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Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council – Preserving Peace – Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030

(Optional referral)

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Rapporteur: **Christian MOOS (DE, Group III)**

Co-rapporteur: **Christophe TYTGAT (BE, Category 1)**

Advisor	Malgorzata DAROWSKA (to the category 1 co-rapporteur)
	Kristýna HELM (to Group I)
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1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1. With war returning to Europe and global rivalries reshaping the world order, the EESC supports the move to draw up a comprehensive European defence strategy. It endorses the Preparedness Union Strategy and the EU Internal Security Strategy, following the Joint White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030. It also highlights the recommendations of its CCMI/256 opinion on the European Defence Industry Transformation Roadmap.

1.2. Credible European defence requires democratic accountability and transparency, including public monitoring of readiness and industrial impacts. The EESC supports a comprehensive European defence strategy that integrates military readiness with civil preparedness, social resilience, diplomacy, international law and the promotion of peace, democracy and human rights. Readiness in the field of defence should not lead to militarisation but rather to the strengthening of defence capabilities in a manner compatible with civilian authority and democratic scrutiny.

1.3. The EESC values the Roadmap's organised structure, objectives, timelines and deliverables, but regrets that it does not include naval defence as an essential part of the EU's defence readiness.

1.4. The EESC welcomes the identification of priority capability areas but regrets that some of these capabilities have been delayed or restricted when it comes to Ukraine.

1.5. Europe's defence readiness must be targeted and focus on precision; intelligence; cyber defence; logistics; mobility; air, space, naval, land and missile defence; and the protection of critical infrastructure, including railways and ports.

1.6. The EESC calls for the EU to overcome fragmentation and strengthen and optimise the EU's Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB); it should also enhance cooperation, stimulate joint procurement, reduce foreign dependencies including on energy resources, and ensure supply chain resilience, including on fuels supply, in order to strengthen Europe's strategic autonomy.

1.7. The EESC warns against national protectionism in defence procurement. Joint procurement, ideally through a European platform/agency, is key for developing European defence and improving interoperability among the Member States. A common regulatory framework for military goods is equally vital.

1.8. Capability outcomes must be prioritised, while ensuring the inclusiveness necessary for a collective sense of European ownership. The EESC stresses the need to address the serious social shortcomings that currently exist and undermine the necessary social and regional cohesion, situation that may be reflected negatively in readiness for defence itself.

1.9. The EESC emphasises the importance of a level playing field for public and private enterprises. It highlights the need for targeted support for SMEs with relevant capabilities, but also calls for more incentives for technological leaders among mid-caps.

1.10. Creating a true EU military mobility space by 2027 requires harmonised transport, customs and infrastructure rules. The EESC calls for measurable performance indicators and a one-stop clearance system in order to accelerate cross-border movement.

1.11. Several Member States are re-introducing military service obligations. The EESC therefore recommends an EU-wide debate with civil society on the requirements of military and civil defence.

1.12. The EESC proposes a European defence skills pact to ensure a skilled workforce, and reaffirms the importance of robust labour standards, regional balance, social partner involvement in industrial transformation and the upholding of workers' labour rights. The EESC supports the principle of non-regression in these workers' labour rights and the involvement of the social partners in the necessary industrial transformations through social dialogue and collective bargaining.

1.13. The EESC calls for economic and industrial integration in defence to be advanced in parallel with political and military integration, tapping the full potential of the Lisbon Treaty.

2. **General comments**

2.1. The EESC supports a comprehensive European defence strategy that integrates military readiness with civil preparedness, social resilience, diplomacy, international law and the promotion of peace, democracy and human rights ([1]). In this context, the EESC endorses the Preparedness Union Strategy ([2]) and the EU Internal Security Strategy ([3]), following the Joint White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030. The EESC also highlights the recommendations of its CCMI/256 opinion – on the European Defence Industry Transformation Roadmap – which examines the industrial transformation underpinning defence readiness, and which is closely linked to this opinion.

([1]) OJ C, C/2025/5162, 28.10.2025, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/5162/oj.
([2]) EU Preparedness Union Strategy to prevent and react to emerging threats and crises.
([3]) EUR-Lex – 52025DC0148 – EN – EUR-Lex.

2.2. The EESC values the Roadmap's structure, transparent objectives, timelines and deliverables, and the inclusion of actions by the armed forces of EU Member States. However, the Roadmap lacks clarity regarding governance and the division of competences among key actors, including the European Commission, the European Defence Agency (EDA) and the Member States, and NATO. As a result, there are also overlaps between defence readiness pillars. Coherent actions require clear responsibilities and governance.

2.3. The EESC notes the Roadmap's affirmation of Member States' sovereignty in national security and defence and their responsibility for defining capability objectives in order to ensure armed force readiness for strategic and military tasks. However, the EESC also sees value in reinforcing coordination between the Member States and setting overall European objectives with clear actions and measurable targets.

