

## **Europe must run for a Defence Union: national leaders are stumbling at the start**

### **Unite to prevent war**

On the 9th of May, we celebrate Europe as a peace project, but the clouds of war are gathering again. Instead of waiting for war to unite us, we must unite to prevent war. Russia will not cease its imperialism unless it is stopped in Ukraine and will attack Europe if we are weak. Relying on the United States for protection is [a dangerous gamble](#). But our militaries resemble bonsai trees: miniature, expensive and fragile. What we need is one solid oak to shelter us from the storm.

Luckily, Europe does not need a plan B to a US-dominated NATO. We can return to plan A: the European Defence Union, with joint decision-making, integrated command structures, strategic capabilities, and a rapid reaction force. Such a Defence Union would not duplicate NATO but strengthen it with [a robust European pillar at its centre](#) capable of acting independently if necessary; separable, not separate.

[Two-thirds of Europeans](#) want Europe to be able to defend itself independently.\* We are Members of the European Parliament who share that goal. If we act, the European Union can safeguard the freedom of its 450 million citizens and uphold its founding promise of creating peace. Yet progress remains slow. The words of national governments are not backed up by actions.

### **Buying time but wasting it**

In recent years, EU-US "diplomacy" meant buying time through appeasement. But after a year of US pressure on Ukraine, unilateral tariffs, interference in our elections, and threats to annex Greenland, it is clear that this strategy failed.

The trade-off was that at the same time, Europe would scale up its defence industry, strengthen military capabilities and become more resilient against hybrid attacks and foreign interference.

Even though national leaders have repeatedly voiced the political wish to do this, real political will is lacking. The [rapid increase](#) in European artillery shell production shows what is possible when there is political will. Unfortunately, similar acceleration has not taken place in other areas. That puts Europeans at risk.

### **Stumbling over the first steps**

The upcoming laws in the so-called ["defence omnibus"](#) contain the first steps: cutting time and paperwork for defence production, integrate our defence market and enable joint procurement.

However, short-sighted self-interest and old habits benefiting big legacy industries continue to block real progress. On defence procurement, these attitudes hinder prioritising equipment produced within the EU. Attempts to weaken automatic approval for permits after deadlines risk delaying critical defence manufacturing sites for years. Intra-EU transfer licences and the

treatment of components remain blocked, preventing the dismantling of national barriers to defence trade.

Buying equipment together could save up to 100 billion euro per year. Member States remain stuck in their national trenches. These laws should have been finalised last year. In the period since then, Putin has equipped six new divisions. We need to run a record-breaking race, but Member States are stumbling over the first steps.

### **Winning the race**

This must change. Europe needs to act as one united power. It is only together that we can build our strategic autonomy in defence, energy, and industry. The timelines are tight. The US set a deadline for Europeans to take on greater responsibility within NATO by 2027. After Iran, this shift may [accelerate](#). This can only be done by working closely with key partners such as the United Kingdom, Norway, Canada, and in particular Ukraine.

Three steps are critical:

- Urgently adopt the defence omnibus;
- Create a true single market for defence, reducing dependencies through a principle of European preference, increasing interoperability and achieving economies of scale;
- Build a European Defence Union that strengthens NATO but can operate independently of the United States.

The European Commission and the European Parliament are ready. Now we need a push from national governments. So our call to all Member States on this day, Europe day, is simple: build a European Defence Union, and do it now.

As Paul-Henri Spaak warned in another era: “Il n'est pas encore trop tard, mais il est temps.”

\* <https://bebartlet.com/european-pulse-forum-2026/#defense>

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