

Proposal on a Common European Defence



POLICY PROPOSAL
2025

Union of European Federalists

Rationale

While there is broad recognition of the need for Common European Defence under the current geopolitical environment, including the collapse of the transatlantic alliance, there is still a lack of political leadership in both fostering it and in defining and implementing a concrete work plan within a short time frame. The main obstacles are political fragmentation, an undefined and therefore non-agreed end-goal, a lack of trust among member states, and, more significantly, the lack of political courage to pursue existing initiatives and institutional pathways. The absence so far of genuine political consensus among governments and European institutions on how to move forward is further complicated by institutional obstacles such as the unanimity rule.

The prevailing temptation is to simply increase national military spending within the NATO framework. However, accumulating national defence expenditures does not contribute to a truly European defence. Such an approach does nothing to improve Europe's standing in power dynamics vis-a-vis Trump's US, either within or outside NATO.

With this Proposal the **Union of European Federalists** aims to stimulate reaching a political solution on such an urgent and a critical question with a concrete proposal for a **European Common Defence** in accordance and in any event **compatible with the Treaty of Lisbon**, in view of the upcoming meeting of the **European Council on 6th March**, the **Plenary of the European Parliament of 10th March**, and the publication of the **White Paper on Defence on 19th March, 2025**.

Brussels, 4 March 2025

Domènec Ruiz Devesa

President of the Union of European Federalists and former Member of the European Parliament

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Proposal on a Common European Defence

The Union of European Federalists proposes a Common European Defence

As war rages on European eastern borders and transatlantic alliance is in danger, the Union of European Federalists releases a proposal for a **Common European Defence System (EDS)**, in view of the upcoming meeting of the European Council on 6th March, the Plenary of the European Parliament of 10th March, and the publication of the White Paper on Defence on 19th March, 2025.

The EDS consists of the national armies of the Member States and a 28th European Army, coordinated in a common structure. The EDS would be compatible with NATO and could serve as its European Pillar.

The proposal calls for :

- Massive joint defence investment, procurement, and research, as Russia's military expenditure, calculated in purchasing power parity, has surpassed Europe's combined defence spending last year
- Extension of Common Security and Defence Policy missions to territorial defence and security in our immediate neighborhood
- A Rapid Deployment Capacity of 60.000 soldiers, becoming a 28th European Army, complementary to the 27 national armies in charge of territorial defence
- Europeanisation of French nuclear capabilities with shared financing from willing EU member states.

To finance the EDS, as proposed today, 4 March 2025, by the President of the European Commission, we recommend exempting defence investments from the deficit rule calculation of the Stability and Growth Pact, particularly for joint EU projects.

We also call for new EU federal bonds backed up by additional own resources, and the use of the digital euro to set up a Defence Bank.

A European Defence System can be established by using the available provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon. A concrete progress with a **group of willing countries** is also possible to prevent a blockade by one or more Member States.

Setting up a Common European Defence is by nature a policy that defines, with monetary policy, a federal state. Therefore, whichever path will be the fastest and most effective, it will be a decisive step towards a European federation. This means an independent and democratic control of the EDS through the representatives of the European citizens and member States in the European Parliament and Council.

A democratic and fiscal reform, including the end of national vetoes in foreign and security policy, should be concluded as soon as possible in accordance with the European Parliament's proposal of November 2023.

A European federation with Common Defence will preserve national interests inside the EU and protect citizens and Member States against external aggressions. The time is now.

Context

In the Winter of 2025 Europe is living its most dangerous geopolitical moment since the end of the Second World War. The attempted humiliation of president Zelensky, a wartime ally, by Trump and Vance, in the Oval Office and in front of the world's TV cameras, on the 28th February has been followed by Trump pausing military aid to Ukraine on the 4th March. This move could pave the way for further actions by Trump, including lifting sanctions on Russia. It is just another reminder that Europe, like Britain in 1940, stands alone. Ursula von der Leyen announced the same day of Trump's decision, a EU defence plan to mobilise 800 billion euros to urgently boost its defence spending.

Never before the need to organise an effective and credible common defence of the Old Continent has been as urgent and as obvious as now. The creation of a new European security order is a precondition for the survival of our democracy, social model, economic prosperity, and global standing.

To the East, the full-scale war of aggression launched by the Russian dictator against the democratic and pro-European Ukraine, with the support of China, enters its fourth year, with continued bombing over civilian areas and infrastructure.

To the South, the turmoil in the Mediterranean, Africa, and the Middle East is also the consequence of a European power vacuum, and its inability to project peace and stability in its near abroad.

