

Brussels, 15 April 2025
(OR. en)

8023/25

LIMITE

COPS 172	PROCIV 36
POLMIL 93	ESPACE 26
EUMC 147	POLMAR 16
CSDP/PSDC 231	MARE 14
CFSP/PESC 560	COMAR 16
CIVCOM 92	COMPET 259
RELEX 450	IND 111
JAI 454	RECH 154
HYBRID 33	COTER 58
DISINFO 25	POLGEN 32
CYBER 97	CSC 173

COVER NOTE

From:	European External Action Service (EEAS)
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Report of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the Council: Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence

Delegations will find attached document HR(2025) 73.

Encl.: HR(2025) 73

HR(2025) 73
Limited

EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE



**Report of the High Representative of the Union
for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
to the Council**

of 11/04/2025

**Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Compass for
Security and Defence**

HR(2025) 73
Limited

**Report of the High Representative of the Union
for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
to the Council**

**"Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Compass for
Security and Defence"**

INTRODUCTION

Three years after the adoption of the Strategic Compass, we face an unprecedented combination of security threats and challenges, from outright wars and armed conflicts to various forms of hybrid activities, also targeting our critical infrastructure. We need to speed up our efforts to be better prepared, in particular by rapidly increasing our defence readiness and pulling our resources together to address the whole spectrum of security challenges. While many of the Compass's goals were implemented, we need to do more and be faster to achieve our level of ambition in an ever-changing, unpredictable and challenging security context.

Adopted a month after the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the Strategic Compass was instrumental in guiding the EU's actions in response. This included the provision of military support to Ukraine amounting to over EUR 20 billion for the last year (over EUR 49 billion since 2022) by the EU and its Member States, and the training of over 31,000 Ukrainian soldiers since March 2024 (over 71,000 since 2022) by the EU Military Assistance Mission to Ukraine. In line with the EU-Ukraine security commitments of June 2024, the EU is promoting stronger ties between the Ukrainian defence industry and the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). While Russia's war of aggression continues unabated, we need to provide more and faster support to Ukraine. Investing in Ukraine's security is vital to ensure EU's security.

We have also further developed our civilian and military capacity to act in various theatres. A key deliverable of the Strategic Compass, the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity, became operational early 2025. A flexible and scalable military force of up to 5,000 troops will enable us to respond to various crises. The second live exercise took place in Germany and progress was made on the strengthening of the command and control structure as well as on financing. Our Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations have yielded results in support of EU's, our partners' and global security. The civilian EU Mission in Armenia has increased its presence in 2024 contributing to human security in border areas with Azerbaijan. The civilian EU Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova has helped building the country's resilience to hybrid threats, not least during the referendum and elections held in October-November 2024. The EU Security and Defence Initiative in support of West African countries in the Gulf of Guinea conducted various training activities tailored to local needs, tackling security challenges and spill over of instability from the Sahel. Operation EUNAVFOR ASPIDES contributed to safeguard maritime security and freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and Gulf Region, protecting the passage of over 400 merchant vessels.

HR(2025) 73

Limited

We have further reinforced our resilience and access to strategic domains through the use of tools devised under the Compass. The EU Hybrid Toolbox was activated in June 2024 in response to Russia's intensifying hybrid activities against the EU, its Member States and partners, through cyberattacks, foreign information manipulation and interference, sabotage and other disruptive actions. Further to the establishment of a new sanction regime in view of Russia's destabilising hybrid activities, the Council decided to impose restrictive measures against 16 persons and three entities in December 2024. The Hybrid Rapid Response Teams are now operational and ready to be deployed. Thanks to the EU Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Toolbox, we have been able to protect the integrity of EU's democratic processes and institutions in the context of the June 2024 elections.

We have developed various policies, tools and regulations to enhance our cyber resilience. Work has started to establish the EU Cyber Defence Coordination Centre. Our Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox contributed on several occasions to prevent, discourage, deter and respond to malicious cyber activities. The EU disclosed and condemned Russia's continued malicious behaviour in May 2024 and additional individuals involved in cyberattacks against the EU and its Member States were added to the cyber sanctions regime in June 2024 and January 2025. We reinforced our role as a maritime security actor, by conducting the first EU maritime security exercise in Spain in May 2024 and by implementing joint activities at sea with partners, especially in the Gulf of Guinea and North Western Indian Ocean. We will continue strengthening the EU's situation awareness and strategic foresight, notably the Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity. A review of the Threat Analysis was completed end of February 2025.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and dramatic geopolitical shifts have demonstrated that we need to urgently and significantly increase our defence readiness, notably by rapidly strengthening the European Defence Industrial and Technological Base. The recent release of the White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030 and the ReArm Europe Plan serve this ambition. We will further implement the European Defence Industrial Strategy and adopt the European Defence Industry Programme. We are also implementing urgent and short-term steps measures to ramp up ammunition and missile production, as well as to incentivise joint procurement to acquire the most urgent and critical capabilities, including ammunition, air defence systems and platforms.

Partnerships are instrumental for the Union's and our partners' resilience and security. We have engaged with a growing number of actors worldwide through security and defence dialogues, consultations and joint activities. This was backed up by concrete support through the European Peace Facility in Africa, the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods, Western Balkans and the Middle East. The signature of new bilateral Security and Defence Partnerships provided a comprehensive and tailored political framework for enhanced dialogue and cooperation on CFSP/CSDP issues with key partners, such as the Republic of Moldova, Norway, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia. The strong EU-NATO cooperation continued apace through close coordination of efforts to support Ukraine and the launch of new Structured Dialogues on emerging and disruptive technologies, climate and defence, cyber and defence industry, bringing their overall number to seven. We will pursue our efforts to further develop solid and diversified mutually beneficial partnerships as well as concrete cooperation with an increased number of actors.

HR(2025) 73

Limited

ACT

Through our civilian and military CSDP missions and operations, we further strengthened the security of our Union and our partners. We have continued to build our civilian and military tools to ensure a quicker, more effective and integrated response to crises in our neighbourhood and beyond.

Faster, more flexible and responsive engagement on the ground

The EU continued to demonstrate strong resolve in its unwavering support for Ukraine and its people in the face of Russia's war of aggression. The **EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine**, as of today, trained over 71,000 Ukrainian troops, the equivalent of 13 brigades. The Mission provides leadership, collective and specialised training, conducted in land, air and maritime domains. Training is also delivered on donated equipment. The Mission's flexible, scalable and modular mandate has proved highly effective in addressing constantly evolving battlefield needs. The civilian **EU Advisory Mission to Ukraine** provides strategic advice on Ukrainian security sector reform in support of Ukraine's EU accession commitments. The Mission builds capacity of the Ukrainian law enforcement agencies in addressing their war-related needs. It also supports the investigation and prosecution of international crimes, and stabilisation efforts aimed at re-establishing the rule of law in the Liberated and Adjacent territories.

The civilian **EU Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova** gained further traction in the context of intensifying EU-Moldova cooperation. The Mission focused on countering hybrid threats and cyber-attacks as well as foreign information manipulation and interference increasingly targeting the country, notably during the referendum and presidential elections of October and November 2024. The PESCO Cyber Rapid Response Teams were deployed to Moldova during this period to help build the country's cyber resilience, conduct vulnerability assessments and monitor the cyber security situation. Combined to this, the latest EPF assistance measures adopted in 2024 worth EUR 50 million support the Moldovan armed forces in the field of air defence and surveillance, electronic warfare and logistics among others.

