

News from the Brussels' Bubble



NBB #2026-1, 16 January 2026

EU agenda

Unless indicated otherwise, EU official meetings take place in Brussels

- 01/01/26** • Cyprus Presidency of the EU starts
- 22/01/26** • Informal EU leaders meeting, Cyprus
- 28/01/26** • [EU Defence Agency \(EDA\) annual conference](#)
- 11/02/26** • Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), defence format
- 12/02/26** • Informal EU leaders' retreat, Cyprus
- 13-15/02/26** • [Munich Security Conference](#), Munich
- 26/02/26** • [EDA Defence Industry conference](#), EU Parliament
- 11-12/03/26** • Informal FAC defence, Cyprus
- 12-13/03/26** • [BEDEX - Brussels European defence exhibition & conference](#)
- 19-20/03/26** • EU Summit
- 23-24/04/26** • [Informal EU leaders meeting, Cyprus](#)
- 12/05/26** • Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), defence format
- 18-19/05/26** • [EBS-ASD European Defence and Security Summit](#)
- 18-19/06/26** • EU Summit

ENAAT news

STOP
ReArm Europe
welfare, not warfare

Mondays
26/01 & 02/02
6pm CET
WEBINAR

EUROPE'S HIDDEN HANDS:
FUNDING AND ARMING THE
GENOCIDE IN GAZA

26th of January with:
SHIR HEVER
Alliance for Justice between
Israelis and Palestinians

2nd of February with:
VLAD MURESAN
Palestine Solidarity
collective Cluj-Napoca

ILHAM YASEEN
BDS Movement

ENAAT Members
European Network Against Arms
Trade

Sign up here:
www.stoprearm.org

• "Europe's Hidden Hands: Funding and Arming the Genocide in Gaza" (Webinar series 26/01 & 02/02)

This series of two webinars, organised by Stop ReArm Europe and ENAAT, will explore the European complicity with the Israel's genocide in Gaza and its decades-long military occupation of Palestine in particular through arms trade and strengthened military cooperation, including increased dependency from Israeli security and "battle-tested" technologies, and how resistance is growing and civil society is organising to challenge those policies."

See [here for more details](#) on the content and speakers, or go to the [registration link](#)

- **Blog: Weakening arms transfers rules in the name of 'security' and 'competitiveness'**

The Commission is proposing far-reaching policy changes to de-regulate the European Union, including on military-related matters. Of particular concern is the proposal to "ease" arms trade within the EU under the argument of 'defence readiness' and competitiveness, completely overlooking the consequences on national arms exports control systems. Read the [Stop Wapenhandel blog](#) to understand what this is about, and access [our policy briefing](#) for more in-depth information.

- **Increasing concerns about civil society watchdog role at EU level**

In the framework of the [EU Civil Society Strategy](#), presented as a way to protect European democracies from third country- influence campaigns (read 'Russia'...), the [EP voted on 27 November](#) in favour of an EU directive proposal "establishing harmonised requirements in the internal market on transparency of interest representation carried out on behalf of third countries". If the official intentions may appear legitimate (just remember the Qatargate), civil society actors are alerting that this is a [band-aid on a gaping wound](#) not up to the challenge, and a number of observers have been warning about the -unintended?- impact on EU democracy and in particular the key watchdog role played by civil society to try and counterbalance the heavy corporate influence on EU policies, warning about an [action plan to dismantle democracy while 'NGOs die'](#), and asking ['what will happen after Europe's NGOs are dismantled'](#).

- **Citizens' initiative asking the EC to suspend the EU-Israel association agreement**

The European Left Alliance for the People and the Planet (ELA) recently launched a [European Citizens' Initiative \(ECI\) 'Justice for Palestine'](#), to gather citizens' signatures across the EU and ask the Commission to suspend the EU association agreement with Israël. The initiative needs to collect 1 million signatures within a year, and reach a minimum threshold in at least 7 EU countries to be valid (see [here more details about the procedure](#)). Once validated, the ECI request will be examined by the European Commission, which is obliged to respond to it. The answer may be to do nothing, which is a major limitation of the citizens' initiative process, but it remains a political and symbolic tool worth being used among other campaign tools. Please [consider signing here](#).

