



CEPS TASK FORCE

**A EUROPEAN PILLAR
WITHIN NATO**

PROSPECTUS

TASK FORCE ON A EUROPEAN PILLAR WITHIN NATO

Europe stands at a critical juncture in its security and defence trajectory. The geopolitical environment has grown significantly more volatile, with an array of complex, interlinked threats. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, propped up by China, continues unabated. At the same time, the US President has questioned the interpretation of NATO's Article 5 and signalled an intention to withdraw military assets from Europe.

The evolving threat landscape emphasises the urgency for a coherent and autonomous defence strategy for Europe. Yet internal political fragmentation, over-reliance on the US and underinvestment in the defence industry have compromised Europe's ability to act cohesively and autonomously to address short-term needs.

Faced with the prospect of being preyed upon by great powers, taboos are tumbling – as seen in new defence spending targets, the relaxation of the German debt brake and the EU's fiscal rules, plus a flurry of wide-ranging cross-Channel agreements that have turned the page on a decade where Brexit overshadowed relations between the UK and its neighbours. While the European Commission and High Representative have developed a [White Paper](#) which contains a realistic roadmap to upgrade the EU's defence industrial readiness by 2030, partially by integrating Ukraine's defence and technological base, divisions within the Council about expeditionary operations have pushed several Member States outside the EU's institutional framework to join the UK, Turkey, Norway and others in a 'coalition of the willing', which aims to mount a 'reassurance force' for Ukraine.

What emerges is a patchwork of European defence coalitions defined by shared threat perceptions, trust in each other's ability to shore up the European security order, while banking on a wide range of national, multinational and supranational financial mechanisms.

What is lacking, however, is a clear vision of what a robust and autonomous European defence structure should look like: one which offers a credible deterrent, shores up NATO's Article 5 and integrates command and control structures compatible with those of the Alliance.

Many European politicians casually refer to a 'European pillar within NATO' – but few can say what this means in practice or even whether it would be possible without Washington's full consent.

AIMS AND SCOPE

Against this backdrop, CEPS is convening a Task Force in close collaboration with Clingendael, the Institute for European Policymaking of Bocconi University, and RUSI that aims to plug a major gap left by official initiatives and the literature on what form a future European pillar within NATO could take: one that acts through the Alliance if it can but autonomously if it must.

In doing so, the Task Force will assess the geopolitical landscape, examine ways to coherently plug shortfalls while joining up the defence industrial dimension with the operational, powered by a mix of financial arrangements, all geared towards reinforcing Europe's defence readiness for the short- to mid-term.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Given the volatility of geopolitics, partners will *not* use scenario-based foresight analysis but define a set of assumptions and dilemmas (threats, capability gaps, coalitions) as the starting point of the research and discussions. The following (non-exhaustive) list may serve as a source of inspiration:

1. Russia poses a permanent, perhaps even imminent, threat to many in Europe, not just one nation.
2. Europe's security is inextricably linked to Ukraine's.
3. After years of austerity and a slower than needed rebound, there are many capability shortfalls. It is not just about air and missile defence, cyber, and strategic enablers. It is also about the numbers of active personnel and about sharing losses.
4. NATO remains the bedrock of the European security order but when push comes to shove, the US may adhere to a narrow definition of Article 5, rendering the role of the Alliance uncertain.
5. Europeans will have to replace an unknown number of US military assets in Europe.
6. There is widespread political support for greater European strategic autonomy.
7. The willingness of the European political class (i) to act (ii) through the EU is uneven. Some states are moving forward across institutional divides. In the short-term, Europe's defence relies on Franco-British nuclear coordination and coalitions of the able and willing.
8. Despite various initiatives at joining up financial power, the natural inclination is to spend domestically.

9. The Commission is a catalyst for the defragmentation of the European defence market.
10. Ukraine has become the world's leading defence and technology innovation laboratory. Closer cooperation between the Ukrainian and European defence industries will enable first-hand knowledge transfer on how to best use innovation to achieve military superiority on the battlefield, including on rapidly scaling up production and updating existing capabilities.

The implications of these and other assumptions and dilemmas will form the baseline for defining the elements that coalitions of the able and willing, bi- and multinational structures, and existing international organisations will have to join up in building a strong and autonomous European defence pillar: projects of common interest, financial mechanisms and governance aspects that ensure internal coherence and compatibility with NATO.

