

Security for People and Planet:

Rethinking EU Defence and Security Policy in the Age of Climate and Environmental Crisis

Adopted by the EEB Council on 25 November 2025

Executive Summary & 12 actions to ensure human security

According to the 2024 Global Peace Index, the world is currently witnessing the **highest number of armed conflicts since World War II**. Governments across the world have been ramping up military budgets. In 2024, global military spending surged to a record-breaking \$2.7 trillion, the sharpest increase since the end of the Cold War. At the same time, the economic impact of violence – including conflict – was estimated at \$14.4 trillion in 2023.

As an organisation working for a **future where people and nature thrive together** and where people live in **just and peaceful societies**, we are alarmed by the stark increase in conflict and violence, the militarisation of politics and the **global race to arms**. At a time, when **unity is most urgently needed**, conflicts and aggression cause immense human suffering while diverting resources and attention away from the **triple planetary crisis** of climate breakdown, biodiversity loss and pollution and the **fight to end social and economic injustices**.

At a time when defence, security and rearmament have become top political priorities for the EU and Member States, the EEB seeks to contribute to the debate with this position paper advocating for a **broad understanding of human security and of the interconnectedness** of peace and conflict, inequality and injustice, climate crisis and environmental breakdown.

We believe that the EU and its Member States can and must play a **key role in responding to and reducing existential threats to humankind** – those created by conflict and violence as well as those created by the triple planetary crisis and stark inequalities. We believe that the EU needs to **lead by example** and champion conflict prevention, international cooperation, the respect of international law and accountability for perpetrators, while ensuring a role as a trustworthy and value-based partner who seeks to foster justice and well-being for all.

The EEB urges European leaders to act wisely and firmly in light of geopolitical realities, calling for a **holistic and comprehensive defence and security policy** which is based on the **pursuit of peace** in the first instance, the **respect of the rule of law** and the **protection of human rights**. We call for policies which are consistent with the founding principles of the EU as a declared peace initiative and with international cooperation within the United Nations, **having learnt from the terrible wars, violence and injustices** that our region has suffered and that European countries have inflicted on others.

Considering current security threats, a **European defence and security response** must enable the EU and its Member States to defend themselves in case of aggression. This includes preparedness also for hybrid warfare including through cyberwarfare, disinformation, deliberate incursions targeted at disrupting everyday life or potential attacks on critical infrastructure. This response must be informed by **transparent and democratic decision-making** bringing people and public interest along and it cannot be driven by the **profit interests of the weapon industry**.

This response needs to be geared towards **resilience and long-term sustainability** safeguarding all essentials of life including the integrity of ecosystems, clean air and clean water and food sovereignty as well as good governance, democracy and the rule of law. It must be **fit for purpose** and **cost-efficient**. It must not undermine our **current and long-term security** through a deprioritisation of the **triple planetary crisis and inequalities** in these critical years where our actions - or inactions - create serious threats to the security of current and future generations.

We propose **twelve actions to ensure human security**:

- 1) EU defence and security policy needs to be based on a **holistic understanding of human security**, acknowledging the existential threats of the triple planetary crisis as well as the intersections of conflict, inequalities, power imbalances and environmental destruction. This includes a gender-sensitive approach to peace and security.
- 2) Different future scenarios are possible, and leaders have **alternative options for action**. We urge our political leaders not to feed into martial rhetoric and militarisation, but to **act wisely and firmly**, weighing the consequences of military escalation and giving priorities to alternatives wherever and as long as possible. European leaders need to **prioritise the prevention and de-escalation of conflict**, arms control and disarmament, leadership in peace-making and skilled diplomacy.
- 3) The EU and its member state need to exhaust all non-violent measures to exercise pressure on aggressors as long as possible, **making full use of economic and trade measures**. The EU and member states also need to **champion the rule of law and ensuring accountability for perpetrators**.
- 4) The EU and its Member States need to put in place a **comprehensive ban on arms exports** to any country that may, or in fact does, use such weapons to target civilians, to aggress its neighbours or to oppress its own people. This includes dual use components and their export where their use cannot be effectively controlled for non-weapon purposes.
- 5) Across the region, and beyond, we call for an **investment in the education to peace, non-violence and cooperation** in the first place, to foster a peaceful and cooperative society. To be able to face external threats, we also need education to **civil resistance and preparedness**. Next to education, we call for support for independent media and information.
- 6) In face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and having learnt from the mistake of having put economic interests above security considerations, we call on the EU and Member States to cut **fossil fuel, nuclear and material dependence from Russia** and to work with partners globally to dry up Russia's war coffers. Equally, we call on the EU to ensure energy and material autonomy from all authoritarian and oppressive regimes.
- 7) Recognising the risks of the EU's **security and energy dependence from the US**, we call on European leaders to ensure a **defence and security policy which is independent**, guided by the values enshrined in the Treaties and international law, and encourages cooperation across the EU including through non-aligned and non-NATO members.