The civilian **EU Mission in Armenia** saw a significant increase of its personnel in 2024, also reinforcing its capacity to conduct patrols in border areas with Azerbaijan. Through its visible presence and reporting, the Mission contributes to an increased sense of security and safety among the population, especially those living in border areas, coinciding with a period of decrease in armed incidents.

The increasing challenges in the Sahel region, including political instability, as well as violent extremism and the hostile presence of strategic competitors, led to the closure of the **EU Military Partnership Mission** and the civilian **EU Capacity Building Mission in Niger** as well as the **EU Military Training Mission in Mali** in 2024. Besides the continuous presence of the civilian **EU Capacity Building Mission Sahel Mali** and the **EU Advisory Mission in the Central African Republic**, work is under way to find innovative avenues to re-engage with partners in the Sahel on defence and security with a view to contributing to peace and stability in the region, as part of the EU's renewed approach to the Sahel. Over a year after its launch, the **EU Security and Defence Initiative in support of West African countries in the Gulf of Guinea**, namely Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo and Benin, has made good progress by delivering tangible results, with the training of over 700

HR(2025) 73

Limited

police and gendarmerie officers as well as military training tailored to local needs and requests from partners.

In Mozambique, the **EU Training Mission** successfully completed its mandate. To ensure continuity, the **EU Military Assistance Mission** has been established to enable the 1700 military personnel trained by the Training Mission to be fully operational by June 2026, thereby contributing to create a more secure environment in the Cabo Delgado province.

Launched in February 2024, operation **EUNAVFOR ASPIDES** is contributing to safeguard maritime security and freedom of navigation as well as supporting trade routes and protecting seafarers' lives in the Red Sea and Gulf region. To date, operation ASPIDES protected over 400 vessels transiting the Red Sea and saved 49 seafarer's lives. The Operation complements the existing EU's maritime security presence and reinforces EU's credibility as a global maritime security provider.

In the Middle East, the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023 on Israel and the ensuing war in Gaza further constrained the ability of our two longstanding civilian missions, the **EU Border Assistance Mission for the Rafah crossing point** (EUBAM Rafah) and the **EU Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories** (EUPOL COPPS), to provide capacity building to the Palestinian Authority. At the same time, this created new opportunities for EUBAM Rafah to resume its original core mandate in a third party and confidence building role. EUBAM Rafah – operating in recent years in a much reduced format - benefited from a staff and financial increase in 2024 to prepare for a possible resumption of activities at the Rafah Crossing Point in support of the ceasefire agreed on 19 January 2025. In a dramatic year, both missions have managed to adapt to the new context and re-engage with counterparts, and could potentially play a substantial role in enhancing security, governance and the rule of law in the future depending on the evolution of the situation.

In the four years since its creation, the **European Peace Facility** (EPF) has proven its added value as a flexible tool to help and assist partners worldwide and reinforce regional security architectures. The Facility has a dual role: providing military assistance to third countries, and financing the common costs of EU military missions and operations. It also enhanced the EU's partnerships and cooperation on shared policy objectives. So far, EPF has provided support to 26 partners in the Eastern neighbourhood, the Western Balkans, Africa and the Middle East, in compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law. The overall financial ceiling of the EPF was increased to EUR 17 billion. Military support to Ukraine is at the centre of attention and collectively the EU and its Member States have provided over EUR 49 billion worth of equipment and training since 2022. While work is ongoing to mobilise an additional EUR 6.6 billion, including EUR 5 billion under the Ukraine Assistance Fund, unity among EU Member States is essential to the effectiveness of EPF action. Further, the Facility was successfully used to channel the extraordinary revenues generated by Russian immobilised assets for military support to Ukraine with a first instalment of EUR 1.4 billion to equip the Ukrainian armed forces and invest directly in the country's defence industry. A second payment of EUR 1.9 billion will follow in April 2025. Through the EPF, we have also contributed to deliver on our goal to provide one million rounds of artillery ammunition to Ukraine.

Making use of more efficient and robust instruments and procedures

The **EU Rapid Deployment Capacity** (EU RDC), a key deliverable of the Strategic Compass, became operational. This enables the EU to respond quickly to different external crises and threats through the deployment of a robust, flexible and scalable force of up to 5,000 troops, composed of EU Battlegroups and national modules, including land, air, maritime, space and cyber components.

Five operational scenarios have been finalised: initial phase of stabilisation, rescue and evacuation, military support to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, conflict prevention and capacity building, and peace enforcement. In order to further enhance preparedness and foster interoperability, we will further develop our advance planning, and conduct regular EU RDC **live exercises**, entailing the use of real forces and capabilities. The second live exercise of this type took place in November-December 2024 in Germany with the participation of 15 EU Member States and more than 1700 soldiers. The third edition occurs in Hungary in March-April 2025.

The **Military Planning and Conduct Capability** (MPCC) has been strengthened: its staff doubled and considerable progress been made in addressing infrastructure as well as communication and information systems needs. This will enable the MPCC to be the preferred EU command and control structure, for CSDP missions, EU RDC operations and its live exercises. Further to the **reassessment of the scope and definition of common costs**, EU Member States have agreed on the financing, in common, of certain costs related to the deployment of the EU RDC, including Battlegroups and national modules, and to EU live exercises.

The **Civilian CSDP Compact** implementation focused on increasing the effectiveness of civilian missions, with the introduction of an evaluation mechanism measuring their impact, and on the development of national capabilities by Member States based on National Implementation Plans. The first EEAS-led **impact evaluation** (EULEX Kosovo) strengthens strategic oversight of civilian CSDP, ensuring that a mission's impact is taken into consideration when reviewing its mandate. Work is on-going to define the civilian level of readiness which is linked to the EU's ability to deploy 200 experts within 30 days by 2027. Under the **Civilian Capability Development Process**, we continue to develop civilian illustrative scenarios to identify concrete capability needs for the foreseeable future. We transformed the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability into the **Civilian Operations Headquarters**, which will help the Civilian Operations Commander exercise improved command and control over civilian CSDP missions. There was progress in ensuring the scalable and modular character of civilian missions thanks to improved procedures shortening deployment time, enhancing interoperability of specialised teams among missions and streamlining the use of short-term deployments, such as visiting experts to answer to specific needs on the ground.

Respecting human rights and promoting gender equality is essential to credible and effective peace, security and defence policy and actions. We have continued to integrate human rights and gender equality standards in civilian and military CSDP, notably in missions and operations, with the presence of dedicated Gender and Human Rights Advisers and focal points as well as the inclusion of human rights and gender in internal and external activities. An example of good practice is the work of EUAM Ukraine, where Conflict-related Sexual Violence is addressed as an aspect of international crimes. To ensure the protection and promotion of international human rights and humanitarian law, we have pursued our work to implement the **EU Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on Security Support to Third Parties**, notably focusing on risk assessment.

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine continues to confirm how crucial it is to enhance moving of military assets and equipment in order to respond quickly and at scale to crises erupting at EU's borders and beyond. The **Military Mobility** Action Plan 2.0 facilitates the coherence and articulation between EU-level work strands and EU Member States' activities. It is complemented by the Military Mobility Pledge 2024, through which Member States committed to, inter alia, prioritise investments in transport infrastructure benefitting military movements, accelerate cross-border movement permissions, and enhance EU-NATO cooperation. Furthermore, as regards infrastructure,

HR(2025) 73

Limited

we have identified four priority military mobility corridors for short-notice and large-scale military movements in all domains across the EU, based on inputs from Member States and in close consultation with NATO. This will allow to better prioritise future investments in developing a well-structured military mobility network. To close the gaps and bottlenecks, an analysis of investment needs is ongoing. The achievement of our level of ambition still necessitates adequate funds.

