European Union

The Role of the European Union in Regional Security: The Drone Wall

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Introduction

For the European Union (EU) to step into the realm of defense policy and coordination is not natural. Created in 1951 as the European Coal and Steel Committee, the EU was established to promote economic development, especially trade. It evolved to embrace open-border cooperation. The result is a rules-based community of 27 member states structured to bind the members through commerce and shared prosperity, not through military defense.

The idea of a European army was always treated as a ‘federalist fantasy’. Instead, EU countries continue rely on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States for their defense. Only NATO brings support from the United States and the mutual defense pledge, its Article 5 commitment, under the 1949 Washington Treaty.

A shift is gradually occurring towards such a federalist defense posture brought about by extreme fear forged on the battleground for Ukraine's sovereign identity. After almost four years of the Russia-Ukraine war, the human cost is staggering, compelling the EU and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to reassess their approach to defense, policy framework, and military capabilities.

Two conventional developments have come to define this defense policy shift, *drone* and *counter-drone* initiatives. Drones in Ukraine transformed war for everyone. Russian drone incursions into European airspace are becoming routine. Russia has been redirecting Ukrainian drones to hit EU countries (Kovalchuk 2026). The day seems closer and closer when a Russian drone makes a destructive attack on European Union soil, or a drone attack from Iran or terrorists hits a European military base or government office.

Russia's hybrid (or psychological) warfare on Europe and the U.S.'s dwindling security alliance with Europe are forcing both the EU and NATO to modify their defense posture through collective resilience and advancement in defense technology and industrial empowerment.

Europe’s goal is to achieve such a security against drone attacks through the European Drone Defense Initiative (EDDI), Low-Cost Effectors and Autonomous Platforms (LEAP), and the European Long-Range Strike Approach (ELSA) (Fix 2026; Shumlianskyi 2026). But are they up to the threat?

Delegates at ODUMUNC 50’s European Commission face a world in which American

assurances through NATO are fast being undermined from Washington, while the EU is poorly equipped to compensate. Defense policy integration through the European Union might provide a bridge between national defense prerogatives and regional autonomy.



Figure 1. *Disarming an explosive drone at Leipzig/Halle Airport in Schkeuditz, Germany, 5 August 2026, thought to be sent by Russia. Reuters.*

However, political disagreement over leadership, goals and spending greatly complicate such hopes. The great powers in Europe, traditionally France and Germany, fear a shift in the balance of power which favors the European Commission.

European middle powers like Italy, Spain and Poland demand a more prominent role. Smaller states like the Baltic States and Finland think a drone wall is essential now. Others further from Russia are less excited. And all fear any European success will be used by Washington to justify further American withdrawal, leaving them worse off.

This adds up to an existential crisis for Europe. Can the dangers of drone attack be mitigated through strategic defense and security flexibility? What can be achieved through European institutional coordination and adoption of defense frameworks and technology? What lessons can be imported from Ukraine (Wright 2024; Clapp 2025; C. Edwards et al. 2026)?

Background

With the end of the Soviet Union and the Cold War in 1991, problems of military security and defense in Europe seemed remote. Even reliance on the United States for security guarantees seemed less necessary. While European countries were fully committed to preserving NATO and their relations with the United States, there was a

general desire to build Europe's distinct capabilities for the post-Cold War world. Where they previously stressed national security against threats from the Soviet Union, with support from NATO and the United States, opportunities were envisioned for military cooperation in new areas such as international peacekeeping, cooperative weapons development and production.

The result was the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Fearful of endangering NATO and cooperation with the United States, CSDP was crafted to avoid overlap. In practice, CSDP showed the limits of EU-sponsored defense policy cooperation.

European countries still leave defense under the operational control of their own defense ministries and their national militaries. All war planning—coordination of operational planning—is done exclusively through NATO. The EU focuses on areas of defense policy where civilian cooperation matters most, such as international peacekeeping, European defense-industrial projects and areas like space policy and cyber security.