To the West, under an unpredictable president Trump, the United States is set to abandon Ukraine, question the US commitment to NATO, appears to believe in a world of spheres of influence, given its expansionistic claims in the North Atlantic and the Western Hemisphere, and follows an imperialist *divide et impera* policy towards the EU. Trump is seeking to impose a permanent ceasefire in unfavourable terms for Ukraine, and therefore Europe. This will jeopardise EU security.

The new US administration even proposed to

take control of most of Ukraine's mineral resources and infrastructures to make the aggressed country pay for the costs of the war instead of the invading one. As a reminder, war of aggression, which is clearly what is happening in Eastern Europe, is forbidden by the organization to which Russia belongs as a permanent member of its Security Council.

This is truly the 1945 rule-based order which is on the edge of collapsing because of imperial powers considering that some countries are legitimate to dominate others. The UN Charter was designed to not make again the mistakes that led to devastating world wars. Those principles of equality between nations are now challenged by the two key powers, Russia and the United States, who decided to create this international organisation to maintain peace.

Europe, having learned lessons from its own past, can be the last standing power which can defend a rule-based world order instead of a potential battleground for imperial powers at the expense of the weakest nations and social groups. But to do so, **Europe has to become a power**. That is, it must complete its process of political unification on a federal basis. Any initiative for the creation of a Common Defence must be considered in this context. There is a long way to go. But "*where there is a will, there is a way*".

We must acknowledge and raise awareness on the fact that setting up **a Common European Defence is a very different type of integration because it is by nature a policy that defines, with monetary policy, a federal state**. Therefore, **it must refer to a legitimate and democratic political power**, which in Europe can only be of a federal nature.

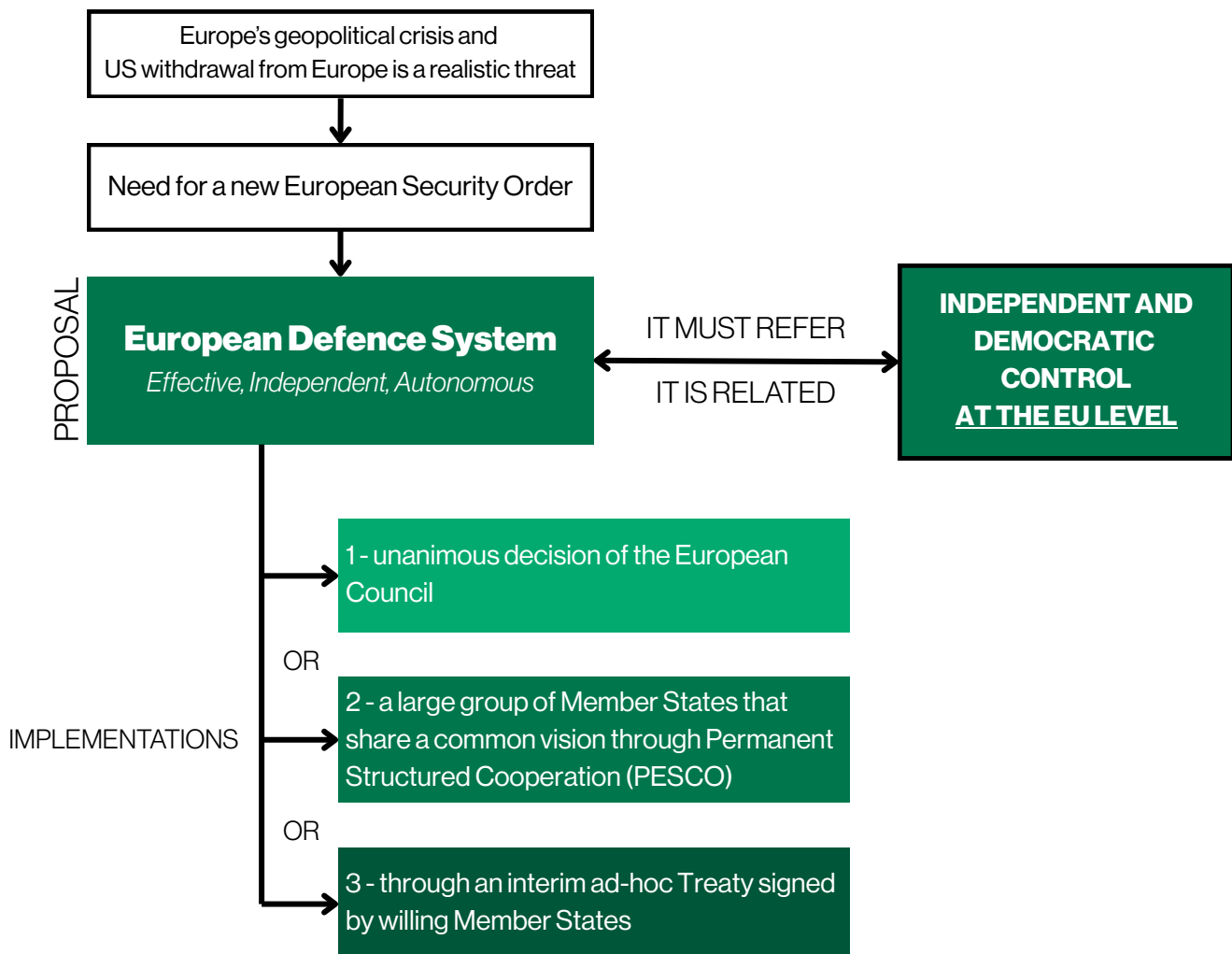
Whichever path will be the fastest and most effective, the **final objective we want to reach is a fully-fledged European Defence System**. It will be a decisive step towards a European federation, provided it is accompanied by an **independent and democratic control at the EU level**.