2.4. With the 27 EU Member States having over 178 weapons systems (unlike the US which has 30) and 80 % national procurement, Europe's defence products are neither standardised nor interoperable, and this causes duplications, inefficiencies and high costs. Existing fragmentation of Europe's industry undermines the EU's defence readiness. Ukraine's wartime experience highlights the importance of centralised purchases and capability management. The EESC supports the Roadmap's call for more coordinated procurement of military equipment, including joint procurement procedures, and calls for adequate solutions to avoid fragmentation and bottlenecks.

2.5. The EESC underscores the need to strengthen and optimise the EDTIB, reduce fragmentation and duplication, enhance cooperation and pooling, stimulate joint procurement, minimise foreign dependencies, buy European products – including through a European preference system in security-sensitive sectors such as defence – and ensure supply chain resilience in order to strengthen Europe's strategic autonomy and resilience and optimise the use of resources ([4]).

2.6. The EESC emphasises that a Capital Markets Union is essential to achieving the EU's objectives of strategic autonomy and defence readiness.

2.7. The EESC stresses the need for targeted support for SMEs with relevant capabilities, and stronger effective incentives for innovative companies able to organise value chains and integrate start-ups and academia. All public investment and procurement must be linked to social conditionalities to provide better incentives for industry to invest in upskilling, reskilling, quality jobs and recruitment of workers for a just transition.

2.8. The EESC affirms that the principle of non-regression of labour rights, social dialogue and collective bargaining are essential if the transformation of the European defence industry is to be effective.

2.9. The EESC underlines the importance of regional development, including better use of the Cohesion Fund to modernise dual-use infrastructure, alongside simplified procedures and equitable access to funding.

2.10. Europe's defence readiness must focus on precision strike capabilities; intelligence; cyber defence; logistics; air, space, naval, land and missile defence; protect critical infrastructure, including railways and ports, and enhance port-hinterland connections. These strengthen deterrence while limiting collateral risks and enhance resilience.

2.11. The EESC welcomes the identification of key steps and milestones, including initial priority capability areas, but regrets that some of these capabilities – although already available – have been delayed or restricted by the Member States when it comes to Ukraine, reducing the effectiveness of European support.

([4]) OJ C, C/2025/2013, 30.4.2025, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/2013/oj; OJ C, C/2024/4663, 9.8.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/4663/oj; OJ C, C/2024/4662, 9.8.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/4662/oj; OJ C 486, 21.12.2022, p. 168; OJ C 129, 11.4.2018, p. 51; OJ C 288, 31.8.2017, p. 62.

2.12. Dependence on critical raw materials, including energy resources, poses a growing strategic threat. Defence readiness therefore also depends on securing industrial and resource resilience through diversified, reliable EU-based (as in the case of biofuels from sustainable domestic biomass) supply chains and processing capacities in Europe ([5]).

3. **The Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030: Assessment and recommendations**

3.1. The EESC welcomes the fact that the roadmap unites industrial, innovation, procurement and mobility policies into a coherent plan to make Europe defence-ready by 2030, including pan-European flagship projects, an EU-wide military mobility space by 2027, and links to the 'ReArm Europe' financial architecture.

3.2. The EESC warns against national protectionism in defence procurement and calls for solutions. Shielding domestic industries from European fair competition breeds inefficiency, duplication and higher costs. Protectionism fragments markets, creates redundancies, stifles innovation, erodes trust among Member States and may hamper interoperability.

3.3. Clear guidance for industry on joint procurement participation is needed as a matter of urgency, especially covering tax matters like the VAT exemption under Article 20 of the SAFE Regulation. This guidance should be consistently reflected in the applicable defence and security procurement framework, including Directive 2009/81/EC ([6]), as well as in EU cost-eligibility rules for components and subsystems. Greater transparency will enable companies to plan production and investment more effectively. Clarification of State aid rules for publicly funded investments is also essential.

3.4. Chapter 5 of the Roadmap rightly stresses the need to close capability gaps and strengthen Europe's competitiveness, where speed and efficiency are essential for readiness. Capability outcomes must be prioritised, while ensuring the inclusiveness necessary for an effective common defence, strategic autonomy and a collective sense of European ownership.

3.5. The EESC urges the creation of a genuine single market for defence equipment built on transparency and common standards, ensuring a level playing field between public and private companies

3.6. The Roadmap rightly calls for coordinated investment, industrial scaling and greater operational readiness. However, this is no new insight: the EESC has long warned that Europe's defence remains fragmented ([7]). Initiatives such as the EDIRPA have been important pilot measures but remain temporary and too limited in both funding and institutional scope. To reach the target of 40 % joint procurement by 2027, the EU needs a permanent procurement platform/agency to coordinate, standardise and scale acquisitions.

