

Davide Fiammenghi
Andrea Locatelli

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HVALISANJE ALI REALNOST? OCENA OBRAMBNIH POBUD PRVE KOMISIJE VON DER LEYEN

HYPE OR REALITY? AN ASSESSMENT OF THE FIRST VON DER LEYEN COMMISSION'S DEFENSE INITIATIVES

Povzetek Prispevek ocenjuje uspešnost prvega mandata Evropske komisije pod vodstvom Ursule von der Leyen glede pobud za krepitev vojaškega sodelovanja med državami članicami EU. Te so bile deloma odziv na zunanje dogodke, predvsem vojno v Ukrajini, deloma pa rezultat dolgoročnejših strateških prizadevanj. Pobude so oblikovale razvejano mrežo dejavnosti, od institucionalnih reform in skupnega naročanja oborožitve do sprememb vojaške doktrine. Članek ocenjuje njihov potencial in omejitve ter jih umešča v razpravo o strateški avtonomiji EU. Prav tako analizira politične, gospodarske in vojaške omejitve evropskih obrambnih ambicij ter daje priporočila za izboljšanje obrambne integracije EU.

Ključne besede *Evropska komisija, Evropska unija, vojaško sodelovanje, strateška avtonomija.*

Abstract In its first mandate, the Von der Leyen Commission launched a number of initiatives aimed at strengthening military cooperation between EU Member States. Some were spurred by external events, like the war in Ukraine; others were part of longer-term projects. These initiatives resulted in an articulated web of efforts which spanned institutional reform, weapons procurement, and doctrinal change. The aim of this paper is to appraise the potential and the limitations of these efforts, and to design policy prescriptions aimed at improving defense integration in the EU. The paper first provides a systematic review of the aforementioned initiatives; it continues by contextualizing these initiatives within the broader debate on EU strategic autonomy, and discusses the limits of European ambitions (political, economic and military). It concludes by presenting policy recommendations.

Key words *European Commission, European Union, defense cooperation, strategic autonomy.*

Introduction

So far, President Trump's policy toward Russia and Ukraine has wandered between abortive efforts to broker a negotiated peace between the two countries, and a tendency to step back from such efforts. Overall, the absence of robust support for Ukraine, coupled with persistent doubts about the United States' commitment to safeguarding its European partners, prompted the European Union (EU) to undertake a comprehensive program of rearmament. However, Europe's desire to become a more independent power, with military as well as economic heft, is not solely a by-product of Trump's second term as president. When Ursula von der Leyen stated the "geopolitical" purpose of her commission in 2019 (European Commission, 2019; von der Leyen, 2019, pp 2–3), she raised the bar of EU ambitions. The events which have occurred since 2019 – the external shocks bestowed first by the Covid-19 pandemic, then by the Russian aggression in Ukraine, and more recently by the Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea – have provided further impetus to the Commission's attempts to promote integration in the defense sector. The "return of geopolitical competition" strengthened the argument in favor of strategic autonomy (Haroche, 2023, p 971), but it was also built on top of a process which was already in place (Giusti, 2022, p 13; Håkansson, 2024, p 29). Moreover, in the past, these types of initiatives by the EU and its Member States have followed a regular trend: periods of frantic activity, followed by years of stagnation. The recent wave makes no exception.

As many have lamented, however, the result of this trend is far from satisfactory: after more than 30 years, Christopher Hill's (1993) famous capability-expectations gap has not been bridged. As such, we aim to answer a simple question: do the efforts of the 'Geopolitical Commission' have the potential to go beyond this trend and boost the defense integration process? To answer this question, we provide a policy assessment of the EU defense initiatives launched by the first Von der Leyen Commission, and contrast them with the requirements for tangible results. Our argument unfolds as follows: first, we provide a brief outline of the recent integration efforts in the defense sector; then, we discuss the causes of the progress in defense integration; and finally, we assess the state of defense integration, and put forth some policy prescriptions for the EU and for Slovenia.