This should be clear at the beginning to avoid unexpected falling support from EU citizens and Member States. **It also raises the question of the guarantees the federation would offer as a counterpart to Member States to safeguard their autonomy on national matters, in line with the federal principle of subsidiarity.**

If in the past the common market and the euro have fostered political integration of Europe through spill-over effects, now security and defence integration is both a necessity and a wedge to open through a strong initiative on a precise point - as Monnet explained - the process of political convergence to give the EU a new identity in this historical moment and overcome institutional constraints.

Therefore, **defence integration could be done, either:**

1. by a **unanimous decision of the European Council;**
2. by a **large group of Member States that share a common vision through Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO);**
3. or, as a last resort, **through an interim ad-hoc Treaty signed by willing Member States,** to be integrated as soon as possible in the EU framework.



The need for Common Defence

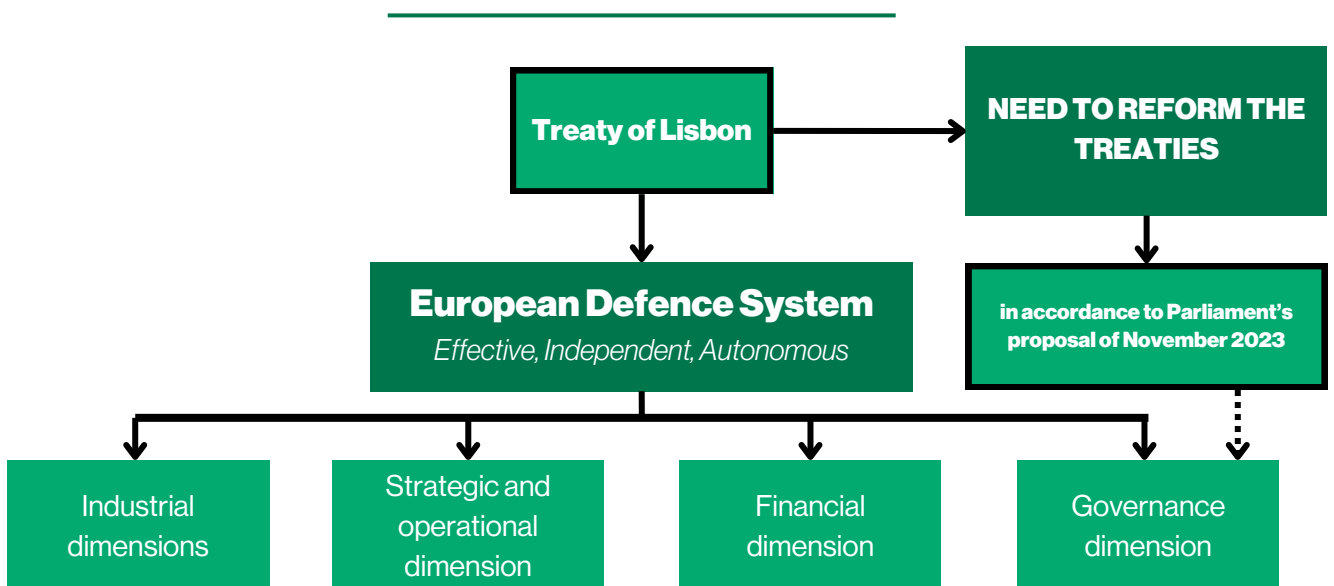
The new force model doctrine approved by NATO provides that in case of an attack Europeans must mobilize 300,000 troops within a month, and 500,000 within six months before any US troops are mobilised. However, a withdrawal of the 100,000 US armed forces from Europe, and/or the refusal of the current US government to provide military assistance to another NATO member in the event of a Russian attack is now, unfortunately, a realistic prospect that would endanger the said model. On such existential matters, Europe has no other choice but to think the unthinkable and develop its own Common Defence, including territorial defence and nuclear deterrence.

