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Europe is arming itself, but not only with weapons

Germany, Ukraine, and the new European security architecture

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Policy-oriented analytical article

Abstract

Europe's current rearmament is not limited to weapons procurement or defence spending. It reflects a broader effort to rebuild the continent's security architecture through industrial capacity, logistics, civilian infrastructure, cyber resilience, private-sector participation and lessons from Ukraine's war experience. Germany is examined as a central logistical and industrial hub, while Ukraine, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Estonia and France illustrate different dimensions of Europe's emerging preparedness model.

Keywords: European security, rearmament, Germany, Ukraine, defence industry, resilience, NATO, EU, cyber security

Introduction: From rearmament to a security system

The European security architecture is in the period of its most profound transformations since the end of the Cold War. This process is often described as rearmament: the growth of defense budgets, the acquisition of new armaments, the reinforcement of armed forces, and the expansion of military-industrial production. However, this description only partially explains what is taking place. Europe today is arming itself not only with weapons. The entire security system is being revised: from industry and logistics to civilian infrastructure, the private sector, cyber security, population preparedness, and practical coordination among allies.

At the core of this transformation is the understanding that high-intensity warfare requires production capacity, a continuous supply of ammunition and spare parts, rapid repair networks, protected ports and railways, resilient energy and digital infrastructures, as well as a society prepared to maintain the vital functions of the state under conditions of a prolonged crisis.

Hereby we will attempt to understand how quickly individual European countries are primarily increasing defense spending and whether these expenditures are transforming into a single functional defense ecosystem.

The Russian threat and the rationale for European rearmament

The primary and immediate driver of European rearmament is Russia's war against Ukraine. Through its Strategic Concept adopted back in 2022 NATO defines the Russian Federation as the most significant and direct threat to the security of allies and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.[1] The EU's Strategic Compass was also adopted immediately after Russia's full-scale invasion and presented an action plan for strengthening the security and defense policy up to 2030.

The problem is that the Russian threat is not limited to the fact of readiness to change borders by force, pressure on NATO's eastern flank, cyber and information operations, the utilization of energy dependencies, hybrid risks to infrastructures and the political application of nuclear rhetoric. Precisely for this reason Europe's response cannot remain solely at the level of troop numbers or armaments.[2]

Here the second dimension of the issue is also important. The US continues to remain the primary ally of European security, but there is a growing realization in European capitals that the long-term provision of security cannot entirely depend on Washington's political cycles. Discussions by the Spanish Foreign Minister regarding EU military capabilities and Germany's rationale for seeking broader security ties with the EU, Canada and Great Britain indicate that the issue of strategic autonomy has returned to the European agenda.

Ukraine as a component of European defense transformation

Ukraine in this process has transformed from an aid-receiving country into a practical component of European defense thinking. The war exposed the high consumption of ammunition, the massive use of unmanned systems, the key role of electronic warfare, the constant demand for air defense, the necessity for rapid repair and the importance of quick feedback from the battlefield to the industry.[3]

The Ukrainian experience demonstrated that even high-end weaponry quickly loses its effectiveness if the production and technical adaptation cycles are slow. In the field sensors, communication means, methods of engagement, anti-drone solutions and the electronic warfare environment are changing. All of this forces the European industry to think not only about the possibility of ensuring large-scale industrial volumes but also about responding to the rapidly changing demands of war.[4]

This is one of the reasons that is gradually turning EU-Ukraine defense cooperation into a bilateral process. Europe supports Ukraine, while Ukraine's combat experience redefines European planning, production requirements and technological priorities. The formats of maintenance, repair or industrial cooperation of Rheinmetall and KNDS in Ukraine demonstrate that battlefield experience is beginning to connect directly with the European production system.

Germany: Europe's logistical and industrial hub

Germany is increasingly turning into one of the central hubs of the new European security architecture. Its geographical location, industrial base and political weight make Germany a key link in the European pillar of NATO. According to the official description of the Bundeswehr's OPLAN DEU, in an emergency situation up to 800,000 allied service members and 200,000 vehicles must be able to pass through Germany within six months and receive Host Nation Support.[5]

The above-mentioned fact alone would be sufficient to register that the criterion of Germany's security significance has changed since the end of the Second World War. And as we can see, the issue is not merely the combat readiness of the Bundeswehr. If Germany is to serve as a transit and support center for allied forces, then ports, railways, bridges, roads, fuel supply, medical services, private logistics companies and the civilian administration become decisive. The description of the Bundeswehr's Host Nation Support itself emphasizes that this function is inter-agency and involves not only the armed forces but also civilian bodies, emergency services and commercial companies.[6]

Within this logic, Rheinmetall's contract for the supply of more than 2,000 military transport vehicles to the Bundeswehr is observable as an indicator of logistical capability. Military mobility, trucks, storage, fuel, technical maintenance and the transportation of heavy loads have long become components of deterrence just as important as front-line combat strike assets.[7]

The increase in Germany's budgetary military expenditures can be characterized in this context and called a turning point. According to Reuters, within the 2027 budgetary framework Germany plans to significantly increase defense spending and continue the financial support for Ukraine. In other words, the Zeitenwende is gradually turning not only into the reorganization of the army, but into the reconceptualization of Germany as a logistical, industrial and political hub of European security on the one hand and a cornerstone of security on the other.[8]

Industry: From classical military industry to a broad production base

The next layer of European rearmament is industrial. The EU's Readiness 2030 / ReArm Europe agenda and the European Defence Industrial Strategy demonstrate that they are making the military industry more self-sufficient, technologically advanced and coordinated to reduce external dependency and confront security challenges. Documents from the European Commission emphasize that a significant portion of EU member states' defense procurement in recent years was conducted outside the EU, which reveals not only a military but also an industrial dependency.[9]