- 8) An autonomous European defence and security response requires **political will for closer cooperation** for rapid response, intelligence, crisis diplomacy, humanitarian protection and **lawful defensive operations** including **effective defensive cyber operations** and **counter disinformation campaigns** — subject to clear mandates, judicial review and parliamentary oversight.
- 9) For the EU's defence and security policy and related budgets, we call for an **open, transparent and democratic decision-making process** including parliamentary approval and meaningful consultation of the public, curbing the influence of the weapons industry.
- 10) We demand that **defence spending remains as lean as possible, efficient and accountable**, with resource allocation informed by an **evidence-based review of capabilities and threats**. Military investments must not come at the expense of **vital spending** on decarbonisation, zero pollution, biodiversity protection, social justice, health care, education, independent media, civil protection, or climate adaptation—all of which are essential to human security.
- 11) We call on the EU **not to compromise environmental and human rights safeguards** by fast-tracking and expanding metals and mineral extraction and not to allow for **environmental exemptions or fast-track clauses** for defence projects. We urge to uphold public participation, access to information, and justice in all environmental decisions. The protection and restoration of ecosystems, including the remediation of sites contaminated by the military, and the protection of communities against environmental harm must remain a core pillar of Europe's wider security policy.
- 12) As part of the EU's holistic defence and security policy, we encourage political leaders to acknowledge and to address, next to the humanitarian aspects of conflict, the long-term **environmental and social harm caused by conflict**, to increase its support to the countries and communities most affected, to ensure accountability and reparations, and to recognise intentional, large-scale environmental destruction, referred to as **ecocide**, as a crime under the international legal system.

Context

Human security at risk

[According to the 2024 Global Peace Index](#), the world is currently witnessing the **highest number of armed conflicts since World War II**. These have resulted in immense human suffering with mass civilian harm, the devastation of basic infrastructure, large scale environmental destruction and the displacement of millions fleeing violence and destruction. We witness a profound erosion of basic principles of international law, the blatant disrespect of humanitarian principles and impunity for perpetrators. Nuclear and conventional weapons' proliferation, deliberate nuclear incidents, intended and unintended military escalation, hybrid warfare and new interstate wars are real risks.

Conflict and militarisation have consequences that extend far beyond the battlefield, with **women and marginalised groups often bearing the greatest costs**. Military operations degrade and destroy land, water and ecosystems, undermining livelihoods and limiting access to essential resources. Since women are frequently responsible for securing food, water and

providing care, they face a disproportionate burden when these resources are disrupted, alongside heightened risks of violence and displacement. Already marginalised or oppressed communities are consistently the most affected, carrying the heaviest weight of military conflict and its long-term impacts.

At the same time, these security threats are not alone. At a global scale, **climate breakdown, biodiversity loss, widespread pollution and water availability are amongst the biggest security challenges** of our times. In the EU, extreme heatwaves, wildfires, floods and droughts have laid bare our own vulnerability while civil protection systems remain underfunded and overstretched. Intelligence services warn that the destabilising effects of climate and environmental breakdown will not only cause disasters and hunger but also fuel new conflicts and displacement of people worldwide – threatening our very survival. Conflict and violence are often deeply interconnected with unequal access to resources and inequalities, climate breakdown, massive pollution and biodiversity loss.

The EEB works for a **future where people and nature thrive together**, and where people live in **just and peaceful societies**. We are alarmed by the stark **increase in conflict** and violence, the militarisation of politics and the **new race to arms**. Even before, the US, Russia and European powers alone held enough nuclear weapons to inflict existential destruction on humankind, and the world has enough conventional weapons to kill billions. We believe that the EU and its Member States can and must play a **key role in responding to and reducing existential threats to humankind** – those created by conflict and violence as well as those created by the triple planetary crisis and social and economic injustice.

A major shift in EU security policy

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine launched in 2022 is Europe's first large-scale interstate war in the 21st century. It triggered unprecedented military, political and economic responses from the EU, including arms transfers to Ukraine and sanctions against Russia. EU Member States' defence budgets have seen two clear waves of acceleration: the first after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the largest, fastest jump after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.¹ The **combined defence spending jumped sharply to about €343 billion in 2024** (a ~37% increase compared to 2021).² Readiness 2030 (formerly ReArm Europe), the latest strategic defence initiative proposed by the European Commission in March 2025, seeks to mobilise up to €800 billion for Europe's defence. The [EC's proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework \(MFF\)](#) covering 2028–2034, defence and space spending is set to increase fivefold, reaching €131 billion.

After the end of the Cold War, many European countries reduced their defence spending, reflecting a belief in a stable European security order in which a confrontation between NATO and Russia seemed unlikely. Most Western **European states cut defence budgets by 20–40% between 1990 and 2008**.³

In the 2000s, Russia became a key energy supplier to the EU, providing over 25% of the EU's natural gas and a sizeable portion of its oil. The North Stream 1 pipeline was approved in 2005 and operational 2011, with more major infrastructure planned. The EU became Russia's largest trading partner and Russia one of the EU's top 10. The **mutual economic**

¹ See [SIPRI Military Expenditure Database](#).

² Figures on EU defence budget [according to the Council of the European Union](#).

³ For analysis of defense and security spending we refer to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

dependence was reflected in political and diplomatic engagement including strategic partnership agreements, annual EU-Russia Summits and Russia's WTO accession.