COALITION OF THINK TANKS

- CEPS (overall coordination and editing; focus on governance models)
- RUSI (focus on military capabilities)
- Clingendael (focus on geopolitics)
- IEP at Bocconi University (focus on finance and economic coherence)

Each partner will lead a discussion in a closed-door meeting and contribute to the discussions on other topics.

TIMELINE

Four Task Force input meetings will be organised after the Summer, with the aim to produce a draft final report for discussion among the Chair and Rapporteurs in a final meeting in January 2026.

- (i) Geopolitical outlook (October, Clingendael, The Hague)
- (ii) Capability gaps and projects of common interest (November, London, RUSI)
- (iii) Financing mechanisms (December, Brussels, IEP Bocconi)
- (iv) Governance issues (January, Brussels, CEPS)

A final version of the report will be submitted at the end of January, to be officially launched at the CEPS Ideas Lab in Brussels on 2-3 March 2026.

CHAIR OF THE TASK FORCE AND RAPPORTEURS

Chair: Sauli Niniistö, former President of Finland and Special Advisor of the Commission on [Europe's civil and military preparedness and readiness](#)

Rapporteurs: Steven Blockmans, CEPS
Bob Deen and/or Louise van Schaik, Clingendael (tbc)
Daniel Gros, IEP at Bocconi University
Jonathan Eyal, RUSI (tbc)

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

To be determined by the partners in consultation with the Chair.

FUNDRAISING

The Task Force's financial strategy is designed to be comprehensive, involving the mapping and assessment of diverse funding sources. Primary focus will be on securing public funding at both national and supranational level, while also targeting dual use private companies. This model is designed to provide the Task Force with a stable and resilient resource base.

PARTICIPATION CONDITIONS

Participation in the Task Force is subject to a fee to cover organisational expenses. CEPS members are entitled to a discounted fee and non-members pay the full fee.

The fee covers:

- The research carried out by CEPS staff
- Organisational, logistical and other costs of all meetings
- Web access and documentation
- Launch of the final report in Brussels at a public event to maximise exposure
- Press release, accompanying CEPS Expert Commentary and communications management
- Printing and editing costs of the final report
- Distribution of the final report to key stakeholders in the industry and among policy circles

CEPS MEMBERS:

Fee Structure (+21% VAT)	
Premium Corporate Members	Free
Corporate Members	EUR 2,500
Association Members	EUR 2,500
Premium Institutional Members	EUR 1,000
Institutional Members	EUR 1,500

NON-MEMBERS:

Fee Structure (+21% VAT)	
Corporations and Associations	EUR 5,000
Institutions	EUR 2,000
Civil Society Organizations	EUR 500
Academic/Policy Observers	Free (academics, policymakers, regulators, supervisors, independent experts)

CONTACT US

For further questions, please do not hesitate to contact:

Steven Blockmans by email at: steven.blockmans@ceps.eu

Sergen Kizilhan by email at: sergen.kizilhan@ceps.eu

PARTICIPATION FORM

CEPS corporate members – check the applicable box (+21% VAT)

£ CEPS Premium Corporate Members | EUR 0 £ CEPS Corporate or Association Members | EUR 2500
£ CEPS Institutional Members | EUR 1500 £ CEPS Premium Institutional Members | EUR 1000

PLEASE INDICATE THE NAME AND POSITION OF THE MAIN CONTACT PERSON

First name:	Last name:
Job title:	
E-mail:	Telephone:

Non-members- check the applicable box (+21% VAT)

£ Corporations and Associations | EUR 5,000 £ Institutions | EUR 2,000
£ Civil Society Organizations | EUR 500 £ Academic/Policy Observers | EUR 2,000

PLEASE INDICATE THE NAME AND POSITION OF THE MAIN CONTACT PERSON

First name:	Last name:
Job title:	
E-mail:	Telephone:

Billing information

Company/Association:

Department:

Tax register number (VAT for Europe):

Postal address:			
	Postcode:	City:	Country:

Contact person:

Date: Signature:

ANNEX 1: PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR CEPS TASK FORCES

PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR CEPS TASK FORCES

Task Forces represent structured dialogues among industry representatives, policymakers, academics and other relevant stakeholders who discuss topics in dedicated meetings. The final report is the result of the research carried out independently by CEPS Rapporteurs.