1 EU DEFENSE INITIATIVES BEFORE AND UNDER THE 'GEOPOLITICAL COMMISSION'

In the current political debate, two terms seem to have monopolized attention: strategic autonomy and strategic sovereignty. As Giusti (2022, pp 16–17) notes: "where strategic autonomy refers to security and defense/.../ the concept of strategic sovereignty concerns the EU's ability to manage certain strategic policies in a coordinated manner". This narrative has led the Commission to expand its role in three macro-areas of action: 1) increasing the military capabilities of the EU and its Member States; 2) reducing its energy dependence on third states; and 3) strengthening its economic base. Leaving aside the energy dimension, which is beyond the scope of this paper, we will focus on the initiatives launched by the EU to increase military capabilities and strengthen the European Defense Technology and Industrial Base (EDTIB).

In 2016, a few months after Brexit, the Council endorsed the European Defense Action Plan proposed by the Commission, which provided for three new cooperation instruments: CARD (Annual Coordinated Review on Defense), PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation, which had already been foreshadowed in the Lisbon Treaty, but had remained a dead letter so far) and the EDF (European Defense Fund). The idea behind these proposals was that the three mechanisms should work synergistically: through CARD, Member States would identify areas of potential cooperation to produce military capabilities; PESCO would then provide an institutional framework for the production of these joint capabilities; and finally, the EDF would provide financial resources for the development of the collaborative projects agreed within PESCO. These initiatives, albeit with various limitations, were welcomed by most Member States. Specifically, by the end of 2023, 68 PESCO projects had been launched, while the sum allocated to the EDF in the period 2021–2027 was close to €8 billion (European Commission, 2021, p 2).

Just a month after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU unveiled the Strategic Compass, the equivalent of a White Book on defense. The document, whose content was the result of an almost 2-year confrontation between the EEAS and all the Member States, was hailed by some as evidence of the Member States' willingness to increase cooperation on security issues (Sweeney, Winn, 2022), and the increased involvement of the commission in this realm (Håkansson, 2024; Sus, 2024). Regardless of what one's position on the document is, it is indeed worth noting that it includes both a balanced assessment of the current security situation and clear strategic goals for the Union, with guidelines to improve the EU's military capability. As such, it has raised the stakes of European ambitions.

In terms of institutional reform, the creation of the Directorate General for Defense, Industry, and Space (DG DEFIS) and the establishment of the European Peace Facility (EPF) are also examples of the Union's efforts to increase defense capacities. Designed originally by the then High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, and established in 2021, the EPF is a funding mechanism originally conceived to replace and improve the existing Athena mechanism and the African Peace Facility. While Athena was limited to financing the common costs of EU military operations, and the African Peace Facility focused on supporting peace and security initiatives in Africa, the EPF was intended to provide readily available, off-budget funding for common operations virtually anywhere in the world. Governed by a Facility Committee comprising representatives from all 27 EU Member States, the EPF operates on the principles of intergovernmentalism, thereby allowing Member States to maintain control over their contributions. When the war in Ukraine broke out, the EPF was used to provide weapons to the Ukrainian military and fund joint artillery procurement in support of Kyiv. Initially, €450 million was allocated, but this amount rapidly increased to €3.1 billion within a few months, and an additional €2 billion increase was agreed in 2023 (Fabbrini, 2023, pp 53–4).

DG DEFIS was established in January 2021 under the European Commissioner for the Internal Market, as part of the European Commission's efforts to enhance its role in defense and security. This strategic move was aimed at consolidating the EU's defense-related expertise and administrative capacity, reflecting the growing importance of defense and space within the EU's broader policy framework. DG DEFIS emerged partly from the restructuring of DG GROW, with a view to leveraging existing expertise while expanding the EU's capabilities in defense and space matters. The creation of DG DEFIS represented a significant shift in the Commission's approach to defense policy. While some EU Member States expressed concerns about the Commission's expanding influence in this realm, particularly its increased 'entrepreneurial firepower', the establishment of DG DEFIS enabled the Commission to play a more central role in shaping Europe's defense strategy. In particular, by assuming direct control over the EDF, the Commission positioned itself as the key actor in fostering EU-wide defense collaboration, innovation, and industrial development (Müller et al., 2023, pp 13–4).