3.7. Such a platform/agency could generate economies of scale, enhance transparency and support SMEs through open digital tenders. It should act not as a 'Brussels buyer' but as a cooperative hub. (The procurement of vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic could serve as an example.) The EDIRPA, EDF and EDA form the base, but a legally anchored, jointly governed and adequately funded platform remains the missing institutional link for lasting collective procurement.

3.8. The Roadmap's 40 % joint procurement target is both ambitious and essential. The EESC recommends intermediate milestones (25 % by 2026), transparent reporting and an open-architecture approach using common, defined technical standards and interfaces to ensure interoperability and prevent vendor lock-in.

([5]) OJ C 349, 29.9.2023, p. 142; OJ C, C/2023/857, 8.12.2023, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2023/857/oj.

([6]) Directive 2009/81/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 on the coordination of procedures for the award of certain works contracts, supply contracts and service contracts by contracting authorities or entities in the fields of defence and security, and amending Directives 2004/17/EC and 2004/18/EC (OJ L 216, 20.8.2009, p. 76, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2009/81/oj).

([7]) EUR-Lex – 52025DC0148 – EN – EUR-Lex.

3.9. The EESC takes note of the ambitious flagship programmes such as the European Drone Defence Initiative, the Eastern Flank Watch, the European air and space shields, and the military mobility corridor network and calls for clearly established governance arrangements.

3.10. Military mobility is essential for European security and defence, including EU support for Ukraine. Achieving a fully integrated EU military mobility area by 2027 requires a harmonised transport framework with unified procedures, standardised customs declarations and strengthened dual-use capabilities. Reliable liquid fuel supply infrastructure is indispensable for military mobility. Energy infrastructure, which should become fully sustainable as soon as possible, is important for defence readiness and dual use. Better coordination between civilian and military authorities, interoperable infrastructure and clear performance indicators are crucial. As 95 % of investments are dual use, the EESC supports a one-stop clearance system to facilitate cross-border movements. Where public infrastructure is concerned, the social partners must be involved. Naval defence is an integral part of defence and military mobility. The EESC suggests including naval defence as an essential part of the EU's defence readiness response, and underlines the need to include ports among lists of critical infrastructure that must be protected. The EESC calls for the full involvement of social partners in all processes of possible revision of existing regulations on military mobility, whenever these have an impact also on workers in the civilian sector.

3.11. Large-scale troop and equipment movements require substantial, readily available dual-use capabilities, particularly rolling stock. The EESC therefore supports pooling dedicated resources and calls on the Commission to use targeted financial programmes to consolidate and replenish fleets. The EESC also stresses the need for much stronger integration between major EU ports and the rail network, which remains a weak point in the logistics chain.

3.12. ReArm Europe should integrate European Investment Bank (EIB) and European Investment Fund (EIF) guarantees, and advance purchase agreements and risk-sharing tools to expand industrial capacity. Fast-tracked State-aid approval must apply to projects with proven European added value and positive employment impact ([8]). More generally, the EESC recommends strengthening the role of the EIB group in the transformation of the European Defence technological and industrial base and highlights the contribution of the Defence Equity Facility, implemented by the EIF in mobilising equity financing for European defence and dual-use companies.

3.13. Europe should develop Defence Innovation Hubs and testing infrastructure, promote challenge-based procurement aligned with flagship projects, and integrate Ukrainian expertise in drone, rocket, cyber and logistics technologies under clear intellectual-property-sharing frameworks and standards based on European values.

3.14. Europe faces a polycrisis. At the same time, strategic clarity and the swift closing of immediate capability gaps, notably to keep up support for Ukraine, are essential. A focused roadmap with the necessary prioritisation and a 360-degree perspective must go hand in hand.

4. **The civil society dimension of defence readiness**

4.1. The EESC recognises the value of dual-use and dual-purpose technology and infrastructure and calls for specific operational arrangements to ensure that these capabilities also enable civil society to benefit from enhanced defence capabilities and increased defence readiness.

4.2. Additional defence spending must not come at the expense of the social acquis of the EU and its Member States; with 100 million EU citizens living in poverty or at risk of poverty, social cohesion is also an important element of our society's resilience.

([8]) OJ C, C/2025/2013, 30.4.2025, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/2013/oj.

4.3. Several Member States are re-introducing military service obligations. The EESC therefore recommends an EU-wide debate with civil society on the requirements of military and civil defence. Such a debate could be linked to the campaign planned by the Commission in conjunction with the Munich Security Conference entitled *Protect What Matters. Together.*

4.4. The EESC calls for a European whole-of-society approach to military and civil resilience and underlines the importance of civil society engagement, education, life-long learning and civic participation ([9]). Citizens must see themselves as active participants in the defence ecosystem, whether in military or in civilian contexts.

