused on technological sovereignty and third-generation defence systems (e.g. GCAP, FCAS, Eurodrone), it is evident that European industry has moved in a direction opposite to that which has been theorised, concentrating instead on the more conventional dimensions of warfare. A clear illustration of this trajectory is the sharp increase in land systems military revenues following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine: between 2023 and 2024, they increased by 34% (see Fig. 2.18). Also noteworthy is the trajectory of the aerospace aggregate, which generated military revenues of EUR 36.8 billion in 2011 and – after reaching a low point in 2017 (EUR 29.6 billion) – only returned to 2011 levels in 2024 (EUR 36 billion).

Fig. 2.17 Military revenues by defence domain in the EU DIB (2011-2024)



Millions of euros at constant 2024 prices. Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

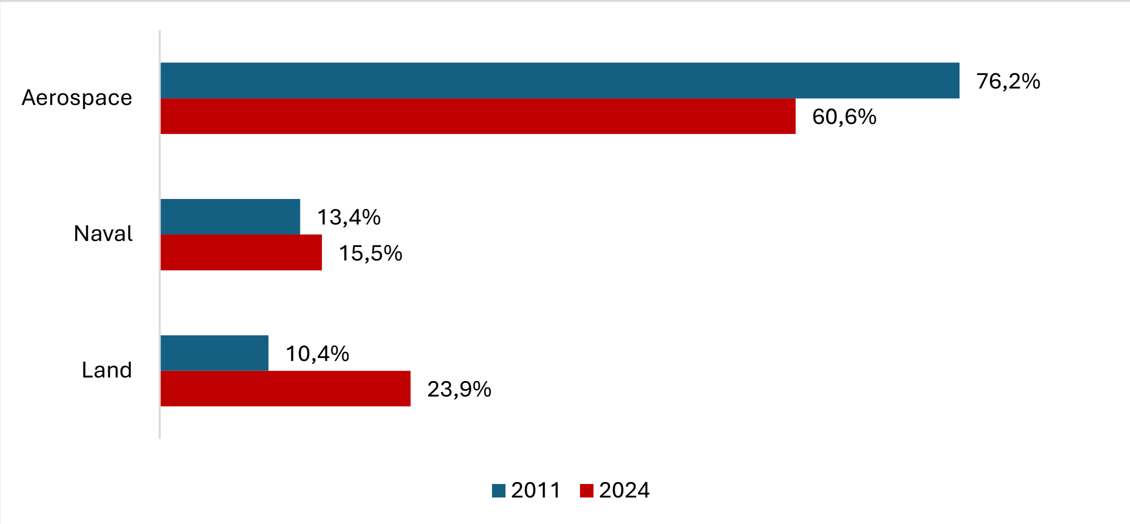
Fig. 2.18 Military revenues trend by defence domain in the EU DIB (2011-2014)



Millions of euros at constant 2024 prices. Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

In relative terms, between 2011 and 2024 the aerospace sector recorded a contraction of -2.3%. The downsizing of its role within the European industrial agenda is reflected in the decline of its share of total EU military revenues, which fell from 76.2% (2011) to 60.6% (2024). This decline reveals several parallel dynamics: the loss of competitiveness of the EU aerospace industry vis-à-vis both regional competitors (such as the United Kingdom, see below) and international actors (Latham, 2021); the saturation of European industrial production capacities, which has not been offset by structural technological investment (Freyrie, 2023); and constraints linked to the strategic influence of the United States[31] (particularly during the second Trump administration). The stagnation of the aerospace defence sector becomes even more evident when compared with the naval and land systems segments of the EU. While the former has shown signs of saturation, the latter has experienced expansion, acting as a driver of European military expenditure growth.

Fig. 2.19 Percentage variation in military revenues by defence domain in the EU: 2011 vs. 2024



Analysis by Archivio Disarmo on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

Although it remains substantially smaller than the aerospace segment, the volume of naval and land systems military revenues has more than doubled, rising from EUR 11.5 billion in 2011 to EUR 23.4 billion in 2024, representing a relative increase of 103.8%. The transformation of the EU DIB has not only altered industrial power relations in favour of traditional military domains but has also undermined the notion of a common defence, which – despite the rhetoric of European institutions – has shifted from a 'third generation' perspective towards an

[31] It is important to underline that the United States is the principal supplier of weapons systems to EU Member States: 38% of US military exports are directed to the EU (George *et al.*, 2026).

increasingly conventional orientation. This shift is evidenced by the expansion of the combined share of the naval and land sectors. In 2011, these two domains together accounted for approximately one quarter (23.8%) of EU military revenues; by 2024, this share had risen to around 40% of the EU DIB.

Examining the naval and land domains separately reveals further insights into the state of European industry. Growth in the naval sector has been moderate but steady over time, increasing from EUR 6.4 billion in 2011 to EUR 9.2 billion in 2024, a relative increase of 42%. Of the three European defence domains, it is the one that has maintained the most stable relative share, recording a positive change of two percentage points, whereas aerospace has ceded approximately 16 points to the land systems sector. The latter is the domain that has experienced the most significant transformation, emerging as the second largest economic segment of the EU defence industry. As shown in Figure 2.17 (see above), real military revenues have nearly tripled, increasing from EUR 5 billion in 2011 to EUR 14.2 billion in 2024, a relative increase of 183.4%. The expansionary cycle of the land sector is further illustrated by the change in its share, which more than doubled from 10.4% (2011) to 23.9% (2024) (see Fig. 2.19).

The discontinuity is marked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. From 2022 onwards, a vertical acceleration of EU defence activity can be observed, and given the nature of the conflict, the land domain is dominant. This trajectory suggests a form of ‘emergency procurement’, focused on the replenishment of stocks (ammunition, armoured vehicles, etc.) rather than long-term technological development [32]. While the land-based DIB responds promptly to demand, the stagnation of the aerospace sector raises serious questions regarding the European Union’s strategic autonomy.

The EU is financing the most conventional domains of warfare; however, this is not matched by equivalent investment in next-generation defence capabilities (as illustrated by the Eurodrone project, under development since 2017) (Leonardo, 2026). The current configuration of the EU defence industry risks sustaining the development of a ‘heavy’, technologically conventional military force, while future defence capabilities remain largely dependent on non-EU suppliers[33].

[32] In this context, it is appropriate to mention ASAP (see above, para. 1.6).

[33] Possibly with this awareness, on 6 March 2025 Leonardo signed a memorandum of understanding with Baykar Technologies (Türkiye) to establish a joint venture to produce unmanned aerial systems (Leonardo, 2025). Furthermore, on 11 February 2026, the European Commission announced the launch of the so-called ‘Drone Alliance’ with Ukraine. The aim is to bring together European manufacturers with Ukrainian start-ups and companies to leverage the know-how and Defence Industrial Base made available by the authorities in Kyiv (Ansa, 2026).

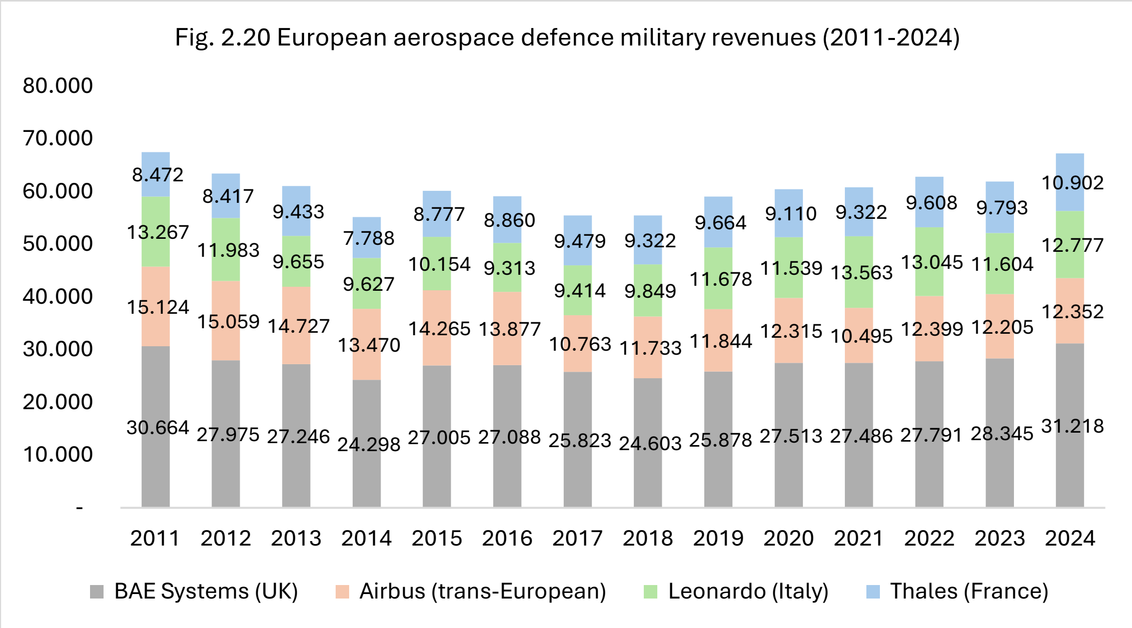
2.2.3.1. European aerospace defence

When isolating real military revenues of the four main European aerospace defence champions (BAE Systems, Airbus, Leonardo, Thales), it becomes even more evident that the model of common defence has given way to national industrial logics. The analysis highlights a significant heterogeneity in national responses to demand-side stimuli, revealing fragmentation not only across the three European defence domains – competing for the allocation of public resources – but also within each individual sector.

First, a structural divide emerges between the UK-based BAE Systems and EU-based companies (Airbus[34], Leonardo[35], Thales). None of these firms reaches the scale of BAE Systems, which remains the leading industrial pole of the European aerospace defence sector. With a relative increase of 1.8% (2011-2024), BAE Systems' real military revenues reached EUR 31.2 billion in 2024, exceeding by an average of more than EUR 10 billion all EU competitors (see Fig. 2.20). The revenue trajectories of Airbus, Leonardo, and Thales show convergence within a range of EUR 11-13 billion. However, while in 2011 the gap between these companies' military revenues was substantial, with a difference of EUR 6.6 billion between Airbus (highest) and Thales (lowest), by 2024 it had narrowed to EUR 1.8 billion, indicating a levelling of financial magnitudes among the EU aerospace defence industrial poles (see Fig. 2.21).

With specific reference to Airbus, the trans-European group constitutes the EU's largest defence industrial conglomerate in terms of military revenues. Although showing signs of recovery, Airbus has undergone twelve years of relative decline, recording a -18.3% contraction between 2011 and 2024 (the worst relative performance within the European aerospace defence sector).

[34] Airbus – formerly EADS (European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company) until 2013 – was created in 2000 through the merger of Germany's DaimlerChrysler Aerospace, France's Aérospatiale-Matra, and Spain's Construcciones Aeronáuticas SA.
[35] Until 2015, Finmeccanica.



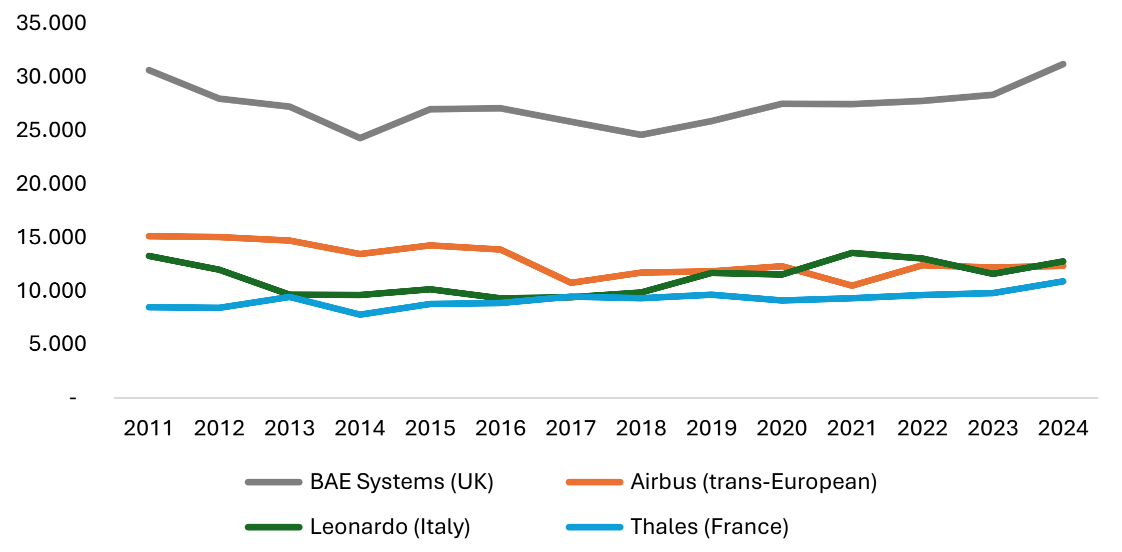
Millions of euros at constant 2024 prices. Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

Italy's Leonardo represents the largest industrial pole among EU Member States and the second largest within the EU aerospace defence sector. Between 2011 and 2024, although with a weaker performance than Airbus, Leonardo also recorded a relative decline (-3.7%). Among the four industrial champions analysed, the French company Thales exhibits the strongest relative performance. Starting from the lowest level of military revenues within the EU aerospace defence base, Thales achieved steady growth, partially closing the gap with its EU competitors, consistently exceeding the EUR 9 billion threshold and reaching EUR 10.9 billion in military revenues in 2024.

With reference to NATO guidelines agreed in Newport (2014), the data on European aerospace defence reveal a significant mismatch in the transmission of commitments embedded in national industrial agendas. In the three-year period following the NATO summit (2015-2017), while BAE Systems and Thales embarked on structural growth trajectories, Leonardo and, in particular, Airbus experienced a contraction in military revenues. This suggests that the NATO-driven investment impulse benefited other defence domains and national industries, rather than the aerospace sector or more diversified and/or trans-European approaches.

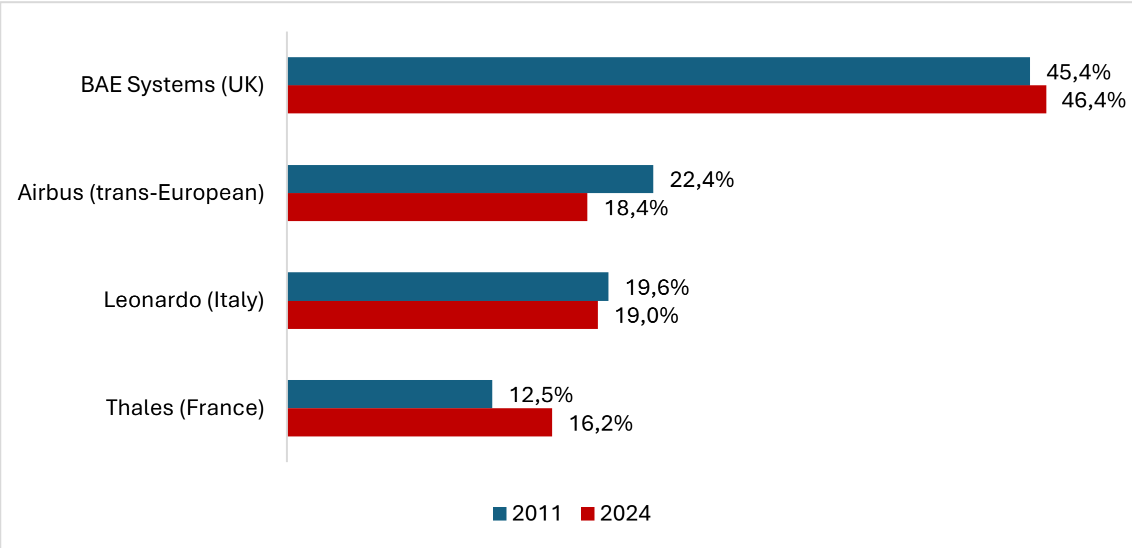
In the 2022-2024 period, the Russia-Ukraine conflict acted as a multiplier of military revenues for certain aerospace firms. BAE Systems consolidated its dominance, while Thales emerged as the most dynamic company in relative terms. This trend signals a strategic shift in demand towards defence electronics, cybersecurity, and C4ISR systems, areas in which the French company is particularly strong. Conversely, Leonardo shows a degree of stagnation: despite a recovery in 2023-2024 (when it reached EUR 12.7 billion in military revenues), it does not significantly surpass pre-2014 levels. In real terms, this indicates that the Italian company has preserved its value but has not capitalised on defence market growth with the same intensity as its French and British competitors.

Fig. 2.21 Trend in European aerospace defence military revenues (2011-2024)



Millions of euros at constant 2024 prices. Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

Fig. 2.22 Percentage change in military revenue shares in EU aerospace defence: 2011 vs. 2024



Analisys by Archivio Disarmo on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

The analysis of market shares in European aerospace defence reveals a restructuring of industrial balances in a direction that runs counter to the hypothesis of increasing trans-European integration (see Fig. 2.22). The United Kingdom (BAE Systems) not only maintains its share unchanged, but strengthens its central position, rising from 45.1% (2011) to 46.4% (2024). This British dominance is politically significant, as it highlights how the leading actor in the European aerospace defence industry operates outside the EU.

However, the most concerning performance from the perspective of common defence ambitions is that of Airbus, whose share declines from 22.4% (2011) to 18.4% (2024). Within EU Member States, the French champion (Thales) is the main beneficiary of demand dynamics in the aerospace sector, increasing its share from 12.5% (2011) to 16.2% (2024). The Italian champion, by contrast, remains broadly stable, falling slightly from 19.6% (2011) to 19.0% (2024). Despite the broader global rearmament context, Leonardo exhibits a form of market stagnation.

The decline of the trans-European industrial model, which has been relatively effective in the civilian domain, reflects the portfolio preferences of Member States, which – particularly in periods of heightened security uncertainty – tend to favour national suppliers over European co-production schemes. The relative decline of Airbus in favour of BAE Systems (extra-EU) and Thales (EU-France) illustrates how the aerospace defence market rewards technological specialisation and national (or transatlantic) industrial structures, rather than large-scale European cooperative programmes, which often suffer from decision-making inefficiencies.

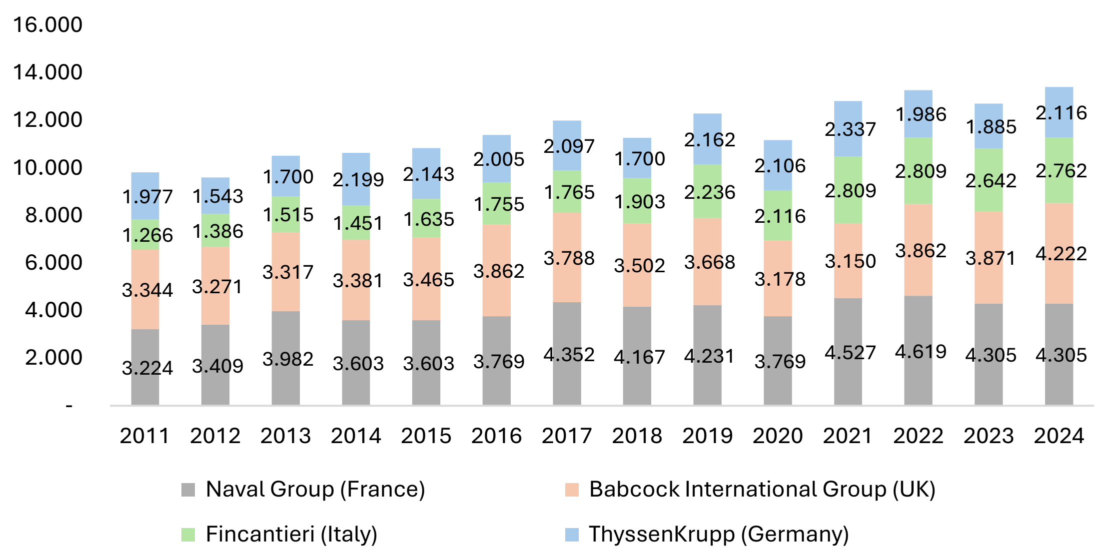
2.2.3.2. European naval defence

With regard to the industrial champions of European naval defence (Babcock International Group, Fincantieri, Naval Group, ThyssenKrupp), a highly competitive landscape also emerges in this sector – albeit on a different scale compared to the aerospace domain – where success depends on the varying capacities of national actors to respond to global and continental demand-side stimuli. The EU naval defence sector displays two main characteristics: on the one hand, the Franco-British duopoly formed by Babcock and Naval Group, which maintain a leadership position throughout the period under analysis; on the other hand, the resurgence of Italy's Fincantieri and the stagnation of Germany's ThyssenKrupp (see Fig. 2.23).

More specifically, Babcock and Naval Group operate on financial scales at least EUR 1 billion larger than those of other European competitors, recording military revenues of EUR 4.3 billion and EUR 4.2 billion respectively in 2024. However, the trajectories leading to these outcomes differ significantly: while France's Naval Group surpassed the levels achieved by its British competitor, Babcock experienced a marked contraction during the 2019-2020 period, before recovering because of the demand surge associated with the war in Ukraine.