Two weeks after the start of the war, in the Versailles Declaration, the European Council mandated the Commission and the European Defense Agency (EDA) to draw up a report on the Union's capability deficits (European Council, 2022, p 5). The document that followed essentially reiterated what had already been written in the Strategic Compass. However, it acted as a trigger for the launch of new initiatives, including the establishment of a Task Force to coordinate arms procurement in the immediate term, a regulatory framework, a short-term instrument, and a consortium of Member States to promote joint procurement (European Commission 2022). Despite the Commission's and the High Representative's efforts, the policies in the next two years remained limited to two funding lines: the Instrument for the Strengthening of the European Defense Industry through Joint Procurement (EDIRPA) and EU Regulation 2023/1525 on Support for Ammunition Production (ASAP).

When the Commission first proposed EDIRPA, in July 2022, it was guided by the lessons learnt during the pandemic: just as Member States rushed to unilaterally procure vaccines, their action was also uncoordinated when it came to replenishing their depleting stockpiles as they supported Ukraine. By doing so, they risked increasing the fragmentation of the EDTIB, as well as creating inflation in prices and potential supply shortages (Schnitzler, 2023, p 2). Once again, the Commission leveraged its financial power to promote coordination between the Member States; specifically, those states which were willing to take part in joint procurement of capabilities could receive partial reimbursement from EDIRPA. However, it took almost a year before the Council and the EU Parliament reached a provisional agreement, and a few more months for the Council to turn the agreement into a regulation (Council of the European Union, 2023). Moreover, instead of the €500 million initially proposed, the final regulation settled for just €300 million. The troubled development of EDIRPA was the consequence of obstacles raised by Member States in the negotiation process (see Clapp, 2023a).

In March 2023, Ukraine asked for further assistance in the supply of ammunition. In the face of a manifest capability gap, the Council proposed a three-track approach. Track 1 was aimed at delivering ammunition from existing Member State stocks, under the financial support of the EPF. Track 2 involved a joint procurement of ammunition and missiles from the European defense industry, coordinated through a collaborative project arrangement by the European Defense Agency, but still under the EPF budget. Track 3 was aimed at increasing production capacity to meet future demands. Track 3 implied a new instrument dedicated to increasing the EU's production capacity to meet future demands. A few days later, the Commission proposed ASAP. The proposal included not only a budget scheme (initially endowed with €500 million), but also a regulatory and a monitoring framework. Differently from EDIRPA, negotiations proceeded relatively smoothly, and the act was signed at the end of July – notably, without reference to the regulatory and monitoring frameworks (Clapp, 2023b, pp 7–9).

The latest EU defense initiative is the European Defense Industrial Strategy (EDIS). Launched in March 2024, its main goal is to enhance Europe's defense readiness – one of the many weaknesses exposed by the war in Ukraine. Differently from EDIRPA and ASAP, EDIS aims to set a long-term vision for the development of the EDTIB. Key aspects of this strategy, organized in five pillars, include incentives for EU countries to invest collaboratively, strengthen the European defense industry through innovation and responsiveness, and support defense spending via the European Defense Industry Program (EDIP), which has been equipped with €1.5 billion until the end of 2027.

2 A DAUNTING TASK: WHY IS DEFENSE COOPERATION SO DIFFICULT?

Despite all the aforementioned initiatives, EU defense cooperation still falls short of what was hoped for, and of what is necessary for the EU to be a global power. What accounts for this result falling so markedly below expectations? We will divide the root causes which have hindered defense cooperation into political, economic, and military dimensions. We call them the demand (or customer) side, the supply side, and the end-user side. The first relates to Member States' defense policies, the second concerns the EDTIB, and the third involves the Armed Forces. We will consider each of these points in turn.

3.1 The Demand Side: Lack of Coordination/Integration in Defense Policy

Europe's failures in developing capabilities commensurate with its economic wealth can be traced to three interrelated factors: the institutional fragmentation of defense policies, the limited military expenditure of Member States, and their lack of willingness to cooperate.