PARTICIPANTS

The **Chair** could be an expert appointed by CEPS to steer the dialogue during meetings and advise as to the general conduct of the activities of the Group.

The **Rapporteurs** are CEPS researchers who organise the task force meetings, conduct the research independently and draft the final report.

The **Members** are any individuals, such as academics, policymakers, regulators, supervisors, representatives of commercial companies, trade associations, consumer interests' groups, investors' associations, who participate in the activities of the Task Force in a personal capacity. They must have expertise in the topics discussed and provide input to the discussions through presentations and relevant material for the final report.

1. The role of the Task Force members

The Task Force members will:

- Steer the research agenda of the meetings and the content of the active discussions;
- Contribute to meetings with active input, including targeted presentations;
- Support the research of the Rapporteurs and comment on the various drafts of the reports, including the possibility to produce written contributions (subject to the Rapporteurs' approval and editing);
- Ensure that the research behind the final report adheres to the highest standards;
- Have access to all the documents and presentation made during the meetings;
- Contribute to the recommendations that will be discussed and added to the final report.

2. The role of the Observers

A group of policymakers, academics, consumers' associations and independent experts may attend the TF meetings. They will attend in an observer capacity, so they will not be

required to provide a contribution (unless agreed otherwise). This group will also include speakers invited by CEPS to provide individual contributions to one or more meetings.

The lists of members of the Task Force and the Observers will be featured in the final report and on the CEPS websites. All members attend the meetings in a personal capacity and do not necessarily endorse the recommendations of the final report.

OBJECTIVES OF THE FINAL REPORT

- The report is meant to contribute to the policy debate by presenting a balanced set of arguments, based on the discussions among participants and internal desk research.
- The report seeks to provide readers with a constructive basis for discussion. The authors will advance a single position or misrepresent the complexity of the subject matter.
- The report also fulfils an educational purpose and is therefore drafted in a manner that is easy to understand, with technical jargon fully defined.

DRAFTING OF THE MAIN TEXT

- In the main text, the Rapporteurs detail the results of the research carried out independently in the framework of the Task Force. This part of the report will refer to the discussions during the meetings but also to available data and literature.
- Scientific literature may be cited in this part of the report. Members are not expected to endorse any reference to this literature. A general disclaimer is inserted to clarify this.
- The conclusions of each section will be clearly presented.

USE OF DATA

- The final report features data that are considered both relevant and accurate by the Rapporteurs.
- Task Force members are encouraged to contribute with any data or propose any source of data that Rapporteurs consider as relevant.
- Task Force members may question either the relevance or accuracy of any given data. After consultation with the Chair, the Rapporteurs may decide either to exclude this data or to mention these concerns in the main body of the text.

DRAFTING OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The final report will feature a set of policy recommendations, drawn up by the Rapporteurs, which are meant to reflect the Task Force's discussions during the process. For a recommendation to be featured in the report, there needs to be enough information being discussed in the open debates among the TF members. In all cases, the report will seek to identify the points where there is some sort of common understanding of market issues.
- Both policy recommendations and the content of the final report will be summarised at the beginning of the report in the form of an 'executive summary'.
- TF Members will be given ample opportunity to review the final report and provide their input on a draft version. Nevertheless, the Rapporteurs will be solely responsible for the content of the final report.

DISCLAIMER

'The findings presented in this Final Report do not necessarily reflect the views of all the members of this Task Force. However, the members were involved during the drafting of the Final Report and provided input to the discussions through presentations and the provision of data and other materials, which have been used in this Final Report. A set of principles has guided the entire drafting process to allow all of the interests represented in the Task Force to be heard. The Rapporteurs are solely responsible for its content and any errors contained therein. The Task Force Members, or their respective companies, do not necessarily endorse the conclusions of the Final Report.'

Chair: *Sauli Niinistö, former President of Finland and Special Advisor to the Commission on Europe's civil and military preparedness and readiness*

Rapporteurs: *Steven Blockmans, Senior Associate Research Fellow at CEPS
Bob Deen and/or Louise van Schaik, Clingendael (TBC)
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