Italy's Fincantieri represents the most dynamic industrial case within the naval sector[36]. Benefiting from a EUR 1.1 billion contract with the Indonesian Ministry of Defence for the supply of two patrol vessels (Fincantieri, 2024), the Italian group recorded a 118% increase between 2011 and 2024, achieving the strongest relative performance among European naval defence companies. This expansion enabled Fincantieri both to narrow the gap with market leaders and to distance Germany's ThyssenKrupp. The latter, despite starting from a solid base in 2011 (EUR 1.9 billion), higher than that of Fincantieri, closed 2024 with military revenues amounting to EUR 2.1 billion, reflecting substantial stagnation (+7%) and a limited capacity to exploit the expansionary phase of the naval defence market as effectively as its competitors (see Fig. 2.24).

Fig. 2.23 European naval defence military revenues (2011-2024)



Millions of euros at constant 2024 prices. Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

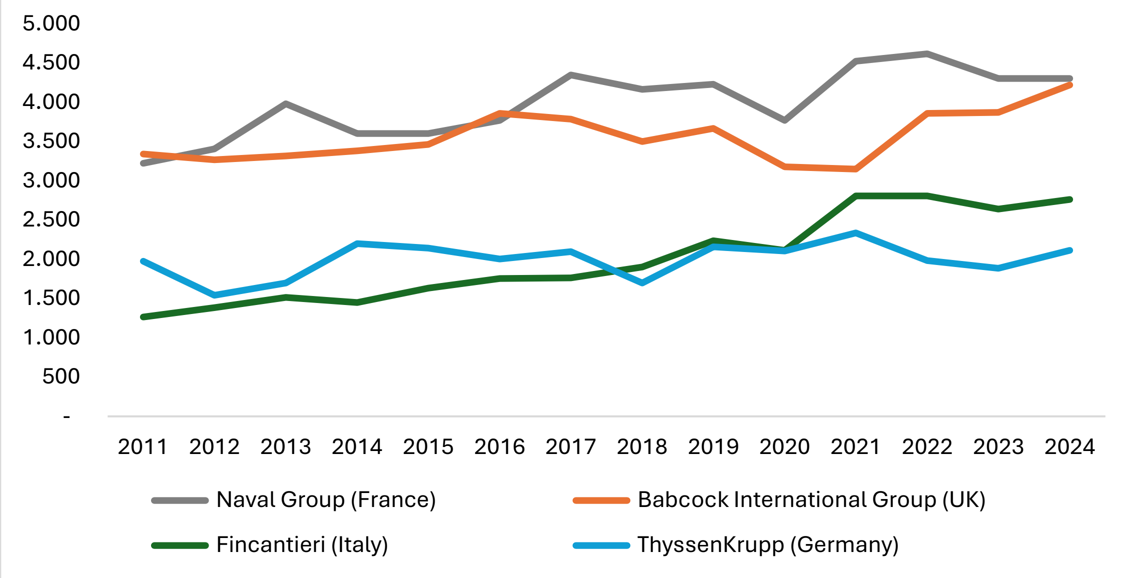
The temporal analysis suggests that exogenous demand shocks (the Newport Summit, the annexation of Crimea, and the war in Ukraine) have produced asymmetric effects. While Fincantieri initiated a phase of structural growth as early as 2015, the Franco-British giants recorded their most pronounced accelerations only in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with Naval Group reaching a peak of EUR 4.6 billion in 2022.

The variation in market shares within European naval defence confirms a realignment of power balances in favour of Italy (see Fig. 2.25). In 2011, the market

[36] In this context, the political obstacles placed in the way of Fincantieri's acquisition of STX France are emblematic of the tension between European integration and state protectionism. Despite agreements providing for the acquisition of 66.7% of STX by the Italian company, the French government blocked the operation by threatening the nationalisation of STX (IREF, 2017).

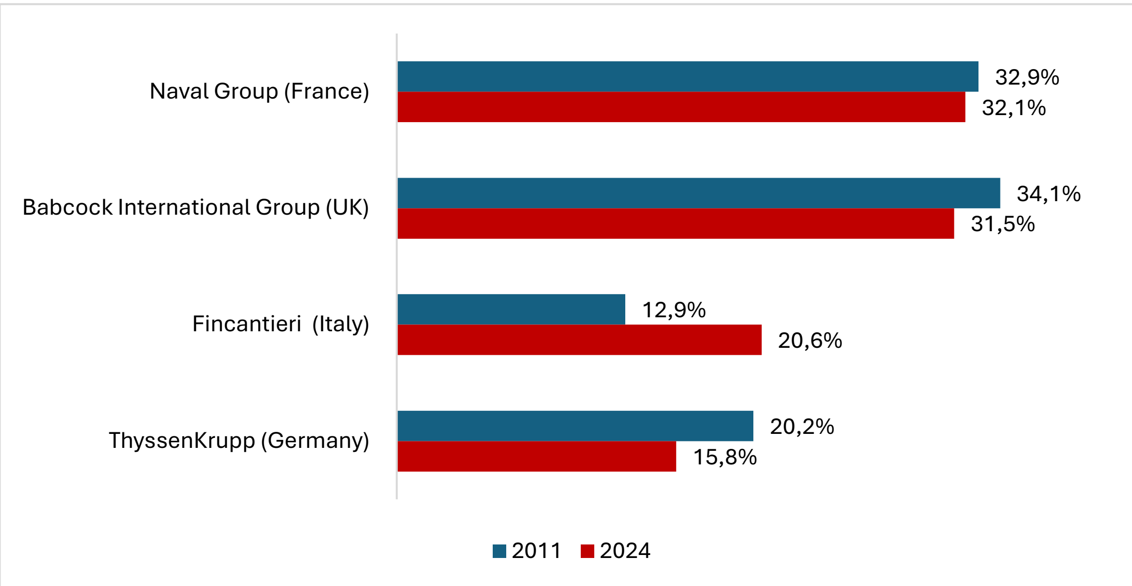
was dominated by Babcock (34%) and Naval Group (32.8%), with ThyssenKrupp (20.1%) occupying the position of third major actor and Fincantieri (12.9%) as the fourth industrial player. By 2024, the picture had changed: although Naval Group (32.1%) and Babcock (31.5%) retained leading positions (despite marginal losses in market share), Fincantieri nearly doubled its relative weight, rising to 20.6% and overtaking ThyssenKrupp, whose share declined to 15.7%.

Fig. 2.24 Trend in european naval defence military revenues (2011-2024)



Millions of euros at constant 2024 prices. Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

Fig. 2.25 Percentage change in military revenue shares in EU naval defence: 2011 vs. 2024



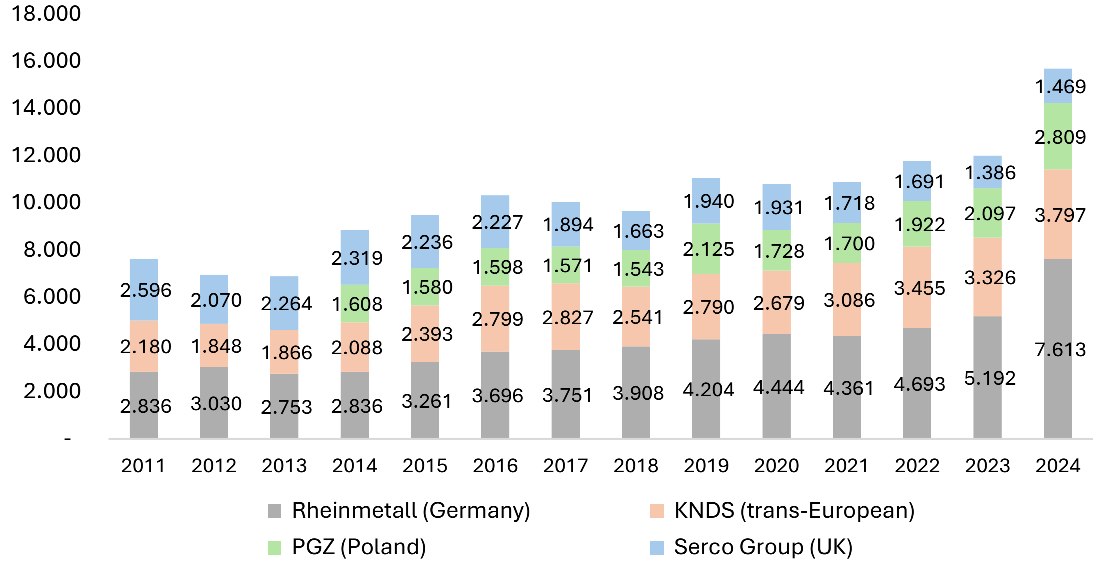
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

2.2.3.3. European land defence

Disaggregating the data relating to companies operating in the field of European land defence (KNDS[37], PGZ, Rheinmetall, Serco Group), reveals an oligopolistic dynamic far more pronounced than in the other two sectors. Whereas in the aerospace domain British dominance is consolidated but counterbalanced by continental actors (particularly Italy and France), the land sector is characterised by the hegemony of German industry, driven by Rheinmetall[38]. Further significance is attached to the growth of both an 'eastern flank' company such as Poland's PGZ and the trans-European (Franco-German) group KNDS (see Fig. 2.26).

In 2011, Germany's Rheinmetall recorded military revenues of EUR 2.8 billion, a figure broadly comparable to that of its British competitor Serco Group (EUR 2.6 billion). By 2024, however, the gap had widened considerably: Rheinmetall reached a peak of EUR 7.6 billion, nearly tripling its initial value and clearly distancing itself from all other European competitors.

Fig. 2.26 European land defence military revenues (2011-2024)



Millions of euros at constant 2024 prices. Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

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[37] Founded in 2020 through the merger of the French company Nexter and the German company Krauss-Maffei Wegmann. Military revenues prior to 2020 were estimated by aggregating the revenues of Nexter and Krauss-Maffei.

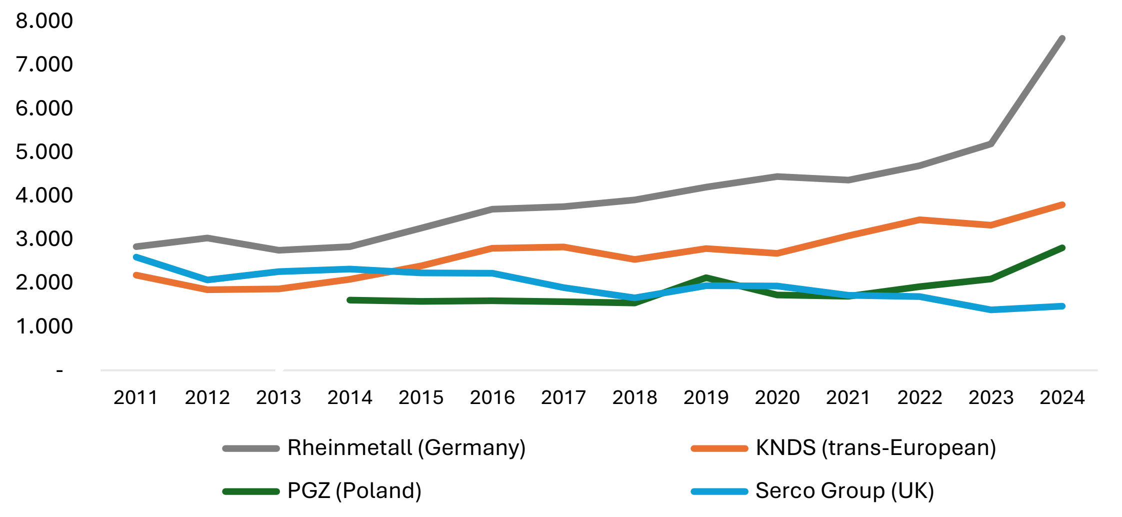
[38] On 5 June 2024, Rheinmetall and MBDA signed an agreement to integrate MBDA's Small Anti-Drone Missile (SADM) into Rheinmetall vehicles (Analisi Difesa, 2024). Furthermore, on 15 October 2024, Leonardo and Rheinmetall signed a memorandum of understanding establishing the joint venture Leonardo Rheinmetall Military Vehicles (LRMV). The primary objective of the new company – of which Leonardo and Rheinmetall are equal shareholders – is the industrial development and commercialisation of the new Italian Main Battle Tank (MBT) and the Lynx platform for the Armored Infantry Combat Systems (AICS) programme (Leonardo, 2024).

The revenue curves of KNDS and PGZ show a certain capacity to capture the increase in demand for land defence. The trans-European KNDS rises from EUR 2.1 billion in 2011 to EUR 3.8 billion in 2024, maintaining a positive trend, albeit at a slower pace than Rheinmetall (see Fig. 2.27). Poland's PGZ shows growth – although lower in absolute terms compared to KNDS – rising from EUR 1.6 billion to EUR 2.8 billion in 2024, benefiting from the strengthening militarisation of NATO's eastern flank.

In this context, it is reasonable to argue that the war in Ukraine has acted as an 'asymmetric multiplier'. While in the aerospace sector the benefits of rearmament have been distributed more broadly (albeit favouring French high-technology firms), in the land domain the demand for heavy artillery, ammunition, and armoured vehicles has been primarily absorbed by German industry, and to a lesser extent by Polish firms.

The transformation of the European industrial landscape highlights a growing convergence between the automotive and defence sectors, with production capacity and supply chains increasingly being repurposed, as seen in the case of Rheinmetall and PGZ (Steitz and Inverardi, 2025). From this perspective, the automotive and land defence sectors share structural features that make conversion more feasible than in the other two domains (aerospace and naval): vehicle engineering, electronics, sensors and integrated systems, robotics and large-scale manufacturing, and advanced materials and lightweight structures. These overlaps enable the dual-use automotive industry to leverage civilian innovation for military applications, thereby contributing to the expansion of EU land defence (Zandee, 2024; EFFRA, 2026).

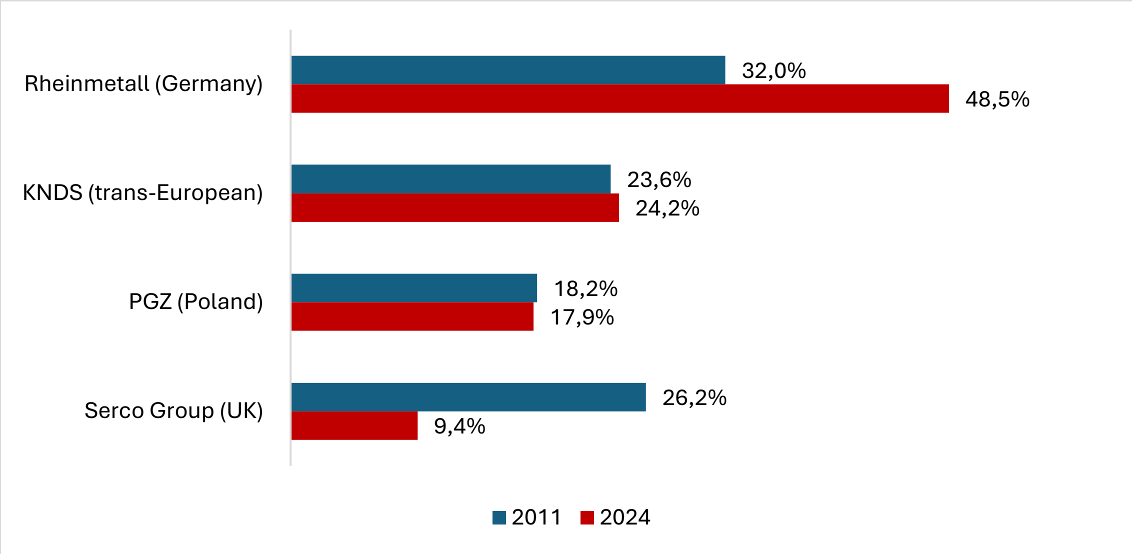
Fig. 2.27 Trend in european land defence military revenues (2011-2024)



Millions of euros at constant 2024 prices. Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

The analysis of market shares in the land defence segment confirms the sector's oligopolistic restructuring (see Fig. 2.28). In 2014, the market displayed relatively balanced characteristics: Rheinmetall accounted for 32% of European land defence, followed by the UK-based Serco Group (26.2%) and the trans-European group KNDS (23.6%). Ten years later, the situation has changed radically. Rheinmetall controls almost half of the aggregate (48.5%), having absorbed market shares from its European competitors. The most pronounced decline is observed outside the EU, with the UK's Serco Group increasingly marginalised in the European land defence market.

Fig. 2.28 Variation in market shares (%) of EU land defence military revenues: 2011 vs. 2024



Analysis by Archivio Disarmo on SIPRI Arms Industry Database.

KNDS and PGZ maintain broadly stable positions, with only marginal relative changes: the trans-European consortium rises to 24.2% (+0.6%), while the Polish group stands at 18% (+0.3%). This indicates that, despite increasing defence budgets, the capacity to capture demand has been almost exclusively concentrated in German industry. Unlike the aerospace sector – where the UK's BAE Systems maintains dominance – European land defence is increasingly shaped by German industrial leadership. The United Kingdom appears to be in a position of 'strategic retreat' from this specific industrial domain, allowing Germany to consolidate its role as the reference supplier for Europe's land defence capabilities.

2.3. Comments on Chapter 2

The analysis of the economic, financial, and industrial dynamics of EU defence reveals a reality that is markedly distant from the rhetoric of European institutions: the Union is undergoing a transition towards a 'pre-war economy' relying on financial instruments largely driven by a single Member State (Germany) and on a defence industrial base that appears to prioritise nationalisation over cohesion.

First, the ‘guns versus butter’ trade-off is no longer a theoretical policy choice, but a structural constraint imposed by limited fiscal space. The synchronous surge in EU military budgets after 2022 has generated crowding-out effects on civilian investment. Even more concerning is the accumulation of public debt across Member States, which reduces the capacity to respond to future exogenous shocks and imposes constraints on future generations.

Second, the rhetoric of a common defence is increasingly contradicted by the re-nationalisation of the EU DIB. Trans-European groups (traditionally regarded as key vectors of European integration) have experienced a sharp decline in market share, illustrating the extent to which Member States prefer to support their respective national champions. Despite commitments made within NATO frameworks, the gap with the US defence industrial base remains substantial, suggesting that EU strategic autonomy is, at present, not achievable.

Overall, the data describe an EU that is financing a heavy military build-up through debt. The aerospace sector (whose leading champion operates outside the EU, being British) is stagnating and has ceded market share to the land sector, particularly in Poland and Germany. This shift implies that the post-2022 acceleration is driven primarily by the replenishment of stockpiles (ammunition, armoured vehicles) rather than by long-term technological development. The tangible risk is the emergence of a technologically lagging military force dependent on non-EU suppliers for next-generation defence capabilities. In other words, the EU appears to be prioritising mass production in response to the emergency created by the war in Ukraine, while progressively losing ground in the race for technological sovereignty.

Mothodological note – Chapter 2

Chapter 2 reconstructs the time series of military revenues at constant prices (arms revenues, constant prices) based on data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Arms Industry Database. The SIPRI Arms Industry Database reports military revenues in both constant (real) and current (nominal) prices. Constant-price data are adjusted for inflation, meaning they account for changes in price levels over time (e.g., 2011 values are expressed in 2024 prices); current-price data, by contrast, reflect values measured at the prices prevailing in each specific year (e.g., 2011 values are expressed in 2011 prices). This chapter uses constant-price data with 2024 as the base year. The deflator used to convert current prices into constant prices is the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of the relevant country. SIPRI reports data in US dollars (USD) and converts local currencies using annual average market exchange rates (MER) or, in some cases, official fixed exchange rates. To ensure comparability with international aggregates, data for the five global industrial actors (China, Russia, United Kingdom, United States, and the European Union) are expressed in USD. Whereas data for the European DIB (France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom and trans-European groups) are converted into euros (EUR), using the 2024 average exchange rate provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)[39].

The SIPRI database includes both public and private defence companies and excludes production or maintenance units of armed forces. Unless otherwise specified, only firms engaged in the production of military goods and services are included, while holding companies and investment firms are excluded. Military R&D units within academic institutions are also not considered. To ensure full time-series consistency, all available annual datasets (2002-2024) were downloaded and merged into a single panel using the R statistical environment. To ensure robustness in cross-country comparisons, two ‘industrial samples’ (firms with the highest total real revenues in 2024) were selected for each country. After filtering the dataset to remove incomplete observations, the final period of analysis is 2011-2024. The resulting sample comprises 23 firms: 4 British companies (Babcock International Group, BAE Systems, Rolls-Royce, Serco Group), 2 Chinese companies (AVIC, Norinco), 3 French companies (Naval Group, Nexter, Thales), 2 Italian companies (Fincantieri, Leonardo), 1 Polish company (PGZ), 2 Russian companies (Rostec, United Shipbuilding Corporation), 3 trans-European groups (Airbus, KNDS, MBDA), 2 US companies (Lockheed Martin Corp., RTX), 1 Swedish company (Saab), and 3 German companies (Krauss-Maffei Wegmann, Rheinmetall, ThyssenKrupp). Regarding the three traditional domains of European defence (aerospace, naval, and land), firms were classified according to the primary source of their military revenues. For instance, Leonardo – despite being active across multiple defence segments – has been assigned to the aerospace domain, as most of its military revenues are attributable to helicopter production.

[39] For average annual exchanges rates, see: https://www.imf.org/en/data.