We will continue to strengthen **preparedness for mutual assistance** in case of an armed aggression on the territory of a Member State (Article 42(7) TEU), including by organising and conducting regular exercises. This will be supported by the Preparedness Union Strategy presented on 26 March 2025 that explores ways to operationalise mutual assistance and solidarity clauses (Article 222 TFEU) as well as to further strengthen the operational cooperation at staff level with NATO in all crisis contexts. This would include developing and preparing for scenarios specifying how the EU could support Member States in the case of an activation of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

The growing prevalence of armed conflicts worldwide entails increasing demand and EU's engagement for conflict prevention and violence mitigation as well as for peaceful and inclusive conflict resolution support. We have continued to engage in **peace mediation** support in more than 25 conflicts, predominantly in Sub-Saharan Africa as well as the Middle East and North Africa region. We continued to act as a mediator in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, and support the normalisation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. We are also developing the capacity of civilian CSDP missions to engage in mediation and dialogue support activities. We continued holding regular exchanges with the UN mediation support unit on respective peace mediation engagements, including EU support to UN-led mediation efforts for example in Yemen, Libya and Syria.

SECURE

We have taken concrete steps to strengthen EU anticipation, detection and response to multifaceted threats by reinforcing our resilience and deterrence in all strategic domains. Through this, we are protecting our citizens, interests and partners worldwide, thus also contributing to our internal security, safeguarding our societies and everyday lives.

Boosting our intelligence capacities, situational awareness and strategic foresight

To boost our intelligence capacities, situational awareness and strategic foresight, we continued to invest efforts in strengthening the **Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity** (SIAC), including through organisational adjustments, reinforcements and additional resources. Concretely, this has resulted in a new structure of SIAC's military pillar, with additional staff assigned to thematic priorities such as cyber, air, space and maritime, as well as the development of geospatial support, in close cooperation with the EU Satellite Centre. Additional funding and personnel are still to be provided to EU intelligence structures, being necessary to fulfil the related Strategic Compass commitment. Contributing to a common understanding of threats and challenges and to build a common strategic culture, SIAC revised the threat analysis which was completed end of February 2025.

We continue working on the reinforcement of the **EU Satellite Centre** to increase the EU's autonomous geospatial intelligence capacity, supporting the decision-making of the EU and its Member States. We are exploring feasibility options for developing a new EU earth observation governmental service to strengthen situational awareness for security and defence applications, which will build on the complementarity between EU Satellite Centre and the EU Space Programme

HR(2025) 73

Limited

Agency. Secure communications and satellite navigation systems are indeed essential in support of both defence and civilian domains.

Countering hybrid threats, foreign information manipulation and interference, and strengthening resilience

The EU, its Member States and partners are increasingly targeted by a wide range of hybrid activities from state and non-state actors, such as the weaponisation of migration, sabotage, arson, cyberattacks, information manipulation and interference, among other disruptive actions. The **EU Hybrid Toolbox** provides the framework for a coordinated response to hybrid campaigns and enables us to address them, including by facilitating information sharing and providing options for collective action. For example, in October 2024, we strongly condemned Russia's intensifying hybrid activities campaign against the EU, its Member States and partners, and we established a dedicated sanction regime, targeting individuals and entities engaged in such destabilising actions, with first listings agreed in December 2024. In parallel, we finalised the establishment of **EU Hybrid Rapid Response Teams**, which are now operational and can be mobilised to provide targeted assistance to Member States, EU CSDP missions and partner countries to help countering hybrid threats. At the end of 2024, Member States established relevant procedures and budget for the deployment of EU Hybrid Rapid Response Teams. In December 2024, a Communication was adopted to support Member States to counter hybrid threats from the weaponisation of migration by Russia and Belarus and to strengthen security at the EU's external borders.

Hostile actors using foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) increasingly undermine our democracies, security, societies and lives, posing a serious security threat to the EU and our partners. The responses deployed under the **EU FIMI Toolbox** continued to protect the integrity of EU's information environment, democratic processes and institutions, especially in the context of the June 2024 European elections. Notably, we made use of tools such as the Rapid Alert System to share information and coordinate with EU institutions and Member States, as well as EUvsDisinfo to reach record audiences of more than 38 million people in the EU and beyond on awareness-raising and resilience-building campaigns. We also strengthened cooperation with international partners such as the G7, notably its Rapid Response Mechanism, and NATO. The FIMI Information Sharing and Analysis Centre continued evolving as a platform to reinforce the analytical capabilities of civil society organisations countering FIMI both inside and outside the EU. The capability of our CSDP missions and operations to detect and respond to FIMI attacks was reinforced, notably in the Eastern neighbourhood and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Our **critical infrastructure** remains vulnerable, including to hybrid threats, as in the case for underwater cables and pipelines. With the entry into force of the Critical Entities Resilience (CER) Directive in October 2024, we are enhancing the resilience of critical entities providing essential services in eleven sectors (energy, transport, banking, financial market infrastructure, health, drinking water, waste water, digital infrastructure, public administration, space, as well as the production, processing and distribution of food). An EU Critical Infrastructure Blueprint was adopted in June 2024 to ensure swift coordination between Member States and EU institutions in case of significant cross-border critical infrastructure incidents. The EU Blueprint on cybersecurity crisis management will be updated in 2025, as a comprehensive framework to enhance our collective cybersecurity posture. It will reinforce the coordination between various actors in the context of a cyber crisis, leverage existing instruments and processes and complement the Critical Infrastructure Blueprint. Additionally, the Protective Security Advisory Programme provides practical support for increasing the security of critical infrastructure via the deployment of trained experts to conduct security

assessments of critical infrastructure sites. To ensure cybersecurity of critical infrastructure across the EU, the revised Network and Information Security Directive entered into force in January 2023, with a deadline for transposition into Member States' law in October 2024. It notably requires essential entities in Europe's critical sectors to take cybersecurity risk management measures, including for supply chains, and to report significant incidents.

Securing access to strategic domains

The cyber threat against the EU, its Member States and partners remains significant and diverse, and stems from both state and non-state actors. As the rules-based international order is increasingly challenged, also in the cyber domain, we stay strongly committed to a free, global, open and secure cyberspace. In this regard, our November 2024 Declaration on a Common Understanding on the Application of International Law to Cyber Space is an important milestone. In addition to promoting norms of responsible state behaviour, we strengthened our capacity to prevent, discourage, deter and respond to malicious cyber activities. This is exemplified by our increased use of the **Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox**, notably by strongly condemning Russia's continued irresponsible behaviour in cyberspace. We have also adopted new sets of restrictive measures against individuals involved in cyber-attacks targeting the EU and its Member States. The implementation of the **EU Policy on Cyber Defence**, tracked via the EU Cyber Census, contributed to enhanced cooperation, capabilities and investments in the military domain. For example, work is underway to establish the **EU Cyber Defence Coordination Centre** with the aim to reinforce situational awareness and coordination among EU and Member States cyber defence actors. A first nucleus will be developed within the EU Military Staff from 2025 onwards and will focus on CSDP missions and operations in the first phase.