Before 2022, most European leaders **did not expect a full-scale invasion of Ukraine**. Those who foresaw a large-scale attack tended to be from countries geographically close to Russia and/or previously under Soviet rule or influence. Political leaders such as Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron believed that economic interdependence would prevent a wider conflict. Among scholars, there is a growing consensus that the EU should have taken a firmer stance in 2014 after the annexation of Crimea, arguing that the strategic partnership model was no longer viable and that failing to act upon Russia's destabilising force was a strategic error.⁴

Part of the **changing world order**, which led to a paradigm shift in the EU's defence and security policy, is also the **re-election of Donald Trump** in 2025. While the US have a doubtful record when it comes to peace and security in the world – having initiated several wars since the end of World War II such as in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan – European leaders have traditionally relied on the US as the automatic guarantor of European security. Trump's repeated criticism of NATO allies, an "America First" foreign policy and erratic decision-making, have exposed the EU's dependency and have driven a push for greater strategic autonomy, also contributing the EU's and Member States' sharp increases in defence spending, joint procurement and cooperation.

Finally, the **dysfunctionality of the UN's Security Council** has become ever more evident. Caused by geopolitical divisions such as the U.S.' support to Israel despite widespread acknowledgement of a genocide against Palestinians, Russia's aggression against Ukraine and China's resistance to human rights scrutiny, the Council is marred by veto paralysis. Its recent failures to act decisively have created dangerous precedents for any potential aggressor. Many countries, especially in the Global South, see it as outdated and unrepresentative of today's world order. While the EU has reaffirmed its commitment to multilateralism and international law, it has neither been able to stand firm and united in face of violations of international law, nor has it been able to push for a reform of the UN's security system.

Martial rhetoric

Part of the major shift in European security and defence policy has been a **shift in public political discourse** in which political leaders across the continent have adopted markedly martial rhetoric. Examples include not only Ursula von der Leyen's stress that we live in an "era of rearmament" (naming the investment programme in defence 'ReArm Europe') but also Charles Michel's "war-ready" rhetoric, calling for a "war-economy" and asking people in the EU to stockpile supplies to be prepared in case of an attack. Such language, while reflecting and answering to legitimate security concerns and the need to mobilise support for Ukraine, simultaneously contribute to a **heightened sense of existential threat and the normalisation of war as the most likely future scenario for the EU**. The increased use of militarised rhetoric can contribute to further **fuelling tensions and their escalation** at the expense of other options.

What also needs to be carefully considered is that the **militarisation of politics is a recurrent characteristic of authoritarian regimes**, where security, discipline and national strength often serve to consolidate power and to suppress dissent. The invocation of external or internal threats legitimises the expansion of state authority and the curtailment of democratic

⁴ See, for instance, Håkan Gunneriusson and Vira Ratsiborynska "Case Study of Crimea Historical Analysis of the Heritage of 2014", in Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Geopolitics (2024).

deliberation under so called emergencies. Similar dynamics can increasingly be observed in democratic societies, including in the US and in Europe when security imperatives begin to override pluralism, transparency and civil freedoms. It reflects not only a response to geopolitical tensions, but a **deeper transformation in the political imagination of Europe**.

Global arms race and private profits

Martial rhetoric goes beyond just words. Governments across the world have been ramping up military budgets: in 2024, **global military spending surged to a record-breaking \$2.7 trillion**, the sharpest increase since the end of the Cold War – a **global race to arms**.

Private corporations dominate the global weapon production and arms trade. The top five – Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon and Airbus – are all privately owned or publicly traded companies. By 2025, estimates place the industry's value at around **\$475–500 billion annually**, with most of this revenue concentrated among privately owned firms such as Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, and Airbus.

Russia's attack on Ukraine has acted as a catalyst: even countries far away see potential threats from underfunded security or supply disruptions and there are new fears of large-scale war between states. Next to this ripple effect we experience, for instance, a **regional arms race** in Asia, where China is increasing defence spending, also in rivalry with the US. This in return triggers Taiwan, Japan and India to follow suit. Africa has seen a sharp upward trend in arms spending, with an increase of 22% since 2015.

Massive increase in EU defence spending

The commitment of NATO EU countries to raise defence spending targets from 2% to 5% of GDP—including 3.5% for “hard” capabilities such as tanks and weapons, and 1.5% for “soft” capacities such as cyber security and military infrastructure—represents **a rapid increase with profound fiscal implications**. According to analysis by the New Economics Foundation (NEF), achieving this target would require an **additional €613 billion annually**, equivalent to 3.4% of the EU's GDP. By contrast, the estimated investment gap to meet EU green and social priorities—including climate mitigation, healthcare, and housing—ranges between 2.1 and 2.9% of GDP (€375–526 billion per year in 2024 prices). Even with the temporary exception to fiscal rules allowing an additional 1.5% of GDP for defence, only a minority of Member States—Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, and Lithuania—would be able to meet the NATO targets without reallocating resources, raising taxes, or changing fiscal rules. Overall, just ten EU Member States could achieve the 3.5% target for “hard” defence spending without cutting other budgets. This demonstrates that the proposed increases are unfeasible without **compromising social and environmental priorities**.

