

The EU's new bilateral security and defence partnerships

SUMMARY

The Strategic Compass, adopted by the 27 EU Member States in March 2022 – only weeks after the onset of Russia's unjustified and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine – emphasised the need for robust partnerships in order for the EU to be able to achieve its objectives in the area of security and defence. Alongside 'acting' (operations), 'securing' (resilience) and 'investing', 'partnering' is one of the four main pillars of the Compass. The document itself outlines specific targets and deadlines against which to measure progress in this area.

While the EU has partnered with other security and defence actors (essentially states and international organisations) in the past, a new model of tailored security and defence partnership was launched shortly after the Compass was adopted, as a framework for enhanced partnership. To date, the EU has signed nine such partnerships – with (by date of signature) Moldova, Norway, Japan, South Korea, North Macedonia, Albania, the United Kingdom, Canada and India – and more are envisaged. While the partnerships vary in content, depending on the assessed mutual interests of the EU and each individual partner, around 10 areas of cooperation are common to all nine.

The European Parliament has highlighted the significance of the Strategic Compass's partnership dimension and, in particular, the value of security and defence dialogues with partners from the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership, as well as with key partners in strategic maritime areas such as the Southern Neighbourhood and the Indo-Pacific. Parliament has also underlined that cooperation with countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Norway, Ukraine, Georgia, Western Balkan countries, Japan, Australia and certain African countries serves as a key element of the common security and defence policy. In 2023, it called for deeper military and defence cooperation with Japan and South Korea, and for closer cooperation with partners in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This briefing updates an earlier one from January 2025, drafted by Elena Lazarou with Panagiotis Politis Lamprou.



IN THIS BRIEFING

- Strategic Compass
- Moldova
- Norway
- Japan
- Republic of Korea (RoK)
- North Macedonia and Albania
- United Kingdom
- Canada
- India
- Future partnerships
- European Parliament position
- Outlook



Strategic Compass: Reinforced emphasis on partners

Following the approval by the EU and its Member States in February 2022 of the [Strategic Compass](#) – a jointly agreed action plan for the EU to achieve its goals in security and defence – the EU launched a new set of tailored [security and defence partnerships](#) (SDPs). SDPs are a new framework for cooperation to further strengthen bilateral relations with like-minded partners in peace, security and defence. Envisaged in the Compass, they reflect the EU's commitment to engaging 'more coherently, consistently and comprehensively' with bilateral partners and to building '**tailored partnerships**' based on shared values and interests. SDPs are legally non-binding instruments that provide tailor-made, mutually beneficial frameworks for boosting the EU's political and practical cooperation with its partners.¹ To date, **nine such partnerships** have been launched and signed. An analysis of their content shows that, while several areas of cooperation are common to all nine agreements, the focus largely depends on each partner's needs and specific particularities. For example, within the SDP with Moldova, there is a clear shared interest in addressing hybrid threats, countering foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), as well as strengthening integrated border management, all of which constitute significant policy areas of mutual interest.

All SDPs contain a review clause worded 'as appropriate', allowing for adjustments depending on the progress made as well as on potential developments or new priorities. The European External Action Service (EEAS) is responsible for negotiating and concluding the provisions of the SDPs after being authorised by the [Political and Security Committee](#). The SDPs are signed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP), [after](#) having received the Council's authorisation, and by the respective partner country's minister for foreign affairs and/or minister for defence.

The SDPs are directly relevant to the implementation of the [SAFE Regulation](#) since they serve as a key gateway for a third country's industrial participation in the EU's common defence procurement. More specifically, under the regulation, the first requirement for a third country (apart from Ukraine and EEA/EFTA members) is to qualify either as an acceding, candidate or potential candidate country or as another third country 'with which the Union has entered a Security and Defence Partnership'. For states that do not fall within the accession or candidacy track, an SDP is therefore essential to enable their defence industries' involvement in common procurement under SAFE, although a unanimous decision by all Member States is eventually required to sign such an agreement. This is precisely the case for Canada and the United Kingdom, with which the Council has authorised [negotiations](#) on industry participation under SAFE, based on their recently established SDPs (see below). In addition, the Republic of Korea has [reportedly](#) submitted a formal request for its industry to benefit from the SAFE funds. Consequently, following the presentation of the [ReArm Europe](#) initiative in March 2024, SDPs are emerging as a central instrument for EU and third-country defence industrial cooperation. Beyond the defence industrial framework, SDPs also feature in the EU's [preparedness union strategy](#), which highlights their role in strengthening 'cooperation on preparedness and resilience with key partner countries and societies'.