With respect to the first point, the fragmentation of the institutional process takes place at two levels. The first occurs at the national level: defense is an area where state prerogatives are impervious to supranational integration. In fact, according to the Treaty on European Union, Article 4, second par., “national security remains the sole responsibility of each Member State”. However, as we have seen, this has not prevented EU institutions from carving out some space for themselves. Over the past two decades, and more forcefully since 2017, the Commission has used its spending (see the EDF, EDIRPA, ASAP, EDIP) and regulatory power to promote a single defense market. However, this process has not happened in a linear and planned manner, but with sporadic and uncoordinated initiatives.

This has led to the second level of fragmentation – the supranational one – which sees different agencies with overlapping competences (think DG DEFIS and EDA on EDF and EDA and EEAS on CARD) (Locatelli, 2022, pp 42–3; Brøgger, 2024, p 4). Institutional fragmentation is thus matched by policy-making fragmentation. As we have seen, the Commission’s actions have frequently resulted in a mere attempt to promote joint procurement through economic incentives, and, as noted by Helwig and Iso-Markku (2024), the Union’s efforts to promote integration have been driven by three different modes of governance, each reflecting the diverging interests and interpretations of the role of the EU.¹ As a result, the leverage of the Commission (and other EU agencies) over Member States’ defense could not be fully brought to bear.

The second problem concerns defense budgets. As lamented by virtually every single American administration over the past seventy years, European states’ propensity for military spending is limited and sub-optimal. The US defense budget is almost three times as large as the European one. Moreover, the propensity to spend (measured by the ratio of the defense budget to GDP) remains at 1.5%, well below the 2% threshold that NATO countries (i.e. the majority of EU Member States) committed to reach in 2006 and again in 2014, and even farther below the 5% that they committed to reach in 2025. In rough terms, as lamented by the joint EDA-Commission report on the Union’s capability deficits (European Commission 2022, p 4), had the EU states followed through on their pledge to reach 2% since 2006, they would have added almost €1.1 trillion to their budgets up to 2020. According to a more recent report, if European countries increased the share of their GDP that they allocate to defense expenditure from 2 to 3.5% (based on the NATO target for 2035), they could achieve a 0.9-1.5% yearly increase in their GDP (Ilzetzki, 2025, p 2).

The share devoted to investment (total R&D and procurement expenditure) has traditionally been low, to the benefit of personnel expenditure. Unsurprisingly, then, one of the recurring mantras in EU defense circles has become ‘spend more, spend better’ (European Commission 2024). Looking at the available data, over the past ten

¹ In the legislative mode, the EU and the European Commission use their competences and expertise to liberalize and regulate defence markets. The coordination mode is similar to the inter-governmental approach, and relies on cooperation between European countries in the defence sector. Finally, the financial mode uses the EU budget to fund the defence sector. See Helwig and Iso-Markku (2024, pp 16–17).

years the trend in defense spending has been reversed, although up to 2018 the actual allocation did not meet the benchmark, set by the EDA for Member States as early as 2007, of allocating 20% of their defense spending to EU defense. Since 2021, this upward trend seems confirmed, to the extent that the figure for 2022 is close to 25% (or €58 billion) (EDA, 2023, pp 8–9).

The demand side problem of EU defense cooperation concerns the propensity of Member States to define their military acquisition policies unilaterally. In particular, states which have some defense industry and are arms producers – France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Poland and Sweden – tend to favor their national champions. The result is a long list of duplication and waste (with costs estimated at between €26-130 billion), as well as an inability to exploit economies of scale and interoperability between EU Member States (e.g., Pronk et al., 2022, p 17). As reported by Ostanina and Tardy (2024, p 3), the number of platforms made in Europe compared to US equivalents doubled in about thirty years: from a 3:1 ratio in the mid-nineties to 6:1 today.

The indicator that best represents this problem is the percentage of cooperative procurement projects at the EU level, i.e. weapons systems whose customer is not a single state but a consortium of states. Unfortunately, the data made available by the EDA is not entirely reliable, as it only reports what states make available (e.g. in the 2022 report, this figure is absent). However, data collected for previous years abundantly shows that Member States are very suspicious about cooperation in procurement: leaving aside year-to-year fluctuations, since 2005 the average share of European collaborative procurement over total defense procurement was 18% (authors' elaboration from EDA, 2022, p 16), barely half the 35% benchmark agreed upon in 2007. Most armament programs are developed exclusively at the national level, with a few exceptions mainly confined to the aerospace sector (e.g., Calcara, 2020; Faure, 2019; Fiott, 2019). To sum up, from an economic point of view, and despite all its ambitious efforts, the Commission has not made any significant progress in facilitating defense cooperation in the EU.