4.5. Voluntary organisations also remain essential for crisis response and cohesion. They should be recognised as first-response partners and be provided with stable funding, training and legal status. Public services form the backbone of infrastructure, continuity, mobility and democratic resilience. Investment, interoperability and staff protection are core to defence readiness.

4.6. Soldiers' rights vary significantly across the EU. Effective interoperability requires a degree of harmonisation, in line with the EU values they are tasked to protect and defend. Under peace-time conditions, this should include the right to assembly, social dialogue and representation, health, safety and family protection, education and ethics consistent with civilian primacy and humanitarian law, as well as fair working conditions, career mobility and transition support.

4.7. Civil society partners must be included in preparedness planning. Structured dialogue between authorities and citizens strengthens trust, legitimacy and shared ownership ([10]).

4.8. Formal and informal education, civic training and sustainable funding for civil society actors are essential for societal resilience and for countering disinformation and manipulation. They are vital for building a European identity anchored in peace, service and solidarity. Emphasis should be placed on rapid learning, continuous cognitive skills development, and the effective use of AI to counter polarisation and disinformation in the context of emerging cognitive warfare, thereby strengthening societal resilience and securing military and strategic advantage.

4.9. A resilient Europe must combine technological capacity with social cohesion. The EESC proposes a European defence skills pact, robust labour standards, cross-sectoral mobility, regional balance, social partner involvement in industrial transformation, and the respect of workers' labour rights. The EESC also supports the establishment of a Skills Guarantee pilot through an accelerated implementation and close monitoring of micro-credentials and individual learning accounts to build a versatile and resilient defence sector workforce.

4.10. Democratic accountability is non-negotiable. The EESC proposes a public dashboard – to be included in the annual Defence Readiness Report – tracking procurement, innovation and employment impacts; annual assessments on competition and SMEs; and continued arms-control and transparency measures to foster stability.

4.11. Europe must build a defence capacity that protects peace without militarising, deters without dominating, and unites rather than divides. A credible defence capability and a coherent industrial base, vibrant civil society, active citizenry and democratic oversight form the shield of a free and peaceful Europe.

([9]) OJ C, C/2026/42, 16.1.2026, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2026/42/oj.
([10]) OJ C, C/2025/2957, 16.6.2025, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/2957/oj; OJ C, C/2024/2481, 23.4.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/2481/oj.

5. **Aligning ambition with possibilities**

5.1. The Committee emphasises that European defence policy must remain ambitious yet realistic, focusing on what is achievable within the next decade. Any EU initiatives on defence or security should not come at the expense of social progress, workers' rights or working conditions. Increasing production capacity in Europe's defence industry will only be successful if it is supported by a coherent industrial strategy, as the EU needs to invest in the entire value chain. The recent massive investment announcements need to translate into long-term company orders.

5.2. A common regulatory framework for military goods is equally vital, one that is based on shared standards, mutual recognition and streamlined procedures that speed up development, certification and deployment. Regulation must enable capability, not obstruct it.

5.3. The EESC observes that the Roadmap does not highlight the need for supplier and product eligibility as required by Article 16 of the SAFE Regulation or the EDIP Regulation. This omission could weaken qualification standards during implementation, including in flagship projects. Given the sensitive nature of defence initiatives, the Roadmap should explicitly reaffirm adherence to eligibility and security-of-supply requirements to align with existing regulations and maintain high standards.

5.4. The EESC recognises that the geopolitical landscape has fundamentally changed and therefore calls for economic and industrial integration in defence to be advanced in parallel with political and military integration. This will entail tapping the full potential of the Lisbon Treaty, including giving practical effect to the mutual defence clause under Article 42(7) TEU, strengthening the EU Military Staff, giving real meaning to the mutual defence clause, and creating a Council of Defence Ministers in order to support joint capability development, build an effective European Defence Union and enable the EU to act as a pole of stability in a multipolar world.

5.5. The EESC considers that rapid decision-making is essential for defence readiness. It therefore reiterates the need to move away from unanimous decisions making in foreign and security policy, in addition to the best defence industrial base. The EESC notes the European Parliament's resolution of 22 October 2025 ([11]) which among other relevant matters, addresses this important issue, and reiterates its own conclusions of a previous opinion ([12]) which presents one of the following two possibilities as a transitional solution to achieve this objective:

— either a temporary trial period of qualified majority voting or super-qualified majorities (i.e. higher thresholds for qualified majority); or

— greater use could be made of Article 44 of the TEU to allow cooperation between Member States willing to move forward and with adequate capabilities in the field of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), through a Council delegation.

Brussels, 18 March 2026.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Séamus BOLAND

([11]) European Parliament, 2024-2029 Texts adopted.
([12]) OJ C 140, 21.4.2023, p. 20.