



New CER policy brief: How the UK and the EU can deepen defence co-operation

by Luigi Scazzieri, 7 March 2025

The UK and the EU face daunting common security challenges. However, EU-UK defence co-operation remains limited and the UK's defence relationship with the EU is shallower than that of many other non-EU partners. Labour's idea of a security pact with the EU has become mired in the broader discussions over the EU-UK reset.

The current lack of co-operation is a challenge. While most defence co-operation in Europe happens bilaterally, in NATO and in small groups, the EU's role is also growing, with funds to foster joint defence research and procurement, and to expand industrial production.

A new CER paper '[How the UK and the EU can deepen defence co-operation?](#)' by Luigi Scazzieri assesses the state of UK-EU defence co-operation, comparing it to the EU's relationships with other key allies like Norway and Canada. One challenge is that the EU's defence toolbox only allows for limited involvement by non-EU countries, except for Norway, which is formally associated to EU defence tools.

The paper offers concrete recommendations for EU and UK policy-makers.

- 1) The EU and the UK should quickly conclude a security and defence partnership to formalise their foreign policy dialogue. The partnership should include or set out a timeline for the UK's association to the European Defence Agency and for its possible participation in EU military operations.
- 2) The UK and the EU should work together closely in developing options to channel additional funds to defence. A co-ordinated funding injection would frontload spending, increase co-operation and send a strong signal to Europe's allies and adversaries.
- 3) The EU could take unilateral action to integrate the UK more closely in its defence capability development efforts, to benefit from its large and advanced industrial capacity and expertise. If the EU issues defence bonds, it could make it possible for UK companies to plug into individual projects.
- 4) The UK should seek formal association to EU capability development tools, whether by copying Norway's association model or by negotiating a bespoke agreement.

Luigi Scazzieri, author of the paper said *“Defence needs to be disentangled and elevated from the discussions surrounding the implementation and revision of the UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement. Linking the UK to EU defence tools as closely as possible would strengthen the pan-European defence industrial base and make a decisive contribution to Europe’s security. Failure to work together will only make Europe weaker.”*

Notes for editors:

To discuss the policy brief or request an interview with Luigi Scazzieri [@LScazzieri](https://twitter.com/LScazzieri) and [@lscazzieri.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/lscazzieri.bsky.social) please contact Kate Mullineux in the CER press office on pressoffice@cer.eu or +44 (0) 20 7233 1199.

The Centre for European Reform is a think-tank devoted to making the EU work better and strengthening its role in the world. The CER is pro-European but not uncritical.

Follow us on X: [@CER_EU](https://twitter.com/CER_EU) on BlueSky: [@centreeuropeanref.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/centreeuropeanref.bsky.social) on Threads: [@cer_eu](https://www.threads.net/@cer_eu)