Therefore, we propose a determined, concrete, and rapid action for the establishment of a European Defence System (EDS) by using the available provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon, and otherwise in compatibility with it, notwithstanding the need to reform it as soon as possible in accordance to Parliament's proposal of November 2023, also in terms of the necessary fiscal and democratic backing of the proposed defence architecture, and the elimination of national vetoes in foreign and security policy.

Furthermore, even if today's leaders in reluctant countries may not be still in power forever, **concrete progress with a group of willing countries is also possible to prevent a blockade of EU defence by one or more Member States.**

The proposed EDS must be in line with the Niinistö report and its comprehensive, 360 degrees approach to security, and ensure civil and military preparedness, covering not only collective defence and peacekeeping but also countering sabotage, disinformation, hybrid threats, cyberwarfare, military artificial intelligence, drone warfare, and space security.

The EDS shall contain both the industrial and the military dimensions, including adequate defence planning and deployment capabilities, to guarantee the territorial defence of Europe. It should include an agreement on its financing and democratic governance.



The industrial dimension

Regarding the defence industrial dimension, Europe's combined 2024 defense spending was \$457 billion last year, half of the US defense budget, but Russia's military expenditure calculated in purchasing power parity would come to \$461.6 billion. Europe needs to do more, together, and fast. We support the Commission's first proposals - such as Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act (EDIRPA), and European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) - to increase the joint development and procurement of defence equipment, in line with the priority capabilities identified by the European Defence Agency (EDA), **and the 800 billion plan announced on 4th March (ReArm).**

The national fragmentation of the defence industries, and the exception clause to the internal market, implies continued capability gaps, duplication of capabilities, interoperability problems, foreign dependencies, and inefficient expenditure. The lack of defence cooperation results in an estimated annual loss of no less than 25 billion euros.

Plus, many advanced systems and platforms are too expensive to be developed by single Member States and their attractivity is hampered by certain licensing practices, notably restricting their maintenance.

Otherwise, the increase in national defence expenditures due to the Russian aggression, could result in a massively inefficient and uncoordinated exercise when it comes to the common operation and deplorability of weapons systems in the battlefield.

To strengthen the European Defence Industrial and Technical Base, **we call to achieve a 50 per cent target as soon as possible of**

- **joint research and innovation**
- **joint capability development**
- **joint procurement of defence equipment made in Europe, and the full inclusion of Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and other members of the European Political Community in this effort.**

The strategic and operational dimension

Regarding the defence planning and operational dimension, the Defence Union should include improved CSDP missions and operations, the Rapid Deployment Capacity, and the European Defence System.

First, we call for the streamlining and strengthening of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations (conducted by definition outside the Union) in order to also contribute to the territorial defence and security of Europe in our immediate neighbourhood. This means that they should be deployed in the near abroad (Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova, Caucasus).

In addition, we must increase naval CSDP missions to protect vital shipping lanes and underwater infrastructure, including in the Red, Baltic and Mediterranean Seas.

Second, the Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC), which is currently an entry force composed of Battle Groups for operations outside the Union, **should become operational this year and progressively attain the objective of 60.000 soldiers agreed in the Helsinki 1999 European Council**, with a strong focus on human resources management, training, retention and so on.

It is important to emphasize the fact that these

soldiers **must be permanently placed at the disposal of the EU** and not temporarily assigned, as is the case today, by Member States. **Over time the RDC should become a “28th army” and therefore an integral part of the EDS alongside the national armies, in charge of territorial defence.**

Third, we propose the creation of the EDS made up by the national armies of the Member States and the 28th European Army in a common planning, and a Common Computerized Command, Control, Communications, Surveillance, Reconnaissance, Target Acquisition (C4ISTAR) structure.

This constitutes a federal-oriented defence structure, by combining European and national capabilities.