To overcome this dependency, the EU is advancing EDIS, EDIP and SAFE. EDIS defines goals for the growth of trade within the EU defense market and procurement from the European industrial base by 2030, EDIP envisions the reinforcement of

European and Ukrainian defense industry capacities, while SAFE is a credit instrument of up to 150 billion euros for joint procurement and rapid investments. Canada's involvement in SAFE indicates that the European defense architecture is attempting to form a broader Western industrial framework, not limiting itself strictly to the production base within the EU.[10]

In this context, the role of civilian industry is also notable. The statement by the management of Mercedes-Benz that the company is ready to consider the possibility of entering defense production if it has a clear business logic is an indicator that civilian production capacities not only can be but their necessity is also viewed as a potential additional resource for defense supply chains. The same trend is visible in discussions around KNDS seeking additional production capacities from the automotive industry, as well as through attempts to involve automakers in defense supply chains in the US.[11]

Such an approach is also conditioned by the fact that for Europe it is becoming important to have not merely tank and artillery manufacturers, but its own self-sufficient production, including electronics, spare parts, communication means and repair capabilities.[12]

Preparedness: business, infrastructure and society

Europe's security restructuring extends also to state administration, business and civil defense. Sweden's total defence approach shows that in conditions of war or a major crisis the state's viability depends not only on the armed forces but also on energy, transport, communications, food supply, the banking system and pre-organized cooperation with large companies. The business council initiated by the Swedish Armed Forces and civil defense structures is exactly an example of this logic.[13]

Discussions around the revision of Great Britain's Government War Book confirm the same trend. As presented by the leadership of the British armed forces, the new war preparation plan must force society to think differently about resilience and include not only the army but also the government, industry, healthcare, water supply, energy and transport.[14]

The British Arrcade Strike exercises in an unused section of London's underground Charing Cross station also demonstrated the change in the war environment. The scenario was based on a possible Russian attack towards the Baltic states in 2030 and included multi-domain command: land, sea, air, space and cyberspace. This example should be viewed not as some extraordinary phenomenon but as an indicator that European armies are preparing for the necessity to operate in an urban, subterranean, digital, unmanned and electronic warfare environment.[15]

Estonia's example completes the picture from the perspective of a state with small resources. The 2026 national security concept emphasizes whole-of-society preparedness and stipulates that in the event of the severance of international land, sea and air communications society must be able to overcome the crisis situation for at least 30 days. For small states this means not only the readiness of the armed forces but also reserves, local self-government, vital services, prior preparedness of the population and a certain self-sufficiency in conditions of the disruption of external communications.[16]

Cyber security and technological sovereignty

Europe's rearmament is not limited to physical space. France's 2026-2030 national cybersecurity strategy presents cyberspace as a domain of power where states, interests and ideologies collide. Cyber security is becoming an important sphere of state sovereignty, the reduction of technological dependencies, the protection of critical infrastructures and strategic deterrence.[17]

The French example is important for the whole of Europe because it links cyber resilience with industrial and technological policy. Digital infrastructures, cloud services, the cyber talent base, the development of artificial intelligence and quantum technologies are transforming into components of the security agenda. In this sense Europe is arming itself also in the digital space, not solely to defend itself but with the aim of reducing technological dependencies.[18]

Internal constraints and the issue of legitimacy

The European defense transformation also has internal constraints. The first is the problem of production volumes. Over decades the European defense industry has operated according to the logic of limited orders and a peace dividend. For that reason rapid scaling up faces problems with equipment, specialists, subcontractors, financing and bureaucratic permissions.[19]

The second is infrastructural preparedness. When ports, railways, bridges, energy grids or healthcare systems are not designed for the heavy load of a military or hybrid crisis, then even a large defense budget cannot automatically convert them into real preparedness. The weak link of Europe's security architecture might not be a shortage of ammunition, but rather those infrastructures, data centers or the supply chain that will not be able to operate under crisis mode conditions, consequently failing to withstand such situations.[20]

Next is public legitimacy. [21]

In Germany and a number of European countries, the increase in defense spending can be perceived as militarization, especially when it is contrasted with social, environmental or economic priorities. Therefore, the language of the philosophy of political reconceptualization has a decisive significance here. If rearmament is

presented as an end-in-itself militarization by the state, it will face resistance. In this context, framing rearmament as a necessary response to military, hybrid and information threats, and linking it to resilience, democratic oversight and civil security, makes it more understandable and politically legitimate. As a result, the possibility of public acceptability as a criterion of flexibility and resilience to crises will become a constant and most important component of that very same rearmament.[22]

Summarizing the above, let us record that Europe's security cannot be built merely at the expense of buying more ammunition and weapons or increasing the size of armies. The current rearmament is a broader process, the goal of which is to connect military, industrial, civilian, digital and societal capabilities into a single operational system.

Ukraine's experience shows that in modern warfare production speed, the adaptation of unmanned and electronic systems, the stability of supply chains and the resilience and endurance of society are just as important as frontline weaponry. Germany's example shows that not only a part of Europe, but the whole entity needs to set before itself the task of optimizing the operability of logistical, industrial and infrastructural hubs. Sweden, Great Britain, Estonia and France complete this picture, showing that preparedness extends to business, civil defense, including the self-sufficiency of small states, and cyber sovereignty.

Thus, Europe's defense capability will be measured not only by the power of its armed forces, but also by the degree of interaction between states, which will include not only the unified enhancement of the resilience of military links, but also such important components as logistics, industry, infrastructure, cyber security and societal preparedness and resilience.

Author note

The views contained in this article are the author's alone.

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