At the same time, political administration and institutions have strived to determine the policy framework and governance on defense, particularly how defense planning and operations affect the social and economic dynamics of society. Tagarev (2006, 15) implies that planning applies exclusively to the military and to its use of force to engage with and resolve political interests. There exist diverse areas of defense policy, ranging from traditional to Cyber, AI, and missile defense, connected to political theories and conceptual analysis. However, in this brief, defense policy will be analyzed from the perspective of drone and counter-drone concepts, strategy, and initiatives in relation to the EU and NATO defense strategy. The defense posture of the EU and NATO is rooted in geopolitical territorial security, and there is currently a fundamental shift in conceptual frameworks from burden sharing to burden shifting and autonomy. This is largely driven by the perceived decrease in the reliability of the U.S. security guarantee and Russian hybrid aggression and incursion in Europe (Melike 2026; Antoaneta 2026).

Most scholars, like Balmus et al (2026, 26), argue that the European drone wall concept is patterning a new line of defense. However, the implementation and operation of this drone wall concept is creating political tension between Eastern and Western Europe, with the East desperate to counter Russia and the West desperate not to be ignored.

Russia's alleged deployment of UAVs enabled through shadow-fleet vessels in international waters undermines the existing defense framework in Europe. This has uncovered critical gaps in NATO air defenses, command responses, and the dichotomy between political and military policy in threat engagement, neutralization, and containment. Shadow UAVs have infiltrated European defense infrastructure, including American bases and nuclear weapons coordination sites. Another target was the French ballistic missile submarine based at Île Longue.

Despite these offensive assaults by Russia, Europe continues to be fragmented in its defense strategy and concessions, compounded by deep historical resentment over power hierarchy and balance that benefits France and Germany most politically, while maintaining a strategic US security alliance and presence in Europe (C. Edwards et al. 2026, 8).

Russia's response to the drone wall initiative is strong political condemnation coupled with tactical countermeasures, camouflage, and adaptation to the growing threat of drone innovation and counter-drone systems. Russia uses the Germes (Hermes) short-range man-portable air defense system and Volna Kuol Garant jamming system, disrupting the Starlink satellite network that Ukraine uses to pilot many of its drones (Hunder 2024; TASS 2026b).

Russian government spokesman Dmitry Peskov characterized the EU drone wall initiative as a dangerous step, a militaristic approach over diplomatic dialogue and security guarantee

resolution. While maintaining no involvement in Europe's drone incursion, Russia's Foreign Ministry stated that these defense measures will only escalate military tension across Europe and fuel geopolitical bias against Russia (Ary News 2025).



Figure 2. *US Air Force B-1B bombers scramble on 4 October 2026, evacuating their airbase in England after men were arrested apparently starting an Iranian-linked drone attack. Associated Press.*

Current Situation

The concept of the drone wall can be traced back to May 2023 when the then-Lithuanian Interior Minister Agnė Bilotaitė proposed the initiative as part of the broader efforts to secure border defense within NATO's eastern flank through collective surveillance. The European Council of 23 October 2025 did not approve the roadmap for the Readiness 2030 plan, which the European Commission (EC) presented on 16 October 2025. Amongst the defense priority initiatives proposed by the EC was the EDDI, also known as the EU Drone Wall (Holler 2025; Maulny 2025).

Political pressure and support have been fragmented within the European Union between Eastern and Western Europe. French President Emmanuel Macron kicks against the oversimplification of the Drone Wall concept while advocating for a modern early-warning system that detects threats more effectively.

Additionally, members of the EU and NATO have raised questions regarding how the drone wall will operate, who controls the project, and the financial burden associated with the project. The foundation of these questions reflects concerns involving fairness, transparency, and strategic alliance, which are essential for establishing credibility in collective defense (Mihayloff 2025). This issue brief aims to analyze how the EU can build a credible, operational defense capability,

specifically in drones and counter-drone air defenses, without duplicating NATO's efforts, alienating non-EU allies, or abandoning its core identity as a civilian, trade-based union.

The Drone Wall Design (EDDI)

The idea regarding the EU drone wall is an aerial surveillance and defense integrated network. The strategy aims to harmonize collective security by incorporating technological advancement and innovation in defense infrastructures and digital systems, focusing on drones and counter-drone sensory transmission.