EU support for the arms industry

- **EDIP & SAFE: "Europeanisation" still struggling, arms dealers pocketing the profits**

The Commissioner responsible for defence industry, Kubilius, has once again urged Member States to play the "European" game within the framework of the EDIP and SAFE programmes, demonstrating a growing concern that progress in this area remains limited, [reports Euractiv](#): "On the €1.5 billion EDIP programme, he said it would be a "big mistake to only use this financial big bang for national defence industries and its products," adding that inward-looking country plans would only increase fragmentation and dependencies on third countries." As regards SAFE, "only 65% of the budget is earmarked for joint procurement" as "[EU countries opt for solo projects in €150 billion joint defence procurement scheme](#)."

SAFE: UK out, Canada, Norway & Ukraine in

[According to Euractiv](#) quoting the Ukrainian defence ministry, "Ukraine has submitted "its own defence-industrial projects" under SAFE and to potentially secure around €4.3 billion of the €150 billion loans in joint procurement deals." In December [a deal was reached](#) to allow Canadian arms dealers into SAFE contracts: Canada would pay an 'entry-fee' worth €10 million, as well "an additional 15% contribution [...] for any contract where Canadian components account for more than 35% of the total cost of the final product" [reports Euractiv](#). A maximum cap being up to 80% of the value of purchased equipment to be Canadian, still [according to Euractiv](#). The European Parliament and member states still need to approve the deal.

Interesting to note that despite all this being done in the name of 'European defence' to face the Russian threat, it is easier to integrate Canada than the UK (see [NBB 2025-7](#)), usually considered the 6th world military power (and the first European one...). No need for a crystal ball to know that France is opposed to the integration of such a political and industrial rival...too bad for the common good!

"SAFE more useful to some than others, says Moody's"

"Nineteen countries will use €150 billion in EU defence loans to build up their armies, but Hungary, Poland, and Romania stand to benefit the most from it financially according to the credit agency Moody's", [reports Euractiv](#). As for the next steps, the European Commission is continuing to assess and [approve the national plans](#) submitted in late November/early December, running late on its own calendar, [reports Euractiv](#).

EDIP kicking off after final approvals

The EU Council (member states) and the European parliament [approved the final deal](#) on the European Defence Industry programme (worth €1.5 billion & to run till 2027), which will fund arms production boosting and joint acquisitions (see [NBB 2025-6](#)). [Trade-unions had called MEPs to reject the deal](#) amid concerns about exemptions from the working time directive as well as "derogations from environmental rules and health and safety standards" which would lower down workers' safeguards.

The first EDIP committee – made up of country representatives – met mid-December to discuss how to implement the EDIP work programme, [according to Euractiv](#), as "they have until April to put the work programme together."

• **EP early Christmas gift for the arms industry**

Just before the winter break, the European Parliament played Santa Claus. In a series of votes held 15 to 17/12, a large majority of MEPs paved the way for an increase in funding and a reduction in rules and standards on rearmament: They approved in Plenary the final deals about facilitating access of the arms industry to the €400 billion-worth Cohesion Policy pot (see [NBB 2025-5](#)), as well as [opening civilian funds](#), such as the Digital Europe Programme or Horizon Europe (for research & innovation) to dual-use projects with military applications (see [NBB 2025-7](#)). The EU transport policy (the Connecting Europe Facility) will also fund military mobility projects (see [NBB 2025-7](#)).

At Committee level, [MEPs adopted their positions to enter into negotiations with the member states on the so-called 'Defence Omnibus'](#), that is a package of deregulation proposals to favour the business of arms (see [NBB 2025-4](#)); Those committees also decided to by-pass the plenary assembly and enter directly into negotiations with the Council and Commission early 2026, a procedure meant to be exceptional but that became the norm under military-related policies, and which is now expanding to civil policies.

Among the problematic proposals under this "simplification" package, one of particular concern to us relates to arms trade: it proposes to deregulate the rules about arms trade inside the EU [to a point that it will hamper the possibility for national governments to respect EU and international norms](#) about arms exports, making them accountable to the industry rather than the other way round. And the [current position of the European parliament makes the initial proposal even worse](#), including by giving a blank check to the EC, in practice the DG for the Defence Industry, without suggesting any safeguards nor making any reference to relevant EU and international law.

On 26 November, MEPs had already accepted the [proposal that puts an end to the concept of controversial weapons](#) (reduced to that of prohibited weapons), a decision described as 'technical' but which has serious political, financial and ethical consequences at a time when the EU is financing the development of disruptive technologies, including lethal autonomous weapons, to prepare the 'wars of the future'.