The trend toward higher military expenditure is occurring against a backdrop of **constrained public finances and growing societal needs**. Over the past decade, government spending in NATO EU countries has increased by 20% in real terms, while defence budgets rose by more than twice that rate; spending on health grew by 34%, education by 12%, and environmental protection by only 10%. Pledging 5% of GDP to defence would divert hundreds of billions from schools, hospitals, climate infrastructure, and social programs. Framing security solely in military terms narrows the policy horizon at a time when Europe faces pressing non-military threats, including climate breakdown, energy insecurity, pandemics, and social inequality. Military spending benchmarks set as a percentage of GDP—whether 2%, 3%, or 5%—are arbitrary and **lack transparent, evidence-based justification**. They fail to

account for an **evidence-based assessment of different threats, differences in economic capacity, or efficiency in military spending**, and they exclude other dimensions of security such as ecological sustainability, energy independence, and social cohesion.

Economic evidence also suggests that prioritising military expenditure over green and social investment is **counterproductive for both prosperity and resilience**. Studies from the IMF and other researchers show that each Euro spent on green technologies generates between €1.10 and €1.50 in economic activity, with some estimates reaching multipliers as high as €4.20, whereas military spending generally produces lower economic returns and fewer jobs per Euro spent. That means, investments in defence should be as lean as possible to meet the objectives ensure sufficient defence capacities to meet actual security threats, while ensuring maximum public investments in securing long-term resilience.

Weapon industry lobby shapes policies

The global arms race and the increase in military spending in the EU is not independent from the **weapon industry's intensified lobbying** in both the US and the EU, capitalising on and driving the surge in defence spending. Most European defence procurement—nearly 80%—is imported, with the U.S. supplying 64% of NATO arms imports. Hence, Europe's increase in defence spending primarily benefits American military firms. In Europe, companies and associations such as the Aerospace and Defence Industries Association of Europe (ASD) actively engage with EU institutions to shape joint arms procurement and the European Defence Fund. According to the European Network Against Arm Trade (ENAAAT), the EU defence industry has long cultivated close ties with the European Commission and MEPs, influencing policies even before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The establishment of DG DEFIS in 2019 institutionalised this dialogue, with hundreds of meetings between industry and EU officials since 2014. This influence supports legislation boosting exports and funding, including regulatory exemptions and expanded access to resources. The industry has also secured inclusion in sustainable finance frameworks, framing itself as essential to European security and sustainability, and shaping positions in key EU policy documents and financial institutions such as the European Investment Bank. These lobbying efforts have contributed to the growing institutional entrenchment of the defence sector within policymaking, **blurring the line between security and defence policy and industrial interest**.

Extractivism, emissions and environmental destruction

The **military sector increasingly shapes demand for critical minerals** such as lithium, cobalt, and rare earths and militarisation exacerbates unhealthy rivalry between nations by creating new "resource races" for strategic minerals needed for weapons production. Defence contracts are also **increasingly intertwined with mining interests** and the trade in raw materials. This is creating opaque alliances between arms producers, extractive corporations and decision-makers. This dynamic undermines democratic accountability, fuels resource colonialism in the Global South and drives extractivist policies. Extractive projects fast-tracked under "security" pretexts frequently **bypass Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and community consent**, generating social unrest and ecological harm. Europe's current approach to raw materials, which is accelerated by militarisation, mirrors fossil-era extractivism, reinforcing unequal power relations while ignoring local participation.

Increasing global military spending is also linked to **rising greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions**. According to a 2025 report by Scientists for Global Responsibility (SGR), an increase of **\$100 billion in military expenditure** is projected to raise the global military carbon

footprint by **5 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent**. Militaries are among the world's largest institutional energy consumers, relying heavily on fossil fuels for operations, logistics, and equipment production. Despite this, military emissions are often **excluded from national climate reporting**, creating a significant "military emissions gap" masking true environmental impact. The contradiction is stark: while governments pledge to meet the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C target, escalating defence and security budgets are accelerating climate breakdown.

Moreover, military operations and training contaminate soil and water with explosives, heavy metals and chemicals, **disproportionately affecting marginalized or rural communities as well as women and girls**. In Montenegro, the "Save Sinjajevina" movement blocked military exercises that threatened a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and 22,000 people's livelihoods. Similarly, Sweden's Lake Vättern region faces decades of ammunition dumping combined with a proposed rare-earth mine in the protected Norra Kärr area, prompting local resistance for the protection of drinking water and biodiversity. These examples show that militarisation not only drives ecological destruction but also deepens social inequities, highlighting the urgent need for policies that link security to environmental justice.

Deregulation wave and attacks on civil society

Finally, the elevation of security to a top political priority in the EU is closely bound to the current **deregulation agenda**. Economic competitiveness and rearmament have displaced a holistic, long-term vision of sustainability and resilience. By dismantling safeguards designed to protect social, environmental and ultimately economic stability, deregulation undermines the EU's own Green Deal, social cohesion and security goals, trading short-term gains for long-term fragility in Europe's democratic and ecological model. At the same time, mounting attacks on civil society and critical voices across the region mirror this rollback, eroding protections and shifting political priorities. Together, these trends heighten **Europe's vulnerability** to climate risks, deepen social polarisation, weaken democratic structures, and ultimately jeopardize the safeguarding of human security in the long run.