Moldova

The [EU–Moldova SDP](#) was signed on 21 May 2024 during the eighth Moldova-EU Association Council. The partnership underlines that both parties 'face an increasingly challenging security environment inter alia due to ongoing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine' and look for ways to 'seize the momentum to further intensify cooperation to better address shared challenges and strengthen Moldova's resilience'. The SDP upgrades and formalises the EU-Moldova security and defence consultations to an annual EU-Moldova Security and Defence Dialogue (at the level of head of directorate/EEAS managing director) and will assist Moldova in 'transposing and implementing the EU standards and building capacities related to [the] protection of classified information'.

The **11 areas of cooperation** are closely related to efforts to strengthen Moldova's **resilience against conventional, cyber and hybrid threats**. In particular, the EU and Moldova will continue to enhance

Moldova's military forces and capabilities, consolidating its participation in EU common security and defence policy (CSDP) military missions and operations (see Table 1). The SDP also refers to Moldova's potential contribution to the EU [rapid deployment capacity](#) and EU (live) military exercises. On the civilian side, the parties will explore the development of the country's **civilian capacities**, with a view to enabling Moldovan experts to participate in EU CSDP civilian missions.

In addition, cooperation on **countering hybrid threats** will be fostered by sharing analysis and best practice, and by participating in exercises. At the same time, the [EU partnership mission in Moldova](#) (EUPM) will support the strengthening of Moldova's crisis management structures. Concerning **cyber issues**, apart from deepening the existing cooperation and exchanging views on tools for preventing, detecting and countering malicious cyber activities, the EU will support cyber capacity building and rapid response assistance. In parallel, the EUPM will offer strategic advice and operational support to the country's National Cyber Security Agency. The cooperation under the [European Peace Facility](#) (EPF) will be further advanced in order to strengthen Moldova's national security, stability and resilience in the defence sector. With respect to strategic communications and countering FIMI, the parties have agreed to share information on threat assessments in the field of disinformation proactively, and to explore opportunities for operational cooperation. At the same time, the EU will support Moldova's efforts to build its institutions' capacities.

The partnership includes provisions for potential cooperation and/or consultations on i) non-proliferation, disarmament and conventional weapons; ii) counterterrorism and violent extremism; and iii) integrated border management (e.g. irregular migration and human trafficking, organised crime and arms trafficking). With regard to **defence industrial initiatives**, the EU and Moldova will explore Moldova's potential participation in [permanent structured cooperation](#) (PESCO) projects and other initiatives, including joint procurement. The possibility of conducting technical consultations between the European Defence Agency (EDA) and Moldova's Ministry of Defence will also be considered. Furthermore, cooperation in CSDP training and education, including participation in the European Security and Defence College (ESDC), will continue. Finally, gender equality in the context of security and defence will be promoted by exchanging good practice.

Norway

As one of the EU's closest European partners, Norway signed a [security and defence partnership](#) with the EU on 28 May 2024 – this includes **17 areas of cooperation**, which both parties intend to expand further. The EU and Norway committed to providing and strengthening long-term support for **Ukraine**. In October 2022, Norway became the first non-EU country to [contribute](#) to the EPF, with a payment of approximately NOK 150 million (about €14.5 million) in support of the EU's Military Assistance Mission in Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine). Norway subsequently [increased](#) that amount to around NOK 400 million (roughly €36.5 million) through a second voluntary contribution, before its June 2025 [donation](#) of NOK 1 billion (€86 million), underlining Norway's close security cooperation with the EU and its backing of Ukraine's defence efforts. The parties also agreed to further expand their cooperation in international peace and crisis management.

More specifically, Norway will continue participating in EU CSDP civilian missions and crisis management exercises (e.g. [Integrated Resolve](#) and [MILEX](#)), and to consider potential participation in military operations. Norway has to date **participated in three military and nine civilian missions and operations**. In 2024, it was invited to offer contributions to the [EU mission in Armenia](#) (EUMA) and the [EU partnership mission in the Republic of Moldova](#). Other actions include intensifying interaction and information exchange, including in the context of Norway's intention to contribute to a CSDP mission or operation, and deepening exchanges on consular matters regarding the protection of the EU's and Norway's citizens in third countries. The partnership also refers to maritime security and to the objective of promoting a free and rules-based **maritime security environment** by organising joint activities and port calls, as well as by enhanced dialogue on the EU's maritime initiatives, including through the EU's [coordinated maritime presences](#). In a 2023 [paper](#), experts highlighted that, as a non-EU country, Norway needs bilateral agreements to join

many of the EU maritime security initiatives, which they considered to be of particular importance to Norwegian security and defence interests.