According to M. Rosenkranz (2026), the EDDI is a multi-layered system programmed to detect, track, and neutralize enemy drones while equipped with precision strike capabilities. The EDDI was originally intended to be launched in the first quarter of 2026, reach its first defense integration by the end of the year, and become fully interoperable by the end of 2027.

It was initially aimed at countries within the EU's 4,000-kilometer eastern border. However, other EU countries have also shown interest in the initiative and called for comprehensive implementation of the initiative. Although the EU does not have all the details of the initiative figured out, tentatively the eastern border drone wall is estimated to be 100 kilometers in length and 15 kilometers in depth, while around 5,000 soldiers, divided into several battalions, are to defend and support the initiative.

Components

The drone wall is designed to consist of multiple sensor networks, encompassing combat air drones (UAV's), land drones (UGVs), and sea drones (USVs) that operate as surveillance intelligence protecting the borders of the EU from malicious threats. Additionally, a multi-level countermeasure system and a C4ISR command and control information system are to serve as an interoperability platform for the EU.

The networking of different sensors such as acoustic sensors and seismic sensors provides a multispectral defense capability, with Artificial Intelligence (AI) playing a central role in the automation of real-time data and reaction speed of these sensors. The drone wall is equipped with Electro-Optical (EO) and Thermal Imaging (IR) modules. The EO modules provide high-resolution images of objects, their direction of movement, and surroundings, while the IR modules register heat signatures of objects, enabling detection despite targets' camouflage or speed.

The EDDI is also meant to have 60 passive radio frequency spectrum analyzers per 100 kilometers interlinking the sensors, coupled with electromagnetic attack devices capable of suppressing drone control and blocking transmission channels. Radars like the Saab Giraffe 1X, Hensoldt TRML-4D, APS SkyCtrl, or Echodyne Echoshield are essential active radar systems to be incorporated into the drone wall initiative for defense coordination measures. This is because they can detect unmanned flying objects that conceal communication signals, like autonomous drones or fiber optic control devices (Rosenkranz 2026).

Role of the EU

Under the Treaty on European Union (TEU or Maastricht Treaty or 1993), the foundation of the European Union, the EU is an economic and trade coordinator and implementer. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, and drone incursions into member states' territory, the EU's role has shifted to defense policy coordinator, funder, and regulator. This shift, although unprecedented, is legitimate and provided for under Articles 24 and 42 of the TEU, which approved the EU to establish a progressive framing of Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) and Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), an integral part of the EU that might lead to collective defense enforcement.

However, this collective defense framework is very limited. It can only apply within the

boundaries of Article 4(2), which provides that issues of national security remain the sole responsibility of each Member State. The EU cannot make defense policy. This means that the EU cannot conduct a military operation on its own but can engage in Joint forces defense, whether for preemptive security measures or solidarity defense strategy under Article 222 (TEU 1997).

In 2021, the European Peace Facility (EPF) was established as an off-budget fund worth €17 billion, for a period of seven (7) years under the 2021- 2027 multiannual financial framework. It is designed to be financed outside the EU budget for the prevention of conflict, preservation of peace and the strengthening of international security. For the first time, the EPF funded the supply of lethal weapons to Ukraine, including the EU Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM) for Ukrainian soldiers' military training (EEAS 2025; UWA 2026).

In contrast, the EU member states serve as sovereign operators and procuring entities. They decide on the purchase, deployment, and use of defense systems, inclusive of drones and counter-drone systems. When it comes to implementing defense policy, it remains the sole responsibility of member states to comply, despite the European Council's unanimous decisions on defense and security matters. This sovereign autonomy of states can weaken the regional authority of the EU and at most encourage selective collaboration, policy incentives, mutual funding, and the promotion of industrial procurement channels for member states, and certainly not truly collective security or defense. This is a limitation embedded in the EU constitutional framework which will require reform if collective security and not cooperation is to be strengthened (Horn 2025).

Landmark EU Resolutions

On 11 February 2026, the EC presented the EU with an Action Plan on Drone and Counter-Drone Security. The policy framework prioritized the civilian internal security dimension while complementing the defense domain strategy on fighting malicious drones through civil-military synergies.