The way forward

1) A holistic understanding of human security

The issue: Part of de-escalating the discourse, is also to (re)define what we mean by security. Human security cannot be understood in terms of military security alone, in particular where such security precipitates a race to arms. A holistic understanding of human security and response to it includes addressing non-military threats like cyber-attacks, disinformation, economic coercion – and, importantly, environmental damage and ecosystem collapse, and by positively focusing on the security arising from a healthy environment, democracy and respect by all of the rule of law. Especially from the perspective of Europe, a resource-dependent region, there is a need to minimise material and energy dependencies which undermine our security and risks tying us to authoritarian regimes, whether this is through fossil fuels, supply chains needed for decarbonisation and digitalisation, or raw materials. The European Environmental Agency's (EEA) recent report has stressed that "Europe's sustainability challenges remain complex and systemic" and that the "outlook for most environmental trends is concerning and inextricably intertwined with Europe's economic

prospects, security and quality of life.”⁵ With the current narrow focus on military security, isolated from the risks posed by non-military threats including environmental breakdown, Europe risks losing track of ensuring what is necessary for near and long-term human security.

The ask: EU defence and security policy needs to be based on a **holistic understanding of human security**, acknowledging the existential threats of the triple planetary crisis as well as the intersections of conflict, inequalities, power imbalances and environmental destruction. We call on European political leaders to embrace a broad understanding of human security which acknowledges that it depends on water and food, a stable climate and healthy ecosystems, clean water, air and soil, human rights, justice and equity, good governance and transparency, including a gender-sensitive approach to peace and security policy.

2) Alternatives to war – championing peace

The issue: Security risks and wars are regrettably real and increasingly so. Part of that reality is the existence of regimes that are deeply militarised, and either are aggressing or ready to aggression, within or without their borders.

While security risks are real, the belief in the inevitability of war or its expansion can itself become a powerful driver of conflict. When a society collectively assumes that new wars are unavoidable, it often leads to military buildup, diplomatic breakdown, dehumanisation of the enemy – all of which make war or its expansion more likely, even if it could have been prevented. With World War I, Europe has experienced a war in which the widespread belief in the inevitability of war, fuelled by nationalism, rigid alliances and fatalism, played a key role in driving mobilisation and a rapid logic of escalation.

The European Union has been conceived as a peace project after the devastations of two World Wars, in which at least 80 million people were killed, leaving trails of destruction throughout Europe and many parts of the world. It is based on that experience that Article 1 of the Treaty of the European Union declares that the EU is established “to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples.”

While founded as a peace project, the EU’s focus has been on peace within the EU and wider Europe rather than on promoting peace and preventing conflict globally. The impacts of past colonialism of some of the member states have not healed and made up for. In some cases, they have been exacerbated by member states’ direct or indirect engagement over the past decades in conflicts and their political, economic and military support for authoritarian and oppressive regimes.

The ask: Different future scenarios are possible, and leaders have **alternative options for action**. Looking at various geopolitical crises, we urge our political leaders not to feed into martial rhetoric and militarisation, but to **act wisely and firmly**, weighing the consequences of military escalation and giving **priority to alternatives wherever as long as possible** like diplomacy, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and broader human security measures.

Europe has the potential to act as an agent of measured and holistic security, advancing a defence and security policy that integrates a **strong commitment to peace, diplomacy and the rule of law**. Rather than defining security narrowly through deterrence and armament,

⁵ EEAs ["Europe's environment 2025 - Europe's environment and climate: knowledge for resilience, prosperity and sustainability"](#).

European leaders must prioritise conflict prevention and resolution for as long as possible — focusing on early prevention, mediation and de-escalation. This is not to be naïve about factual security threats but about making sure we continue to invest in conflict-sensitive diplomacy, dialogue mechanisms and peacebuilding capacities. Europe can position itself as a **global leader in preventive security** rather than reactive warfare.

3) Exhausting non-violent economic and legal mechanisms

The issue:

The EU has used sanctions and asset freezes, for instance, against Russia and Belarus, Syria or Myanmar. However, the EU and Member States have not been willing to cut off Russian gas supplies entirely and to effectively sanction trade and assets linked to Russian companies and has chosen its own economic benefits over peace. Also, the EU's failure to find an agreement of Member States to suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement in face of the genocide in Gaza has exposed a lack of unity and determination to use all economic instruments so aggressors feel the heat of economic sanctions.

Despite the ICJ's finding that Israel may be committing acts plausibly amounting to genocide and the ICC's arrest warrants against Israeli leaders for alleged war crimes, the EU and several member states have failed to show consistent support for these international courts. This lack of alignment creates a dangerous double standard: while the EU claims to uphold international law, it effectively normalised relations with a government whose leaders are wanted by the ICC.