Moreover, the EU and Norway will examine opportunities to enhance Norway's **participation in European defence industrial initiatives**. The text explicitly references the [European defence industry programme](#) (EDIP) and PESCO. The two partners will also boost their cooperation on **space security** and defence through Norway's participation in EU space-related programmes and will work towards enhancing their coordination in relevant multilateral forums such as the United Nations (UN). Strengthened cooperation and regular exchanges are also envisaged on cyber issues, hybrid threats and strategic communications (including on countering FIMI).

Cooperation on **counterterrorism** and the prevention of violent extremism, as well as on conflict prevention, will also be explored. Moreover, the EU and Norway will intensify consultations to improve the **resilience of critical infrastructure** across Europe, including that of **underwater infrastructure**.² Furthermore, the parties will deepen their consultations and coordination on non-proliferation and disarmament treaties and instruments and on export control regimes, while promoting dialogue among nuclear-weapon states to establish a potential future framework for nuclear arms control. Further opportunities in the field of capacity building will be explored, while training and education cooperation with the ESDC will be developed further.

Regarding cooperation in third countries, EU delegations and offices will seek to exchange information with Norwegian missions and embassies. In **multilateral forums**, the EU and Norway will **strengthen their consultations** on issues relating to the UN, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe, while increasing their regular exchanges on EU-NATO cooperation and on contributions to and support for UN peacekeeping operations.

Lastly, the two parties will aim to address shared risks concerning the external aspects of economic security and ensure that gender equality is incorporated into cooperation on security and defence.

Japan

The EU-Japan [SDP](#) was signed on 1 November 2024. The preamble highlights the interconnectivity and interdependence between Europe and the Indo-Pacific, underlining an 'increasingly challenging and interlinked security environment as demonstrated by unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force'. Building on existing cooperation and dialogue frameworks, such as the [Japan-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement](#) (2018), the two parties agree to further strengthen their cooperation, including by exploring the possibility of a Japan-EU agreement on the security of information, and by enhancing coordination of capacity building and support for other partners. In 2022, Japan was the first country with which the EU [launched](#) a digital partnership; Japan has also had multiple iterations of the dedicated [cyber dialogue](#) with the EU.

The areas of cooperation and targeted dialogue are structured along nine themes. First, **maritime security exchanges** will be deepened, while concrete **naval cooperation** will be promoted through the 2023 [administrative arrangement](#) (AA) between [EUNAVFOR Atalanta](#) and the Japanese Self Defence Forces. Cooperation will be further strengthened through: i) activities including joint exercises, which may also allow for the participation of mutually designated third countries; ii) the exploration of cooperation in the framework of the EU's coordinated maritime presences (CMP) initiative; and (iii) possible cooperation on maritime capacity building of third countries in the Indo-Pacific region. On **space security** and defence, the parties will explore the possibility of expanding the EU-Japan space policy dialogue to include topics related to space security. At the same time, they will promote greater coordination of external engagement in multilateral,³ plurilateral and bilateral forums, with a view to promoting responsible behaviour in outer space. Practical cooperation will also be enhanced in the cyber domain by promoting the [UN framework for responsible state behaviour in cyberspace](#), and by developing and implementing cyber confidence-building measures in the ASEAN Regional Forum.

On FIMI, the partnership emphasises the need to deepen research and analysis on **hybrid threats**, to share best practice in developing relevant strategies and policies, and to share information on threat assessment proactively. On **non-proliferation** and **disarmament**, the EU and Japan will strengthen their bilateral consultations and jointly promote coordination within multilateral treaties and export control regimes, as well as within the relevant dialogues among nuclear-weapon states. Moreover, the partnership envisages consultations on the development of respective defence initiatives and on the possibility of mutual involvement in them. Regarding conflict prevention and crisis management, further cooperation will be explored in various fields, including CSDP and joint support for third states, and coordination will be enhanced vis-à-vis relevant multilateral forums.