Progress was also made on legislation. The **Cyber Solidarity Act** to improve the preparedness, detection and response to largescale cybersecurity threats and attacks across the Union entered into force in February 2025. The Act includes a European Cybersecurity Alert System constituting a pan-European network of cyber hubs, and the Cybersecurity Emergency Mechanism ensuring preparedness and mutual assistance. The Cyber Solidarity Act provides for the creation of an EU Cybersecurity Reserve, consisting of incident response services from the private sector ready to intervene at the request of a Member State or EU institutions, bodies, and agencies, as well as associated third countries, in case of a significant or large-scale cybersecurity incident. Published in July 2024, the Risk assessment report on cyber resilience in EU's telecommunications and electricity sectors contributed to enhancing the level of cyber security by identifying risks to the sectors and proposing recommendations to address these risks.

The **Cyber Resilience Act**, which entered into force in December 2024, introduces common cybersecurity requirements for products, hardware and software with a digital component. As these products are omnipresent in our lives, the Cyber Resilience Act makes our societies and economies more secure against risks and threats from malicious cyber actors.

Space systems and services are crucial for the functioning of our society and economy, as well as for our security and defence. The implementation of the **EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence** is well on track, with progress achieved to strengthen the resilience and protection of space systems and services in the EU. Continued efforts are invested to enhance analysis of and response to space threats. For example, an informal workshop with EU Member States in November 2024 discussed the reinforcement of the EU Space Threat Response Architecture, addressing the security of systems and services deployed, operated and used under the EU Space Programme, and playing an important role for the Union's security. Exchanges also focused on the need for a more comprehensive coverage

of space threats, beyond those to the EU Space Programme, and on the use of a wider range of responses (technical, diplomatic, economic) relying on CFSP/CSDP policies and instruments. In the coming period, the Commission will put forward a European Space Act that will propose an EU framework regulating the conduct of European space operators, and providing a stable, predictable and competitive business environment, also addressing the growing issue of space debris and the environmental impact of space activities.

We further consolidated our position as a capable maritime security actor, in line with the revised **Maritime Security Strategy and its Action Plan** of October 2023. This was demonstrated by the important role played by operation ASPIDES in the Gulf and Red Sea region, and the first **maritime security exercise** (MARSEC) organised in Spain in May 2024. It brought together EU institutions and specialised agencies as well as navies and coastguards from seven Member States, with a focus on the protection of critical maritime infrastructure. The **Common Information Sharing Environment** (CISE) for the maritime domain became operational in July 2024, enabling real-time, secured exchange of information among Member States' authorities and EU institutions and agencies. It thereby allowed more effective operations at sea and connectivity to the Maritime Surveillance (MARSUR) network for Member States' navies. We increased cooperation and joint activities with partners under the **EU Coordinated Maritime Presences** in the Gulf of Guinea and North Western Indian Ocean. In the upcoming period we will hold the second EU maritime security exercise and work on new initiatives such as the European Ocean Pact, the EU Strategic Approach to the Black Sea and the EU Ports Strategy. The protection of critical maritime infrastructure became another critical area where we took concrete measures with the **EU Action Plan on Cable Security** of February 2025 to strengthen the security and resilience of submarine cables. This Action Plan sets out a whole-resilience-cycle approach to prevent, detect, respond and repair, and deter from incidents against our submarine cable infrastructure, through coordination and solidarity at EU level and in close cooperation with like-minded partners.

The **air domain** is becoming increasingly congested and contested. Further to the strategic reflection on ensuring a free, safe and secure European access to airspace, we will continue our work on the preparation of an EU Airspace Strategy for security and defence, as recalled by EU Member States in the Council Conclusions on EU security and defence of May 2024.

Countering terrorism, promoting disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control

Terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation, notably online, continue to represent serious threats to European and global security with regular attacks conducted on the European soil. EU's co-chairmanship of the **Global Counterterrorism Forum** enabled us to continue shaping relevant policies and instruments. This related in particular to the establishment of good practices in oversight and accountability for counterterrorism operations through the Brussels Memorandum on Good Practices for Oversight in Counterterrorism, providing for better compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law and for better governance in counterterrorism. In 2025, we will continue our co-chairmanship and further develop partnerships with governmental and non-governmental actors in Africa, the Middle East and South-East Asia.

The EU Network of **Counterterrorism/Security Experts** expanded with a new role to reinforce the strategic information environment and counter terrorist propaganda and disinformation. The Network maintained a wide geographic coverage, whilst reinforcing its presence in Africa and Central Asia.

HR(2025) 73

Limited

Through its vast cooperation programme, the EU continued supporting partners' capacities to counter terrorist and violent extremist threat, with counterterrorism dialogues ensuring both the political outreach to a range of countries and institutions, as well as tailored support.

The pressure on the global **disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control** architecture further amplified, mainly due to Russia's disruptive behaviour and disrespect of established norms. As a consequence, agreed outcomes were difficult to achieve in various multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament fora. Nonetheless, multilateralism delivered forward looking outcomes for example with regard to the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons and on the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention.

The EU continued to engage in defending and supporting the multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. It held non-proliferation and disarmament dialogues with key third countries and continued to seek to strengthen its engagement with the Global South.

In 2024, the EU adopted eight new projects in support of its non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control goals for a value of EUR 31 million. The new projects adopted in 2024 include the EU support to the International Atomic Energy Agency's work on nuclear security, including in Ukraine, additional support to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and strengthening of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, as well as a continued strong engagement on small arms and light weapons in South East Europe, Ukraine and with the League of Arab States.

Climate change, disasters and emergencies

Further to our 2023 Outlook on how to address the **impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on peace, security and defence**, the implementation of its four pillars and 28 concrete actions is well on-track, as showed by the February 2025 Progress Report. For example, climate and environment now feature more strongly in EU conflict analysis impacting policy and programming. A Climate Change, Environment, Security and Defence training platform was established under the auspices of the European Security and Defence College (ESDC). Further to the Climate and Defence Network, work is on-going to establish a Climate and Defence Support Mechanism to assist Member States armed forces in their climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. For the upcoming period, the focus will be on further analysis and implementation of the national strategies for Member States armed forces, the deployment of environmental advisors in civilian and military missions and operations, as well as the conduct of environmental footprint reporting across all CSDP engagements. Climate and security feature extensively in dialogues and partnerships with bilateral and multilateral partners.

The **EEAS Crisis Response Centre (CRC)** continued working on the EU's response to external crises, notably in the Middle East (including Lebanon and Syria) and the Sahel (Niger), in close coordination with Member States and partners' crisis centres, as well as with crisis structures in the Commission (notably the Emergency Response and Coordination Centre - ERCC), and the Council. In this continuously challenging context, the CRC consolidated its capability to provide early warning and situational awareness through the EU Situation Room, as well to support decision-making processes and information sharing with Member States. It continued to ensure the EU's duty of care for its staff across 145 Delegations around the world, providing a safe and secure environment for the EU staff to conduct their work. In cooperation with Member States, the CRC worked on a number of preparedness and response plans to consular crises affecting EU citizens abroad through an increased number of exercises and contingency plans. There were about 35 consular crisis preparedness

exercises conducted in 2024. Following up on the updated EU exercise requirements outlined in the Strategic Compass, the CRC led the revision of the EU Exercise Policy under CFSP that was approved by the Council in 2024, encompassing the EU Integrated Resolve and Military Exercises, among others. Looking ahead, the CRC will work towards enhancing its ability to anticipate and prepare for crises by integrating new tools and technologies. It will also continue supporting the network of EU Delegations in bolstering their readiness in case of complex crises.