All of this has led to distrust of the EU from Global South countries and to it being regarded as hypocritical when it lays claim to morally charged terms such as 'rules-based order'. A vital first step are dependable and fair partnerships, encouraging non-European countries to reduce their own dependencies on authoritarian states and to build trust globally. This will entail changing the EU's approach to international trade and taxation, and to put global partnership and fairness before economic interests.

The ask: The EU and its member state need to exhaust all non-violent measures to exercise pressure on aggressors as long as possible, **making full and consistent use of economic and trade measures**. This means making full use of economic measures such as coordinated asset freezes, sanctions to government officials, companies or high net worth individuals complicit in aggression or violations of and secondary sanctions against noncooperating third parties.

The EU and member states also need to **champion the rule of law, making consistent use of international legal measures and ensuring accountability for perpetrators**. The EU needs to use all means at hand to uphold international law and to ensure accountability for perpetrators of aggression to build moral authority and credibility in global affairs. This includes solidarity and support to prevent or end situations of aggression and occupation and to ensure the right to self-determination, including through full support through the international legal system, the International Cour to of Justice and the International Criminal Court.

Such an approach would align with the European Union's normative foundations — peace, human rights and multilateralism — demonstrating that robust security can coexist with restraint, and that long-term stability is best achieved through justice, cooperation and the sustained pursuit of non-violent solutions.

4) Banning weapon exports

The issue: The European Union's arms export policy reveals a troubling inconsistency between its stated commitment to human rights and its actual practices. While the EU has decided on weapon embargoes in the past, for instance, against Russia and Belarus, there is a gap between EU aspirations and a rhetoric in favour of human rights on the one hand, and the decision for and enforcement of arms export bans on the other hand. The failure of the EU so far to effectively ban weapon exports to Israel, for instance, highlights the need for stronger mechanisms, underscoring how political and economic interests often override humanitarian principles in the Union's external relations.

The ask: The EU and its Member States need to put in place a **comprehensive ban on arms exports** to any country that may, or in fact does, use such weapons to target civilians, to aggress its neighbours or to oppress its own people. This includes dual use components and their export where their use cannot be effectively controlled for non-weapon purposes. Finally, this also means not allowing the use of EU airports and ports for the transit of such weapons.

5) Investing in education and information for peace

The issue: Despite Europe's long-standing commitment to democracy and human rights, education systems across the continent often fall short in systematically promoting peace and non-violence. Structured programs that cultivate conflict resolution, empathy and intercultural dialogue remain marginal. This lack of emphasis on peace education leaves society less equipped to challenge rising nationalism, xenophobia and polarisation. Without stronger integration of non-violent values into schools and universities, Europe risks undermining its own aspirations for a cohesive, tolerant society within and globally, highlighting the urgent need to embed peace education as a central pillar of civic learning.

Access to accurate information, exposure to multiple perspectives and engagement in informed debate is under threat and undermines cooperation within and across societies.

The ask: We call on European leaders to invest in **education for peace, non-violence, and cooperation**. Building a peaceful and resilient Europe and world requires nurturing a culture that values dialogue, empathy, and shared responsibility. Education systems should equip people with the skills to prevent conflict, to understand and manage diversity, and to strengthen the social fabric that underpins democratic resilience.

At the same time, facing the complex security environment of today including disinformation and the potential for both natural and human-caused crises—**education for civil resistance and preparedness** is essential. Citizens must be empowered to act responsibly and effectively in times of crisis, to recognise manipulation, and to uphold democratic principles under pressure. Investing in civic awareness, media literacy, and community-based preparedness are a cornerstone of a holistic defence and security policy.

Active support should be provided for a **pluralistic media and social media ecosystem**, including measures to prevent the concentration of media and social media ownership.

6) Cutting of supplies to Russia's war coffers

The issue: Looking at the on-going aggression against Ukraine, civil society organisations from Europe and Ukraine have repeatedly urged the EU to end fossil fuel imports and nuclear dependency from Russia. Revenues from fossil fuel exports have brought Russia over

955 billion EUR still after February 2022, with the EU itself accounting for around 22.3% of all Russian fossil fuel purchases. In 2025, member states continue to import Russian gas. Europe's reliance on Russian oil, gas and coal has not only deepened the continent's strategic vulnerability but also undermined our climate and human rights commitments. It has provided Russia with enormous resources to sustain its military aggression.

The ask: We are asking the EU to take decisive action and **cut all fossil fuel imports from Russia** as part of the region's commitment to climate neutrality and the full phase out fossil fuels altogether. We urge the EU to extend this commitment to all energy supplied by regimes whose revenues finance repression and aggression. We are asking the Union to build up new alliances and to invest in relationship-building in a multipolar world, so that together we can convince others to stop funding aggressors, too. Only by aligning energy policy with democratic values can the EU strengthen its resilience and credibility on the global stage.