On **counterterrorism** and the prevention and countering of violent extremism, strengthened interaction between the different entities in these fields will be explored, and the parties will coordinate their positions in multilateral and regional forums. On women peace and security (WPS), the EU and Japan, both being committed to the WPS agenda, will exchange good practice and will ensure gender equality in their cooperation on security and defence.

Republic of Korea (RoK)

The EU and the Republic of Korea (RoK) signed their [SDP](#) on 4 November 2024. Before that, the 2023 [EU-RoK Summit joint statement](#) had reaffirmed that the bilateral partnership 'is grounded in common interests' and in shared global threat perceptions, 'notably Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) nuclear and missile programmes, as well as multi-dimensional challenges'.

The parties have, prior to the signing of the SDP, been cooperating in a number of fields, as demonstrated by: the EU-RoK [Framework Agreement](#), which covers most areas of mutual interest, including **political dialogue, development, education, justice and security**; the 2011 [Free Trade Agreement](#); and the 2016 [Framework Participation Agreement](#) (FPA) in EU crisis management operations – the first such agreement between the EU and a country in Asia. In 2022, the EU and the RoK launched a [digital partnership](#), one of only four such partnerships the EU currently has.

Building on the existing cooperation formats and reflecting the strong strategic convergence of the two parties, the SDP aims to 'develop and strengthen dialogue and cooperation across the whole range of security and defence topics'.

At the political level, the annual ministerial EU-RoK strategic dialogue will provide oversight of and guidance for the SDP. At the technical level, the existing security and defence consultations will be upgraded to an annual RoK-EU security and defence dialogue at director-general/EU managing director level. Thematic structured dialogues, including possible annual Indo-Pacific consultations to coordinate approaches to the region, will report to and inform the annual security and defence dialogue. Additionally, the signing parties will explore the possibility of concluding an EU-RoK agreement on the security of information and establishing a secure communications connection.

Concerning specific areas of cooperation envisaged in the SDP, the RoK will expand its participation in EU CSDP civilian and military missions and operations, building on the existing FPA. On **maritime security**, the parties acknowledge shared values (including respect for international law and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea), and agree to: i) strengthen exchanges; and ii) establish a regular maritime security dialogue to foster mutual understanding, strengthen operational cooperation, develop joint activities, explore cooperation under the EU's coordinated maritime presence initiative and cooperation on the maritime capacity building of third states in the broader region of the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia and the Pacific (the RoK is a [contributing nation](#) to EUNAVFOR Atalanta). Regarding **cyber issues**, on top of the existing [cyber dialogue](#), the EU-RoK cyber policy consultations will be deepened, and the parties will continue to coordinate and cooperate at multilateral, regional and bilateral levels.⁴

The parties agree that **hybrid threats** constitute a major common challenge and commit to deepening their cooperation on research and analysis, sharing best practice in developing strategies

and policies, and coordinating possible diplomatic responses. The annual EU-RoK security and defence dialogue will be used to discuss hybrid threats, along with other relevant topics such as cybersecurity, FIMI and economic security. In particular, regarding FIMI, the EU and the RoK will expand their ongoing bilateral exchanges towards more structured, operational cooperation, and will proactively share information on disinformation-related threat assessments.

On non-proliferation, disarmament and international transfer of conventional weapons, as well as on responsible use of artificial intelligence in the military domain, the parties will deepen consultations and promote coordination vis-à-vis multilateral treaties and export control regimes, while encouraging enhanced dialogue among nuclear-weapon states towards a possible future nuclear arms control framework. Concerning **space**, they will establish a dialogue on space security and further pursue coordination of external engagement in multilateral and bilateral forums. Exchanging information on defence industry-related matters and exploring cooperation on CSDP-related training, education, peace mediation, and conflict prevention (including joint support for third states) have also been agreed. Cooperation on the external aspects of economic security, human trafficking, and transnational organised crime will be explored as well. Finally, both parties have declared their commitment to fully implement the women, peace and security agenda enshrined in [UN Security Council Resolution 1325](#), and to ensure gender equality 'as a political and security related priority'.