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Abstract Chapter 3

Chapter 3 analyses survey data (particularly Eurobarometer data) concerning public opinion in the EU 27 on the issues of Defence and Security over the period 2022-2025. The complexity of European citizens' opinions emerges clearly: on the one hand, they identify 'Employment, social affairs and public health' as the priority area in the allocation of public expenditure; on the other hand, they recognise the growing importance of defence and security functions. The shock caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 produced an initial surge in support for European rearmament, followed by a stabilisation and recalibration of collective priorities.

By analytically distinguishing the public of the EU 27 Member States into: 1) *Founding* countries; 2) *Bordering* countries; 3) *Other* countries, differentiated dynamics emerge. In the *Founding* countries, defence needs receive substantial recognition, although growing symptoms of war fatigue can be observed. These are particularly evident among Italian respondents, who were already especially cautious regarding military expenditure. A slight decline in support for common defence can also be observed in the *Other* countries. Conversely, in the *Bordering* countries, support for military commitment (expenditure and European cooperation) remains significant. It should nevertheless be noted that support for common defence depends strongly on the way in which questions are formulated: it increases when the defence function is presented in general terms, whereas it decreases when the costs and redistributive implications of rearmament are made explicit. Overall, a picture of conditional support emerges, in which European public opinion, despite persistent concern for international security, displays autonomous attitudes that tend to be more cautious than the strategies pursued by political elites.

3. Public opinion and European defence

3.1. Eurobarometer: purpose and methodology

For over fifty years, Eurobarometer, the official body of the European Commission and the European Parliament, has been gauging public opinion in EU Member States on the key issues on the European agenda.

Using Eurobarometer data, we have analysed Europeans' attitudes towards common defence by examining two sets of questions selected for their relevance to our study. The first set concerns citizens' preferences regarding the allocation of public spending in the EU, with reference to military expenditure. The second set focuses on citizens' views regarding defence cooperation among Member States.

Those who believe that Europe may one day become a unified political entity capable of tackling the major challenges of the globalised world appear to agree on one condition: that this process, destined to be enshrined in institutional decisions, agreements and regulations, must simultaneously be shared 'in the minds and hearts' of those who will be its citizens. Therefore, the views and sentiments of the latter, as well as their scientific observation and interpretation, constitute an important factor in legitimising the entire European project[1].

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[1] In this context, the state-of-the-art accuracy of surveys gauging public opinion is a strategic tool for politics, the media, research and, last but not least, the public itself. However, our appreciation of Eurobarometer's qualities (starting with its continuity, which allows for the analysis of time series otherwise unavailable) and our consequent decision to rely on its data do not exempt us from pointing out some of its limitations. On previous occasions in the academic literature, Eurobarometer has raised concerns regarding certain aspects that are only apparently technical, such as the framing and wording of questions, which critics attribute to an a priori 'integrationist' stance (Aldrin, 2013; Hőpner and Jurczik, 2015; Moise *et al*, 2023; Wang and Moise, 2023). For our part, the main problem we encountered in the secondary analysis of Eurobarometer data on defence is the failure to distinguish, in the questionnaires submitted to the sample of citizens, between the governing bodies of the EU and those of the individual Member States. This relates to questions such as respondents' views on the functions (civil and military) for which they would like 'the EU budget to be spent', or on 'strengthening the EU's capacity to produce military equipment', and so on. The distinction between the two levels of governance is not trivial. Except (and only partially) in the case of exceptional ad hoc interventions by the Commission and/or the Council (such as the PNRR/Next Generation EU during the Covid-19 emergency or ReArm Europe/Readiness 2030 in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine), it is national governments that decide on the funding of the various budget items for their public expenditure, and not Europe. The distinction between national and European decision-making is always relevant, but it is particularly so in a highly politicised field such as the financing and organisation of defence, in its various forms: operational bodies (armed forces), procurement (arms industry) and related sectoral policies. To compensate for the lack of a clear distinction between European and national decisions, we have supplemented the Eurobarometer findings by comparing them with data from other opinion poll sources (see below, section 3.2.3.).

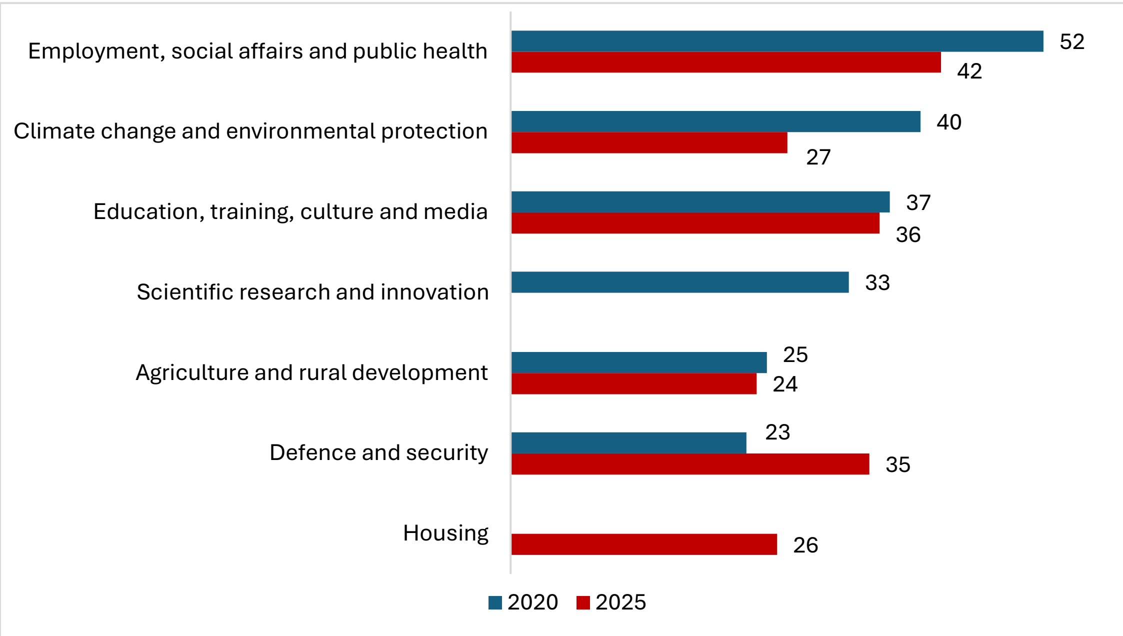
3.2. Public spending priorities according to European citizens

As discussed in Chapter 2, the NATO summit was held in The Hague in June 2025, during which the 32 heads of state and government agreed to increase military spending for each member country from 2% to 5% of GDP by 2035. The 5% target is divided into two parts: 1,5% is allocated to the protection of critical infrastructure and the safeguarding of networks, with the aim of contributing to civil resilience and strengthening the defence industry; 3,5% is allocated to increasing expenditure on defence itself (NATO, 2025).

In this context, it is particularly important to analyse the extent to which these trends are reflected in the spending preferences expressed by European citizens, as revealed by Eurobarometer surveys.

The Eurobarometer biannual report for autumn 2018 included a new section entitled 'Europeans and the EU budget'. The section explores public opinion on spending preferences for the European budget (which is, of course, distinct from the budgets of individual Member States). This section of the questionnaire was administered continuously from 2018 to 2020, with a break in the period 2021-2023, before resuming in 2024. Here, we will analyse two reference years: 2020, the year of the UK's exit from the EU, and 2025, the year of the latest available survey.

Fig. 3.1 Priorities in the EU budget. The 6 most frequently selected categories: EU 27 (%).



Q. On which of the following would you like EU budget to be spent?
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurobarometer data (2020-2025).

A sample of citizens from the EU 27 is presented with a list of 15 budget priorities, from which they are asked to select the four they consider to be the most important. In both years, the highest priority is identified as the category *Employment, social affairs and public health*, which received 52% of the votes in 2020 and 42% in 2025. The *Defence and security* sector, which ranked sixth in 2020 with 23% of the votes, rose to third place in 2025 with 35%, a clear consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (see Fig. 3.1).

In 2025, the priority remains *Employment, social affairs and public health*, although this drops to 42% of preferences. Standing at 36% of the total, the category *Education, training, culture and media* ranks second. With 27%, *Climate change* drops from second to fourth place, followed by the new entry of *Housing* (26%), which was not among the priorities in 2020. Finally, in sixth place is *Agriculture* (24%). The category *Scientific Research and Innovation*, which was among the six most frequently chosen categories in 2020, drops to seventh place in 2025, with 23% of the vote.

3.2.1. The increase in defence spending (2022-2025)

Given that defence ranks third among European citizens' priorities regarding public policies, it is useful to examine their views on the specific issue of increasing defence spending.

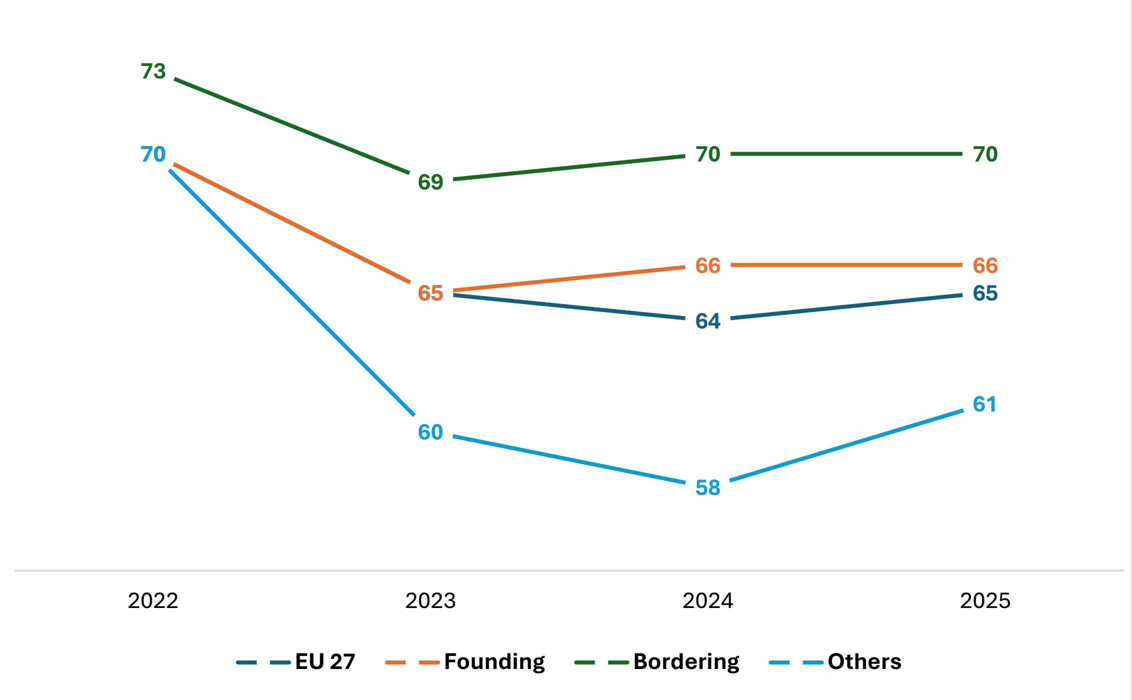
In this context, the analysis focuses on the evolution over time of public support for increased defence budgets during the period 2022-2025. To identify any differences in perceptions of the threat and in levels of support, the sample of respondents was broken down and re-aggregated internally.

To better focus on the European public's views regarding the military response in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we decided to divide the sample of respondents into three groups to highlight possible differences in the perception of the threat posed by the Russian Federation. The aim is purely heuristic and does not intend to introduce an ontological distinction between the 27 EU countries. The first two sub-samples represent a profile based on certain historical and geographical variables, whilst the third group is of a residual nature.

The first group, which we have called the *Founding countries*, consists of the six countries that participated in the founding of the political entity that has, over time, become the EU: *Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg* and *the Netherlands*. The second group is represented by the *Bordering* countries, to which we have assigned the countries located in the northern and eastern quadrant of the EU, in proximity to the Russian Federation – a proximity that can be defined as such in both strictly geographical terms (land and/or maritime) and, in a broader sense, strategic terms: *Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania* and *Sweden*.

Finally, the remaining countries that do not fall into the two previous categories have been grouped under the heading *Others countries*: *Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia* and *Spain*.

Fig. 3.2 Agreement on the need to increase defence spending in the EU: EU 27 + three groups of countries: *Founding*, *Bordering*, *Others* (%).

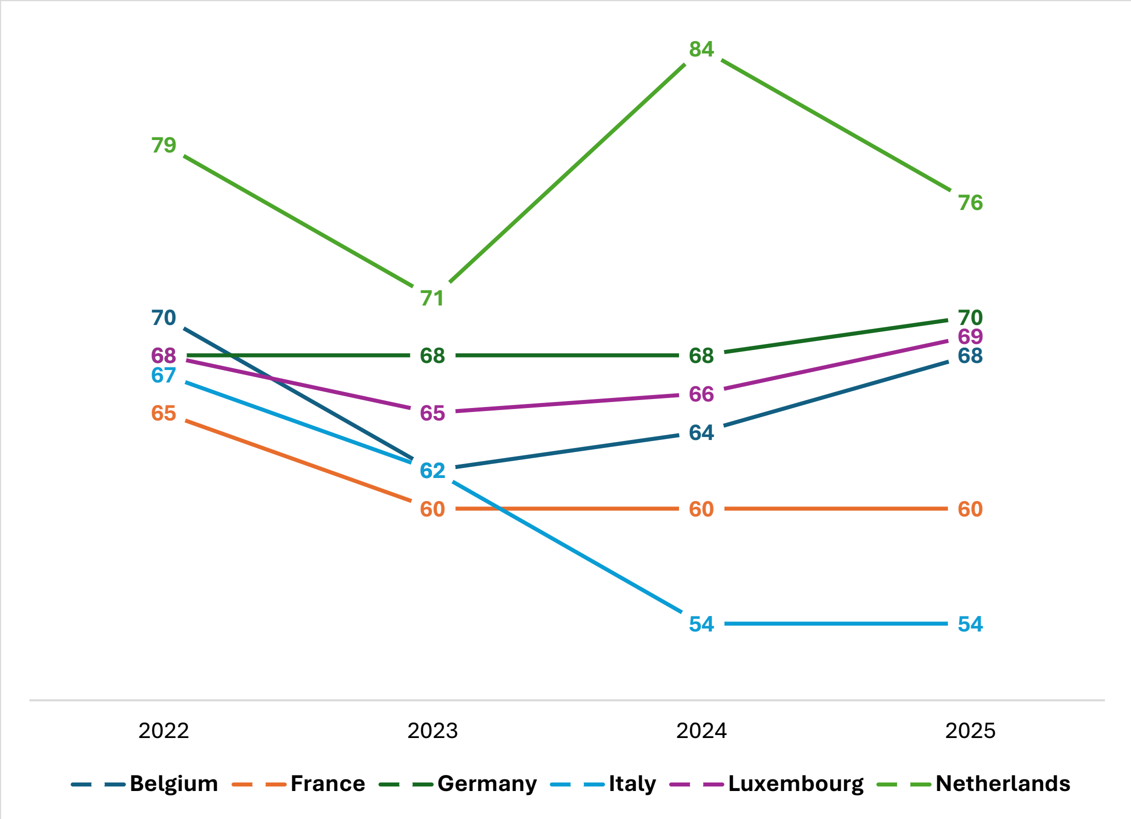


Q. Please tell to what extent you agree ('totally' + 'tend') or disagree ('totally' + 'tend') with the statement: 'More money should be spent on defence in the EU'.
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurobarometer data (2020-2025).

As shown in Fig. 3.2 (see above), overall, citizens of the EU 27 show, following a peak of 70% in 2022, a stabilisation at around 65% approval. Although this trend is broadly shared across the three sub-samples, there are some differences between the groups of countries considered. The decline in support is most evident in the *Others* countries group, which recorded a 9% decrease.

Moving to the national level, four years after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, significant variations emerge – even within a homogeneous group such as the *Founding* – regarding levels of support for increased military spending (see Fig. 3.3).

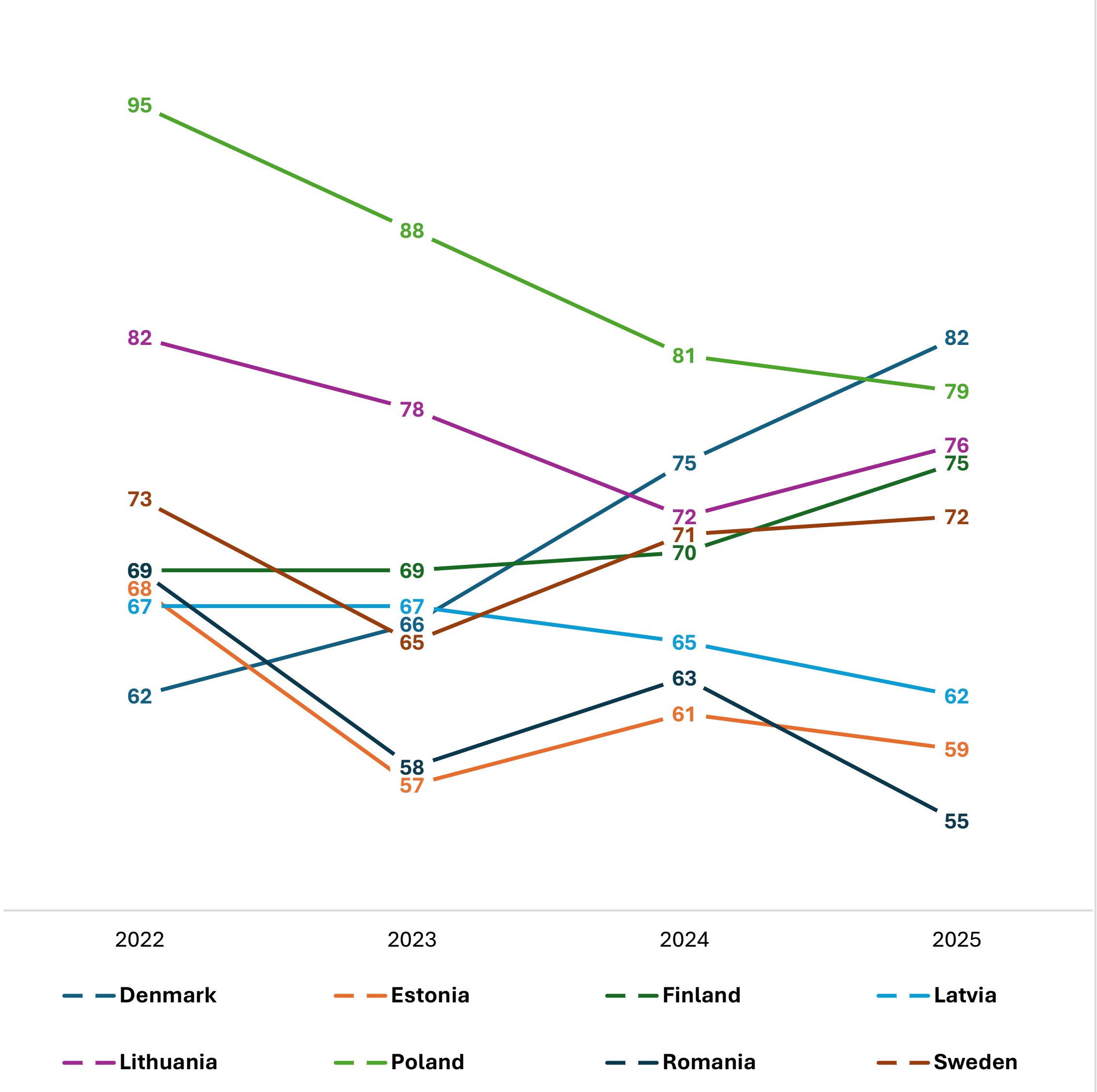
Fig. 3.3 Agreement on the need to increase defence spending in the EU: *Founding countries* (%).



Q. Please tell to what extent you agree ('totally' + 'tend') or disagree ('totally' + 'tend') with the statement: 'More money should be spent on defence in the EU'.
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurobarometer data (2020-2025).

Examining the opinions of the individual *Founding* countries, the marked fluctuations in the Netherlands stand out, which, while consistently at very high levels, alternate between peaks (84%) and troughs (76%). Similarly notable is the steady decline observed in Italy (see Fig. 3.3). In Italy, support, starting at 67% in 2022, appears to be gradually declining to 54% by 2025. This is a significant trend, likely explained by the shift 'from theory to practice' coinciding with the Meloni government's commitment to the new NATO pledges, which in June 2025 set the new target for the defence budgets of Alliance countries, including Italy, at 5% of GDP. The 'practical disillusionment' hypothesis does not appear to apply to Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg, where support remains stable, while in France support had already declined since 2023.

Fig. 3.4 Agreement on the need to increase defence spending in the EU: *Bordering* countries (%).



Q. Please tell to what extent you agree ('totally' + 'tend') or disagree ('totally' + 'tend') with the statement: 'More money should be spent on defence in the EU'.
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurobarometer data (2020-2025).

As for *Bordering* countries, following the peak in 2022 marked by fears of a Russian invasion, willingness to increase military spending has shown a general decline in subsequent years (see Fig. 3.4).

The first exception is Finland (+6%), whose accession to NATO seems to have instilled a particular sense of responsibility in its citizens, and above all Denmark, which has seen an extraordinary increase of 20 percentage points, rising from 62% to 82%. The surge in support for increased military spending reflects both the new role Denmark has assumed in defence within the EU and the strategic uncertainty caused by Trump's threats regarding Greenland (see below, Fig. 3.15).

