

BUSAM ANALYSIS

**THE 'EU AMBASSADORS CONFERENCE' AND
AND THE REVIVAL OF THE 'DEFENCE UNION'**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. S. Sezgin Mercan

FEBRUARY 2025





THE 'EU AMBASSADORS CONFERENCE' AND THE REVIVAL OF THE 'DEFENCE UNION'

The new leaders and bureaucrats of the European Union (EU) have recently sought to overcome the stagnation observed in terms of deepening and enlargement objectives by mobilizing integration dynamics through defence-related issues, both in moral and sectoral dimensions. The 'EU Ambassadors Conference,' inaugurated on February 3 by EU leaders and diplomats, constitutes the first concrete manifestation of this effort under current conditions. In her speech at the conference, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, Kaja Kallas, attempted to answer the question of "what kind of EU is needed today." She emphasized that the EU, composed of economically strong allies, represents a stance against the rising authoritarian axis in the world, particularly against Russia as one of its leading representatives. She also highlighted the EU's role as a constant presence at the table, asking the right questions and functioning as a balancing actor grounded in the right values.

Although this conference may be associated with the re-election and official inauguration of Donald Trump as President of the United States (US), it is in fact a clear outcome of the last decade of self-assessment in Europe regarding security and defence policies following the Russia-Ukraine war, as well as the legislative initiatives carried out since November 2023 [1]. In other words, it reflects the transformation of internal integration dynamics under the influence of external actors and developments, manifesting in the political and strategic sphere. When it comes to defence, the EU consistently faces questions regarding how to finance such efforts and how to develop, deepen, and sustain cooperation. The EU plans to address these questions through the forthcoming "White Paper." At the same time, scenarios and projections are being developed concerning the future trajectory of transatlantic relations, particularly in light of US policies on tariffs and expectations for increased defence spending by European countries.



These projections, however, do not negate the indispensability of the US for the EU. This indispensability, nevertheless, is not without cost. For instance, by framing the Russia–Ukraine war as a struggle between democracies and authoritarian regimes, the US has contributed to deepening the conflict from the perspective of European countries. It has also sought to shift Europe’s strategic focus toward Eastern Europe. The EU’s weaknesses in security and defence policy have played a significant role in this process. The reliance of Eastern European EU member states on US and NATO military guarantees under conditions of war and conflict serves as concrete evidence of this weakness [2].

On the other hand, although European politics and public opinion display both positive and negative attitudes toward defence investments, the Russia–Ukraine war has underscored the urgent need to strengthen the EU’s defence capacity and border security. It is possible to point to increasing military capacity through public and private sector investments, including those involving the European Investment Bank. Moreover, some representatives of European politics have sought to provide new momentum to the defence industry through the slogan “buy European first.” For instance, Valérie Hayer, President of the Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, emphasized strategic investment in European industry and highlighted the importance of the Single Market in defence [3].



The European People's Party (EPP), one of the leading groups in the European Parliament, also stresses that the coming decade should be the decade of European defence. Accordingly, it has put forward several key priorities: the creation of a genuine European Single Market for defence; the development of the European Defence Industry Programme; investment in future defence technologies; addressing the need for greater defence cooperation at the EU level and an integrated European capacity; the advancement of a European Defence Union (EDU); strengthening the EU Intelligence Analysis Centre (INTCEN); and supporting the appointment of a Defence Union Commissioner (DUC) to coordinate both defence and broader security issues, ensure coherence among EU instruments and initiatives, and promote cooperation. Furthermore, it advocates for the enhancement and deepening of strategic relations and defence cooperation with like-minded partners such as the US, the United Kingdom, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Canada, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand [4].

According to the European Commission, the EU should allocate €500 billion to defence. However, data from the European Defence Agency indicate that total defence spending by EU member states currently remains below €350 billion. Although the increase from approximately €170 billion in 2018 to around €330 billion by 2024 represents a significant rise, it is still insufficient for the EU. At this stage, only such measures could alleviate the widespread sense of urgency among EU member states and enable Europe to become a more efficient, autonomous, and reliable defence actor [5]. This objective can be achieved through enhanced cooperation with strategic partners such as NATO and the United Kingdom [6].



One of these important partners is Türkiye. Having institutionalized its relations with the EU, being a member of NATO and one of the leading military powers globally, Türkiye should never be regarded by Europeans as an ordinary third country. Even if it is not a full member, it should be positioned as a regional power that provides—and will continue to provide—strategic contributions to the EU’s defence future and objectives. Finally, under conditions where 71% of Europeans expect improvements in military infrastructure, the EU is making progress in addressing its strategic and technical deficiencies in security and defence [7]. Nevertheless, national sensitivities and preferences continue to slow the development of the European defence industry and lead to divergences in choices. A fragmented defence industrial structure with limited capacity and high variability causes production to be spread over time and increases costs [8].

While the EU has long focused on issues such as climate, environment, and digitalization, it is now re-emphasizing classical domains such as security and defence that retain enduring relevance. It seeks to meet expectations for a more coherent and consistent EU in foreign policy. In doing so, the EU aims to project its principles internationally not only through political and economic channels but also through military and industrial means. In other words, the EU increasingly prioritizes reinforcing its normative and transformative capacity by complementing political tools with economic, commercial, and military instruments.



[1] “A new era for European Defence and Security,” https://commission.europa.eu/priorities-2024-2029/security-and-defence_en.

[2] Nuray Mert, *Yeni Karanlık Yüzyıl: Bitmeyen Savaş*, Doğan Kitap, İstanbul, 2024, s.216.

[3] Catherine Laurence Martens-Preiss, “EU Summit – Urgent decisions must be taken to maintain European security,” <https://www.reneweuropegroup.eu/news/2025-02-03/eu-summit-urgent-decisions-must-be-taken-to-maintain-european-security>, 3 Şubat 2025.

[4] “A Europe that protects and that stands for true peace: building a European Defence Union,” <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/a-europe-that-protects-and-that-stands-for-true-peace-building-a-european-defence-union>, 7 Ekim 2024.

[5] Alice Tidey, “EU leaders meet to thrash out defence priorities and iron out remaining but significant divisions,” <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/02/02/eu-leaders-meet-to-thrash-out-defence-priorities-and-iron-out-remaining-but-significant-di>, 2 Şubat 2025.

[6] Beyza Binnur Dönmez, “EU leaders convene in Brussels to discuss ways to enhance European defense,” <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/eu-leaders-convene-in-brussels-to-discuss-ways-to-enhance-european-defense/3470019>, 3 Şubat 2025.

[7] “A new era for European Defence and Security,” https://commission.europa.eu/priorities-2024-2029/security-and-defence_en.

[8] Luigi Scazzieri, “Towards an EU Defence Union?” Centre for European Reform, 2025, s. 5.