North Macedonia and Albania

On 19 November and 18 December 2024 respectively, the EU signed SDPs with [North Macedonia](#) and [Albania](#), with almost identical content. Both partnerships establish a security and defence dialogue between the two parties and explore the possibility of establishing further thematic consultations in fields of mutual interest.⁵ Both texts underline that the basis of the partnerships stems from the respective stabilisation and association agreements, and underscore that the parties have adopted strategic documents (notably the EU's Strategic Compass, Albania's 2024 [National Security Strategy](#) and North Macedonia's [Defence Strategy](#)), which focus on cooperation with allies and partners. Both countries are already **established contributors to the CSDP**, with a notable participation in the military operation [Althea](#) in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2006 by both [Tirana](#) and [Skopje](#). Concerning the collaboration envisaged, there are **13 similar areas of cooperation** in both documents. Initially, the EU and its two partners will boost their cooperation in the field of CSDP, aiming to consolidate the two candidate countries' participation in EU military CSDP missions and operations, including a **potential future contribution to the EU rapid deployment capacity** and participation in EU (live) military exercises. Accordingly, they will explore options for reinforcing Albania's and North Macedonia's civilian capacities to achieve greater participation in EU civilian CSDP missions. Regarding the war in Ukraine, all parties are committed to continuing to provide support to Kyiv for 'as long as necessary'. All parties will bolster their cooperation and exchange best practice on **hybrid threats**. At the same time, the EU and Albania will additionally seek ways to foster collaboration on relevant research and analysis. Apart from exchanging tools to 'prevent, deter and respond' to cyber issues, the EU will support Albania's and North Macedonia's cyber resilience capabilities.

Regarding capacity building, the EU will continue to support both countries' armed forces to strengthen their operational effectiveness and interoperability. The partnerships also refer to the role of the EPF in boosting the countries' national security. Similar capacity-building assistance is envisaged in the areas of strategic communications (STRATCOM) and FIMI. Moreover, on non-proliferation and disarmament, both partnerships highlight the roadmap on small arms and light weapons (SALW) control in the Western Balkans, and the EU action plan on firearms trafficking. Additionally, cooperation in the area of **counterterrorism** and the prevention and countering of violent extremism will take a whole-of-society approach. This is in line with the approach embodied in the [report](#) entitled 'Safer together: Strengthening Europe's civil and military preparedness and readiness' by former Finnish President Sauli Niinistö.

Regarding consultations on defence initiatives, tools and instruments, the partnership texts state that the possibility of participating in PESCO projects and developing mutually beneficial cooperation with the EDA will be explored in both cases. In the case of North Macedonia, in particular, there is a clear focus on boosting cooperation in **military mobility** to facilitate the movement of military goods and staff, including through potential participation in the EU's actions for the harmonisation and reduction of administrative processes and procedures. In addition, the ESDC will play a significant role in training and education initiatives to be shared between the EU and the two partners. At the same time, cooperation in the external aspects of integrated border management will also entail issues related to irregular migration, organised crime and international trafficking. All parties will continue close cooperation on women, peace and security, with gender equality recognised as a political and security priority. A unique area of cooperation not covered by other partnerships is the [protection of cultural heritage in conflict and crisis](#) situations. As described in both documents, 'crimes related to **cultural heritage**, especially trafficking in cultural property, represent a threat'. Finally, the EU and its partners will exchange good practice on the [external dimension of economic security](#).

United Kingdom

On 19 May 2025, at the first-ever EU-United Kingdom (UK) summit held in London, the EU concluded its [seventh security and defence partnership](#), this time with the UK. Despite the UK's withdrawal from the EU, the agreement recognises 'significant shared interests' and a 'share[d] responsibility for the security of Europe'. It establishes structured cooperation frameworks, including the possibility for the UK to participate in Council of the EU meetings and in the annual EU-UK security and defence dialogue. The partnership includes **21 areas of cooperation**, the scope of which is broad enough to further advance bilateral collaboration. Several of these areas are also present in other SDPs (e.g. the women, peace and security agenda), while the SDP also introduces fresh domains of collaboration that are not usually included in previous agreements. For instance, the SDP includes exchanges on the security and resilience of **emerging disruptive technologies**, as well as on preparedness and response to global public health security emergencies. Furthermore, the text explicitly refers to the possibility of concluding an administrative arrangement between the EDA and the UK to formalise the UK's participation in EDA activities, including PESCO.