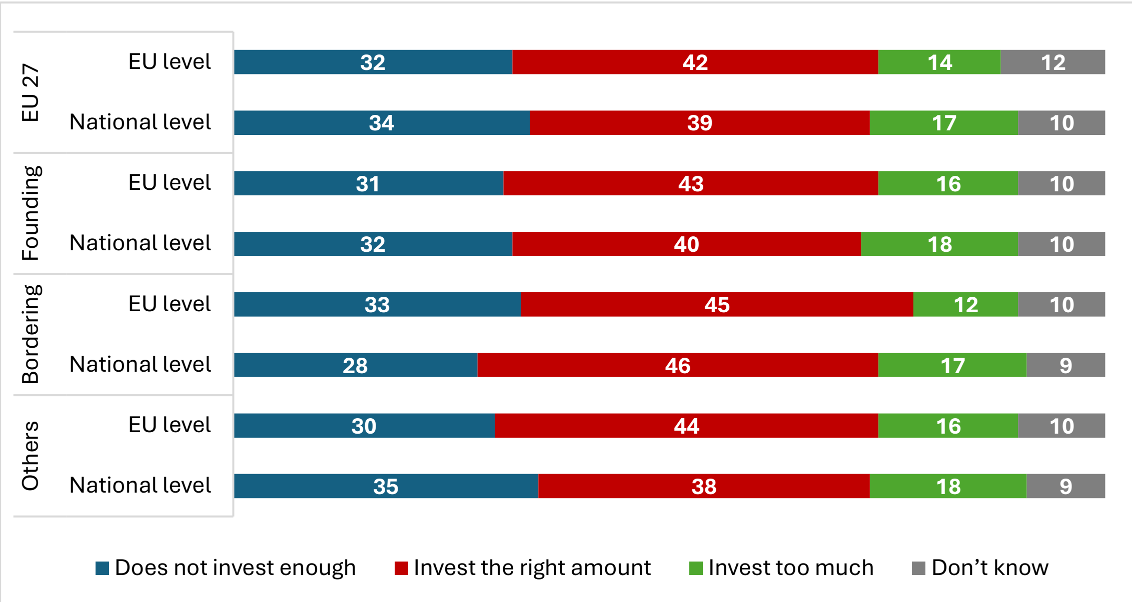
3.2.2. Perceptions of defence spending at European and national level

While the analysis of public opinion provides an insight into the level of support for increased defence spending, it is equally important to examine how citizens assess current levels of investment, distinguishing between the European and national dimensions.

The analysis now focuses on the most recent survey available, namely *Flash Eurobarometer 574*, a special survey published in February 2026. It introduces an element of methodological significance: for the first time, within the Eurobarometer surveys on defence spending, an explicit distinction is made between EU and national levels of spending. The wording of the question and the structure of the pre-coded responses differ from those adopted in the previous six-monthly surveys we have examined so far, making the results not directly comparable. This innovation, however, allows for a clearer understanding of public opinion regarding the different levels of governance.

Analysis of perceptions regarding investment in defence and security confirms a substantial stability in European public opinion, but also some significant differences where reference is made to expenditure at EU level as distinct from that at national level (see Fig. 3.5).

Fig. 3.5 Perception of investments made at EU or national level: EU 27 + three groups of countries: *Founding*, *Bordering*, *Others* (%).



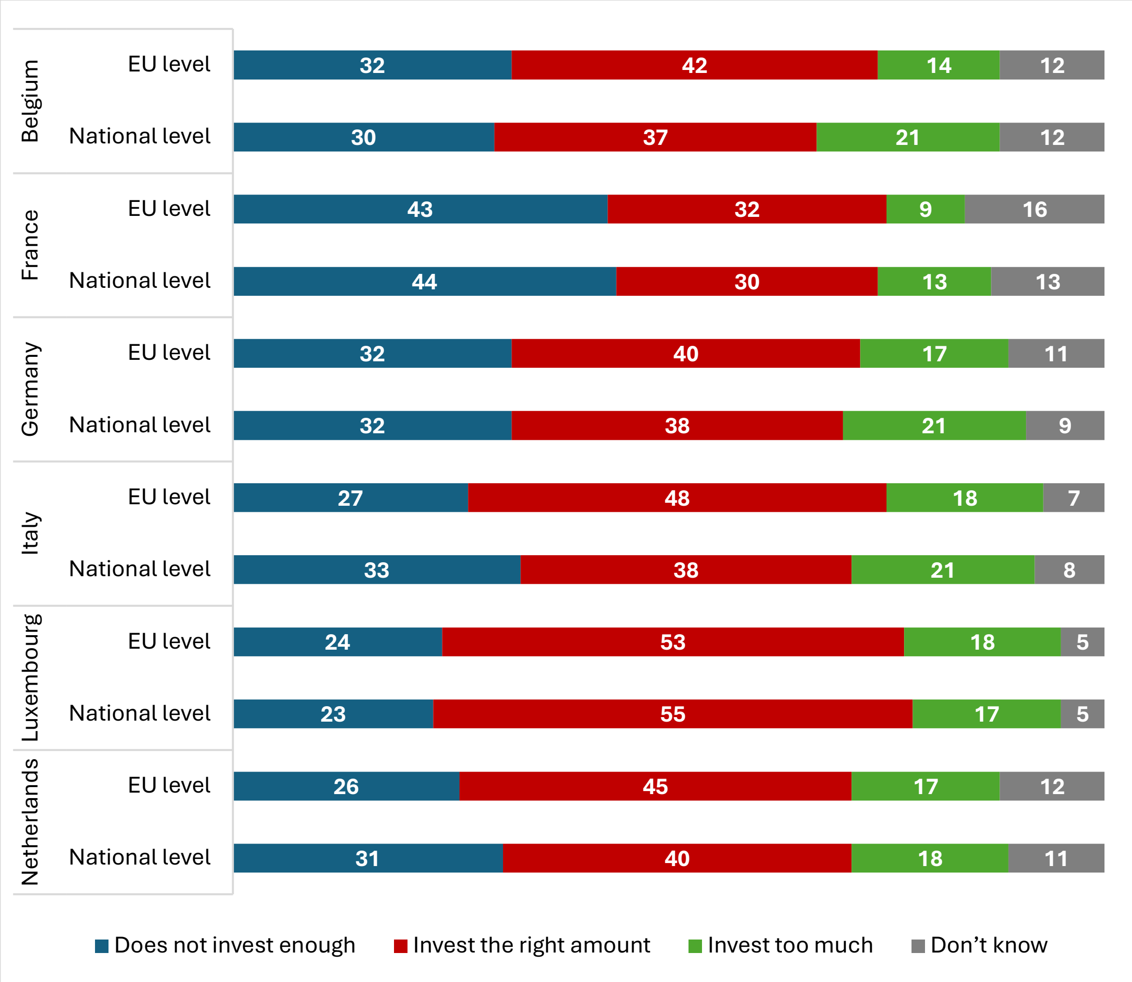
Q1. Thinking about current levels of public spending, how would you assess the level of investment made by EU in defence and security programmes? (EU levels).
Q2. Thinking about current levels of public spending, how would you assess the level of investment made by your Country in defence and security programmes? (National levels).
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurobarometer Flash 2026 data.

Looking at the EU 27, as a unit, the proportion of those who believe that ‘the right amount’ is being invested prevails in both cases (at EU and national level) (42% and 39% respectively). This is followed by those who consider investment to be insufficient (34% at national level and 32% at EU level). Finally, the perception that spending is excessive is held by a minority, though not a negligible one (17% at national level and 14% at EU level). Overall, these figures highlight a predominantly balanced perception of defence spending, but also the presence of a significant proportion of the public who question its adequacy, particularly at national level.

We now turn to the country-by-country breakdown of the three groups of countries (see Fig. 3.5). Among the *Founding* countries, assessments are largely aligned between the European and national levels, with a slight prevalence of the ‘right amount’ option, i.e. an assessment of the financial commitment as fair. In the *Bordering* countries, however, greater polarisation emerges whilst at EU level the perception of adequate investment remains virtually unchanged (45% vs 46%), at national level the proportion of those who believe too much is being invested increases (17% vs 12%). This evidence suggests a greater sensitivity to the direct effects of national military spending in more geopolitically exposed contexts, where proximity to risk factors makes the perception of the economic and social implications of defence policies more immediate.

Moving on to analyse individual countries, among the *Founding* countries the general prevalence of the perception that investment is adequate – at both EU and national level – nevertheless shows some significant differences (see Fig. 3.6). In Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, there is substantial consistency between the two levels: the proportion of those who believe that ‘the right amount’ is being invested remains the majority view, whilst opinions are distributed relatively evenly between perceptions of insufficiency and those of excess. However, in all three cases, there is a slight increase in the proportion of those who consider spending at national level to be excessive, indicating greater sensitivity to the burden that public spending represents nationally.

Fig. 3.6 Perception of investments made at EU or national level: *Founding* countries (%).



Q1. Thinking about current levels of public spending, how would you assess the level of investment made by EU in defence and security programmes? (EU levels).
Q2. Thinking about current levels of public spending, how would you assess the level of investment made by your Country in defence and security programmes? (National levels).
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurobarometer Flash 2026 data.

The specific characteristics (which are at odds with one another) of the French and Italian cases are, however, more pronounced. In France, the perception that investment is insufficient clearly prevails, both at EU level (43%) and national level (44%), compared with a relatively smaller proportion of those who consider it adequate (32% and 30% respectively). This figure implies the greatest expectation of increased defence spending among all the *Founding* countries.

In Italy, however, regarding the European level, the perception that investment is adequate prevails (by a narrow margin) (48%), whilst at the national level, both the proportion of those who believe too much is being invested (21%) and those who consider investment insufficient (33%) are on the rise. This reveals a certain ambivalence, with a more positive assessment at the European level and greater polarisation at the national level.

Finally, Luxembourg represents the most ‘stable’ case among the *Founding* countries. It stands out for having the highest proportion of respondents who consider the level of investment adequate, both at EU level (53%) and national level (55%), accompanied by relatively low levels of perceived inadequacy.

As for the *Bordering* countries, there is greater heterogeneity in perceptions and a more pronounced sensitivity regarding their own country’s military spending, evidently a deeply felt issue due to their geographical proximity to crisis zones (see Fig. 3.7).

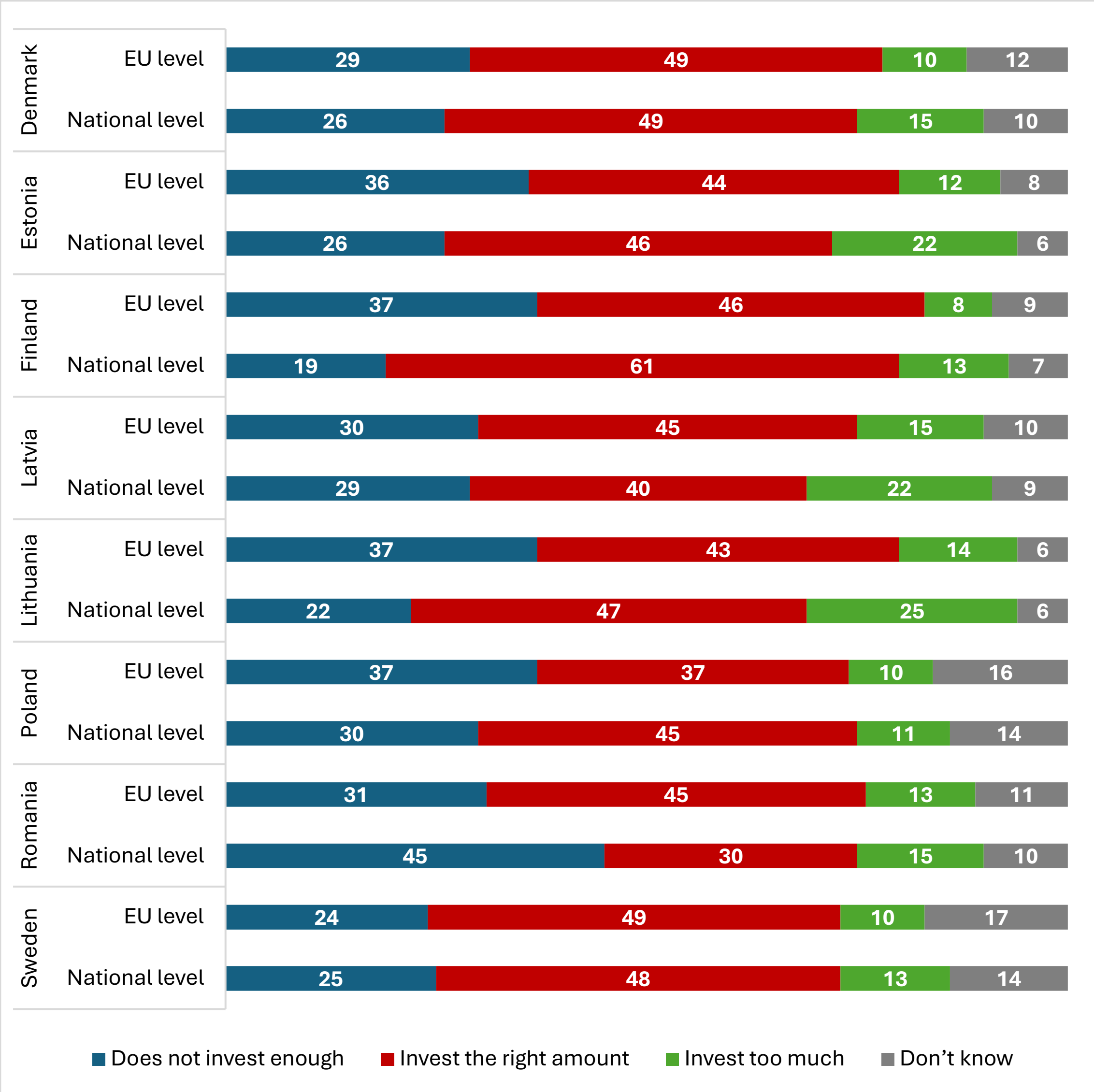
Referring to spending at EU level, the prevailing view is that the EU invests ‘the right amount’, with high figures in almost all countries (ranging from 43% in Lithuania to 49% in Denmark and Sweden). However, alongside this perception of adequacy, a significant proportion of respondents believe that European investment is insufficient, particularly in Estonia, Finland, Lithuania and Poland (all around or above 35%). This figure indicates that, in the most exposed contexts, the European dimension is perceived as both necessary and insufficient.

The shift from the European to the national level introduces elements of greater polarisation. In several countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the proportion of those who believe that too much is being invested rises significantly (up to 25% in Lithuania), whilst in other contexts a clear perception of insufficiency emerges. The most striking case is that of Romania, where 45% of respondents consider national investment to be inadequate, compared with a more modest 31% who are dissatisfied at EU level.

Finland presents a peculiar case: at the national level, a clear majority considers the level of spending adequate (61%), accompanied by a relatively modest proportion perceiving it as insufficient (19%). This data suggests a high degree of internal legitimacy for defence policies, likely linked to the strong sense of insecurity regarding international relations affecting their country.

Poland shows an intermediate pattern: at EU level, there is a clear symmetry between perceptions of adequacy and insufficiency (37% each), whilst at national level the view that spending is adequate prevails (45%), albeit with a not insignificant proportion of undecided respondents (14%).

Fig. 3.7 Perception of investments made at EU or national level: *Founding* countries (%).



Q1. Thinking about current levels of public spending, how would you assess the level of investment made by EU in defence and security programmes? (EU levels).
Q2. Thinking about current levels of public spending, how would you assess the level of investment made by your Country in defence and security programmes? (National levels).
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurobarometer Flash 2026 data.

Compared with the *Founding* countries, the *Bordering* countries appear to be more responsive to the geopolitical context. Whilst the European level tends to be regarded as relatively adequate, it is primarily at the national level that more pronounced tensions emerge between security requirements and the sustainability of public spending.

3.2.3. The relationship between military and social spending: a comparative perspective with other European opinion polls

Although the international context in which the various Member States operate remains crucial, the importance of specifying whether military spending at European or national level is too high, too low, or just right is confirmed.

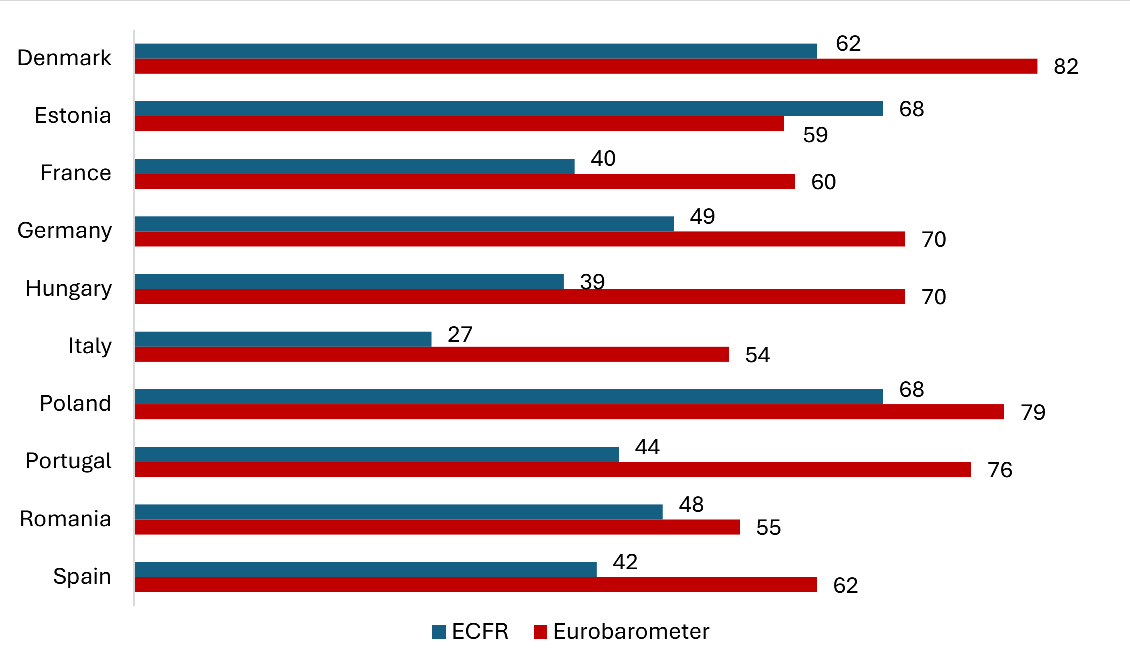
Whilst it was necessary to wait for the special Eurobarometer *Flash* survey of February 2026 to distinguish between the two levels of governance (European/national), the other important clarification regarding the relationship between military spending and other public expenditure comes from surveys outside the Eurobarometer.

In order to make the analysis more comprehensive, we cross-checked the data from the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)[2]. The far less favourable picture regarding increases in military spending (for all countries except Estonia) can be attributed to the explicit identification of the costs associated with increased spending. In contrast to the rather abstract wording[3] of Eurobarometer's regular (half-yearly) surveys, which ask respondents to express their views on the idea of increasing defence spending in the EU, the ECFR frames the question by prefacing it with an introduction that makes explicit the possible trade-off with other items in the public budget and the recourse, albeit limited, to borrowing. In all cases (with the sole exception of Estonia), willingness to increase defence spending is consistently lower when the necessary funding is mentioned. The differences in responses to the two formulations reach 20-30 percentage points, ranging from the generous consensus of the Danes (which drops from 82% in favour to 62% when the issue of funding is mentioned) to the more cautious stance of the Hungarians (from 70% to 39%) and the extremely cautious stance of the Italians (from 54% to 27%).

[2] When comparing the two opinion poll sources, it should be borne in mind that the ECFR data refer to a smaller number of countries (10) than the EU 27 covered by Eurobarometer.

[3] Even in *Eurobarometer Flash* 2026, the only contextual reference provided to respondents is of limited significance, as it is phrased as follows: 'given current levels of public spending'.

Fig. 3.8 Comparison between those in favour of increased defence spending in the EU (Eurobarometer) and those in favour of increased EU defence spending with a well-justified scope (ECFR) (%).



Q. ECFR: Some European leaders argue that increased defence spending does not need to be paid for by increased taxation on the public, instead it can be met by reallocating funding from other areas of public spending and through limited fiscally responsible borrowing. To what extent do you support or oppose increasing national defence spending?