We need to better prepare to address the variety of threats and crises that affect our external and internal security and thus our societies' ability to function. The **Preparedness Union Strategy**, building on the Report by Special Adviser Niinistö on Strengthening Europe's civil and military preparedness and readiness presented in 2024, has a broad scope along an all-hazards and whole-of-society approach, covering civilian and military cooperation as well as preparedness at societal level. It paves the way to build our resilience and readiness to various scenarios, from human-induced disasters and climate-related crises to hybrid campaigns and military confrontation, in support of the work already done by Member States. The Strategy foresees that the EU crisis coordination hub within the ERCC should have a role both within the Commission and in supporting interlocutors in Member States, with a focus on anticipating and managing the consequences of crises across sectors. The hub would closely coordinate with the EEAS, in particular with the CRC. The Strategy involves also joined-up efforts of notably governments, citizens, private sector and civil society, as well as EU institutions. The **Internal Security Strategy** supports EU countries in guaranteeing security for its citizens. It sets out a work plan with a stronger legal framework, better information sharing and closer cooperation to address increasing security and hybrid threats on EU like terrorism, organised crime, cybercrime, and attacks on critical infrastructure.

INVEST

We need to invest more, better, together and European to increase our defence readiness by ensuring urgently and at scale the availability of defence products. For this, we need to reinforce the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB), so that it is able to provide for the needs of the EU Member States' armed forces as well as for those of partners, notably Ukraine. While increasing defence industrial readiness and production capacity, it is crucial to ensure access to increased, adequate and consistent financing for the defence sector. We also need to dedicate more efforts to research and development to be at the forefront of innovation and to develop cutting-edge capabilities.

Defence expenditures & priorities

Defence spending in the EU has been on the rise for nine consecutive years. In 2023 we witnessed a sharp increase in total defence expenditure, with a total amount of EUR 279 billion being spent by EU Member States. At the same time, this total defence expenditure in 2023 still accounted for only 1.6 % of the EU Member States' 2023 Gross Domestic Product overall, albeit with large differences between Member States. Defence investment reached a peak of EUR 72 billion, accounting for 26% of total defence expenditure. Expenditure and investment across the EU Member States are estimated to have reached EUR 326 billion and more than EUR 100 billion respectively in 2024 (1.9% of the overall EU Member States' Gross Domestic Product). The increase in defence spending across the EU is expected to continue in 2025. EU Member States collectively surpass the 20% investment agreed benchmark, expected to reach 31% across the EU at the end of 2024. The increase in total defence spending benefitted defence research and development, which nevertheless grew at a slower pace than the procurement of defence equipment, reaching EUR 11 billion in 2023. As a share of total defence expenditure, EU Member States allocated 1.4% to defence research and development.

HR(2025) 73

Limited

Despite Member States efforts, they are still failing to reach the 2% benchmark on defence research and development.

To do this and taking into account the new EU Capability Development Priorities adopted in November 2023, the **2024 Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD)** report was approved in November 2024. It assesses that national efforts, while indispensable, are not enough. The geopolitical landscape makes our cooperation, alongside increased spending, essential to be ready for high-intensity multi-domain warfare. Additional funding for defence should be spent as efficiently as possible, using part of it through collaborative European investments on identified capability needs at EU level. The CARD report identifies concrete and actionable collaborative opportunities for Member States to develop critical military capabilities together. For the first time, 22 EU Member States signalled their interest by signing one or more letters of intent in four areas: integrated air and missile defence; electronic warfare; loitering munitions; and a European combat surface vessel. The scope of these letters of intent ranges from short-term joint procurement, through medium-term modernisation and upgrades, to long-term development of future capabilities. The Agency continues supporting Member States to implement further collaborative development opportunities, including in view of the new dedicated financial instruments.

With its reinforced mandate endorsed by the EU Defence Ministers in May 2024, the **European Defence Agency (EDA)** works with a stronger focus on supporting Member States through the full development cycle of military capabilities. EDA's core tasks increased from three to five, highlighting the importance of collaborative defence research, technology, and innovation as well as of aggregating demand towards joint procurement.

Mobilising EU tools to spend better together for ambitious capabilities

With a view to respond to Ukraine's and Member States' urgent needs for artillery ammunition and missiles, we have put in place an ambitious framework to ramp up defence industrial production in the EU. Under the **Act in Support of Ammunition Production**, 31 industrial projects across 16 Member States and Norway were selected for grants with a total funding of EUR 500 million. They aim to increase European industry's readiness, and incentivise the ammunition and missile production as well as their timely delivery to Ukraine. While the EU artillery ammunition production capacity is already increased to one million loaded shells per year, this instrument will enable us to significantly strengthen our capacity to reach an estimated two million shells by the end of 2025. In addition to joint procurement from lead nations, the European Defence Agency has swiftly put in place 60 framework contracts for the joint procurement of 155mm ammunition shells or their components that have been used by 10 Member States.

With the **European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act** emergency instrument (budget of EUR 310 million), we are further incentivising cooperation in defence procurement to jointly acquire the most urgent and critical defence products in the areas of ammunition, air and missile defence and platforms. In November 2024, the Commission has approved funding for five cross-border projects in view of signing grant agreements with beneficiaries very soon.

Further to these short-term instruments responding to must urgent and critical needs, we presented the first ever **European Defence Industrial Strategy** on 5 March 2024 to enhance EU's defence industrial readiness through a more structured long-term approach and to strengthen ties between the EU and Ukrainian defence industries. The Strategy has already delivered tangible results. In May

HR(2025) 73

Limited

2024, the first EU-Ukraine Defence Industries Forum gathered 400 participants in Brussels and created matchmaking conditions for 140 EU and Ukrainian defence companies to better deliver on Ukrainian military needs. A second edition of the Forum is envisaged in May 2025. Through the opening of the EU Defence Innovation Office in Kyiv in September 2024, the EU started to prepare the participation of Ukrainian companies in the Union's programme, build institutional awareness on the Ukrainian defence landscape and identify future avenues for defence industrial cooperation between the EU and Ukraine. The first EU-NATO Structured Dialogue on Defence Industry took place in September 2024, and the second iteration occurred on 4 March 2025.

As part of the Strategy and to support its implementation, the European Commission has put forward a proposal for a **European Defence Industry Programme** with a proposed budget of EUR 1.5 billion which is under discussion. The objective of the proposal is threefold: (1) strengthen the competitiveness, resilience and responsiveness of the European defence industry (2) enhance the ability of the European defence industry to ensure the timely production, availability and supply of defence products (3) contribute to the recovery, reconstruction and modernisation of the Ukrainian defence industry. The Programme is expected to be adopted by the co-legislators by mid-2025, as called for by the European Council.

To respond to the short term urgency of supporting Ukraine and address the pressing need to boost Europe's security and defence, the **White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030** presented on 19 March 2025 proposes to massively invest in defence, jointly procure defence systems, and build up the readiness of the European defence industry on the long run. Key lines of actions relate to: close critical capability gaps; support the European defence industry through aggregated demand and collaborative procurement; support Ukraine through increased military assistance and deeper integration of the European and Ukrainian defence industries; deepen the EU-wide defence market and boost competitiveness through a huge simplification effort; accelerate the transformation of defence through innovation; enhance European readiness for worst-case scenarios and strengthen partnerships with like-minded countries.