However, the text remains vague on the UK's participation in the EU's defence industry, leaving the depth of defence industrial collaboration unclear. The SDP merely states that the parties 'will explore possible mutual involvement in respective defence initiatives in accordance with the respective legal frameworks', while providing no specific modalities or implementation procedures. Against the backdrop of the EU's accelerating defence industrial ambitions, notably under the ReArm Europe plan, the question of UK participation remains unresolved. Several experts have highlighted 'the [lack](#) of detail on defence industry collaboration' and have noted that the [partnership](#) 'is a good starting point, with much more work to be done'. In the same vein, ASD and ADS Group, representing the EU's and the UK's defence industries, respectively, have issued a joint [statement](#), calling for swift implementation of the partnership to 'boost industrial collaboration and strengthen Europe's collective defence'. As of early March 2026, the Commission and the UK had not yet reached an agreement on the UK's preferential access to SAFE loans.

Canada

On 23 June 2025, the EU and Canada signed an [SDP](#) at the 20th EU-Canada Summit, highlighting the strategic importance of strengthening their relationship and reaffirming their commitment to deepening security and defence ties amid geopolitical instability. The text defines the EU and Canada as 'key and strategic partners in security and defence' and notes that the two parties face 'shared foreign and security policy challenges', prompting them to 'develop and strengthen dialogue and cooperation across the whole range of security and defence topics'. The partnership will be accompanied by dialogue and consultation mechanisms, including thematic dialogues on specific topics of shared interests (e.g. assessments of the security landscape or consultations on threats).

The partnership includes **20 concrete areas of cooperation**, many common to most security and defence partnerships (e.g. arms control and non-proliferation, cyber issues and hybrid threats). However, as the partnership is tailor-made to the needs and interests of both parties, it focuses in particular on issues of mutual interest and concern, including those linked to Canada's NATO membership. The text explicitly refers to **military mobility** and **interoperability**, which constitute top priorities for both the EU and NATO, with the aim to 'enhance Canadian military mobility across the European Union territory through expanded collaboration' on the relevant PESCO project, one of the two PESCO projects in which Canada participates. In parallel, as with the UK, the EU and Canada will explore the possibility of establishing an administrative arrangement between the EDA and the Canadian Department of National Defence. Under the SAFE Regulation, the EU has agreed to grant Canada an exemption allowing its defence industry to contribute beyond the 35 % cap applicable to the cost of components produced by third countries. Canada was endorsed by the Council in December 2025 to [participate](#) in SAFE. Following the adoption of [Council Decision \(EU\) 2026/444](#) and the publication of the EU-Canada participation agreement in the Official Journal ([OJ L 2026/445](#)), the arrangement was authorised for signature and provisional application. Canada thereby becomes the first non-EU country formally associated with the instrument. At the time of writing, the agreement had not yet entered into force, as its formal conclusion remains subject to the consent of the European Parliament.

India

On 27 January 2026, the EU and India [signed](#) a [security and defence partnership](#) in the margins of the EU-India Summit. The implementation of the SDP, which includes **16 areas of cooperation**, will be underpinned by a series of dialogue mechanisms to provide steering and oversight. In addition to discussing developments in security and defence policies and relevant geopolitical issues, the EU and India will hold targeted dialogues and boost cooperation in areas such as: **maritime security**; **cyber-related issues** (deepening the existing [cyber dialogue](#)); AI and emerging disruptive technologies; hybrid threats; **resilience and protection of critical infrastructure**; counterterrorism, by strengthening the existing Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism; non-proliferation and disarmament; and **space security**. So far, this is the only EU SDP that does not include strategic communication and countering FIMI as specific areas of cooperation. Aside from increased coordination and cooperation in multilateral fora, the partnership further stipulates that the EU and India will increase exchanges related to UN peacekeeping operations.

The EU and India have established cooperation and various dialogues on security and defence matters in the past; these include joint [maritime activities](#) with EU naval forces (EUNAVFOR), focused on counter-piracy efforts, while India continues to engage with the EU project 'Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia and the Indo-Pacific' (ESIWA+). The EU and India also have annual security and defence consultations and [launched](#) a strategic dialogue on foreign and security policy in June 2025. Back in [February 2025](#), European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced that the EU was exploring an SDP with India 'in the mold of the partnerships [the EU has] with Japan and South Korea'. The [joint communication](#) on a new EU-India strategic agenda, published in September 2025, underlined that a SDP would deepen strategic consultations, enable closer cooperation and facilitate defence industrial collaboration. In addition, the joint communication and the SDP note the interest in concluding an agreement on security of information that 'could also pave the way for India's participation in EU security and defence initiatives'.