Q. Eurobarometer: Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the need to increase defence spending in the EU?

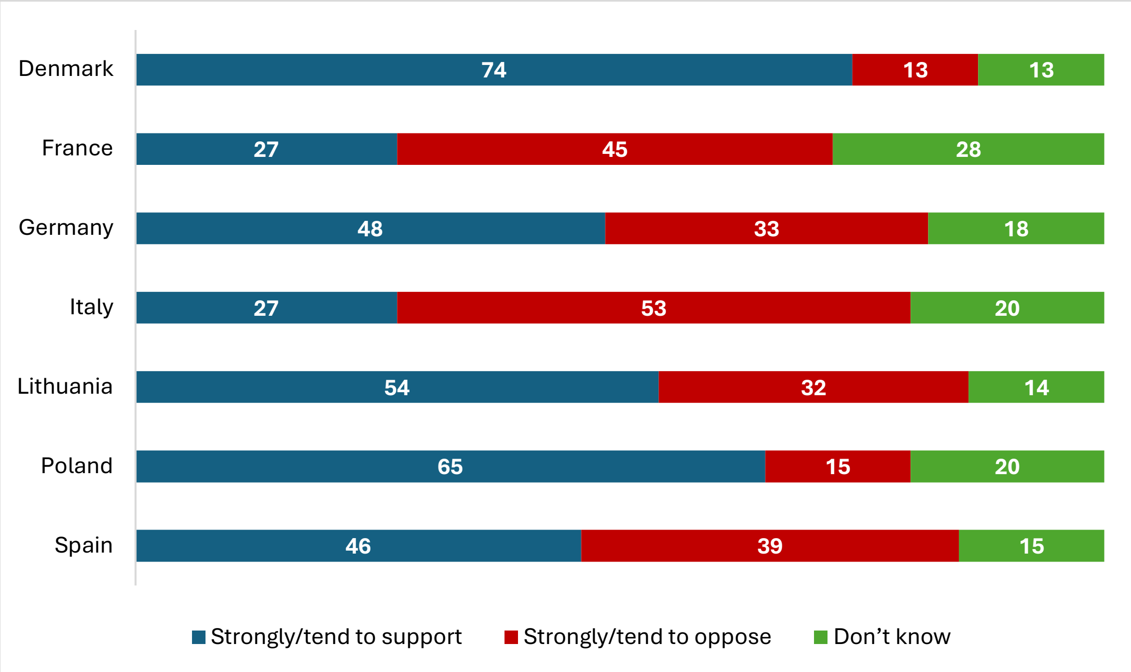
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on European Council on Foreign Relations – ECFR (May 2025) and Eurobarometer (Oct/Nov 2025) data.

It follows that the level of support for increased defence spending depends significantly on whether or not further information is available regarding the circumstances (sources of funding) and the consequences (costs): as the details of how the expenditure is to be funded (through taxation, reallocation, or an increase in public debt) become clearer, the willingness to support increased defence spending decreases. In other words, the support expressed in response to an abstract formulation tends to diminish when the public is asked to consider the necessary financial choices and the resulting opportunity costs.

The data collected by YouGov also support the hypothesis that public opinion varies significantly depending on the context in which the questions are posed. The survey, conducted between 23 September and 3 October 2025 in various European countries, asked respondents about their willingness to increase their country's financial contribution to NATO, considering public spending priorities and constraints (see Fig. 3.9). The results highlight marked differences in public opinion across different countries: whilst support is widespread in countries such as

Denmark (74% in favour), Poland (65%) and Lithuania (54%), in others, such as France and Italy, support appears very weak, barely exceeding a quarter of those surveyed. In Italy, 53% of respondents are opposed to increasing contributions to NATO, compared with 27% in favour, whilst in France 45% are opposed and only 27% are in favour (as in Italy)[4].

Fig. 3.9 European countries' opinions on increasing their financial contribution to NATO (%).



Q. Taking into account all of the spending priorities for the government, to what extent, if at all, would you support or oppose increasing its financial contribution to NATO?
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on YouGov data (Sept/Oct 2025).

Further evidence of how the comprehensiveness of a question can influence the content of the answers comes from national surveys conducted by individual countries such as Germany and France.

For example, *The Berlin Pulse Survey 2024/2025*, which annually monitors German public opinion on foreign policy and defence, asks the question: 'Defence Minister Pistorius proposed raising Germany's defence spending to 3-3,5% of GDP. Do you think this target is appropriate?'. To this, 31% of respondents replied that it is an excessive target, while 50% consider it appropriate and 15% deem it insufficient. On its own, the result would seem to confirm the high level of support among the German public for increased defence spending. However, when respondents were asked to assess the trade-off between defence spending and

[4] The Italian public's well-known reluctance towards increased military spending is underscored by the meagre 22% who, at the start of 2025, supported the NATO increase – at that time still set at 2% of GDP (Archivio Disarmo, 2025) (see section 3.4 below).

other budget items such as welfare, the results changed significantly compared to the cumulative 65% who considered it either fair or even insufficient. In fact, when asked: ‘Would you approve cutting social, environmental, cultural and development budgets to increase defence spending in Germany?’, 56% said they were against it and only 44% said they were in favour.

A similar trend emerges in France. Data from a national Ipsos-CESI survey show that, when asked about a general increase in defence spending, French citizens’ views are broadly favourable: 25% of respondents say they fully approve of such a move, while a further 43% say they do not fully approve of it, but nevertheless consider it justified in the current context. However, when the trade-off that is likely to result at the expense of other areas of public spending is made explicit, the picture changes significantly. When asked about the proposal to fund the increase in defence spending through cuts to sectors such as education, the environment and healthcare, only 15% say they are fully in favour, whilst almost half of those surveyed (49%) are against it.

Here too, the level of support appears to be strongly influenced by the wording of the question, falling sharply once the costs and redistributive implications of budgetary choices are made explicit. Overall, a comparison of the various surveys shows that support for increased defence spending is not a stable or unambiguous figure, but rather a variable that is particularly sensitive to the way in which policy options are presented.

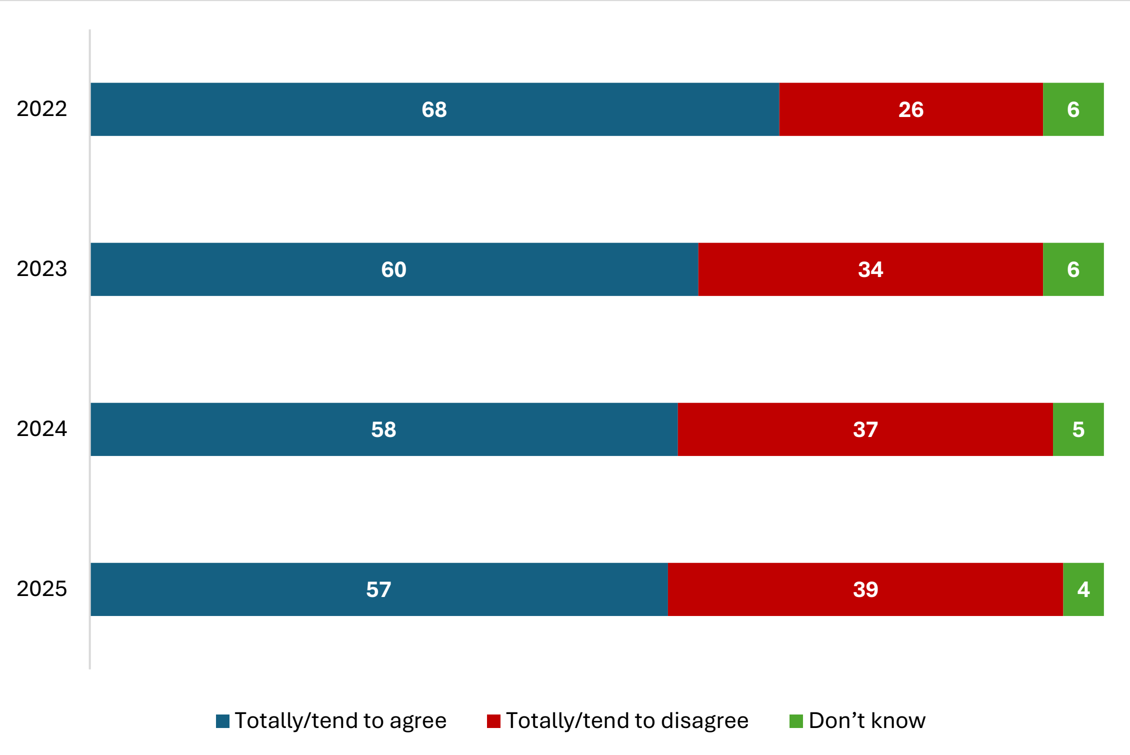
3.3. EU cooperation in the political and industrial field

Having clarified the importance of objectivity in the hypotheses to be tested and the need for a comprehensive understanding of the context and its applications – which necessitates involving the respondents – we now return to Eurobarometer to analyse their views on EU strategies regarding political cooperation (decisions on defence) and industrial cooperation.

Before addressing these broader issues, however, let us examine Europeans’ views on a subject that offers the advantage of the stark reality characteristic of an issue that has been at the forefront for four years: the war in Ukraine and the role played in it by EU countries.

From spring 2022 – coinciding with the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine – a new section of the Eurobarometer questionnaire, entitled ‘The EU’s response to the war in Ukraine’, asks for opinions on ‘funding the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine’. The data collected in this way makes it possible to assess European public opinion’s support for immediate assistance measures, whilst also helping to outline the broader implications of military and industrial involvement.

Fig. 3.10 Agreement and disagreement regarding the funding of the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine: EU 27 (%).



Q. The EU has taken a series of actions as a response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. To what extent you agree or disagree with the financing the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine?
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurobarometer data (2022-2025).

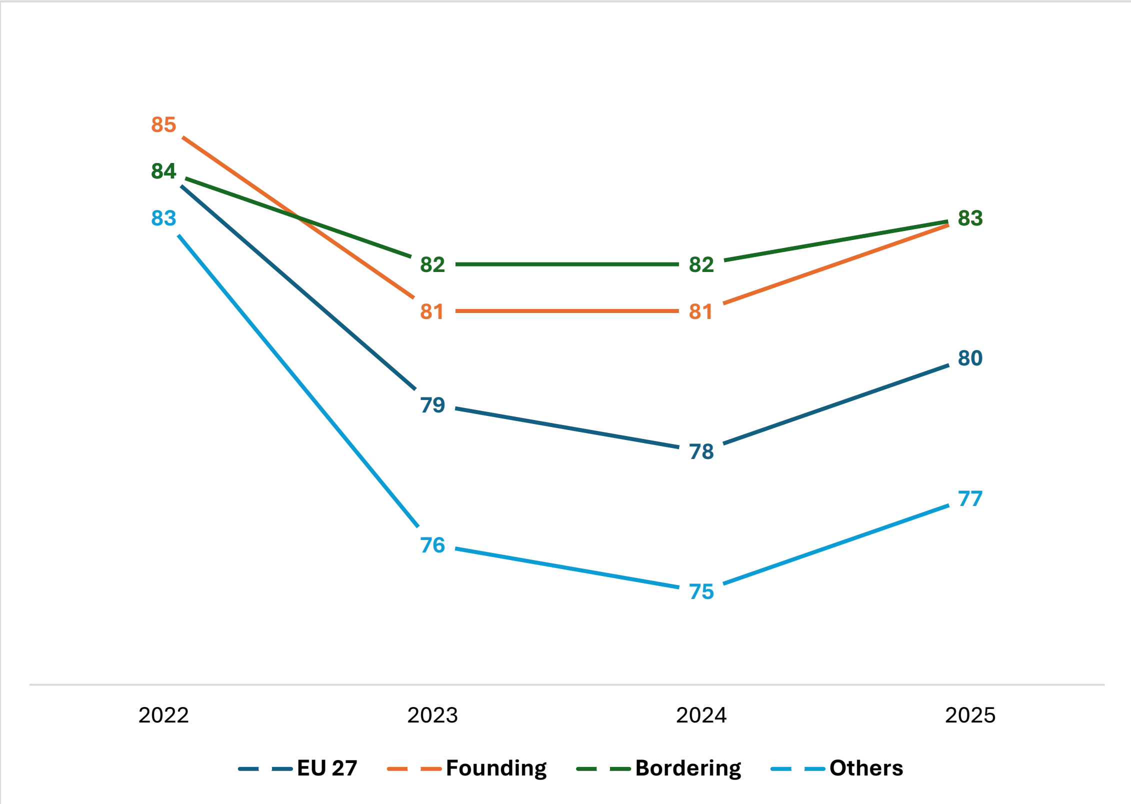
From 2022 to 2025, the majority of respondents were found to be in favour of European support for Ukraine’s resistance, through the purchase and delivery of military equipment. At the same time, support for national and European decisions on the matter shows signs of a gradual war fatigue, causing it to fall by 11 percentage points over the four-year period (see Fig. 3.10).

Turning to general and medium- to long-term prospects, we now analyse the responses regarding the strengthening of political cooperation within the EU.

In the Eurobarometer section dedicated to ‘The EU’s response to the war in Ukraine’, the issue of the possible strengthening of European cooperation on defence takes on particular significance, both in the overall public opinion of the EU 27 and within the three groups of countries we have identified.

The average opinion across the EU 27 Member States – from which the average opinions of the *Founding*, *Bordering* and *Others* countries do not deviate – shows an overall steady trend from 2022 to 2025, settling at a broad consensus for cooperation ranging between 85% and 77%, albeit with a slight downward trend. This level of support, which is significantly higher than that recorded for increased military spending, suggests that political cooperation in defence is perceived as a less controversial and more widely accepted aspect of the European integration process (see Fig. 3.11).

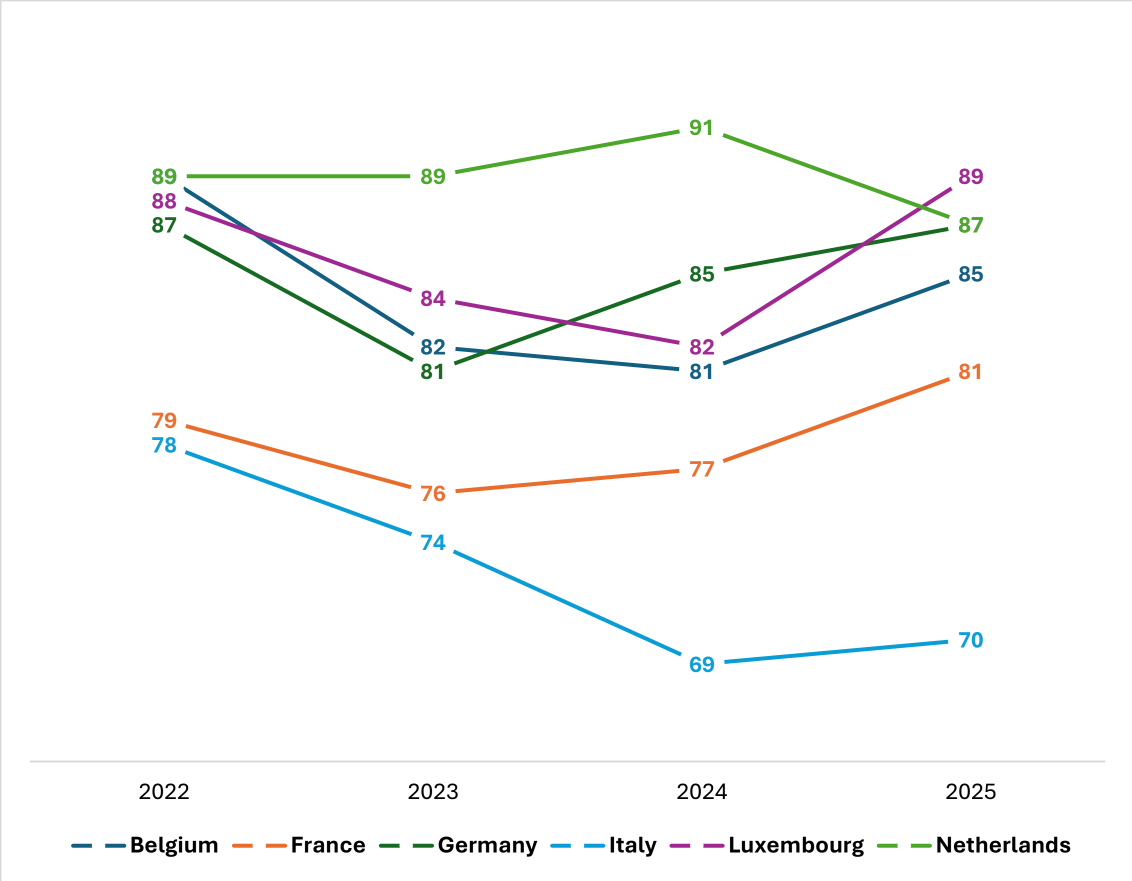
Fig. 3.11 Agreement on strengthening defence cooperation at EU level: EU 27 + three groups of countries: *Founding*, *Bordering*, *Others* (%).



Q. Please indicate to what extent you agree ('totally' + 'tend') or disagree ('totally' + 'tend') with the statement: 'Co-operation in defence matters at EU levels should be increased'.
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurobarometer data (2022-2025).

An examination of trends in public opinion on defence cooperation in the individual *Founding* countries reveals a decline in support only in Italy (-8%). Fluctuations were more limited in France and, starting from an even higher level of support, in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium (see Fig. 3.12).

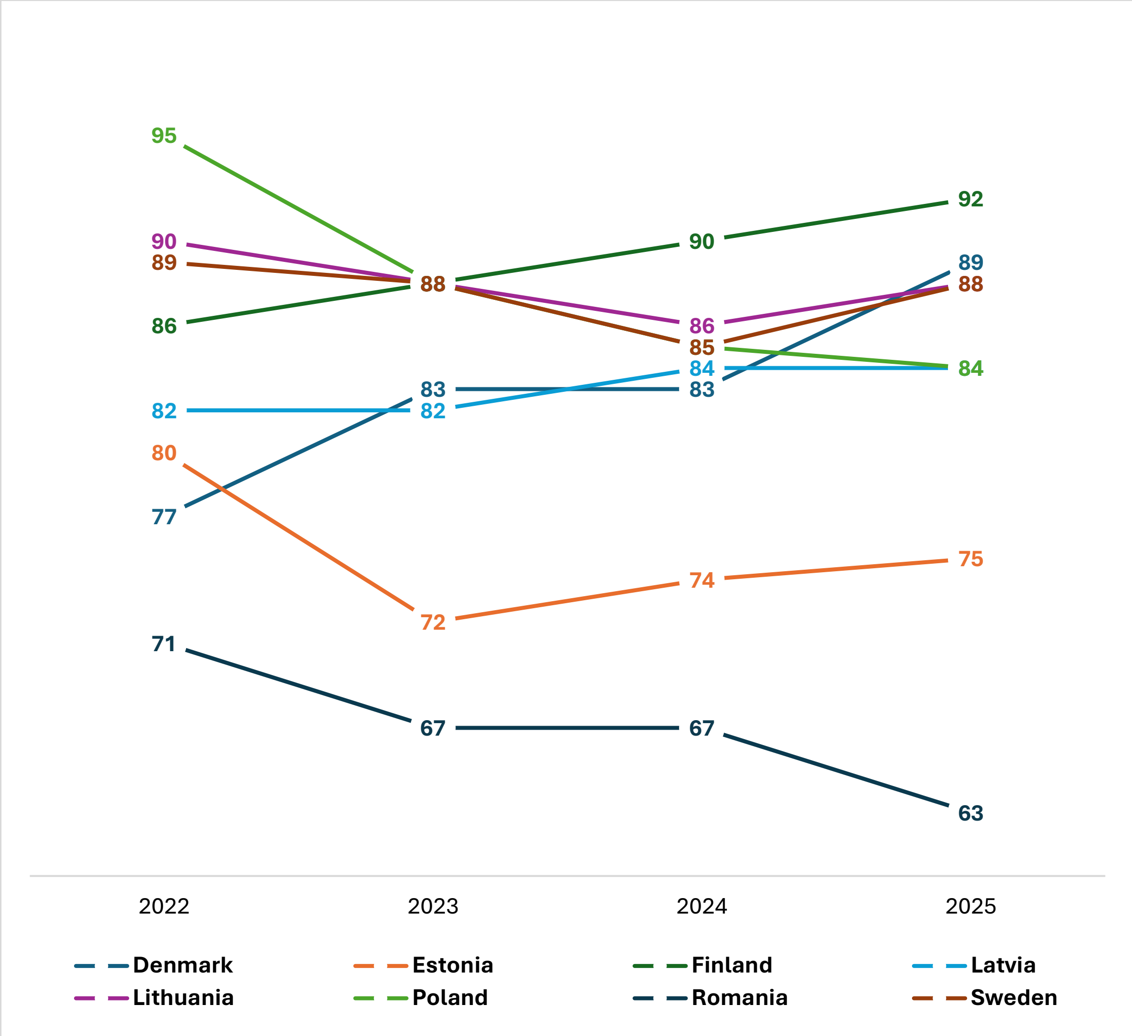
Fig. 3.12 Agreement on strengthening defence cooperation at EU level: *Founding* countries (%).



Q. Please indicate to what extent you agree ('totally' + 'tend') or disagree ('totally' + 'tend') with the statement: 'Co-operation in defence matters at EU levels should be increased'.
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurobarometer data (2022-2025).

As regards the individual *Bordering* countries, a fairly consistent trend can be observed, given the high levels of support for European defence cooperation that all countries already enjoyed in 2022. Here too, the only significant exceptions are the citizens of Poland and Romania who, at opposite ends of the scale in terms of support for cooperation, have seen a drop in approval of 11% and 8% respectively. Compared to the overwhelming 95% in 2022, Poles have moved to a still very high 84% in 2025, whilst over the same four-year period Romanians have fallen from a more modest 71% to 63%. Estonia has also lost 5 percentage points, though it has recovered slightly from the dip to 72% in 2023. Finland and Denmark confirm the popularity of military cooperation with an upward trend from 86% to 92% for the former, and from 77% to 89% for the latter (see Fig. 3.13).

