



EU Steps up Strategic Thinking with the Appointment of Commissioner for Defence and Space

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The creation of the new post of Commissioner for Defence and Space confirms that Member States want the EU to take more responsibility for security in Europe. This is an important step, especially given the weaknesses in the European defence industry exposed by Russia's aggressive actions. The challenge will be to encourage Member States to deepen their cooperation in the face of growing Ukraine war fatigue.

The EU's Changing Role as a Strategic Actor. Until Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, the EU lacked a comprehensive approach to strengthening European security, with cooperation focusing mainly on the non-military dimension. In the current mandate (2019-2024), the EU has mainly sought to strengthen cooperation in areas related to the development of new technologies, adopting a [cybersecurity strategy](#) in 2020, a [cyberdefence policy](#) in 2022 and a [space strategy](#) in 2023. The war experience has already been taken into account in the development of the latter two documents.

Instead, cooperation in areas related to the development of military capabilities has played a secondary role. Among other things, the EU created the European Defence Fund (EDF), which for the first time supported the development of new defence technologies, but it had a limited budget. In addition, states have launched dozens of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects, but most of these have been small in scale and have not yet translated into an overall strengthening of Member States' military capabilities. Deeming armed conflict in Europe unlikely, EU states failed to invest sufficiently in developing the defence industrial base at the national level. The one project where significant progress has been made is in the area of [military mobility](#)—allies Canada, Norway, and the United States have also worked with EU members in this area.

Nevertheless, the Commission in nearing the end of its term managed to provide unprecedented solutions to the security challenges that emerged after February 2022. Under the European Peace Facility (EPF), states allocated a [special budget envelope for military equipment and ammunition](#) for Ukraine, launched a [training mission for Ukrainian soldiers](#), and initiated short-term measures to improve the [production capacity of the European defence sector](#).

Appointment of the New Commissioner. With the appointment of a new Commissioner for Defence and Space, the Commission intends to strengthen its mandate to influence the industrial and defence policies of Member States. This initiative represents a qualitative change within the EU itself, whose ambitions to develop a comprehensive approach to security have so far been limited.

The new commissioner's portfolio will include the creation of a European Defence Union, as well as space security, which is expected to structure cooperation between Member States across the full spectrum of defence capabilities. This will be achieved through the presentation of a "White Paper on the Future of European Defence" within the first 100 days of the new Commission's term. The main principle guiding the work of the new commissioner is to spend more, better, and in Europe. While the Commission stresses that states are responsible for their armed forces, the EU can complement their security efforts by coordinating investment, development, and legislative

processes. This will be done in close cooperation with NATO to strengthen its European pillar.

The first priority will be to develop military mobility and transport corridors, create a common market for defence products, launch new Defence Projects of Common European Interest (starting with the European Air Shield), adopt and implement [the European Defence Industry Programme \(EDIP\)](#), strengthen the European Defence Fund (EDF), and find new ways of securing public and private financing for defence production.

The second priority will be to improve resilience to digital and hybrid attacks. New Defence Projects of Common European Interest will also be launched in this area (initially in the field of cyberdefence).

The third priority will be space-related issues, including the continued implementation of the 2023 space strategy, the strengthening of the European space industry, with a particular focus on increasing autonomous access to space, as well as the creation of an EU Space Law (in particular the standardisation of rules for space operations) and the development of Space Data Economy Strategy.

Security Challenges for the New Commission. Over the past two years, the European security architecture has been damaged by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the increase in hybrid attacks against democratic states. While these challenges were already defined during the previous mandate, the Commission will continue adapting the Union to them. Indeed, hybrid attacks using [digital space](#), [migration](#), and [manipulated information](#) are part of a strategy aimed at both weakening the EU and undermining the current international order. The Commission will therefore be confronted in the coming years with the need to develop a coherent and proactive approach by EU institutions and Member States in the international arena, in particular towards global partners.

The Commission recognises that deepening cooperation between Member States within the EU would facilitate a better response to these challenges. However, this may prove difficult given the growing fatigue in some European societies with the multiplicity of crises, including the war in Ukraine, irregular migration, climate change, and instability in the Middle East. Differing perceptions of threats, as well as the need to strengthen the wellbeing of their own societies, may lead states to limit cooperation. Against this background, ensuring adequate funding for the development of the European defence industry will remain a particular challenge—it is already clear that the €1.5 billion foreseen in the negotiated EDIP will not be sufficient. In addition, it will be necessary to find ways within the Union to achieve political consensus on foreign and security policy

in order, among others, to [effectively contain Russia's aggressive policy](#). This is especially true if the growing isolationist tendencies in the U.S. require the EU to assume greater responsibility for security issues in its immediate neighbourhood.

Conclusions. The decision to create the post of Commissioner for Defence and Space confirms that, in the face of crises, the Commission offers pragmatic solutions to effectively assist states in strengthening their collective security. The proposal to create the new post came at a time when states were actively seeking ways to deepen defence cooperation—only in the wake of a significant threat increase in Europe following Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine. Despite years of neglect, for example, in the area of military equipment and ammunition production, attempts to adopt a similar solution had previously failed due to resistance from EU members.

The proposed portfolio of the new Commissioner for Defence and Space complements the cooperation of states in the field of security and defence, which should allay the concerns of states that the Commission is seeking to increase its competences and influence over the defence policies of EU members, which are seen as the most sensitive dimension of their sovereignty. It also provides an opportunity to structure and link security issues across all operational domains at the EU level. Focusing on the development of military capabilities, notably through the EDIP, can facilitate the resolution of some of the most pressing issues, such as those related to European defence production, and combining them with capabilities in the digital and space domains will help build a more complete EU resilience to future threats. Such an approach will thus lay the groundwork for further increasing military assistance to Ukraine, as well as enhancing the EU's security posture, particularly in the face of increasing global competition.

Nonetheless, the growing divergence in Member States' attitudes towards the war in Ukraine and future relations with Russia may affect the perception of the long-term importance of this process and hamper the new Commissioner's initiatives. The appointment of Lithuanian Andrius Kubilius to the post is therefore intended to reconcile the divergent interests of Member States, as he combines a focus on developing an independent European capability with the pro-Atlantic stance of many Central European states, including Poland. From Poland's point of view, it will be particularly beneficial to structure the EU's cooperation with NATO and to strengthen the European contribution to the Alliance. Opportunities for promoting Polish interests in the EU will also arise from the "White Paper on the Future of European Defence", which will be prepared and presented during the Polish presidency.