For their part, the Member States [reached their compromise position](#) on the different proposals of the 'Omnibus for Defence' on 26 November and are now ready to enter negotiations under leadership of the Cypriot Presidency of the EU. Disagreements are to be expected particularly on the issue of speeding up decisions on granting permits and, even more so, on the European preference advocated in particular by France, while nine smaller/Eastern/Northern "EU countries called for caution on the EU's push to make funding available first and foremost to products produced in the EU", [reports Euractiv](#). Only "the fast tracking of defence procurement (...) was postponed to next year when the Commission will present a revision of the defence procurement directive" [reports Euractiv](#).

• **News briefs**

Defence Fund in 2026 covers hypersonic defense, future tank; SP & FR to compete on interceptor project

"The European Defence Fund plans to allocate €1 billion (\$1.2 billion) in funding for defense research and development in 2026, with the biggest chunk of money budgeted for work on air and missile defense, including countering hypersonic glide vehicles", reports [DefenseNews](#). "From the €1 billion cash pot, the largest share – €168 million – will go to air and missile defence projects, followed by the ground combat sector, including the next-generation battle tank, at €150 million." [further details Euractiv](#). "At €100 million, the hypersonic interceptor project will be the single largest initiative funded next year" for only one of the two competing projects currently funded by the EU: the HYDEF project won by Spain in 2022, and the MBDA-led project HYDIS gifted to France the year after.

Ukraine: European preference under EU loan, tax-haven & easing arms trade for arms dealers

Within the framework of the [€90 million loan package to Ukraine presented by the EC on 14/01](#), “military support would function on a “cascading principle”, whereby the EU would only source weapons from outside the bloc if no adequate European military equipment is available” [reports Euractiv](#). Besides, the Ukrainian government is offering “significant tax incentives” to arms dealers as part of its Defence City Initiative, as well as easing “import and export regulations (...) for companies that become members of Defence City, who need to have at least half of their income stemming from defence products and be registered in Ukraine” [according to Euractiv](#). “The initiative is planned to run until 2036 or until Ukraine joins the EU.”

Arms industry lobbying: Polish PGZ arms dealer opens a Brussels office

“Polish state-owned defense conglomerate Polska Grupa Zbrojeniowa (PGZ) and the wider Polish defense sector are edging into the Brussels influence circuit with new confidence” [reports Politico](#). PGZE opened a [permanent lobby office in Brussels](#) at the time of the Polish presidency of the EU, and “also clinched a seat on the board of ASD, the influential lobby of European defense manufacturers, proudly billing itself as the first Eastern European company to break into the club” adds Politico.

• Related links

[SIPRI Top 100: Europe's defence industry star performer despite supply chain fears](#) | Euractiv, 01/12/25

[Europe ponders how to ready industry for war, without being at war](#) | DefenseNews, 02/12/25

[Polish rearment plan banks on US weapons bought with EU backing](#) | DefenseNews, 08/12/25

[Israel's biggest defence company suspended by NATO amid corruption probe](#) | FollowTheMoney, 08/12/25

[Harder, faster, stronger: Biotech's quest to perfect the soldier](#) | Euractiv, 03/01/26

[Czechoslovak Group plans stock-market listing amid Europe defense boom](#) | DefenseNews, 15/01/26

Other aspects of European militarisation

• Not much for peace in ‘neutral’ EU presidencies

On 1 January, Cyprus took over the EU presidency, and will be followed by Ireland in July. However, the fact that two ‘neutral’ countries will be leading the EU for a year does not seem to be a sign of hope for rethinking security, and no change is to be expected in the militarisation of the EU. The [official Cypriot programme](#) “is calling for the EU to assume a greater responsibility by ensuring defence readiness by 2030, in line with the Commission’s push” [summarizes Euractiv](#), while “multiple Irish officials(...) have insisted that their country, despite its formal neutrality, is a key part of European foreign and security policy initiatives”, [according to Politico](#): “Dublin has stepped up military spending in recent years and is planning overhauls of its historically under-resourced capabilities.”

• EU 2030 war plans: EC leadership outbids to counter EDA’s revival

Mid-January the EC President Ursula von der Leyen told MEPs in a closed meeting [that the EU should become a ‘military powerhouse’](#), and that the EU should develop its own “Security Strategy.” [The Commission will put forward such a paper by June](#), although this was not featured in the EC official 2026 work programme presented in October. How this paper will differ from or bring added-value to a bunch of existing ones such as the 2022 Strategic Compass (that should have been updated in 2025), EC economic security related papers and other roadmaps is another story. This seems more like an overbid on the part of the Commission now that member states have decided to take back control and put the EDA back in the spotlight, as we announced in October (see below and [NBB 2025-6](#)).