The Action Plan calls for stronger EU cooperation and solidarity. Its defense readiness focuses on Europe's resilience against drone incursions and boosting its capacity to detect malicious drone activities. The EC proposes to realize this action plan through the creation of a single air display system, integrating and compiling relevant data on drone activities, in order to identify legitimate drones while exploring novel means of monitoring drone incidents (EC 2026a, b).

The Action plan aims to revise the EU rules and procedures for the operation of unmanned aircraft, which came into effect on May 24, 2019. This policy regulation permitted unmanned aircraft, irrespective of their mass, to operate along manned aircraft within the same single European Sky airspace. However, the EC intends to tighten drone registration in the EU and invest in digital networks, especially by increasing its 5G-based stations and cooperation with Ukraine on drone and counter-drone development (EUR-Lex 2019; Carpenter-Zehe 2026).

Role of NATO

While the EU was created for trade, NATO is only about mutual defense. NATO is a defense alliance, designed to ensure European faith that the United States will come to their aid if they are attacked by Russia. Under US President Trump, NATO’s reliability has been systematically undermined.

Overlap between the two organizations comes through shared membership. Twenty-three of NATO’s 32 member states are also part of the EU, giving NATO a foothold in the affairs of the EU.

NATO endorsed the strategy for industry-NATO cooperation on 3 July 2026, to operate alongside NATO’s Front Door for Industry, in order to boost industrial and technological relations with NATO’s mission. Implementing the European drone wall initiative has faced challenges ranging from political hedging to keep the US, British, and

Turkish industrial capabilities within NATO's interoperability framework to power bias over preserving states' autonomy (Sedlák 2026).

However, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania already formed such an alliance to develop a counter-drone structure called the Baltic Defense Line (BDL). The network combines traditional military infrastructures, including observation posts, anti-armor obstacles, and bunkers, with a technologically advanced surveillance system that links its borders with Russia and Belarus. This defense initiative became politically campaigned for, especially within the Eastern flank states, which are more exposed to Russian drone incursions and territorial invasion (Clapp 2025).

The BDL is proposed to become integrated into NATO's Operation Eastern Sentry for effective interoperability, particularly in countering threats from malicious unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). This makes the EU drone wall a multi-dimensional initiative, extending beyond not only military defense securitization but also several institutional policy integrations, governance, and strategic implementation.

Landmark NATO Resolutions

NATO has been busy, too. On 7 July 2026, NATO's Drone Edge was launched as a critical framework in exploring how drones have impacted states' military approach to modern warfare. It is not a direct rival of the EU drone wall, although there is overlap. NATO's Drone Edge stresses industrial cooperation and procurement mostly. It includes technology for finding and intercepting enemy drone. But it is not for war fighting.

NATO members have pledged to invest over USD 40 billion in the Drone Edge Initiative over the next five years. The objective is to create a NATO drone and counter-drone marketplace that complements existing national marketplaces and industrial procurement efforts, while increasing drone operators in the armed forces by up to fivefold by 2027 (Lehkobyt et al. 2025, 10; NATO 2026b).

Following the launch of the first Adoption Board on 10 September 2026, by NATO's Allied Command Transformation, stressed four beacon drone projects:

1. Smart Counter-Drone Solutions,
2. Multi-Domain Maritime Surveillance Network,
3. Next Gen Targeting Network, and
4. AI Audacious Training.

On this basis, the Layered Counter UAS Initiative, known as LCI-X, was established to enhance continuous learning cycles every three months for counter-drone technology adaptation and resilience. The aim is to promote joint learning and experimentation while integrating sensors, command systems, and defensive mechanisms proven successful into a coherent, layered defense network.

The first implementation of the LCI-X project was the Crucible 1-26, which had 21 Allied nations represented and participating through companies and defense industrial delegations. Up to 500 personnel and roughly 215 technical systems engaged in testing and experimentation of the counter-UAS capabilities, shortcomings, and areas of fortification (NATO 2025, 2026a). Additionally, NATO is proceeding with the acquisition of up to ten Saab GlobalEye surveillance aircraft to replace the aging 14E-3A AWACS fleet of over five decades. This also makes NATO's role parallel and complementary to the EU's function when it comes to defense policy coordination, procurement, and pooling resources for military advancement and diplomatic trust-building (Panorama 2026).