Increasing EU's defence readiness and strengthening the EDTIB require additional efforts, notably sustained investment and adequate financing from the Member States and the Union. It is essential to improve **access to public and private finance for the European Defence sector**, and this also applies to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises. The **ReArm Europe Plan** announced by the President of the Commission on 4 March 2025, enables spending of up to EUR 800 billion. It unleashes the use of public funding in defence at national level through the proposed activation of the national escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact, providing Member States with additional budgetary space to increase defence spending. Under a new dedicated instrument for Security Action for Europe (SAFE), the Commission will raise up to EUR 150 billion to be disbursed to Member States in the form of loans, allowed to scale up defence investments through common procurement from the European defence industry focusing on priority capabilities.

The ReArm Europe Plan also relies on three other work strands: first, the mid-term review of cohesion policy instruments, presented on 1 April 2025, will allow more investments in defence-related projects. Second, the **European Investment Bank (EIB)** Group could widen the scope of its lending to defence and security projects. Further to EU leaders' invitation, the definition of dual-use goods and infrastructure eligible for the EIB Group's support and agreement had already been adapted to facilitate financing for small and medium-sized enterprises in the security and defence industry. In October 2024, the EIB Group and the EDA signed a revised Memorandum of Understanding to build on the enhanced opportunities given to the EIB Group in supporting the defence sector. Third, the proposed Savings and Investments Union, adopted on 19 March 2025, could also help mobilise private capital for defence projects.

With four Annual Work Programmes adopted, the **European Defence Fund (EDF)** already dedicated more than EUR 4 billion to support defence-related research and development activities, with 162 projects funded to date. The Fund's attractiveness continued to grow with a record number of proposals in 2024, marking a 25% increase compared to 2023. The EDF 2024 programme supports projects in critical defence domains, such as countering hypersonic missiles, developing a broad range of unmanned vehicles in the air and on the ground, as well as secure space communications. It also prepares the ground for next-generation defence systems, such as helicopters and mid-size cargo aircraft. The European Defence Agency is increasingly supporting the implementation of EDF funded projects. To this end, within the three Annual Work Programmes, the Agency has been entrusted with 24 EDF projects amounting to a total estimated value of EUR 239.7 million, while the total maximum EU contribution is EUR199.4 million.

The **Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)** is a key framework to deepen cooperation among participating EU Member States. Its binding commitments cover, among others, operational readiness and interoperability, defence spending and investment and capability development, thus helping to build a common strategic culture. Through the Strategic Review, we are working to make PESCO more effective, as well as better adapted to the new geopolitical reality. We will aim at better connecting PESCO with EU initiatives and funding instruments, as well as EU support to Ukraine. With over 60 PESCO projects in place, the Cooperation is already delivering concrete results, witnessing increased Member States participation and growing interest by third states in joining projects, including in the field of military mobility, cyber, space as well as command and control. Through the sixth wave of PESCO projects that are expected to be launched in May 2025, we will further focus on addressing key capability gaps, including for high-intensity warfare, and continue making the best use of collaborative opportunities identified through CARD.

Innovation, disruptive technologies and reducing strategic dependencies

The EDA contributed to both short-term, capability-driven innovation as well as to Research and Technology in the long run, thus helping Member States to strengthen their technological edge. Short-term innovation is bolstered through the activities of **Hub for European Defence Innovation**, designed to stimulate and accelerate defence innovation. It directly supports the efforts of ministries of defence and contributes to strengthening the EDTIB, including Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, in becoming more innovative, competitive and resilient. The Hub for European Defence Innovation has provided Innovation Prizes to the most ground-breaking technologies and further worked on the experimentation of concepts and technologies with potentially disruptive effects on military operations. In 2024, the concept focused on the integration of artificial intelligence in war gaming and a demonstration with end-users will take place in the second half of 2025. The third edition of the European Defence Innovation Days, as well as an operational experimentation on autonomous cross domain logistics, are also scheduled for 2025, Ukraine taking active part in both events. On long-term Research and Technology, EDA has strengthened its role as the Member States' preferred platform for collaborative defence research, with 61 projects in execution (EUR 305 million), and 53 projects in negotiation (EUR 309 million).

Working closely with EDA's Hub, the European Commission's **EU Defence Innovation Scheme** continued delivering a wide range of support measures targeting Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, start-ups and research organisations. This was done with the aim to encourage the uptake of innovative solutions in defence and help breaking down entry barriers into the market. A total of EUR 225 million from the European Defence Fund were committed to research and development

HR(2025) 73

Limited

grants, business coaching, defence hackathons and other measures. 2024 is the first year when the Scheme's Defence Hackathon *Digital in Defence* was held, gathering close to 400 participants in Belgium, Hungary, Greece, Italy, Lithuania and Poland. The Commission will continue to further expand the scope of the Scheme. The EU Defence Innovation Scheme's Business Accelerator and Matchmaking services was launched in February 2025.

Further efforts in identifying strategic dependencies and related risks in defence sector are underway, including under the **Observatory on Critical Technologies**. In 2024 it presented to the EU Member States **seven classified reports** on the subset of semiconductors and autonomous systems. Related technology roadmaps are in preparation and will be gradually published in 2025. Analysis of relevant critical technology areas will continue in 2025.

Further to the adoption of the **European Economic Security Strategy**, risks assessments across the Strategy's four risk categories continue. With respect to technology security and technology leakage risks, the assessments continued to focus on microprocessors, artificial intelligence, quantum and biotechnologies, supported by tailored questionnaires to Member States and Delegations to develop "deep dives" in specific risks identified in the first phase presented to Member States in the spring of 2024. The results of these deep dives are expected in the spring of 2025. Risk assessments with regard to weaponisation of economic dependencies, resilience of supply chains and critical infrastructure continued in parallel, to inform political decisions on how to further develop the Strategy and its implementation, including through closer cooperation with Member States and EU Delegations.

To strengthen our economic security, we are stepping up the screening of foreign direct investments into the EU, which also helps to further enhance the protection of Europe's strategic interests related to security and defence. 24 Member States currently have screening mechanisms in place and three more are in the process of establishing one. The legislative proposal for a **revised Foreign Direct Investment Regulation** by the Commission aims to strengthen the current screening mechanism, better harmonise national rules as well as extend screening to investments by EU stakeholders controlled from a non-EU country. The legislative process is ongoing and negotiations with the co-legislators are foreseen for the first semester of 2025.

PARTNER

The EU's tailored partnerships on peace, security and defence are key to strengthen our own and partners' resilience. Increasing and diversifying outcome-oriented cooperation, support to and joint activities with partners, including exercises, build preparedness and increase effectiveness of EU external action, notably crisis management and capacity building. At a time of growing polarisation and strategic competition, solid partnerships based on common interests remain a strong guarantee to multilateralism as well as international cooperation and dialogue.

