

“Defence and Security Union”: beyond pandemic crisis

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In an international scenario where the growing and uncontrolled competition at all levels is accompanied by return to traditional confrontation of powers in a context of weakening the solidity of the Western world and wearing out the Transatlantic and European cohesion, **Defence ministers of France, Germany, Italy and Spain signed a letter on May 29** addressed to their counterparts from the other 23 EU Member States as well as the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, aimed at reviving the theme of a “Defence Europe.”

The document, **overcoming the short-term emergency perspective**, intended to take a **step towards a more ambitious defence policy**, along a path of redefining security, with the aim of deploying common crisis management tools. The four ministers of the promoter countries first reaffirm their **commitment to reinforced European cooperation in the field of security and defence** and for an exchange of reflections on joint actions towards a more united, resilient and sovereign Europe .

The letter, signed by the representatives of the **four main Member States of the Union in terms of population, GDP and military capabilities**, is therefore of **significant political importance**, for the commitment to **considerably intensify efforts and to work for a more integrated European Union, efficient and capable of acting on the international scene**.

There is thus confirmed **the willing to progress towards a "defence Europe"** capable of meeting future challenges, **protecting citizens and contributing fully to economic recovery**.

Seven priority lines of action are proposed for the coming months.

1. Enhancing solidarity and resilience of the EU and the EU Member States.
2. Strengthening PESCO as the central political framework for European defence cooperation.
3. Reducing our critical dependencies, reinforcing the European Defence Technology and Industrial Base and enhancing our capabilities.
4. Strategic Compass: progressing towards a greater common understanding of the threats and challenges we face and how to tackle them.
5. Strengthening our operational commitment.

6. Improving the coherence of EU tools.

7. Cooperating with NATO and partners.

The document **puts together a complex set of initiatives** already underway and relaunches them with the intention of avoiding the risk that the attention monopolized by the coronavirus pandemic, also for its very heavy economic implications, ends up underestimating other factors of international insecurity which pre-existed and that remain active.

In order to increase the solidarity and resilience of the Union and the single Member States in the face of crises and hybrid threats, **the promoters of the initiative hope to strengthen the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)** as the key framework for European defence cooperation, both by pursuing industrial, technological and digital “sovereignty” (to reduce dependence on non-European suppliers), and by sharing analysis and the definition of threats.

In addition, it is underlined that favouring investment projects between European partners and making defence industries more competitive can represent an important lever for the recovery of the economy of the EU countries in the post-pandemic.

In other words, there is a need to better link economic policies to security and defence interests. In this context, the European Defence Fund (EDF), properly powered, is fundamental.

Finally, the signatories point out that **NATO remains the cornerstone of collective defence** and that France, Germany, Italy and Spain remain committed to strengthening the European defence pillar. Nonetheless, the commitment is also to advance cooperation on this matter with other partner organizations, in particular the UN.

At a time when faced with **commitments for a sustainable, uniform, inclusive and fair recovery for all EU Member States** – as stated by the European Commission in its *Next Generation* proposal articulated on **three pillars**: a) *Support to Member States with investments and reforms*; b) *Kick-starting the EU economy by incentivising private investments*; c) *Addressing the lessons of the crisis* – there is no explicit mention of defence and connected challenges at European level, **Defence ministers of the four countries drew attention to the fact that precisely the current Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated the need for a stronger Europe**, capable of controlling key technologies and production capacities, **in the interest of the ‘safety and security’ of all European citizens.**

Indeed, as the letter concludes: *“The COVID-19 crisis highlighted that the safety and security of European citizens is indeed a global challenge, one that calls for more solidarity, more resilience and more sovereignty. This requires strong and effective instruments, solid processes and pragmatic and coherent cooperation frameworks.”*