Country Positions

Eastern emphasis on a wall against Russia: Nations like Poland, Romania, and the Baltics see the drone wall initiative as a front-line necessity. Poland's Eastern Shield is designed to serve as a physical barrier, fortified with modern

surveillance systems and sensors to detect drone deployments.

Additionally, the Joint Initiative of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, known as the BDL, is structured to link their eastern borders with Belarus and Russia's Kaliningrad exclave, and has invested in its implementation through funds from the SAFE Program. Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia jointly received €14 billion, while Poland received €43.7 billion solely for the defense readiness of the Eastern borders.

The long time for the drone wall to be built makes the Eastern flank sensitive and vulnerable to further Russian drone incursions. The Polish eastern shield is estimated to take two years to complete, stretching over 7000 kilometers according to Polish Deputy Defense Minister Cezary Tomczyk, therefore making matters of defense and security an existential crisis for the politics of Eastern Europe (Yan 2025; TASS 2026a).

A key aspect of the BDL initiative was gained from Ukraine's invaluable, battle-tested expertise on drone warfare and collaborative integration of technical knowledge. The significance of such joint defensive measures lies in strengthening Europe's defense posture in response to Russian unceasing aggression, but political dilemmas arise when such a joint force operation can be interpreted as a new Cold War frontier. The chances of defensive miscalculation, unpredictability, and escalation are higher because of the urgency and fear underpinning the Eastern Flank defense policy relating to deterrence measures and anticipation of military confrontation with Russia.

Western hope for a comprehensive approach: The disagreement regarding the drone initiative hinges on maintaining states' defense autonomy. Some prefer an inclusive drone program that has the US defense force allied to it. Western states like France and Germany are skeptical of the EU having absolute defense mechanisms that rival state-independent military capacities. Western European powers would rather leverage fragmented collaborative defense coalitions than an integrated regional defense framework.

Europe is struggling to strengthen its own defense. This is because the U.S., under the Trump administration, has shown uncertainty about continuing to defend Europe, particularly after removing U.S. troops from Germany and threatening to withdraw more, despite Russia's hybrid warfare and incursions in Europe (Fix 2026).

Important voices, led by French President Macron, say Europe needs a comprehensive, multi-layered defense system operating across all of Europe, Germany, France, Italy, Poland, and the United Kingdom – major European military powers and NATO members- have launched the development of affordable interceptor drones, called the LEAP program, in February 2026. Such a drone mechanism is vital to air defense, strike, and maneuver efficiency when it comes to combating Russia's drone assault and incursions. LEAP was adopted after battle-testing Ukraine's prototype and technology, while the UK was giving the license to begin large-scale production (Shumlianskyi 2026).

Some Proposals for Action

Unlike most other international bodies like the United Nations, decisions by the European Commission are binding on the 27 Member States. This gives the body enormous power, but also explains why it is slow and careful to act. A wrong move, forcing a Member State in a direction it does not want to go, could fracture the EU. Creating tension between the EU and NATO, or between Europe and the United States, is in no European's interest.

Also inhibiting the rise of the EU on defense is its historical identity as a trade and open-borders institution, its limited legislative mandate for defense policy, and overlapping procurement regimes and cooperation with NATO. In this situation, what institutional, industrial and

operational framework should the EU adopt to build an effective drone defense wall without jeopardizing other cooperation?

Complex financial structure

Funding for EU defense policy and operations comes through a complex system of shared financing. Member States and the European Commission (which has its own budget from state contributions) contribute financially. This leads member states negotiate over spending and control.

The money available is potentially substantial. The EU's Security Action for Europe (SAFE), adopted on 29 May 2025 bring loans wroth EUR 150 billion (USD 1770 bn). It is a temporary and exceptional instrument for member states to access financial assistance for urgent investment in European defense technology and industrial infrastructure, a reaction to extreme dangers after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and hybrid aggression against Europe.

So far, Poland is the biggest beneficiary of the SAFE fund, with EUR 43.7 billion (USD 50 bn) allocated for military modernization, which includes an anti-drone shield (Eur-Lex 2026; Bizness Pap 2026).