Robust multilateral and regional partnerships

In an increasingly tense and deteriorating geopolitical environment, we further reinforced our strategic partnership with **NATO**, which remains indispensable for the Euro-Atlantic security and an integral part of EU's efforts on security and defence. Our fully coordinated and complementary response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine remains a pinnacle of EU-NATO cooperation. Our common efforts in the context of the US-led Ukraine Defence Contact Group and through the

EU-NATO Staff Coordination mechanism on Ukraine ensure regular exchanges, close coordination and complementarity of respective initiatives. Our partnership was taken forward with concrete deliverables across all agreed areas. The increased number of high level and senior officials' meetings, regular cross-briefings in respective committees and the launch of four new Structured Dialogues, on emerging and disruptive technologies, climate and defence, cyber and defence industry, are a clear testimony of our strong mutual engagement. EU-NATO cooperation in the field of crisis management and response was also strengthened. This included the conduct, in the context of the Parallel and Coordinated Exercise (PACE) concept, of an EU Integrated Resolve exercise which focused on response to multilevel hybrid crises, with the active involvement of NATO staff and EU participation to the NATO Crisis Management Exercise 2025. We will continue to strengthen the EU-NATO partnership in line with the 2023 Third Joint Declaration on EU-NATO cooperation, also by scoring further progress on political dialogue and on the exchange of classified information.

Further to EU's commitment to contribute to global stability and to uphold the rules-based order, and in a context where multilateralism faces unprecedented challenges, our cooperation with the **United Nations** was further strengthened, notably through the implementation of the EU-UN Strategic Partnership on Peace Operations and Crisis Management. In the context of implementing the joint set of priorities for EU-UN cooperation (2022-2024), a **joint EU-UN gender-responsive conflict analysis** was conducted in 2024, focused on land-related conflicts, with particular emphasis on youth. A new set of joint priorities for 2025-2027 is being defined and the EU engaged in a joint reflection on the future models of UN peacekeeping operations. Our missions and operations continue to coordinate and cooperate with the UN in theatres such as the Central African Republic. For example, EUTM Central African Republic and MINUSCA's engaged joint efforts for the refurbishment of the Officers' school in Camp Kassai. At the same time, we explore ways to upgrade our partnerships by enlarging its scope to cover the full spectrum of our multilateral engagement.

Despite increasing tensions and difficulties affecting security cooperation on the European continent, we remained strongly committed to our cooperation with the **Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe** (OSCE) on peace mediation, capacity building and crisis management. We held regular exchanges with the OSCE Mediation Support Team, sharing institutional and geographic updates, leading to continued cooperation on capacity-building activities and cross-participation in events. The EU-OSCE dialogue on peace mediation, conflict prevention and crisis management took place in Vienna in March 2025, agreeing to pursue engagement and cooperation.

We continued to invest in our strategic cooperation with the **African Union** (AU) in promoting peace and security across the African continent and in countering the global effects of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. EU support to African-led Peace Support Operations further materialised through high-level dialogues and continued funding via the European Peace Facility worth EUR 730 million for 2021-2024. This notably reinforced the operational effectiveness of the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission to Somalia, the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram and the Southern African Development Community Mission to Mozambique. Within the EU-AU dialogue on preventive diplomacy and peace mediation, we will further work on issues related to women, peace and security. We are also building on the first Dialogue on Conflict Prevention and Mediation with the **Economic Community of West African States** (ECOWAS) to strengthen our joint operational capacity. EU and ECOWAS cooperation will notably focus on the prevention of electoral violence and mediation support activities. The EU continued to support the ECOWAS regional Peace and Security Architecture and Operations to strengthen its capacity to prevent, manage

HR(2025) 73

Limited

and mediate emerging and existing conflicts in the region. This included support to ECOWAS early warning and response mechanisms, also at national level.

Based on a shared interest for a free, open and secure Indo-Pacific region, the EU has continued its cooperation with the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations** (ASEAN) on a broad range of security and defence issues. We have also intensified our relations with the **Gulf Cooperation Council** (GCC) further to the EU-GCC Regional Security Dialogue launched in January 2024, by identifying concrete areas of cooperation such as counterterrorism, maritime security, non-proliferation and disarmament, hybrid and cyber threats, as well as disaster preparedness and emergency management. The High-Level Forum on Regional Security and Cooperation took place in April 2024 and discussed broader regional security questions. The second EU-GCC Regional Security Dialogue will take place in the first half of 2025 in Brussels.

Tailored bilateral partnerships

To safeguard our interests, further contribute to global peace and security, and reinforce our operational capacities, we have further deepened and expanded our rich network of tailored bilateral partnerships on security and defence with partners around the world. In 2024 alone, the EU conducted 78 thematic as well as security and defence dialogues with more than 40 partners. Thematic dialogues were held on counterterrorism (with the United Kingdom and India), non-proliferation and disarmament (with China, Ukraine, Cuba, the United States and Brazil) as well as cyber (Ukraine, the United Kingdom, India and Japan). Hybrid threats and maritime security became important dimensions of many security and defence dialogues.

Most notably, we have established so-called **Security and Defence Partnerships**, which are tailored and non-binding instruments for enhanced dialogue and cooperation on CFSP/CSDP-related issues with selected partners. In 2024, the EU signed such Partnerships with Moldova, Norway, Japan, the Republic of South Korea, Albania and North Macedonia.

We continued to engage in a productive dialogue and cooperation with the **United States** (US) on security and defence. Support to Ukraine featured high in the EU-US strategic partnership, most notably via EU participation in the US-led Ukraine Defence Contact Group, including on EUMAM training activities and coordination of military equipment delivery. High-level military ties continued to strengthen. The first engagement with the US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) took place in November 2024, opening new possible work strands. The strengthening and multifaceted partnership with the US is also illustrated by its participation in the PESCO project on military mobility and further implementation of the Administrative Arrangement between the European Defence Agency and the US Department of Defence. There was an increase in classified information-sharing by the US in 2024.

With the signing of the Security and Defence Partnership in May 2024, EU-Norway cooperation has reached new heights. Practical implementation is underway with respect to space security, peace mediation, military mobility, as well as cyber and hybrid threats. Our collaboration in supporting Ukraine continued to be outstanding, including coordination through the EU Military Staff Clearing House Cell. Further to the deployment of Norwegian experts to EULEX Kosovo, Norway expressed readiness to contribute to EUNAVFOR ASPIDES and the EU Advisory Mission Ukraine.

With the **United Kingdom** (UK), the cooperation on security and defence remained limited to the implementation of dialogues and cooperation foreseen in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. The second round of EU-UK dialogues on cyber and counterterrorism took place in December 2024 and February 2025 respectively. Pragmatic cooperation was established on the military assistance and training in Ukraine, stabilisation, as well as on sanctions coordination. Ad hoc cooperation on consular issues has taken place in crisis areas, notably in the Middle East. The UK expressed its interest in strengthening its security and defence dialogue and cooperation with the EU.

Cooperation with longstanding like-minded partners such as **Canada**, **Switzerland** and **Iceland** has developed further. We are now engaged in negotiations to establish a fully-fledged EU-Canada Security and Defence Partnership. In 2024, Canadian experts were also deployed to EUPOL COPPS and the civilian EU Mission in Armenia. The EU-Switzerland Security and Defence Dialogue of November 2024 focused on the regional security situation and support to Ukraine, development of respective security and defence activities as well as emerging threats and challenges. Switzerland also joined the EDA Hub for European Defence Innovation. Following its request and a decision by the Council, Switzerland was invited to join the PESCO military mobility project. The annual Security and Defence Dialogue with Iceland of September 2024 explored further cooperation on maritime security and protection of critical infrastructure, as well as addressing hybrid threats, including FIMI.

