



New CER policy brief: Towards an EU ‘defence union’?

by Luigi Scazzieri, 30 January 2025

The need for Europeans to urgently strengthen their defences is clearer than ever. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine has pushed European countries to raise their defence budgets significantly, but huge challenges lie ahead. The EU has the potential to play a substantial role in building up Europe’s defences. The Union has emerged as a significant defence actor in recent years: it has tools to help expand defence production, to foster joint research and development and to promote joint procurement. There are plans to scale these instruments up, and Commission President Ursula von der Leyen talks of establishing a ‘defence union’.

A new CER paper [‘Towards an EU ‘defence union’?’](#) by Luigi Scazzieri takes stock of the EU’s involvement in defence, its challenges and its prospects. The author argues that EU instruments suffer from limited funding and political buy-in; and that the politics of the EU’s involvement in defence is difficult to navigate.

The paper offers concrete recommendations for European policy-makers:

- 1) The EU should explore the possibility of channelling more funds to defence.
- 2) EU defence tools should focus sharply on addressing military needs and adding value to member-states’ efforts.
- 3) The EU should be pragmatically open to partnerships – a restrictive approach risks disrupting existing co-operation.
- 4) Defence considerations should be mainstreamed into policy-making, to ensure that the impact on defence is considered by policy-makers legislating on other issues.

Luigi Scazzieri, author of the paper, said *“Europeans have avoided taking their defences seriously since the end of the Cold War, but they can no longer afford to do so. The EU has the potential to play a substantial role in addressing these challenges, in synergy with NATO and national efforts, if it adopts an open, pragmatic approach, sharply focused on military needs.”*

Notes for editors:

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