7) Ending security dependency on the US

The issue: A persistent feature of Europe's security policy is its dependence on the United States, a legacy of the Cold War and NATO integration under U.S. leadership. Today, the EU largely outsources strategic planning, high-tech weapons and deterrence to the U.S. By tying its security and energy policy ever tighter to the US and fossil-heavy trade deals the EU risks locking itself into a geopolitical trap that undermines climate action and strategic autonomy

Nearly 80% of European defence procurement is imported, predominantly from the US. Following Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine, European NATO members more than doubled arms imports between 2015–19 and 2020–24, with the U.S. share rising from 52% to 64%—far exceeding contributions from France or Germany. This deepening transatlantic arms-supply relationship locks Europe into long-term, politically vulnerable supply chains. Much of Europe's defence spending strengthens the U.S. arms industry rather than building independent European security capacity.

European reliance on the U.S. extends beyond arms procurement to energy. The new EU-U.S. trade agreement commits Europe to importing hundreds of billions in fossil fuels, further entrenching a fossil-heavy transatlantic trade. This undermines the EU's climate agenda and energy sovereignty. Combined with military dependency, this constrains Europe's strategic autonomy, exposes it to external policy shifts, and reinforces industrial and political ties that may conflict with environmental, social and democratic objectives.

The ask: Recognising the risks of the EU's **security and energy dependence on the US**, we call on European leaders to **ensure independence**, guided by the values enshrined in the Treaties and international law, and to encourage cooperation across the EU including through non-aligned and non-NATO members. This includes a reduction of public spending on U.S. arms, and procuring, where needed, within the EU.

By **diversifying partnerships** in a multipolar world, including engagement with emerging powers in Asia, Africa and Latin America, Europe can cooperate on critical technology and energy resources while asserting greater independence both global security and climate and environmental policy.

8) Cooperating for a European defence and security response

The issue: The European Union’s security and defence policy remains fractured, with member states pursuing divergent national strategies rather than a unified approach. This fragmentation weakens Europe’s collective capacity to respond to crises, creates duplication of military structures, and drives up costs. Instead of pooling resources and coordinating investments, states often compete or act in isolation, leaving gaps in capabilities and interoperability. The result is a costly and inefficient system that undermines the EU’s credibility as a security actor, exposes vulnerabilities and increases pressures on public budgets. Studies suggest that duplication in Europe’s defence markets cost between €20–30 billion per year.⁶ While the member states should cooperate around defence and security, the EU Commission’s promise to establish a ‘defence industry’ is concerning.

The ask: To reduce these vulnerabilities and to reduce costs, the EU and member states must cooperate for self-reliant capabilities for defence in case of aggression and for coordinated procurement where needed. This requires **political will for close cooperation** and **efficient military structures** instead of 27 member states pumping limited funds into isolated structures. We call on the EU to ensure coordination for rapid response, intelligence, crisis diplomacy, humanitarian protection and lawful defensive operations — subject to clear mandates, judicial review and parliamentary oversight including **effective defensive cyber operations** and **counter disinformation campaigns** under independent oversight to protect democratic processes and civilian populations.

9) Ensuring democratic oversight

The issue: Militarisation poses a significant challenge to democratic oversight, actively diverting public funds from climate action, healthcare, and social justice toward arms, technology, and high-tech military infrastructure. Decisions on defence spending are often taken behind closed doors, heavily influenced by the weapon lobby, and with minimal public debate or participatory scrutiny. In the EU, a prevailing narrative of military exceptionalism shields the arms industry from transparency, allowing activities with serious social and environmental consequences to remain hidden under the notions of “national security.” Yet in an era of climate crisis and ecological vulnerability, no industry—particularly one with high environmental costs—should operate without accountability.

Public funds flow steadily into the hands of shareholders in the weapon industry, raising pressing questions about democratic control. This underscores the need to reconsider the privatisation of military industries and ensure that public investments serve the public good rather than generating privatised returns dependent on global unrest.

Beyond fiscal considerations, this trend represents a structural shift that risks weakening democracy, deepen inequality and make conflict more profitable than peace. Ensuring democratic oversight in defence policy requires transparent decision-making, public participation, and accountability mechanisms that align military spending with broader social, environmental, and ethical objectives. What is missing from current policy debates is a serious, independent assessment of actual defence needs. Without safeguards, we risks entrenching an industrial military complex whose growth comes at the expense of people and planet.

⁶ European Defense Agency, Annual Report 2024.

The ask: For the EU's defence and security policy and related budgets, we call for an **open, transparent and democratic decision-making process** including parliamentary approval and meaningful consultation of the public, curbing the influence of the weapons industry. This includes the call for new investments to be based on a **public, evidence-based review** of capabilities and threats to inform resource allocation. Strengthening democratic decision-making also means **reducing access of the lobby of the international and European weapon industry** to European decision-making.

10) No compromising of investments in fair and sustainable societies

The issue: The recent surge in public spending on defence and military across the EU is increasingly compromising investment in environmental protection, social welfare, and essential public services. As budgets are redirected toward rearmament and security priorities, funding for climate action, healthcare, education, and social cohesion is squeezed, undermining the Union's long-term resilience. This trade-off reflects a dangerous imbalance: short-term military spending is prioritized at the expense of sustainability and social stability, leaving Europe less equipped to tackle pressing challenges such as climate risks, inequality, and the erosion of public trust in democratic institutions.