Three years since Russia's war of aggression against **Ukraine**, we remain fully committed to support Ukraine and its people for as long and as intensively as needed. The EU signed joint security commitments with Ukraine on 27 June 2024 to help Ukraine defend itself, resist Russian destabilisation efforts and deter acts of aggression in the future, with EU accession at its core. Boosting Ukraine's cyber resilience to prevent, deter and respond to malicious cyber activities is key in this regard and we coordinated our capacity building efforts with partners, including through the Tallinn Mechanism. The EU contributed more than EUR 18 billion to the G7-led Extraordinary Revenue Acceleration loans initiative which is to be repaid with the proceeds of Russian immobilised assets. Using windfall profits stemming from Russian immobilised assets, we have invested EUR 400 million in Ukraine's industrial base, making the EU the largest foreign public investor in the country's defence industry.

The cooperation with **Moldova** further intensified with the signature of the Security and Defence Partnership in May 2024 giving a strong signal of renewed mutual commitment in security and defence and joint efforts in addressing common threats. The European Peace Facility allocated EUR 137 million since 2021 to build the capacity of Moldovan Armed Forces. The annual Security and Defence Dialogue of November 2024 focused on key areas of cooperation such as addressing hybrid and cyber threats, capacity building and participation in the EU defence initiatives. The EU enhanced its engagement with **Armenia** on peace, security and defence issues. The EPF adopted an assistance measure in support of Armenian Armed Forces in July 2024. We are assessing options to support Armenia in the field of security sector governance, following analysis conducted by the EU Security Sector Governance Facility, and intend to sign a framework agreement for the participation of Armenia in EU crisis management operations. We also intend to launch an EU-Armenia Security and Defence Dialogue to further discuss engagement in this area.

We remain highly engaged in the **Western Balkans** through the provision of EPF support, as well as the presence of EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the civilian EULEX Kosovo mission, contributing to peace and stability in the region. Security and Defence Partnerships were signed with Albania and North Macedonia in November 2024, paving the way for increased collaboration in key

HR(2025) 73

Limited

areas. As a result, Albania substantially increased its contribution to the operation EUFOR Althea and offered a contribution to EUNAVFOR ASPIDES.

Our engagement with partners in the **Southern neighbourhood** remains key for our security and interests. In 2024, a new high level Security Dialogue was launched with Morocco focusing on areas such as regional security, preventing and fighting terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation, non-proliferation and disarmament, combating organised crime networks and illegal trafficking. We held bilateral consultation at senior officials' level with Qatar on counterterrorism, violent extremism, cyber and hybrid threats, maritime security, crisis management as well as conflict prevention and mediation. We will continue similar exchanges with other partners in the region. In light of the highly volatile and unpredictable security situation in the Middle East region, EPF assistance measures were adopted to the benefit of the Lebanese Armed Forces in September 2024 as well of Egyptian and Jordanian Armed Forces in November 2024. We will explore establishing a regular security and defence dialogue with Jordan to address common security challenges.

Peace, security and defence cooperation with partners in **Africa** remained a priority for the EU. Since the creation of the EPF in 2021, over EUR 1 billion has been dedicated to build the capacities of African partners' armed forces. EPF assistance measures providing bilateral support were adopted in relation to Ghana, Ivory Coast, Benin, Kenya and Mauritania since March 2024. We held security and defence dialogues with Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa, a dialogue with Nigeria being foreseen in 2025. The establishment of a Security and Defence Partnership with Ghana will be explored in 2025. France, Italy, Spain and Portugal regularly deployed vessels and aircraft to the Gulf of Guinea under the Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) concept, conducting joint activities at sea and port calls with partners, such as Brazil and India.

We remain committed to our “smart security enabler” approach in the **Indo-Pacific region**, covering domains such as cyber, maritime, counterterrorism, non-proliferation and disarmament, FIMI, disaster relief and crisis management, and with a view to support regional stability while enhancing partners' capabilities. In November 2024, we concluded Security and Defence Partnerships with Japan and the Republic of Korea, which are important milestones for EU's regional engagement. Dedicated security and defence dialogues and consultations took place with Australia, Indonesia and India. They were complemented by specific exchanges on maritime issues, cyber and FIMI with Japan, Singapore, Australia, India and the Philippines. France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands conducted joint maritime security activities in cooperation with partners under the Coordinated Maritime Presences in the North Western Indian Ocean. We expanded our support to partners in the Indo-Pacific region on maritime domain awareness.

We have deepened our engagement on security and defence with **Latin American partners**, underscoring a shared commitment to address global challenges. In this context, the first bi-regional edition of the EU-Latin America and the Caribbean Security and Defence Seminar was held in Colombia in 2024. Building on this, the 5th edition of the EU-Colombia Security and Defence Dialogue was held in Brussels in March 2025. The first EU-Peru Security and Defence Consultations were also held in March, and discussions are on-going to launch similar dialogues with Brazil and Chile in 2025.

To further boost outreach and cooperation on security and defence, we expanded and strengthened the **network of military advisors** in EU Delegations. Military Advisors have been deployed in the Gulf of Guinea (Ghana, Ivory Coast and Benin) filling newly-created positions and enabling the

implementation of activities under the EU Security and Defence Initiative in the Gulf of Guinea, notably civilian and military training.

The EU as a convening power

The second edition of the **Schuman Security and Defence Partnership Forum** took place on 28 and 29 May 2024 in Brussels. It brought together participants from more than 60 partner countries alongside EU Member States and institutions, international and regional organisations, think-tanks and academia. The Forum served as a defining moment for the EU and its partners, allowing for valuable exchanges on how partnerships can respond to common security threats and challenges and contribute to build global peace. Key issues of discussions related to the adaptation of security and defence policies to the evolving security environment, hybrid and cyber threats, the intersection of human security with peace, security and defence, the resilience of critical infrastructures and maritime security.

CONCLUSION

The increasingly challenging international security context and complex threat landscape warrant a change of mindset and gear in building EU's role and action in the field of security and defence. The EU agenda and ambitions set in the Strategic Compass, as well as concrete work achieved under its four pillars, will be relayed and furthered by the White Paper for European Defence readiness 2030 and the Preparedness Union Strategy, amongst others.

We need to step up our defence readiness in the face of the threats Europe is facing, from Russia and various other sources in our neighbourhood and beyond, in a context where power play seems to take precedence over the international rules-based order. It is important to prepare for the most extreme military contingencies, and the White Paper should lead the way for our efforts. It sets out a vision for the realisation of defence readiness by reinforcing the defence industrial policy, strengthening the single market for defence, addressing critical capability gaps and identifying public and private funding options as well as investment needs. The White Paper also includes stepping up our support to Ukraine, ramping up industrial production and mobilising additional funds for defence.

To be able to address the whole spectrum of security challenges, we need to significantly increase our resilience and preparedness for various crises, following an all-hazards, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. We will build bridges between internal and external crisis management policies, structures and activities, including civilian-military synergies. The Preparedness Union Strategy, using the basis provided by Special Advisor Niinistö's report, and the Internal Security Strategy are part of one package, one vision. To translate this into reality and to achieve our goals, we need to mobilise adequate resources, notably funding.

Over the last three years, the Strategic Compass has played an important and overarching role in laying the groundwork for a stronger EU security and defence. We now need to further build on this, in order to match our ambition with today's geostrategic realities, and translate our common determination in investments and action.