3.2 The Supply Side: Limits and Potential of the Defense Sector in Europe

The defense market constitutes the supply side. Since the effectiveness of the Armed Forces depends on the availability of means and capabilities, any discourse on strategic autonomy cannot be separated from the EDTIB configuration. According to SIPRI data (2023), in 2022, of the 20 largest arms manufacturers by turnover, eight were American (including five in the top five), six were Chinese, one Russian, one British and four from the EU.

At the continental level, the fragmentation of the industrial base is evidenced by the presence of only two trans-European industries (Airbus and MBDA) in the SIPRI ranking: at fourteenth and thirty-second place respectively. Nevertheless, this is on a par with the placement of national champions from Europe: BAE Systems and Rolls Royce for the UK (sixth and twenty-fifth), Leonardo and Fincantieri for Italy

(thirteenth and forty-sixth), Thales, Dassault, Naval Group and Safran for France (seventeenth, twentieth, thirtieth and thirty-fourth), Rheinmetall for Germany (twenty-eighth) and Saab for Sweden (thirty-ninth). Although these companies are Europe's best, they cannot compete with major American companies.

For industrial and market reasons, therefore, European companies must specialize in niche capabilities and complex systems (especially in avionics and electronics). Furthermore, as systems integrators they cannot compete with the American giants (the only exception being perhaps BAE Systems; see Calcara, Simón, 2021). Given the complexity and cost of modern weapons systems, this limitation makes the European military industry subordinate to America, as well as China.

There are two possible ways out of this situation (Droff et al., 2024, p 4). The first is industrial consolidation, i.e. favoring a process of market concentration around a few large players. This is what happened in the United States at the turn of the 1990s, when a series of mergers and acquisitions led to more than a hundred companies merging into the five current giants (Gholz, Sapolsky, 1999). In the early 2000s, some kind of consolidation also took place in the European market, driven partly by pan-European mergers, acquisitions and joint-ventures, like the aforementioned Airbus and MBDA (Bellais, 2021; Ditrych, Kucera, 2023, pp 136–7). This was partly due to the internal restructuring of major producers, for example Finmeccanica-Leonardo (Caruso, Locatelli, 2013). However, the market is still divided along national lines, with major companies playing the role of national champions.

The second option to foster the productivity of European companies is through joint projects. This point, which is linked to what was written in the previous section on cooperative procurement, probably constitutes the greatest unfulfilled potential of the European EDTIB. Participation in cooperative projects is not unprecedented, but is certainly not the norm. Some examples include the fourth-generation Eurofighter Typhoon multi-role fighter, the A-400M transport aircraft, the FREMM frigates, and the NH90 helicopter. Although some of these projects have had a particularly difficult life, with significant time and cost overruns, the benefits of cooperation are measured in terms of greater efficiency, economies of scale and improved interoperability. As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, it is quite evident that the Commission has prioritized this option, first through PESCO and the EDF, and more recently through EDIRPA and EDIP.

In conclusion, just as the fragmentation of defense policies prevents the development of a common and coherent approach to strategic autonomy, so too the fragmentation of EDTIB limits the ability of European states to equip themselves with the necessary tools in the contemporary security environment. As noted by Calcara et al. (2023), after the war in Ukraine broke out, some EU defense companies struggled to find the delicate balance between the increased demand for major equipment and the necessity to invest in long-term innovation. Therefore, the current state of affairs calls for a skeptical judgment as to whether defense autonomy can truly be realized.