Fixing military budgets as a fixed percentage of GDP is an arbitrary and misleading approach that ignores real security needs, economic capacity and broader resilience factors. It risks locking Europe into a narrow, militarised understanding of security while neglecting the true drivers of stability, climate action, energy independence, public health and social cohesion. Evidence shows that green and social investments generate far greater economic and employment benefits than defence spending, delivering stronger long-term resilience and prosperity. Expanding military budgets without democratic debate not only diverts public funds from essential services but also drains skilled labour and industrial capacity away from the green transition. Europe's security cannot be built through weapons alone; it depends on sustainable, inclusive, and forward-looking investments that strengthen human and ecological security. Moreover, prioritising military budgets does not only divert public money; it also redirects productive capacity away from the green economy. Economists Tom Krebs and Isabella Weber warn that ramping up defence spending pulls skilled labour, raw materials, and industrial capacity away from renewables and electric vehicles, reinforcing fossil fuel dependence. Allowing defence spending to escape fiscal rules while binding other investments to them risks leaving Europe with more tanks, but fewer wind turbines.

The ask: We demand that **defence spending remains as lean as possible, efficient and accountable**, with resource allocation informed by an **evidence-based review of capabilities and threats**. Military investments must not come at the expense of **vital spending** on decarbonisation, zero pollution, biodiversity protection, social justice, health care, education, independent media, civil protection, or climate adaptation—all of which are essential to human security. If Europe is serious about building genuine security, it must prioritise wider human security, ecological stability, and social justice rather than adhering to arbitrary GDP-based military targets that threaten long-term resilience and prosperity.

11) Avoiding exceptionalism for the defence sector

The issue: The military sector is one of the world's largest institutional polluters, responsible for up to 5% of global greenhouse gas emissions—an amount incompatible with the 1.5°C climate target, as noted in the IPCC's assessments. A recent study published reveals that Europe's military emissions are equivalent to those of at least 14 million cars annually. The environmental impact also includes severe water pollution. For instance, multiple US and NATO military bases in Germany have contaminated water systems with PFAS chemicals. Similar contamination has occurred across the U.S., Sweden and Belgium. In Sweden, PFAS pollution from military operations led to a nearly 30% increase in local water bills, with the Supreme Court ruling the Armed Forces financially liable.

Despite this, governments are increasingly prioritising defence over environmental protection. The proposed EU Defence Omnibus could allow mining projects for military use to bypass key environmental laws like the Water Framework Directive and the Birds and Habitats Directive. It includes fast-tracked permitting systems for military infrastructure, with some countries already moving ahead: Norway has approved a five-fold increase in nitrogen emissions from an ammunition factory into the Oslo fjord, while Sweden has accelerated all environmental permits for its armed forces despite opposition from water providers.

The ask: We demand that the EU uphold its environmental and social commitments by refusing to grant exceptions or pollution rights to military operations within the Union. We call on the EU **not to compromise environmental and human rights safeguards** by fast-tracking and expanding metals and mineral extraction and not to allow for **environmental exemptions or fast-track clauses** for defence projects. We urge to ensure public participation, access to information and justice in all environmental decisions. Equally, the proposed watering down of rules through the defence omnibus must be rejected, as it risks hollowing out hard-won protections. The protection and restoration of ecosystems, including the remediation of sites contaminated by the military, and the protection of communities against environmental harm must remain a core pillar of Europe's wider security policy.

12) Acknowledging and addressing environmental impact of conflict

The issue: Conflict has profound and lasting effects on the environment including land, air, water and oceans, undermining long-term sustainability and jeopardising progress toward global climate and development goals. The bombardment of Gaza by the Israeli Défense Force provides a stark example: large-scale ecosystem collapse, contamination of aquifers, and the near-total destruction of water and sanitation infrastructure have created unliveable conditions for over two million people, demonstrating how armed conflict can devastate both natural systems and human livelihoods.

Nuclear escalation, whether through military deployment or attacks on nuclear facilities in conflict zones, compounds these environmental risks. Historical cases, such as nuclear testing in French Polynesia and ongoing hazards at Zaporizhzhia, highlight the potential for long-lasting contamination, ecosystem destruction, and human health impacts. Nuclear incidents by deliberate targeting and effective weaponisation of nuclear infrastructure create significant risks, in addition to the risk of nuclear incidents arising when key personnel, energy, water or other infrastructure necessary for the safe operation of nuclear facilities is compromised.

The intersection of warfare and environmental vulnerability underscores the need to integrate ecological considerations into security and defence policy. Addressing the environmental

impacts of conflict is essential not only to prevent immediate humanitarian crises but also to safeguard the long-term sustainability of societies and natural systems, ensuring that security policies do not inadvertently undermine the very conditions necessary for resilience, climate action, and human well-being.

The ask: As part of the EU's holistic defence and security policy, the EU needs to play a leading role in acknowledging and to address, next to the humanitarian aspects of conflict, the long-term **environmental and social harm caused by conflict**, to increase its support to the countries and communities most affected and to ensure accountability and reparations. Moreover, the EU should take up a leadership role in developing the international legal system and to **codify ecocide**, that is the intentional, large-scale destruction of the environment, as an international crimes under the Rome Statutes, with the aim of holding perpetrators to account and ensuring justice for those affected.