Fig. 3.13 Agreement on strengthening defence cooperation at EU level: *Bordering* countries (%).

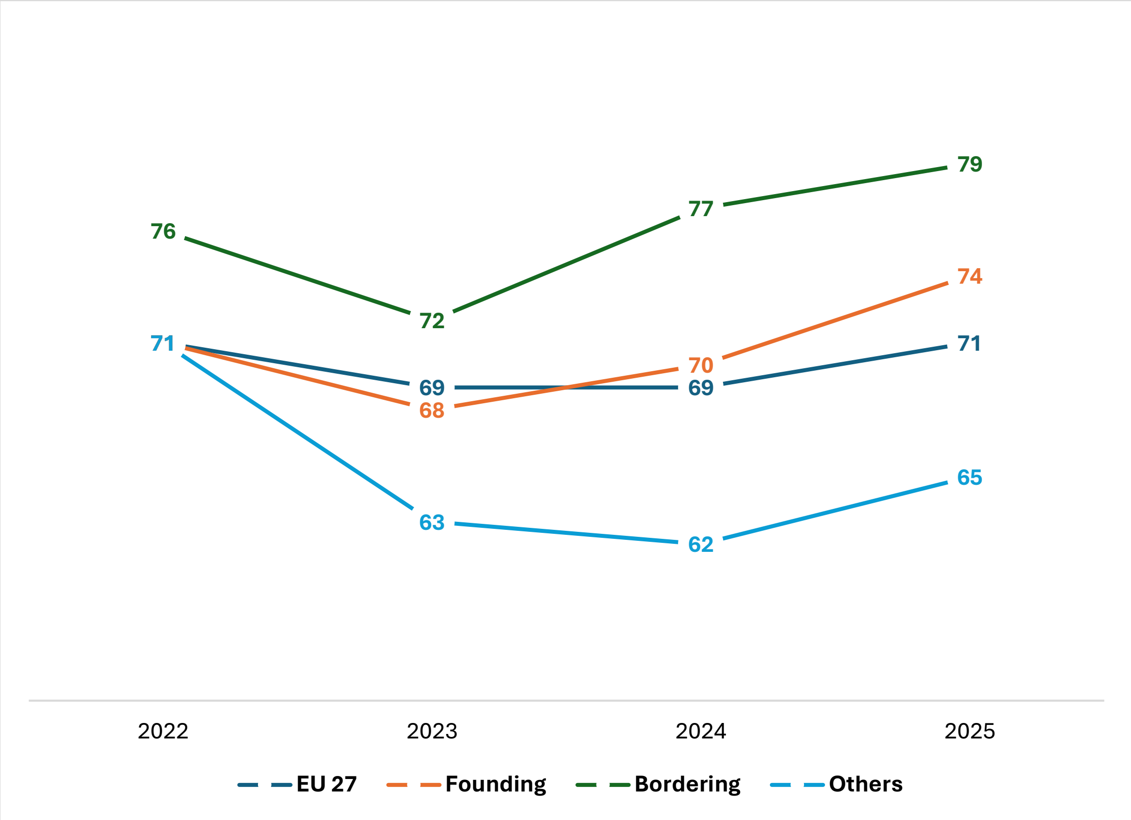


Q. Please indicate to what extent you agree ('totally' + 'tend') or disagree ('totally' + 'tend') with the statement: 'Co-operation in defence matters at EU levels should be increased'.
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurobarometer data (2022-2025).

The strongest support for European defence cooperation comes from the countries that make up the original core of the European Union and those most exposed to the international context.

Still about the strategic decisions Europe should take, the Eurobarometer survey addresses the issue of economic cooperation in the field of industrial arms production.

Fig. 3.14 Agreement on strengthening the EU's capacity to produce military equipment: EU 27 + three groups of countries: *Founding*, *Bordering*, *Others* (%).

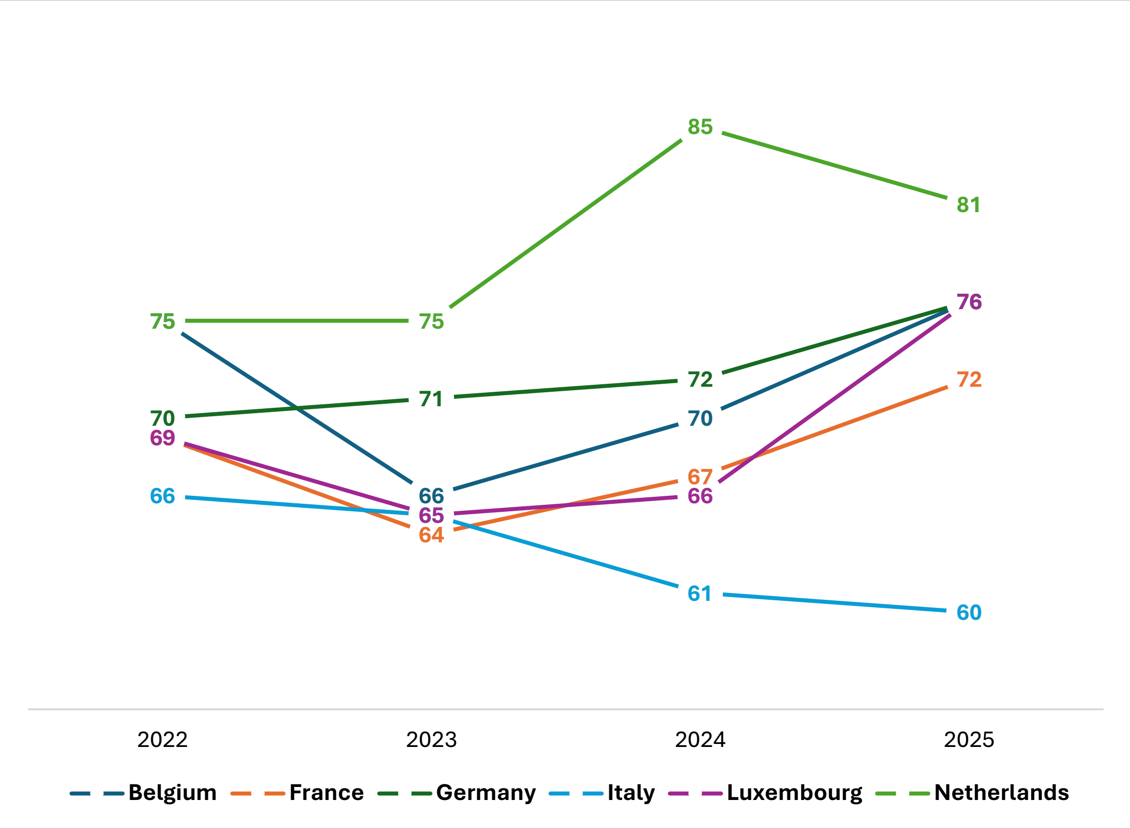


Q. Please tell to what extent you agree ('totally' + 'tend') or disagree ('totally' + 'tend') with the statement: 'EU needs to reinforce its capacity to produce military equipment'.
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurobarometer data (2022-2025).

Support for strengthening the EU's capacity to produce 'military equipment' is held by a majority ranging from around two-thirds to three-quarters of citizens across the EU 27 Member States (see Fig. 3.14). When combining the 'strongly agree' and 'tend to agree' responses three years after the questionnaire was first administered, European public opinion appears stable on this issue.

The *Founding* countries show a slight increase in support, rising from 71% in 2022 to 74% in 2024, partly bucking the trend of stability seen among supporters in the *Bordering* group and the slight decline in the *Others* group (see Fig. 3.14). For this reason, it is useful to examine the distribution of national perceptions by breaking down the data for the countries comprising each of the groups.

Fig. 3.15 Agreement on strengthening the EU's capacity to produce military equipment: *Founding* countries (%).

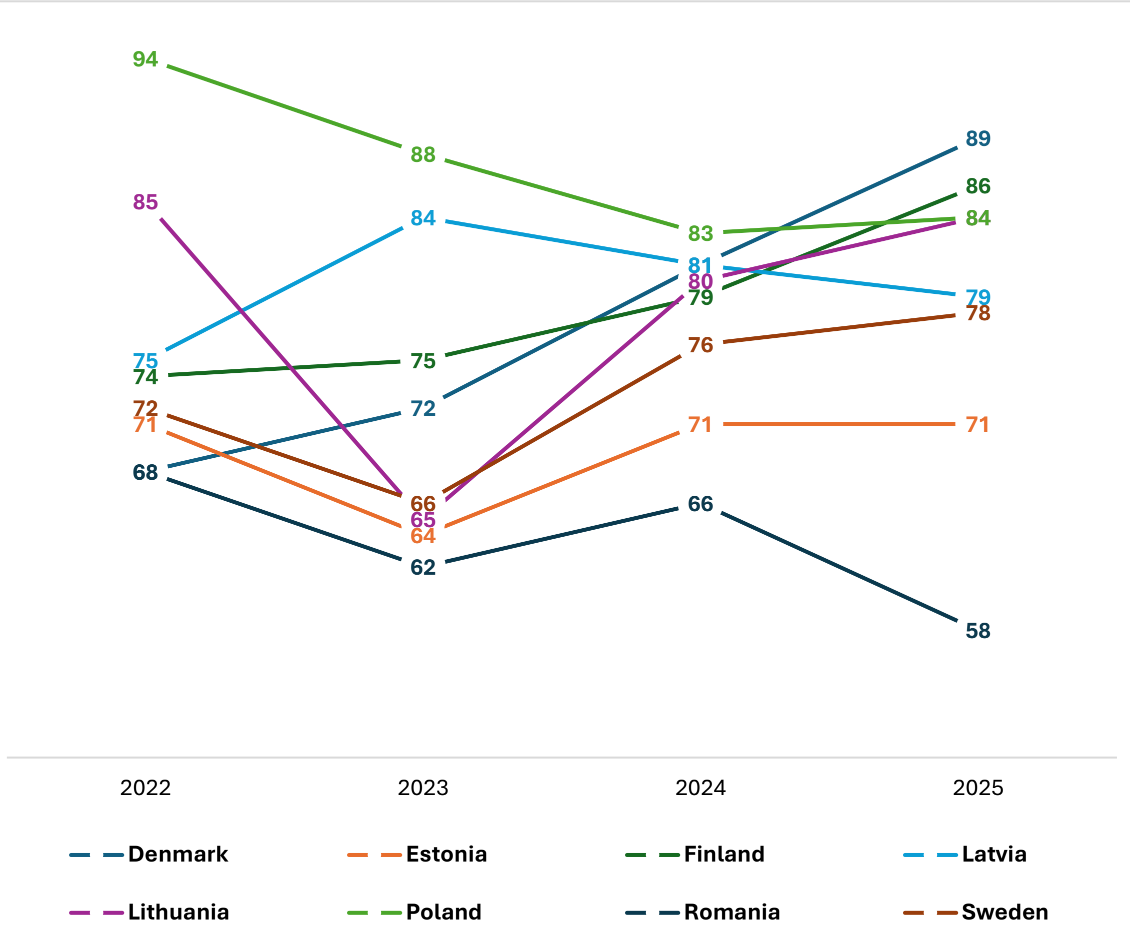


Q. Please tell to what extent you agree ('totally' + 'tend') or disagree ('totally' + 'tend') with the statement: 'EU needs to reinforce its capacity to produce military equipment'.
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurobarometer data (2022-2025).

Within the group of *Founding* countries, respondents are in favour of boosting military equipment production, with a majority that never falls below two-thirds of those surveyed. As regards Italian public opinion specifically, it shows signs of a gradual decline, falling by 6 percentage points between 2022 and 2025. In contrast, in France and Belgium, there is stability tending towards a slight strengthening of support for increased military production capacity, whilst in Germany, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, support has risen by 6-7 percentage points (see Fig. 3.15).

Turning to the *Bordering* countries, a crucial role is played by public attitudes in the Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden and Denmark), where, bucking the trend of the average for other European countries, support for military engagement appears to be growing (see Fig. 3.16). This can be explained by recent processes of restructuring the strategic vision regarding internal and external security. Whilst the reversal of the trend for Finland and Sweden began in 2022 and was institutionalised with their accession to NATO in 2023 and 2024 respectively, for Denmark the strategic 'tightening of the screws' is very recent. Historically, Denmark had maintained a unique position within European integration, not participating in EU military missions (the so-called 'opt-out'). Due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and because of the tensions caused by US President Donald Trump's behaviour regarding the Greenland issue[5], the Danish government decided to respond by allocating new funds for Arctic defence, whilst some European countries have sent symbolic garrisons of soldiers to the disputed island. An even more structural historical shift is represented by the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, both having moved away from the historic positions of neutrality that had characterised their foreign policy for eighty years in the case of the former and for over two hundred years in the case of the latter.

Fig. 3.16 Agreement on strengthening the EU's capacity to produce military equipment: *Bordering* countries (%).



Q. Please tell to what extent you agree ('totally' + 'tend') or disagree ('totally' + 'tend') with the statement: 'EU needs to reinforce its capacity to produce military equipment'.
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo based on Eurobarometer data (2022-2025).

[5] The dispute resurfaced during Trump's 2024 election campaign and became an international issue with the start of his presidency in January 2025. The claim to annex Greenland to the United States had made a brief appearance (noted at the time almost exclusively by the Danish public) during Trump's first presidency in 2019.

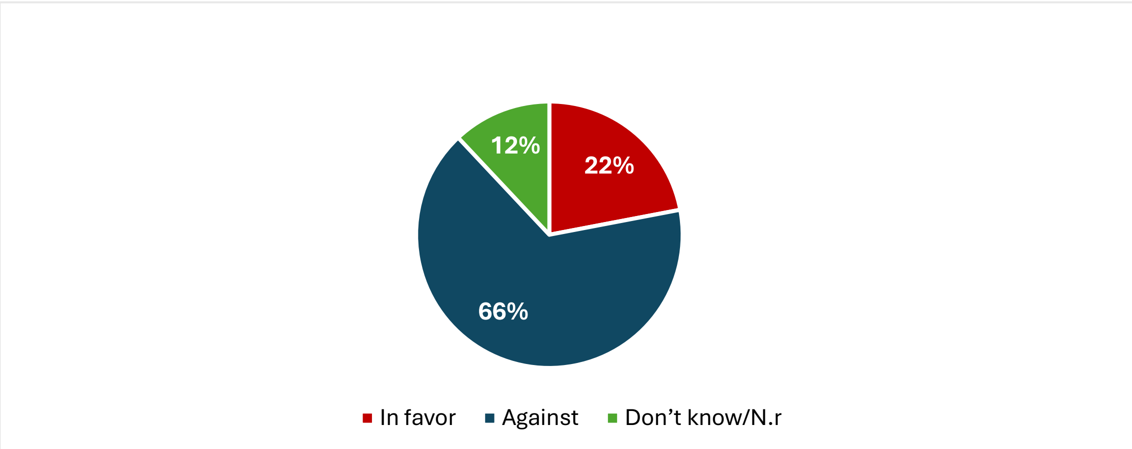
It is also worth noting the relative decline in support for Poland, which has lost 10% of its support from a very high 94%, yet remains among the leading advocates of strengthening cooperation in arms production. Conversely, Romanian public opinion, which was already more sceptical to begin with, has seen its support drop by 10%. It is also worth noting, here as in the responses to subsequent questions, the relatively lower percentage of supporters in the Estonian sample, a factor that may well be linked to the presence in the country of a significant Russian minority (around 25% of the population).

3.4. Italian public opinion: between conditional support for defence and a preference for non-exclusively military solutions

Given the importance of the Italian case for us, we now present the results of the Difebarometro survey No. 11, carried out by Archivio Disarmo in February 2025 on a representative sample of the Italian population. The aim is to examine in greater depth the marked selectivity that emerges in surveys carried out among Italian respondents, regarding defence policies, the expansion of cooperation and, above all, military spending (Archivio Disarmo, 2025).

Firstly, there is clear opposition to the increase in military spending demanded by NATO (which at the start of 2025 remained at 2% of GDP): 66% of respondents are against the increase, compared with 22% in favour (see Fig. 3.17). This figure suggests that the issue of defence is increasingly viewed in relation to costs and potential trade-offs with other public policies, confirming widespread concern over the redistributive implications of security-related decisions. In this sense, support is not entirely denied but is subject to a comparative assessment against other collective priorities.

Fig. 3.17 Italians' views on increasing military spending to 2% of GDP (NATO 2025) (%).



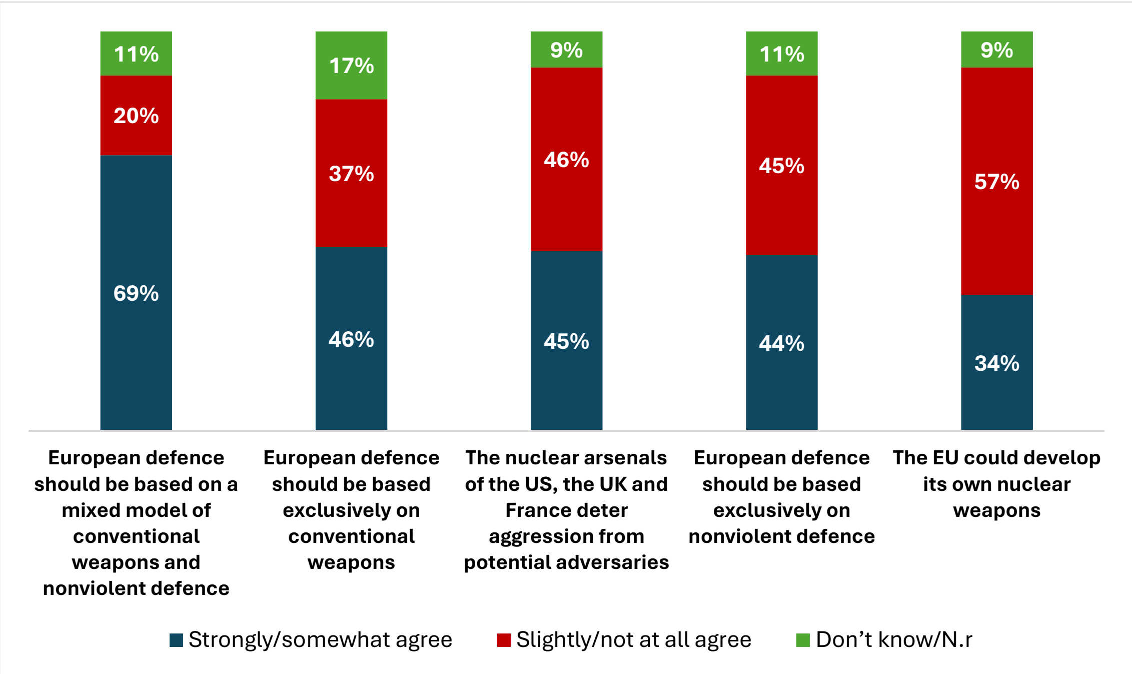
Q. NATO is asking Italy to increase its military spending to 2% of Gross Domestic Product (amounting to an additional €8 billion in 2025 on top of the €32 billion already planned). Are you in favour or against this? Analysis by Archivio Disarmo, Difebarometro No. 11, February 2025, CATI survey by Demetra on a sample of 802 respondents.

Turning to what has become the central theme of this report, respondents were presented with various views on possible defence models for Europe. The most significant finding is that 69% of respondents favour a mixed defence model, based on two components: conventional and non-violent. Thus, Italian public opinion does not categorically reject the concept of defence, but tends to prefer an integrated model, in which military instruments are complemented by practices of prevention, mediation, civil resistance and unarmed conflict management.

Conversely, opinions favouring exclusive solutions do not exceed a support level of around 45%: 46% are in favour of a solely conventional European defence, and 44% of an exclusively non-violent defence. This trend shows that the prevailing preference is not for a total replacement of the military instrument, but for its limitation and integration within a more complex and innovative framework (see Fig. 3.18).

As for nuclear weapons, there is clear opposition to the idea that the EU should acquire them: 57% of respondents are against, compared with 34% in favour. And even the status quo, represented by acceptance of the current NATO deterrent, is evenly split between those in favour (45%) and those against (46%), and in any case does not reach a majority.

Fig. 3.18 Agreement and disagreement with the various models of European defence (%).