3.3 The End-User Side: the Need for Operational Requirements

It is up to the military to set the requirements, timing and orders of the systems to be procured. In a nutshell, they are the key stakeholders in the procurement process, so they bring in their interests. Yet, apart from a few laudable exceptions in the literature on European defense integration (Meijer, Wiss, 2018; Barry et al., 2019; Meijer, Brooks, 2021), the role of the Armed Forces has not received much attention. Likewise, the current political efforts launched by the Commission have failed to address the needs of the military. In fact, while common funding and political statements may provide positive incentives for policymakers and industries, they are of little interest to the men and women in uniform across Europe. For them, defense integration does not mean only building capabilities, but, most importantly, achieving operational cooperation with foreign partners. By and large, the armed forces are very sensitive to three aspects (Monaghan, 2023, pp 6–7; cf. Cladi, Locatelli, 2023, p 3 and 7): the timing of defense planning; the requirements of procured assets; and their interoperability in multinational settings.

The defense acquisition process is notoriously lengthy and problematic (Smith, 2022). It develops in cycles which begin with the initial R&D and are concluded with decommissioning. Depending on the platform, cycles may last for decades. Consequently, planning is a complicated process, even when states work unilaterally. When it comes to cooperation, the partners involved do not only need to share a common will to cooperate, but they also need to align the timing of their needs (Monaghan, 2023, p 7). Consider the transition from 4th to 5th generation aircraft. While some states in the EU (namely Belgium, Denmark, Holland and Italy) already operate 5th generation aircraft (the US-produced F-35), other states are awaiting delivery (most notably the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany and Greece), while others still may join at a later time (Portugal and Romania), and a red herring – France – has opted to rather upgrade its 4th generation fighter Rafale.

The issue of requirements is equally challenging. The uncertainties related to foreign threats and the time and cost of procurement usually lead the armed forces to define strict requirements, with detailed technical specifications. This practice is usually seen as a liability, as it makes the military sector less efficient than the civil sector. However, such requirements are a necessity, since new systems need to be not only reliable, but also capable of operating within existing structures (Smith, 2022, p 16). So, international cooperation requires a great deal of background work between the partners to agree on common specifications. Consider the joint procurement the Franco-Italian FREMM: the two countries agreed on a common platform, but the French and Italian versions present significant differences. This shows how the economic benefits of collaborative procurements may be fewer than expected.

Finally, interoperability is a key concern for the armed forces when soldiers are deployed in joint missions with other partners. To properly carry out their functions, they need a clear line of command, shared operational doctrines, and standardized

weapons. This is particularly the case for high-intensity operations, where the stakes are higher. The European forces have had multiple experiences of joint training and operations, within both the EU and NATO frameworks. This has helped to mend differences, but the problem still persists; as shown, among other things, by the grim results of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC: a permanent operational headquarters, part of the Common Security and Defense Policy) and the now-defunct battlegroups, EU states are reluctant to engage in deeper forms of defense cooperation (Meijer, Brooks, 2021, pp 29–30).

As a consequence, the EU is still lagging behind in terms of operational structures, i.e. the institutional and command-and-control frameworks – both permanent (in Brussels) and mission-specific (in the field) – which would allow the Union to plan, launch, and conduct its Common Security and Defense Policy operations.²

Conclusion Our appraisal of the defense initiatives of Von der Leyen’s Commission is a sobering one. Granted, since 2016, total defense expenditure has been on the rise, and this trend is likely to persist in the future. However, its timing strongly suggests that the trend has been driven by external factors, such as Brexit and the war in Ukraine. As for joint procurement, even admitting that the incentives provided by the Commission will make policymakers more willing to cooperate, there are good reasons to believe that the current economic and military constraints will remain unaltered. Thus, if the intended outcome of the ‘Geopolitical Commission’ was to step up the military capabilities of the Union, this is unlikely to happen anytime soon. The more recent European defense initiative, the Rearm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030, has set a budget of €800 billion (€150 billion coming from a loan instrument, while €650 billion stems from a 1.5% increase in the defense budget). Although evaluating this initiative lies beyond the scope of this article, we estimate that the Rearm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030 will have the same drawbacks as the previous initiatives, and, like them, will hence underperform.

We end this article with two main policy prescriptions. First, joint procurement is a necessary step to increase European capabilities. However, cooperation in armaments is not a panacea and does not solve all problems. As previous experience shows, collaborative projects may be costly and time-consuming. In its endeavor, the Commission should opt for a more flexible approach, allowing for different frameworks, such as mini-lateral cooperation (Faure, 2019), and for the involvement of non-EU countries (Cladi, Locatelli, 2023). Mini-lateral cooperation is particularly well-suited to Slovenia, a country with disproportionate interests in the Balkans and whose main contributions to foreign missions include Kosovo (KFOR) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Althea, Joint Enterprise).