As for the Defence Industry Commissioner Kubilius, he called for “a 100,000-strong “European military force” [to] form the backbone of the continent’s defence” as well as for “a ‘European Security Council’ – made up of Italy, France, Germany, Spain and Poland, alongside the presidents of the Council and Commission”, [reports Euractiv](#); again, “the pitch is not new, but it remains short on detail” such as “how such a force would operate, under which authority, or how it could be deployed”, and whether it would be made up of ‘new’ soldiers or ‘diverting’ them from existing national armies. And most importantly, what would make it different from previous failed attempts (the Battlegroups and the Rapid Deployment Capacity-RDC).

In the meantime, the EC could not even be consistent on [whether the EU 'defence clause' would apply to Greenland](#), and EU member states haven't greenlighted yet the EC four 'defence flagship projects' presented in October (see [NBB 2025-6](#)): "countries are expected to review the projects' list in early January, where they could pitch new initiatives based on their own defence needs" [reports Euractiv](#).

In particular, [a "Mediterranean Flank Watch" could be proposed to please South Europe countries](#), and member states seem more interested in pushing further the EU Defence Agency to lead on "plugging the nine defence capability gaps" previously identified in the EDA frame, [according to Euractiv](#), as well as expanding its cross-country procurement platform [including for capability development and innovation](#).

• News Briefs

Kubilius' Elders council to advise on the future of 'European defence'

On 10 December, the Defence Industry Commissioner Kubilius conveyed a group of 12 former European (not only EU) political figures to reflect on the future of 'European defence', [reports Euractiv](#). After the meeting the list of participants was made public, and included José Manuel Barroso (PT), Pat Cox (IRL), Hans-Gert Pöttering (DE), Herman Van Rompuy (BE), Carl Bild (SW), Enrico Letta (IT), Mikuláš Dzurinda (SK), Arseniy Yatsenyuk (UA), Natalia Gavrilița (MD), Ana Palacio (SP), Stavros Lambrinidis (GR) and David Miliband (UK). The fact that this group includes only two women is indicative of the 'traditional', not to say 'conservative', perspective on security and military issues.

Council agreement on military mobility funding and new working party

Under the coming discussions for the next EU long-term budget for 2028-2034, EU member states agreed their position about military mobility plans under the Connecting Europe facility (CEF), under which the EC wants to earmark €17.6 billion for military mobility projects and mandate EU countries to carry out 500 short-term projects along four identified corridors, [reports Euractiv](#). National governments insist they are on the driving seat and that "military mobility projects pertain to national decision-making". In line with this positioning, the Council decided "to set up an ad hoc working party on military mobility."

UK joins on Defence Exports Controls agreement with France, Spain and Germany

The UK has joined a defence exports treaty including France, Spain and Germany, "which will make it easier for UK defence businesses to export" to its European allies and "highlights the UK's role in supporting Europe's collective defence", according to the [official British government press release](#), which also provides access to the [full text of the agreement](#).

New EU economic security plan aims to curb defence industry's China addiction

The Commission identifies the defence sector as one of six high-risk areas in its economic security 'doctrine,' published Wednesday, fearing that third-countries could impede the use of defence equipment, dual-use technologies and military mobility in times of international crises. ([Euractiv](#))

Biotech Act plans to boost defence and limit misuse

"The European Commission's Biotech Act proposal expected this week dedicates a chapter to laying out under which conditions the EU executive can designate "high-impact strategic projects in health biotechnology". The move is part of the bloc's biodefence capabilities and would therefore enable such projects to get extra EU money." ([Euractiv](#))

Migration issues increasingly painted as defence

Faced with deep divisions between east and south over the origins of security threats, Brussels is increasingly integrating migration into its defence thinking, [reports Euractiv](#).

• Related links

[European Space Agency secures record budget through 2028](#), Euractiv, 27/11/25

[Germany's Merz, Pistorius to skip unveiling of Israel air defence purchase](#) | Euractiv, 01/12/25

[EU capitals eye Frontex revamp with AI tools and new border force](#) | Euractiv, 01/12/25

[Europe's race back to the draft](#) | Euractiv, 03/12/25

[EU rehashes economic doctrine and resources plans to counter China threat](#) | Euractiv, 03/12/25

[The Pentagon wants Europe to take the lead in NATO by 2027](#) | Euractiv, 05/12/25

[Decision on FCAS fighter jet programme postponed indefinitely](#) | Euractiv, 31/12/26