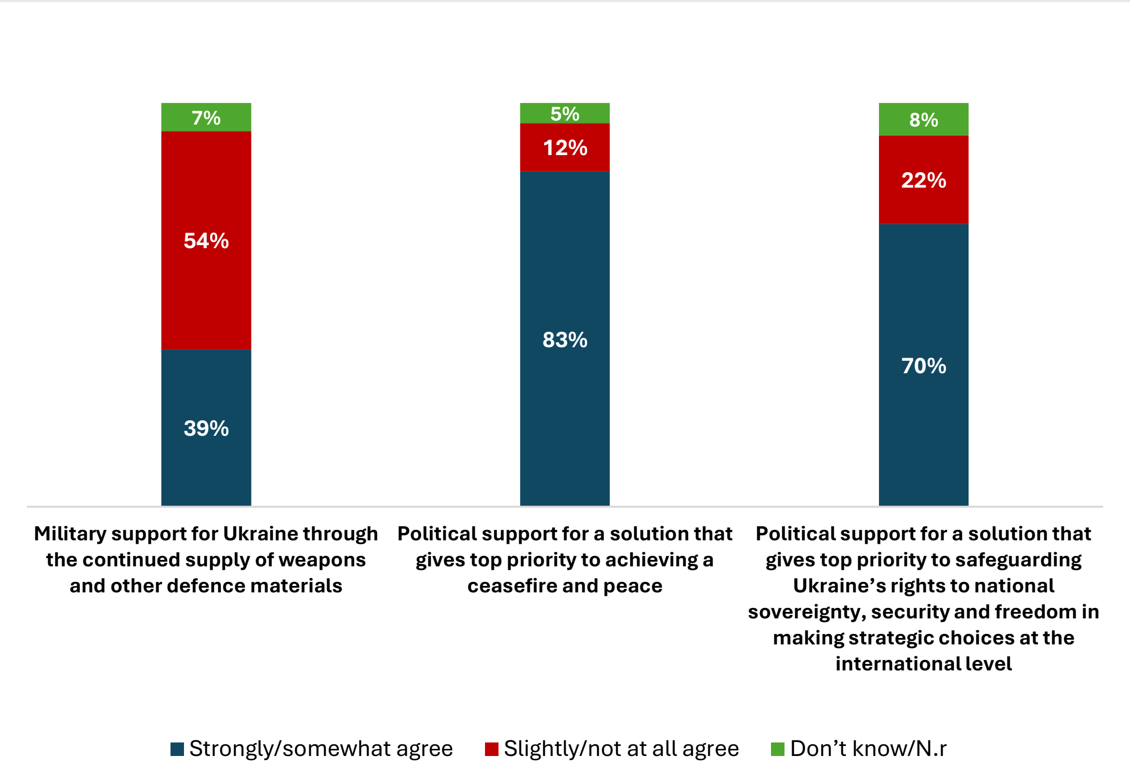


Q. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo, Difebarometro No. 11, February 2025, CATI survey by Demetra on a sample of 802 respondents.

Taken together, the data point to a preference for the hybrid model – which we describe elsewhere using the metaphor of the 'two arms': conventional defence on the one hand, and the diplomatic and non-violent approach on the other.

This preference is confirmed by opinions regarding the conflict in Ukraine, which represent an application of the principles to a difficult context. Faced with the Ukrainians' resistance to the Russian attack, the sample of Italian citizens shows a clear preference for political and diplomatic solutions over military ones. Whilst support for sending weapons is in the minority (39% in favour versus 54% against), a very large majority (83%) are in favour of a path that prioritises achieving a ceasefire and peace. Even when the solution is framed in terms of protecting Ukraine's rights, support remains high (70%), confirming a widespread inclination towards a negotiated resolution of the conflict, but one that leads to a 'just peace' (see Fig. 3.19).

Fig. 3.19 Different opinions on support for Ukraine (%).



Q. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.
Analysis by Archivio Disarmo, Difebarometro No. 11, February 2025, CATI survey by Demetra on a sample of 802 respondents.

This pattern suggests that, in the Italian context, solidarity with Ukraine is interpreted not as support for the continuation of military action through the supply of arms, but rather as support for solutions that combine the protection of rights, de-escalation and the pursuit of a negotiated settlement. In this sense, the data highlights a specific form of political solidarity with the country under attack, based on a preference for instruments perceived not only as less costly and less risky, but also as more consistent with a fair resolution of the conflict. The tendency to favour non-military or, in any case, non-escalation-oriented modes of intervention reflects a public opinion which, even in the face of a concrete case of high-intensity war, maintains a cautious and selective stance, consistent with the conditional support already expressed regarding defence policies in general.

The Italian picture is simply more pronounced, but it is not at odds with the dynamic of critical rationalisation observed at European level: support for defence policies is selective, sensitive to *framing* (or the contextualisation of circumstances) and closely linked to the perception of costs and redistributive consequences. This results in an approach that favours non-military solutions and maintains significant caution regarding the expansion of instruments and investment in the defence sector. The majority of Italian public opinion shows a substantial distancing from the prevailing trends at the level of European governments and EU bodies, which today seem to favour predominantly, if not exclusively, military options.

3.5. Comments on Chapter 3

The evidence analysed in this chapter confirms that citizens' assessments and sentiments, as well as their scientific observation and interpretation, constitute a decisive factor in legitimising the entire European project. This element is particularly relevant in a field such as defence, which represents both a matter of principle and a prerequisite for any action in the realm of polity and policy-making that the Union wishes to undertake in the international context.

An analysis of public spending priorities shows that the *Defence and security* sector occupies a significant third place, whilst the top spot continues to be held by welfare (Employment, social protection and public health). The increased importance attributed to defence appears to be a consequence of the deterioration of the geopolitical context, in particular the Russian invasion of Ukraine and, more generally, a worrying international situation. At the same time, the enduring centrality of socio-economic policies indicates that, in the eyes of European citizens, the growing prominence of external (strategic) security does not entail a reversal of the primacy of internal (social) security.

The evolution of public support for increased defence spending confirms the close relationship between the perception of threat and shifts in public opinion. Following an initial phase characterised by a sharp rise in support, a subsequent stabilisation is observed, accompanied by a gradual decline over time. This trend appears to be broadly shared across different groups of countries, albeit with differences reflecting specific historical, geographical and strategic factors.

In countries most exposed to their proximity to the Russian Federation, there is a greater focus on defence policies, whilst in other contexts more complex dynamics are observed, sometimes characterised by a gradual decline in support. Even within relatively homogeneous groups, such as the *Founding* countries, national trends show varying patterns, highlighting how public opinion is influenced not only by the international context but also by domestic factors.

The introduction of a distinction between European-level and national-level spending is particularly significant, as it allows for a clearer understanding of public opinion regarding the different levels of governance. Overall, the prevailing view is that investment is adequate, both at the EU and national levels, but at the same time a significant proportion questions the scale of spending, citing it as either insufficient or excessive.

This pattern highlights a predominantly balanced perception of defence spending, albeit accompanied by elements of ambivalence. In particular, the national level appears more prone to polarised assessments, whilst the European dimension tends to be perceived as relatively more stable. In more geopolitically exposed contexts, this difference translates into greater sensitivity to the economic and social implications of defence policies, with a tension between security needs and the sustainability of spending.

Analysis of the relationship between military spending and other items in the public budget further confirms the complexity of the views expressed. A comparison of various surveys highlights how support for increased defence spending is strongly influenced by the wording of the questions and the degree of detail provided regarding the circumstances. When presented in abstract terms, support appears particularly high; however, when the costs, funding methods and trade-offs with other public policies are made explicit, support tends to wane.

It follows that the level of support is a variable sensitive to the information context and to the clarification of the implications of the choices, as well as to the way in which policy options are presented. This highlights how consensus is not independent of the conditions under which it is formed but is influenced by the presentation of alternatives and their associated consequences.

Among citizens of the EU 27 Member States, the picture is different regarding the strengthening of European defence cooperation, where consensus raises very few reservations and remains at high and essentially stable levels over time. This figure, significantly higher than that relating to military spending, suggests that political cooperation is perceived as a less controversial and far more widely accepted aspect of the European integration process. Even in countries most exposed to the international context, support for cooperation remains high, indicating widespread acceptance of the idea of broader European coordination.

A similar trend is observed regarding the strengthening of the EU’s capacity to produce military equipment, supported by a broad and stable majority. Differences between groups of countries and between national contexts reflect specific dynamics, in which recent changes in the strategic vision of security carry weight, but do not alter the overall favourable outlook towards European cooperation.

Finally, an analysis of support for funding the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine highlights a favourable trend during the period under consideration, accompanied, however, by signs of a gradual ‘war fatigue’, which has led to a decline in support over time.

Overall, the evidence gathered indicates that support for defence policies in the EU is not a stable and unambiguous figure, but a variable sensitive to the geopolitical context of the various states, to differences between the levels of governance under consideration (national or European) and to the ways in which policy options are formulated. In this context, the observation and scientific interpretation of public opinion remain central to understanding the conditions for the development of a European defence.

Such development, destined to be enshrined in institutional decisions, agreements and regulations, must simultaneously be shared in the minds and hearts of citizens, confirming the role of public opinion as an essential component of the European integration process, particularly in the field of defence.

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Abstract Chapter 4

Chapter 4 analyses the evolution of the concepts of Defence and Security in the European context, examining the possible shift from a traditional vision centred on the nation state and military defence towards an alternative cooperative security perspective for the European Union. This should be based on the concept, expressed at the international level, of reciprocity in the behaviour of actors and the reduction of systemic risks, and, at the domestic level, on the synergy between public institutions and civil society. In a global framework characterised by the return of great power competition, the surge in military expenditure and the integration of emerging technologies (AI) into weapons systems, Defence and Security appear increasingly exposed to the risk of uncontrolled escalation.

In this context, arms control, the relaunch of multilateral disarmament and the strengthening of institutional diplomacy represent essential tools for managing strategic competition. Alongside official diplomacy (*Track I*), the chapter highlights the potential of civil society, its actors (NGOs, associations, religious institutions, etc.) and alternative diplomacy (*Track II*); actors and strategies capable of building trust, fostering dialogue and preparing the ground for formal agreements. Defence and security are thus understood as multidimensional phenomena, encompassing military, political, economic and social aspects, and significantly dependent on internal cohesion, resilience and social capital within a country or community of countries moving towards a shared political entity.

4. European defence: traditional and national or alternative and common?

4.1. What security? The State and cooperative security

As a reflection of historical experience, traditional political and legal doctrine assigns to the State the task of ensuring the security of a social system both internally and externally. In this latter sphere (in the international context), Defence operates, a term that encompasses several dimensions: the function of protecting societies from external aggression, the instrument through which this function is exercised, and finally the policy designed to coordinate both. However, due to the paradox described by Jervis (1978), according to which the pursuit of greater security by one actor produces insecurity in another, it can be argued that the highest level of security is that achieved based on reciprocity. As Galtung (1984, p 206) states, to exist, 'security must be as high as *possible*, as equal as *possible* and as cooperative as *possible* for both parties' (emphasis added).

Since the end of the Cold War, international relations have gone through several phases characterised by a fluctuating pattern. From a bipolar world dominated by the two nuclear superpowers, the USA and the USSR, a roughly decade-long unipolar phase (1991-2001) followed, dominated by the United States, which was then succeeded by a confused multipolar phase marked by the emergence of several regional powers characterised by relationships of both competition and weakly coupled convergence (BRICS countries). Above all, China has now emerged as a central actor with full weight, both actual and potential, as a true challenger to American primacy.

Dramatically, the current phase of international relations appears to be characterised, within a general context of declining trust among states and deterioration of mutual relations, by a worrying resurgence – both in practice and in theory – of the logic of force. This is reflected in the exponential increase in military expenditure, the expansion of arms production and trade, as well as the quantitative and qualitative growth of conventional and nuclear arsenals among major powers. Particularly concerning is the growing integration of emerging technologies into these systems, especially Artificial Intelligence (AI) and related autonomous and semi-autonomous weapons systems, cyber capabilities, and the militarisation of space. This is a systemic competition in which rearmament represents a 'primordial' response to perceived threat.

4.1.1. The role of the State A): relaunching multilateral disarmament

Although, from its very inception, the state has pursued the waging of war as its primary objective, scientific and technological progress has now advanced to such an extent that the use of force to its ‘logical’ conclusion has become impractical, unless at the cost of destruction. Conversely, what has been termed *cooperative security* does not require total political trust but is content with the assumption of a shared rational interest capable of preventing uncontrolled escalation. This particular type of security does not replace deterrence but complements and moderates its function.

The main instrument of cooperative security is arms control, which acts on the material dimension of strategic competition. It is based on a pragmatic principle: limiting, regulating or prohibiting certain capabilities can reduce systemic risk even without seeking to eliminate competition between States. Arms control is not a sequence of unilateral actions by an enlightened party. Rather, as argued at the height of the Cold War by the pragmatic realism of Thomas Schelling and Morton Halperin (1961), it consists of forms of cooperation between potential enemies, aimed at reducing the burden of military expenditure and averting opportunities for conflict. Arms control is based on three pillars: quantitative limitation, non-proliferation with shared technical verification, and the regulatory prohibition of specific categories. The aim is not to eliminate competition, but to prevent its uncontrolled escalation.

Positive examples of arms control are not lacking. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), in force since 1970, has been the cornerstone of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, thus constituting a – albeit partial – constraint on the spread of the most extreme category of weapons (namely nuclear weapons). Of high moral value, however, is the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), in force since 22 January 2021 and adopted by 122 states. Although none of the nuclear-weapon States, nor NATO members, are among its signatories, the TPNW remains an important milestone.

Among the most pressing risks in the contemporary strategic landscape is the emergence of new technologies, foremost among which is Artificial Intelligence (AI) applied to the military domain. Lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) represent an emblematic case of a phenomenon requiring strict regulation in several respects: modes of use, degree of decision-making autonomy, and legal accountability. The debate at the United Nations within the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) reflects the awareness, shared by many States, that unregulated technological competition multiplies systemic risks (Archivio Disarmo, 2025).

The consequences of the integration of AI into military systems include the accelerated pace of decision-making cycles, the reduction in reaction times, and the unpredictable complexity of the now imminent interactions between autonomous systems. The development of hypersonic missiles, the proliferation of offensive cyber operations, and the integration of AI into early warning and alert systems in the nuclear domain further compress decision-making windows, which are, at least in principle, the prerogative of governments (Archivio Disarmo, 2025).

In an environment characterised by a speed exceeding human capacity for adaptation, the risk of unintentional escalation is set to increase. Preventive notifications of tests of advanced systems, the exchange of information on doctrines for the use of military AI, the shared definition of minimum standards for meaningful human control, and dedicated communication channels for the management of cyber or space incidents become crucial in the increasingly near future, alongside the revival of confidence-building measures.

4.1.2. The role of the State B): revitalising institutional diplomacy (Track I)

The current conditions of international relations make it impossible to conceive of diplomacy, as would be desirable, as an alternative to deterrence; more modestly, diplomacy remains an indispensable actor and a necessary culture to prevent deterrence itself from turning into a tragic escalation. With regard specifically to Europe, the serious deterioration of the strategic environment, particularly over the last five years, has led the EU to be criticised, paradoxically, precisely because of its specificity and merits. Due to its reluctance to use force, Europe is reproached for being 'herbivorous animal in a world of carnivores' (Gentiloni, 2023).

The EU must relaunch its diplomatic action with determination, moving beyond the condition of discomfort and impotence imposed by turbulent times, particularly since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This must be done without renouncing its moral legacy and historical foundations, based on the primacy of international law, multilateralism, and the priority given to the protection of citizens and human rights rather than to the use of military force[1] (Delis, 2025).

In the current international scenario, European diplomacy faces a dual challenge. On the one hand, decision-making fragmentation within the EU slows down crisis response; on the other, the increasing speed of technological interactions reduces the time available for de-escalation, as well as for all strategic decisions. Effective conflict management therefore requires a set of conditions,

[1] One example of a European diplomatic initiative is Operation Amaltea, proposed in November 2023 by the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Nikos Christodoulidīs, with the aim of establishing a maritime humanitarian corridor to deliver aid to the civilian population of Gaza (PRC, 2023).

such as faster coordination mechanisms between Member States, greater timeliness in the recognition and analysis of emergencies, the design of graduated and reversible pressure tools vis-à-vis counterparts (targeted sanctions, conditional incentives), and permanent communication channels for the management of cyber or military incidents, among others.

Equipped with a European External Action Service (EEAS), designed to make European foreign policy more coherent and effective on the global stage, but currently too weak and above all lacking representativeness and adequate decision-making capacity, the EU faces numerous and complex challenges. In addition to those inherent in diplomatic action in general, a crucial limitation lies in the fact that the EU is not (yet?) a unified actor, but rather an evolving entity in which the core of foreign policy remains the prerogative of individual Member States.

A critical yet constructive observer of the European project such as Jeffrey D. Sachs argues that Europe should adopt a model of diplomacy that is both 'institutional' and 'sensitive'. Instead, 'setup is chaotic and ineffective [...] while high-level diplomacy – to the extent it exists – is conducted in a confusing and intermittent manner by individual European leaders, the EU High Representative, the President of the European Commission, the President of the European Council, or a variable combination of these. In short, no one speaks clearly on behalf of Europe, since there is no clear European foreign policy to begin with' (Sachs, 2025).

This does not mean that the framework lacks positive potential. As is the case for most diplomacies worldwide today, European diplomacy must operate within a dramatically fragmented international context. In terms of opportunities, however, not all countries possess, as European states do, the potential involvement of civil society, expressed through networks, NGOs, associations, and secular and religious communities capable of generating initiatives not only at national but also at international level. These forms of 'alternative diplomacy' should not merely be tolerated but actively promoted and supported, in line with the *Track II* approach, whose most influential representative was the forward-looking peace diplomat Joseph V. Montville. *Track II* refers to the convergence of actors and resources from civil society, capable of playing a significant role and of integrating with *Track I*, namely institutional diplomacy (Davidson and Montville, 1981).

4.2. Civil society for cooperative security

4.2.1. The role of civil society A): 'People-to-People' diplomacy (Track II)

Alternative people-to-people diplomacy can be briefly defined as 'unofficial, non-structured interaction [...] strategically optimistic, based on the best case analysis' (Davidson and Monteville, 1981, p. 155). This *Track II diplomacy* encompasses non-governmental initiatives, informal mediation, and dialogue processes undertaken and facilitated by social actors who act autonomously, albeit not in opposition to official institutions. Compared to *Track I* diplomacy, even when it does not produce binding agreements, *Track II* creates conditions of trust and communication that can prepare the ground for agreements formalised through official acts.

According to Roberts (2009), alternative diplomacy, despite its actors not being political representatives or public institutions, operates in a space that is by no means *apolitical;* therefore, it interacts with power dynamics and can influence the political sustainability of an agreement. In strategic terms, its value lies in its capacity to reduce miscommunication and manage the symbolic dimension of conflict, while remaining available at any time to facilitate the transition to institutional diplomacy.

Third-sector organisations – NGOs, churches and religious communities, civic associations – often play a crucial role in conflict mediation. The case of the Community of Sant'Egidio in Italy, whose main achievement is its decisive contribution to the Mozambican peace process, is emblematic. Through negotiated hospitality, continuity of dialogue and personal relations with the parties, Sant'Egidio created the conditions for the signing, on 4 October 1992, of the General Peace Agreement between the Government of Mozambique and the rebel movement ReNaMo. Based on the assumption that threats are never solely military but are rooted in political and cultural (identity-based) fractures, the primary objective pursued by Sant'Egidio mediators was the relational transformation of the conflict (Palumbo, 2018; Community of Sant'Egidio, 2022). This is a complex but not impossible process when supported by an informal and empathetic environment in which mediators enjoy the respect and trust of both parties.

A proper enhancement of *Track II* by the EU should involve European encouragement (and not only national, as is currently the case, even in the best instances) of humanitarian initiatives alongside such efforts, such as 'corridors' managed by NGOs in crisis theatres, while always respecting the autonomy of NGOs themselves.

4.2.2. The role of civil society B): the social deterrence of Civil Peace Corps

The action of people-to-people diplomacy constitutes an important aspect of the social deterrence that a country may deploy, in this case projecting civil society resources beyond the sphere of international relations. With social deterrence, the field of action shifts from the external dimension represented by international relations to the internal dimension of a given country, while still maintaining a perspective that transcends national borders. Our assumption is that, even in an apparently highly specialised field such as international relations and one institutionally monopolised by the State, civil society can and should contribute with its own input.

Indeed, security is not exhausted by deterrence, nor by agreed regulation of arsenals, nor by the conclusion of international agreements, but also depends on social cohesion, trust in institutions, and the capacity of political systems to absorb external shocks such as strategic threats.

Developing an insight put forward by Johan Galtung (1983), Barry Buzan (1991) identifies five dimensions of security – military, political, economic, social and environmental – emphasising that society may exhibit vulnerabilities even outside the strictly military sphere. The literature on social capital (Putnam, 1993; 2000) has shown how dense associative networks, interpersonal trust and civic cooperation contribute to the stability of both society and a democratic legal-political order. Fukuyama (1995) has highlighted the role of trust as an immaterial infrastructure essential for the economic and political stability of a country. The resulting systemic resilience can be defined as the capacity of a socio-political system to absorb shocks, adapt to changing conditions and maintain the functionality of its institutions (Norris, 2011). Investments in social inclusion and in literacy (digital and otherwise) constitute key components of a shared security strategy. Consequently, the tendency to treat education as the most expendable area of welfare spending (see. Chapter. 2.1) does not represent a mere economic cut, but a unilateral disarmament applied not so much to military deterrence as to social deterrence.

As supported by empirical evidence (Østby *et al.*, 2019), the structural link between education and stability is inescapable. Drawing on Lipset's assumptions (1959), education can be seen as a prerequisite for security: it neutralises susceptibility to extremist doctrines and provides the tools to interpret reality. In an era of hybrid warfare and disinformation, what the American sociologist defines as the capacity 'to make rational choices' (Lipset, 1959, p. 79) becomes a country's first cognitive line of defence against internal destabilisation.