² *For a collection of essays on the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability, see Faleg, 2022; on the problem of understaffing within the Military Planning and Conduct Capability, see Reykers and Adriaensen, 2023.*

Second, future initiatives in the EDIS framework entail the twin risk of friction with Member States and with other EU bodies (Ostanina, Tardy, 2024, p 10). As such, the EDA is a better option. On the one hand, the intergovernmental cooperation framework which shapes its action ensures greater protection of national interests. Moreover, compared to DG DEFIS, the EDA allows for greater participation of national agencies in the decision-making process, to the benefit of the strategic coherence of EU action. The EU should broaden the EDA's core tasks, and the EDA's 2024 long-term review is a step in this direction. Prime Minister Robert Golob has stated that Slovenia is going to increase its spending to 2% of GDP by 2030 (STA 2025). Slovenia is not the only country which is failing to meet the 2% threshold, and, given its size, the overall amount of its defense spending is not going to affect the European defense sector dramatically. What matters most is that Slovenia proceeds steadily to increase force interoperability with European and NATO partners.

Finally, under President Donald Trump, the American commitment to NATO and to defend Europe is being increasingly called into question. Of course, we hope that the most dreaded scenario of a Transatlantic split does not play out. However, at a moment in which the reliability of the US cannot be taken for granted, the integration of the EU defense sector is more necessary than ever.

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E-mail: davide.fiammenghi@unior.it

ORCID: 0000-0001-9777-929X

E-mail: andrea1.locatelli@unicatt.it

ORCID: 0000-0002-7122-3311

Izred. prof. dr. Davide Fiammenghi je izredni profesor na Univerzi v Neaplju "L'Orientale". Doktorat iz političnih ved je pridobil na Univerzi v Bologni. Ukvarja se z mednarodnimi odnosi, varnostno politiko in političnimi sistemi, s posebnim poudarkom na analizah sodobnih varnostnih izzivov, mednarodnih konfliktov in strategij držav v globalnem političnem okolju. Njegovo delo združuje teoretične in empirične pristope za razumevanje mednarodne politike.

Prof. Davide Fiammenghi, PhD, is an associate professor at the University of Naples "L'Orientale." He obtained his doctorate in political science from the University of Bologna. He deals with international relations, security policy, and political systems, with a particular focus on analyses of contemporary security challenges, international conflicts, and the role of the United Nations. He deals with international relations, security policy, and political systems, with a particular focus on the analysis of contemporary security challenges, international conflicts, and state strategies in the global political environment. His work combines theoretical and empirical approaches to understanding international politics.

E-mail: davide.fiammenghi@unior.it

ORCID: 0000-0001-9777-929X

* Prispevki, objavljeni v Sodobnih vojaških izzivih, niso uradno stališče Slovenske vojske niti organov, iz katerih so avtorji prispevkov.

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Prof. dr. Andrea Locatelli je redni profesor na Katoliški univerzi v Milanu, kjer poučuje politične vede in strateške študije. Doktorat iz političnih ved je pridobil na Univerzi v Firencah. Njegovo raziskovanje vključuje mednarodno varnost, strateške študije, mirovne operacije in politične dinamike sodobnega globalnega okolja, predvsem v povezavi z varnostno politiko in mednarodnimi konflikti.

Prof. Andrea Locatelli, PhD, is a full professor at the Catholic University of Milan, where he teaches political science and strategic studies. He obtained his PhD in Political Science from the University of Florence. His research interests include international security, strategic studies, peace operations, and the political dynamics of the contemporary global environment, particularly in relation to security policy and international conflicts.

E-mail: andrea1.locatelli@unicatt.it

ORCID: 0000-0002-7122-3311

* Prispevki, objavljeni v Sodobnih vojaških izzivih, niso uradno stališče Slovenske vojske niti organov, iz katerih so avtorji prispevkov.

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