Future partnerships

On 17 July 2025, President von der Leyen announced the launch of [negotiations](#) for a security and defence partnership with **Iceland**, noting that the agreement would enable Iceland to potentially access SAFE projects. Iceland's Prime Minister, Kristrún Frostadóttir, [stated](#) that it 'is very important for us to show that we can have cooperation on critical infrastructure, civil protection, any sort of dual use defence investment and this also includes hybrid and cyber threats'. She also underlined that 'she was hoping to conclude talks by the end of the year'.

On 17 June 2025, on the margins of the G7 Summit in Canada, the EU and **Australia** agreed to launch negotiations on a [security and defence partnership](#), covering areas such as the defence industry, cyber security and counter-terrorism. Experts from the Lowy Institute [highlight](#) that the two sides would stand to gain significantly from the exchange of best practices on FIMI, economic coercion and supply chain resilience, as well as the protection of critical infrastructure and responses to sabotage, and to other hybrid threats including lawfare (the strategic use or misuse of legal tools, norms and institutions as a means of pursuing political, economic or military objectives).

European Parliament position

During the February 2026 plenary session, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on the EU strategic defence and security partnerships, noting that they are of high importance in the face of novel and imminent security challenges, while welcoming the recently signed tailored agreements. The resolution stresses the importance of exploring a SDP with the United States, Ukraine and New Zealand. Parliament's 2025 [annual report](#) on the implementation of the CSDP, adopted in January 2026, welcomes the signing of the SDPs and refers to the significance of the 'tailor-made security and defence partnerships that focus on delivering results, enhancing capabilities and reducing overall dependencies on single actors and providers'. However, it stresses that 'in order for an SDP to be effective, it must be complemented by economic diplomacy that strengthens resilience and reduces dependencies'. Parliament's January 2026 [resolution](#) on the implementation of the CFSP in 2025 urges mobilisation of the EU's regional and global partnerships and alliances, underscoring that these need to be based on a level playing field among the partners. The resolution takes note of the SDP with Canada and supports Canada's participation in the SAFE instrument. In its [resolution](#) of 12 March 2025 on the white paper on the future of European defence, Parliament similarly underlines the need to enhance the EU's partnerships with like-minded countries. Parliament's [resolution](#) of 23 November 2023 on the Strategic Compass and EU space-based defence capabilities highlights the significance of the Strategic Compass's 'partner' dimension and, in particular, calls for 'deeper cooperation and for alliances to be established with a broader set of EU strategic partners'.

Outlook

While around 10 areas of cooperation are common to all SDPs, each agreement also includes **tailor-made elements** reflecting the specific needs and interests of the EU and the respective partner (see Table 1). For example, while all SDPs provide for consultations on 'defence initiatives' and on 'defence tools and instruments', the partnerships with Japan, the Republic of Korea and India omit the latter, signalling the EU's preference for fostering closer **defence (industrial) links primarily with geographically proximate partners**. Similarly, the SDPs with Albania and North Macedonia include a dedicated area of cooperation on the **protection of cultural heritage in conflict and crisis situations**, which is absent from other partnerships. Additionally, reflecting the unique nature of cooperation between the **EU on one side and Norway and India on the other**, their tailored partnership agreements include a provision for enhanced exchanges on **consular matters**.

Experts initially expressed **mixed views on the level of ambition underpinning the new partnerships**. An earlier analytical [paper](#) by the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) argued that any form of new partnership, which it referred to as a 'Strategic Partnership Plus format', should move beyond a mere statement of intent and 'reflect the importance the EU attributes to the respective partnerships in contrast to others'. The new 'tailored' approach can be seen as an attempt to meet this objective, although its effectiveness will ultimately depend on **implementation**. Arguably, the presentation of the SAFE Regulation and its conditions governing third-country participation may have contributed to shifting this assessment. The same paper also suggested that a limited number of partners could be invited to participate on a regular basis in the Political and Security Committee and the Foreign Affairs Council, albeit without voting rights. Additionally, it advocated new administrative arrangements (AAs) with the EDA for close partners that do not already have such arrangements in place.

An [analysis](#) by the Wilfred Martens Centre for European Studies, focusing specifically on the partnership with Japan, observes that the partnership's success hinges both on the political limitations present in each partner country and on the relevance and priority attached to other allies, notably – for Japan – the United States. A [paper](#) by the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS) observes that the EU's active pursuit of SDPs with partners beyond Europe, and particularly in the Indo-Pacific (e.g. Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Australia and India) reflects an understanding that European security cannot be confined to the European theatre alone. Additionally, the author argues that SDPs can serve as a first step toward strengthening ties among states seeking to avoid full alignment with either the United States or China, thereby mitigating the risks of great power competition through cooperation with the EU.