Moreover, to be effective, social deterrence must manifest itself not only in the general sphere (political, economic, social and cultural), but also in a specific domain which, involving a necessary degree of physical capacity to defend against aggression, is explicitly strategic. While it is true that security cannot be fully understood through analysis limited to the balance of power or the management of military capabilities, it is equally true that such capabilities are necessary to provide adequate protection in the event of immaterial (political) or material (military) pressure faced by a country.

The theoretical reflection on forms of unarmed resistance has been addressed, among others, by Gene Sharp (1973), who analysed nonviolence as a method of political struggle based on mechanisms of non-cooperation, civil disobedience and organised social pressure. Sharp interprets nonviolence as a technique of conflict based on the erosion of sources of power – consent, resources, administrative obedience.

Comparative studies suggest that political transitions achieved through nonviolent mobilisation are associated with a higher probability of democratic outcomes and a lower risk of civil war (Roberts, 2009). This can be interpreted considering the construction of civic networks and social capital, factors central also to Johan Galtung's well-known theory of 'positive peace' (1969). Empirically, however, Chenoweth (2020) shows that, specifically in nonviolent campaigns for political change after 2010, the success rate has declined, due to the evolution of digital surveillance technologies and the increased capacity of states to control the informational space in an authoritarian manner.

The social dimension of security is becoming increasingly relevant in a context such as the present one, which requires protection across all spheres of a country's life. Even in representative democratic systems bound together by constitutional pacts such as those of the EU, civil defence does not replace the armed forces but rather strengthens the overall posture of resistance to aggression.

As a possible point of convergence between institutional and social approaches, three decades ago the pacifist Alexander Langer, a Member of the European Parliament elected in South Tyrol, proposed the establishment of a United Nations and European Union Civil Peace Corps (ECPC) (Langer, 1994). he proposal, put forward by Langer in collaboration with the Green parliamentary assistant Ernst Gülcher, was officially recognised by the European Parliament in May 1995, when 'the Bourlanges/Martin Report stated that 'a first step towards contributing to conflict prevention could be the creation of a European Civil Peace Corps (including conscientious objectors) tasked with training observers, mediators and specialists in conflict resolution' (Camera dei deputati, 2005)[2].

Often dismissed by those unfamiliar with it as utopian, nonviolent thought can be realistic. As Mao Valpiana, president of the Nonviolent Movement, observes: 'A nonviolent defence can be effective in the face of an armed threat only if it can also operate through peace institutions [...] Nonviolence is by no means in opposition to defence. Pacifism responds to war (i.e. acts afterwards), nonviolence prevents the threat (i.e. acts beforehand)'[3] (Mao Valpiana, 2026).

A leading figure in the European movement of opinion during the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, Alexander Langer attempted in every possible way to stop the catastrophe and genocide. In his Report for the creation of European Civil Peace

[2] In the European Parliament, the Langer-Gülcher proposal was later revived in the annual report on human rights presented in 2008 by the MEP Marco Cappato (Delis, 2025).
[3] Mao Valpiana, communication to the authors, 23 February 2026.

Corps, he recognised the role of military defence and, aware of the risks of cooperation with it, on 30 June 1996 outlined ways to prevent them: 'Members of the civil peace corps will need protection. In most cases military peacekeepers will be present in the field for this purpose. Since there is no natural respect or mutual understanding between military and civilian cultures, much attention and training will be needed to achieve this. Civil corps and peacekeepers must work together at all levels, and this requires training and experience' (Langer, 1994).

The European Civil Peace Corps aims to institutionalise conflict prevention by performing early warning, facilitation, mediation, monitoring of agreements in support of local institutions, international civil protection, and social reconciliation and reconstruction functions. It is conceptually located within the tradition of cooperative security, positive peace and peacebuilding, intervening early on institutional vulnerabilities and escalation dynamics that can reduce the human and economic costs of war. In this perspective, a concrete example is represented by the Republic of San Marino, which, through Law 194/2021, has established a Civil Peace Corps as a state instrument of nonviolent intervention, active in prevention, mediation and humanitarian assistance (Repubblica di San Marino, 2021).

Already referenced in a bill submitted to the Italian Parliament by Valpiana and others in April 2005 (Camera dei deputati, 2005), the issue of Civil Peace Corps has recently returned to the agenda through the citizens' initiative 'Un'altra difesa è possibile' promoted by the convergence of three networks of pacifist associations, la Conferenza nazionale enti di servizio civile, la Rete Italiana Pace e Disarmo e Sbilanciamoci!. The proposal, submitted on 16 March 2026 to the Court of Cassation, provides for the establishment in Italy of a Department for civil, unarmed and nonviolent defence (Rete Italiana Pace e Disarmo, 2025).

The establishment of Civil Peace Corps would expand the application of Article 52 of the Constitution, which defines the defence of the Fatherland as a 'sacred duty of the citizen', in line with the Constitutional Court ruling that recognised this prerogative for the Civil Service. It would do so by providing a framework for young people who do not choose military service but who nevertheless, within the framework of nonviolent thought, wish to express their participation in an institution endowed with the same normative and professional characteristics as a public body.

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5. Conclusions

Beyond not being uniformly applicable to every context, a policy of rearmament for its own sake is not the solution for Europe. In general, and in European societies in particular, comparative analysis shows that:

- *cooperative security* can represent a credible alternative to strategic competition;
- *arms control* agreements and *the regulation of emerging technologies* can reduce systemic risks;
- *social deterrence* contributes to preventing potential aggression by increasing its costs.

Naturally, we take it for granted that the political unity of a Europe inspired in foreign policy by cooperative security, and in military policy by *defensive defence*, it would be fundamental for preventing any potential aggressions.

The evolution of strategic competition in the twenty-first century highlights the growing interconnection between the military, technological, informational and social dimensions of security. The irrational accumulation of military capabilities (even when carried out with the stated purpose of ensuring reassurance and deterrence) is not in itself suitable for providing systemic stability in a context characterised by an increasing compression of decision-making timeframe and the unpredictability of technological developments.

Based on the analysis conducted so far, we adopt the metaphor of 'two arms' for a sustainable model of European defence: one military and non-aggressive, the other civilian and nonviolent. As regards the first arm, the continued existence of a deterrent function provided by a military force (means and personnel) cannot simply be denied. Insofar as it adheres to transparent criteria, reasonable objectives, and balanced dimensions, a genuinely defensive force contributes to deterring direct aggressions.

In other aspects, there is no need to insist on maintaining military deterrence, given that today it enjoys an almost unanimous consensus in mainstream political thought and practice. So unanimous, in fact, that rather than being reiterated once again, military deterrence needs to be freed from the rhetoric that usually accompanies it. In particular, it must be grounded in practice on the basis of serious action/reaction and cost/benefit analyses (in strategic as well as economic terms) with a view to its implementation. Politically, this will entail a genuine push towards a genuine and concrete common European defence project. It shall replace the practice, hitherto followed by Member States of planning the armed forces and the industrial base within a persistently national framework, with a finally federal reorganisation of threat identification and response planning.

As for the second arm – civilian nonviolent defence – conceptually it falls within the broader framework of cooperative security. The latter pursues a series of objectives: reducing the risk of miscalculation and accidental escalation; limiting, through arms control negotiations, the intrinsic dangerousness of the accumulation of destructive capabilities that are excessive in quantity, cost and technological sophistication; strengthening internal stability through systemic resilience; and increasing, through civilian defence, the political and operational cost of any potential military actions or threats.

Achieving these objectives presupposes the timely implementation of a broad process of revision and redesign of an integrated defence system across various domains – both institutional and social, military and civilian.

From this perspective, we propose the following *Twenty points*.

Twenty Points for an Alternative and Common European Defence

1. Europe's path *towards a federal structure* is as urgent as it is complex. The first step is to overcome the consensus rule. Obviously, the complexity does not diminish (indeed, it increases) when pursuing the objective of a common defence. However, on the one hand, European countries cannot envisage survival without a defence function. On the other hand, if they attempt to achieve it 'as has been done so far' (with the sole difference of allocating more resources), they will merely contribute to the process of dismantling the international order currently underway in the world due to the responsibility of the superpowers.
2. The *irreparable crisis of global balances* calls for deep reflection and the development of innovative proposals. A simple return to the post-Second World War arrangement and to the logic that inspired it – namely, the Yalta order in Europe and a bipolar (or unipolar) global order – is no longer feasible today. Once again, the effort required of us is to think the 'unthinkable'. An 'unthinkable' alternative to the apocalyptic one of a generalised nuclear conflict, which during the Cold War did indeed avert a final reckoning between superpowers, but only by postponing it.
3. Against the backdrop of increasing fragmentation and conflict among decision-making and power centres, the ongoing *scientific and technological revolution* is taking shape. A disruptive breakthrough such as Artificial Intelligence plays a leading role in this transformation. Faced with it, the leadership of major powers is called upon to radically change its way of thinking. In general, but also and above all on issues of security and defence, the perspective based on the threat-counterthreat dyad (deterrence) must be replaced by the perspective of cooperative security.

4. There are no signs *that European governance has fully taken account of all the implications* whether of this major revolution or of the other minor revolutions currently underway in the scientific and technological field. Even if the strategic framework were to envisage nothing more than a (unlikely) Europe as a superpower, the steps taken are not appropriate even for that purpose.
5. In financial terms, there are only three ways to obtain substantial resources to allocate to a public policy, and defence is no exception. Resources can be obtained either by increasing *tax revenue*, by expanding *public debt*, or by reallocating them from *other budget items*. The often-cited *spending review* is merely a variant of the third option and is, in quantitative terms, insufficient in itself. In the impossibility, or in the absence of political will, to pursue the first two paths, the projected exponential increase in defence budgets will occur – if not halted – at the expense of the welfare state. The weakening of the latter, through cuts to resources for healthcare, education and social protection, will undermine the foundations of welfare, that is, what has constituted the distinctive feature of the EU since its inception. The emphasis on military security will, paradoxically, have the effect of undermining the indirect security ensured by a cohesive society.
6. The imposing concentration of financial resources in military expenditure is not being matched by progress even in the *rationalisation and* integration of the defence production structure. Likewise, the planning of the development and procurement of weapon systems does not consolidate the partnerships among the main European players. An emblematic case is represented by the fighter aircraft of the 2030s, currently the subject of two competing projects – one trans-European and the other extra-European[1]. Co-productions and purchases from actors outside the EU are not decreasing but are instead increasing in both number and importance, while the organisation of the European arms industry around national 'champions' inhibits mergers between European companies and prevents the creation of EU-level 'champions' internationally.
7. A similar *sovereignist jealousy* to that seen in defence industries also characterises the policy of *European armed forces*. Divided among Twenty-seven different uniforms, the European armed forces do not possess, not only regular common units, but not even common instruments at any of the three levels of planning: strategic, operational, and tactical.
8. This situation results in the coexistence within the European armed forces of a number of redundant and overlapping weapons systems. According to *The Military Balance 2025* of the International Institute of Strategic Studies, in 2024

[1] These are respectively two programs: the Franco-German Future Combat Air System and the -British- Italian-Japanese Global Combat Air Programme.

the armed forces of the Twenty-seven EU Member States had in service 13 models of main battle tanks and 14 models of combat aircraft, as well as numerous types of destroyers and frigates.

9. Full standardisation of national arsenals is not expected in the short term: as a first approximation, it would suffice to attain simple *interoperability*, that is, the ability of different systems to operate together. A degree of interoperability exists only within NATO. To date, the Atlantic Alliance remains the sole framework in which Europeans share certain aspects of strategic, operational and tactical planning, as well as the use of a common language (English). NATO, in turn, faces limitations of the utmost political-institutional significance. Leaving aside the serious current crisis in EU-US relations, it cannot be ignored that some NATO members are not part of the EU (Canada, the United States), while some EU countries are not members of NATO (Austria, Cyprus, Ireland, Malta).
10. Another issue to be addressed concerns *nuclear armament*. It is unlikely that adopting a nuclear deterrent would contribute to European security. Within NATO, an 'extended deterrence' is currently possessed and managed by the United States. American control is absolute regarding direct nuclear deterrence (warheads based on its own territory and related delivery systems), and predominant with regard to 'extended deterrence', consisting of US air bases located in four EU countries (Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands). Recently revived proposals to make the French national deterrent available in order to provide Europe with its own nuclear deterrent face serious obstacles. Even if France and other EU partners agreed, the prohibition set out in Article 1 of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons – which forbids nuclear-armed states from transferring military nuclear technology[2] to others (and others from receiving it) – would still have to be overcome.
11. A truly innovative path would be one that seeks the security of a federal Europe by restoring cooperative security guarantees that had developed in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Guided by the spirit of Helsinki, which had marked the end of the Cold War, those guarantees had been consolidated in the creation of the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which brought together within it all European countries along with the United States and Russia. Today, East–West relations (not to mention those between the North and the South of the world, as well as those between the two shores of the Atlantic) are struggling in a crisis that appears irreversible. International relations have reached the lowest level of trust they have ever experienced in the past

[2] The exception allowing the United States to deploy, and some European countries to host, nuclear warheads is justified by the date of the US–European bilateral agreements, concluded in years preceding the signing of the NPT.

eighty years, and any proposal other than military solutions is dismissed as utopian.

12. Unlike 'realists' at all costs, we believe that security involves many and diverse resources. Defence encompasses a plurality of means: financial, social and technological. These must be prepared and supported according to the metaphor of the 'two arms': a nonviolent, civilian arm and an armed, military arm. This dual logic underpins *defensive defence*, which in turn is part of *cooperative security*. In this framework, all phases and components – identification of strategic objectives, resource planning, theoretical doctrines and practical applications – should be aimed not at confronting all others indiscriminately, but at protecting society from the (genuine) threats posed by some.
13. To pursue this goal, Europe must safeguard two links. One is the link between the *political dimension* and the *economic dimension*. It being understood that a common defence policy goes hand in hand with a common foreign policy, or rather, closely follow it, it is not true that EU countries currently spend too little on defence; rather, the opposite is true: they already spend a great deal. In global military expenditure rankings, the Twenty-seven rank second, just behind the United States. In 2025, the latter allocated 929 billion dollars to defence, while the EU Member States together devoted 430 billion – more than China with its 335 billion (SIPRI, 2026).
14. In addition to overspending, the *Twenty-seven spend poorly*, as each plans and implements military expenditure independently. Moreover, each seeks to possess the full panoply of weapon systems, sometimes only a few units of each, preferably across all domains. In turn, the latter are not only the 'traditional' ones (land, sea, air), but also the 'new' ones (digital, space, hybrid warfare, in the prevention of which the Europe, as a Union, is essentially non-existent).
15. The *rigid sovereignism that inspires European defence policies – both institutional and industrial* – prevents the achievement of significant savings, rationalisation and optimisation in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. These goals could be achieved by pooling the efforts of EU countries in both the production and management of armaments.
16. Should the conditions for a federal Europe mature, its armed forces (obviously open to all European citizens) would need to be organised by specialising member states in operational chains structured across the various domains. To the management of these through land, naval, and air forces, a cross-cutting social domain would be added, spanning the various missions, with a view to the resistance and management of conflicts by nonviolent means. This would embody *the dualism of the 'two arms'*.
17. The other crucial link is that between the *political dimension and the social dimension*. A cohesive society is not achieved through force: the failure of right-

wing populisms is demonstrating this. Citizens cannot be denied social protection because defence requires all resources. In advanced societies, governments do not govern against citizens; they must seek reasonable solutions that secure majority consent. Accordingly, they must be able to ensure that the political security they provide at the international level will not come at the expense of social security at the domestic sphere.

18. European citizens are aware that turbulent times require means of defence and that these entail a cost. However, they no longer believe that the maximum accumulation of means of warfare ensures the maximum level of security, both within and beyond national borders. On this issue, citizens call to be heard – mechanisms already exist, provided that those who direct them in government place themselves in a position of listening – and that those who represent them in parliament refrain from promoting pre-established positions.
19. The European project is opposed by *sovereignist right-wing* voters and supported by *pro-European centrist* voters. The Centre alone does not have a majority. To govern, it needs left-wing voters. *Left-wing* voters may become, if they are not already, convinced supporters of the European project, provided however that it is not militarised. If they persist in pursuing a project of a militarised Europe, governments and centre parties will fall short of the very raison d'être of a united Europe and will fail. The result they will produce will be to replace the inherent Right/Left polarisation with a Militarism/Pacifism polarisation, in these terms, will be fatal for the European project.
20. All this presupposes, on the part of governments and citizens, an awareness of the issues of peace and war that cannot be achieved overnight. Precisely for this reason, it is urgent to begin, with courage, to build this awareness and to embark with determination upon an entirely new path.

Sources

IISS – International Institute for Strategic Studies. (2025). *The Military Balance 2025*. Routledge.

SIPRI – Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. (april 2026). *SIPRI Military Expenditure Database*.

Appendix

Chronology of European Common Defence

European institutions	European defence
	17 March 1948 – Treaty of Brussels The Western Union (WO) was established (Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom).
4 April 1949 – North Atlantic Treaty NATO was established (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, the United States).	
5 May 1949 – Treaty of London The Council of Europe was established (Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sweden).	
	24 October 1950 – Pleven Plan Provided the creation of a European army, (NATO/Europe command).
18 April 1951 – Treaty of Paris The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was established (Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands).	
	27 May 1952 – Treaty of Paris The European Defence Community (EDC) was established; it failed due to non-ratification by the French National Assembly in 1954. (Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands).

	23 October 1954 Establishment of the Western European Union (former Western Union) (Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Spain).
25 March 1957 – Treaties of Rome The European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) were established.	
19 March 1958 – Establishment of the European Parliament (Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands).	
8 April 1965 – Merger Treaty The European Communities were established (merging the institutions of the ECSC, EEC and Euratom) (Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands).	
	1-2 December 1969 – The Hague Summit Launch of European Political Cooperation (EPC).
	26-27 October 1984 – Rome Declaration The WEU was reactivated.
17 February 1986 – Single European Act	
First step towards the European 'single market'.	Closer cooperation in foreign policy.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">7 February 1992 – Maastricht Treaty (TEU)</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center">The European Union (EU) was formally established.</td><td align="center">Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was introduced.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td align="center">19 June 1992 – Petersberg Council

The Petersberg Task were established, whereby WEU declared their readiness to provide conventional military units to NATO and the EU.</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center">1 January 1993 – Launch of the single market

Ensured the free movement of goods, services, persons and capital within the EU.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td align="center">10-11 January 1994 – NATO Brussels Summit

Approval of the Combined Joint Task Forces (CJTF).</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">2 October 1997 – Treaty of Amsterdam

Introduced significant improvements in common foreign policy and the free movement of citizens, aiming to make the EU more effective and democratic.</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center">1 January 1998 – Introduction of the single currency.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2"></td><td align="center">3-4 December 1998 – Franco-British Summit in Saint-Malo

Joint declaration on European defence: The EU must have the capacity to undertake autonomous action, supported by credible military forces.</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center">3-4 June 1999 – Cologne European Council

The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) was formally established.</td></tr>
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	12 December 1999 – Helsinki European Council Formulated the *Helsinki Headline Goals* (EU/NATO cooperation).
	13 November 2000 – WEU Council of Marseille Transfer of powers from the WEU to the EU.
26 February 2001 – Treaty of Nice	
Extension of EU competences (amendment of the TEU).	New military structures were introduced; the method of 'enhanced cooperation' was extended to the CFSP.
	15 December 2001 – Laeken European Council The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) was declared partially operational.
	20-21 June 2002 – Seville European Council Expansion of ESDP objectives include the fight against terrorism.
	16 December 2002 – EU-NATO Joint Declaration on ESDP 'Berlin Plus' agreements (EU/NATO cooperation).
	8 December 2003 – European Security Strategy (ESS) The final version of the ESS was adopted by the Brussels European Council.

18 June 2004 – Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe Approved by the European Parliament; subsequently rejected by France and the Netherlands.	
	12 July 2004 – European Defence Agency (EDA) Established to support Member States and the Council in improving European defence capabilities, particularly in procurement.
	5 December 2007 – Approval of the 'defence package' Increased competitiveness of the defence industrial sector by limiting the application of Art. 296 of the EC Treaty (exemption from internal market rules for essential national security interests).
13 December 2007 – Treaty of Lisbon Introduces significant changes in common security and defence (solidarity clause [Art. 222 TFEU]; mutual assistance clause [Art. 42 TEU]; evolution of ESDP into CSDP).	
	4-5 September 2014 – NATO Summit in Newport (Wales) A target of 2% of GDP for defence spending was set (by 2024).
23 June 2016 – The UK votes to leave the EU Brexit referendum (31 January 2020).	
	28 June 2016 – The EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) European strategy addressing energy security, migration, climate change, violent extremism and hybrid threats.

	June 2017 – European Defence Fund (EDF) Creation of a financial instrument to support research and development in the European defence sector.
22 February 2022 – Russia invades Ukraine The EU and its international partners condemn Russia's war of aggression. The EU adopts sanctions against Russia and provides financial, humanitarian and military assistance to Ukraine.	
	21 March 2022 – Strategic Compass for Security and Defence Definition of a common and concrete vision for European defence policy.
	4 March 2025 – *ReArm Europe/Readiness 2030* Strengthening defence funding by offering greater financial flexibility to EU Member States.
	24-25 June 2025 – NATO Summit in The Hague (Netherlands) A target of 5% of GDP for defence spending was set (by 2035).

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