The European Defense Fund (EDF) is the EU's main instrument for financing defense research and capacity development. It has a budget of approximately EUR 7.3 billion (USD 8.4 bn) for 2021-2027 (EC 2025).

These defense projects are framed to align with NATO's capacity-building priorities while maintaining deterrence policy and civilian protection. However, these financial instruments reveal an overlap in the institutional framework and fragmentation in the process of policy implementation, further resulting in power struggles among members of the EU over how defense policy should be implemented, financed, procured, and integrated.

The eastern flank of the EU holds political attention for defense prioritization and emergencies, accumulating most of the financial resources while creating political tension over the cost of burden sharing and the distribution of security responsibilities.

This unbalanced prioritization has raised concerns among some Western European states like Germany, France, and Italy regarding disparities in defense financing, the emergence of security gaps, and the fiscal pressures associated with increasing defense expenditure. As defense spending rises alongside higher borrowing costs, member states face growing budgetary constraints that may weaken collective defense by encouraging greater political reliance on national autonomy rather than institutional governance (EC 2026b; Kesteloo 2025).

Therefore, there is a need to resolve the EU-NATO financial and procurement overlap. The current duplicated procurement system to finance drone and counter-drone systems should be narrowed down to avoid overproduction of irrelevant device infrastructures that easily become obsolete due to rapid advancement in defense technology.

Additionally, the EU and NATO could create a Joint Demand Annex and single-entry point systems for industrial enterprises to file compliance documentation. Moreover, the EU should be realistic with the limitations of its role. Since it is not a military alliance, the EU can further refine its coordinator role in defense industrial policy by pursuing uniformity in states' defense collective posture. Although this can be a bit too ambitious to attain.

Europe's Missile Renaissance?

Does security against drone attacks require the ability to strike first, to launch pre-emptive long-range attack on drone launchers? Many think there is no alternative, because point defense, intercepting drones one-by-one as they attack, is much harder than hitting launchers.

Europe currently lacks a deep-strike arsenal. This can be traced back to the Cold War era and the

rigid divisions of that era. To this day, many Europeans—left and right—are appalled by the idea of hitting Russia under any circumstances, to stop or hinder Russian attack on Europe.

After Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 and the U.S weakening security guarantee s to Europe, since 2025, Europe has witnessed a new call for a missile renaissance. Wright (2024) argues that some countries have indicated their interest in developing long-range conventional missiles through joint defense. In July 2024, France, Germany, Italy, and Poland launched ELSA, an effort to close the missile gap and the inability to reach a target range greater than 300 kilometers, to destroy Russian drone launchers and deter Russia from attacking.

A case be made that it is high time to integrate ELSA into the NATO defense framework to leverage broader resource channels available to the institution. Conversely, at the NATO Summit held in Ankara, the British Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced a joint effort by NATO member states, including Canada, to develop long-range, deep-precision strike capabilities. States such as Britain, France, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Greece, Czechia, Slovakia, Turkey and Canada pledged to spend USD 50 billion to finance this project. The new ground-based missile is said to have the capability to reach a 2000 km (1250 mile) range and take 10 years to develop.

The EU could incentivize the production of low-cost drones and interceptors while making policy exceptions for innovative defense capabilities that cannot be produced in Europe at scale and within a reasonable timeframe. This pragmatism allows for defense diversification and flexibility.

Finally, many are convinced European defense requires an outside balancer, a third-party, whose committed to Europe's survival. This could be another global power or the revitalization of the EU itself, emerging as the superstate many fear, but which may be essential for European survival.

Although the U.S. was the third-party, outside ally, for some 70 years, that cannot be relied on now. Russia has no incentive to stop its hybrid warfare on Europe and will undermine states' independent acts of military defense unless Europe's defense strategy shifts from collaboration to integration. The complementary roles of the European Union, European Commission and NATO on drones and counter-drones initiatives stand a better chance when defense is strategically interoperable and within a flexible mutual policy framework that provides long-term political resilience, coupled with strategic technological innovation aimed at collective autonomy of Europe as a whole (Kohanets 2026, 11; C. Edwards et al. 2026).

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