Beyond the new SDP format, the EU maintains a wide range of security and defence arrangements with partners such as **NATO, the United States, the African Union** and a host of other countries, including AAs with the EDA, framework participation agreements and bilateral single- or multi-focus dialogues. In this broader European security landscape, the above-mentioned EUISS paper identifies **around 200 defence partnerships**, encompassing both EU-level frameworks and a variety of bilateral agreements between EU Member States, as well as between Member States and third countries. However, as this briefing focuses on the new tailored SDP instrument, the analysis is limited to the nine countries with which the EU has concluded such an agreement.

Table 1 – Areas of cooperation covered by the EU's tailored SDPs, by partner

	Areas of cooperation and relevant activities	NATO PfP partner	NATO Allies					NATO Global Partners		
			EU candidate countries					EFTA state		
	Partner	Moldova	Albania	North Macedonia	Canada	UK	Norway	Japan	Republic of Korea	India
	Date	21 May 2024	19 Nov. 2024	19 Nov. 2024	23 June 2025	19 May 2025	28 May 2024	1 Nov. 2024	4 Nov. 2024	27 Jan. 2026
1	EU CSDP missions and operations and training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Hybrid threats	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Cyber issues	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Coordination/cooperation on (cyber) capacity building	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Coordination/cooperation on capacity building for partners	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	STRATCOM and/or FIMI	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
7	Non-proliferation and disarmament, conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Counterterrorism and preventing/countering violent extremism	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

9	Consultations on relevant defence initiatives	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Consultations on relevant defence tools and/or instruments	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
11	Training and/or education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Integrated border management	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
13	Women, peace and security	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	(Continued long-term) support for Ukraine	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
15	Maritime security	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Space security and defence	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Resilience of critical infrastructure	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
18	International peace/peace mediation/conflict prevention/crisis management	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	Deepening exchanges/coordination on consular matters	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
20	Coordination/cooperation in international fora	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	(External aspects of) Economic security	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
22	Possibility to conclude an agreement on security of information	Already exists	Already exists	Already exists	Already exists	Already exists	Already exists	✓	✓	✓
23	Possibility to establish secure communication connection	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
24	(External aspects of) Human trafficking and transnational organised crime	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
25	Protection of cultural heritage in conflict and crises	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
26	Emerging disruptive technologies	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓

Sources: Security and defence partnerships between the EU and the [Republic of Moldova](#) (May 2024); [Norway](#) (May 2024); [Japan](#) (November 2024); the [Republic of Korea](#) (November 2024); [North Macedonia](#) (November 2024); [Albania](#) (November 2024); [Canada](#) (June 2025); [UK](#) (May 2025); [India](#) (January 2026).

Note: This list non-exhaustive; it assesses the presence or absence of areas of cooperation in the agreements. Similar areas of cooperation implicitly or more vaguely present in the agreements may not be listed.

MAIN REFERENCE

Lazarou, E. and Stanicek, B., [Mapping threats to peace and democracy worldwide: Normandy Index 2024](#), EPRS, European Parliament, September 2024.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ European External Action Service, '[The EU's Expanding Toolkit for Partnerships in Peace and Security](#)', May 2024.
- ² Norway has expressed keen interest in protecting underwater (e.g. energy and telecommunications) infrastructure in the North Sea. In April 2024, Norway signed a [Joint Declaration on cooperation to secure critical subsea infrastructure](#) with Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. Moreover, a Norwegian-German initiative to strengthen NATO's role in protecting undersea infrastructure has recently been [signed](#).
- ³ Japan and the EU will contribute to a joint panel discussion of the First and the Fourth UN Committees on challenges relating to space security and sustainability.
- ⁴ Special reference is made to the DPRK's illicit cyber activities, used to fund its WMDs and ballistic missiles.
- ⁵ Albania: security and defence dialogue to take place annually; North Macedonia: no reference specified.

DISCLAIMER AND COPYRIGHT

This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament.

Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.

© European Union, 2026.

Photo credits: © luzitanija / Adobe Stock.

eprs@ep.europa.eu (contact)

<https://eprs.in.ep.europa.eu> (intranet)

www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank (internet)

<http://epthinktank.eu> (blog)