It is of paramount importance to recall that, in accordance with article 42.2 of the Treaty on the European Union, the end goal of *“the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy”* is the establishment of *“a common defence”*, by a unanimous decision of the European Council, which shall be compatible with NATO.

This means that the Treaty of Lisbon offers the EU the possibility to organise the territorial defence of Europe, beyond the CSDP missions and operations for crisis management and peacekeeping outside the Union.

Such *“common defence”*, if established, will guarantee the orderly operationalization of the mutual assistance clause of article 42.7 TEU in the event of a military aggression to any EU Member State by Russia or any other aggressive power, alongside NATO. However, article 42.2 TEU requires a unanimous decision by the European Council.

Fortunately, **the Permanent Structured Cooperation on Defence (PESCO) is available for either implementing such a decision, or otherwise allowing a large group of Member States to proceed to establish the EDS.**

PESCO has so far been used mainly for defence industrial projects, but its potential is much wider. It is the ideal instrument to implement the institutionalisation of a Common Defence without further delay, even if unanimity is not reached in the European Council, through deciding by qualified majority to establish a European multinational force under Article 42.6 TEU and Article I.b of Protocol 10, and more concretely by strengthening the Rapid Deployment Capacity, thus creating a vanguard open to other Member States, like it happened at the time with the monetary union. Similarly, PESCO can be deployed to establish the EU Military Headquarters and the common command-and-control structure for the participating Member States, and to communitarise existing forms of military cooperation among certain Member states, like the Eurocorps, which already complies with NATO standards, thus speeding up the creation of the EDS.

The effective implementation of the EDS will require:

1. The conversion of the European Union Military Staff and the Military Planning and Conduct Capability into a fully-fledged EU Military Headquarters (EUMH) capable of conducting all types of CSDP missions but also the planning and coordination of territorial defence, with the possibility of adding Eurocorps to the EUMH.
2. The development of a military model, encompassing threats assessments, military means, wargaming and field doctrines.
3. The definition of a Force Model, including the needed numerical forces required for territorial defence in case of an EU-only response, in respect of the principle of the *“single set of forces”*.
4. The strengthening of the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre with direct information gathering capabilities and SatCen to avoid reliance on Musk’s Starlink.
5. A general plan for continental military mobility, that could be financed by the EU budget for the improvement of the infrastructure, such as roads, ports, aviation fields as well as shelters, to not only effectively transport and move troops and equipment, but also protect European citizens.

The European Defence System as NATO's European Pillar

The EDS could also be the “European Pillar of NATO”, by fulfilling the following requirements:

1. **At the political level:** The creation of a Euro-Atlantic Security Council (EASC) composed of the NATO Secretary General, the EU HRVP, and the Defence Ministers of EU and NATO Member States.
2. **At the strategic level:** The agreement on a coordination protocol between NATO and the EDS, including the exchange of classified information.
3. **At the operational level:** Use of NATO standards, manuals, force estimates, and alignment with the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP)

The EDS can therefore be mobilised by the EU in case of NATO's non activation.

The creation of the EDS will also imply a more balanced transatlantic partnership. The EU accession to the North Atlantic Treaty (not to the military structure) could also be envisaged, without prejudice to establishing the necessary special arrangements for non-NATO EU Member States.

Nuclear deterrence

As regards nuclear deterrence, it is indispensable and urgent to rely on capabilities that are not dependent from the US.

The best option is the Europeanisation of French capabilities, with their integration into the Common Defence, and with the contribution of willing EU Member States to its financing.

As underlined by the Chancellor-elect in Germany, **the question of power and burden-sharing of independent nuclear deterrence capacities on the continent should also be part of a new political and security compact**, to allow Europe to freely choose its own way.

Financing and governance

To finance the EDS we call to strengthen the European Investment Bank (EIB) mandate, and for a new issuance of EU federal bonds backed up by additional own resources, and the use of the digital euro, in order, inter alia, to set up a Defence Bank.

We recommend to exempt defence investments from the deficit rule calculation of the Stability and

Growth Pact, particularly for national contributions to the EU tools - such as EDA, ASAP, EDIRPA, EDIP, EDF, etc. – for investing in joint capabilities and procurement and projects of common interest, such as secure satellite communications or an anti-missile shield.

The HRVP would be responsible for coordinating the EDS and represent it externally, including PESCO member states in the event.

The latter would be responsible for externally representing the PESCO member states and coordinate the EDS. The European Parliament would play a role in exercising political oversight over the Commission/High Representative by approving annual reports on the implementation of PESCO and voting on potential motions of censure.

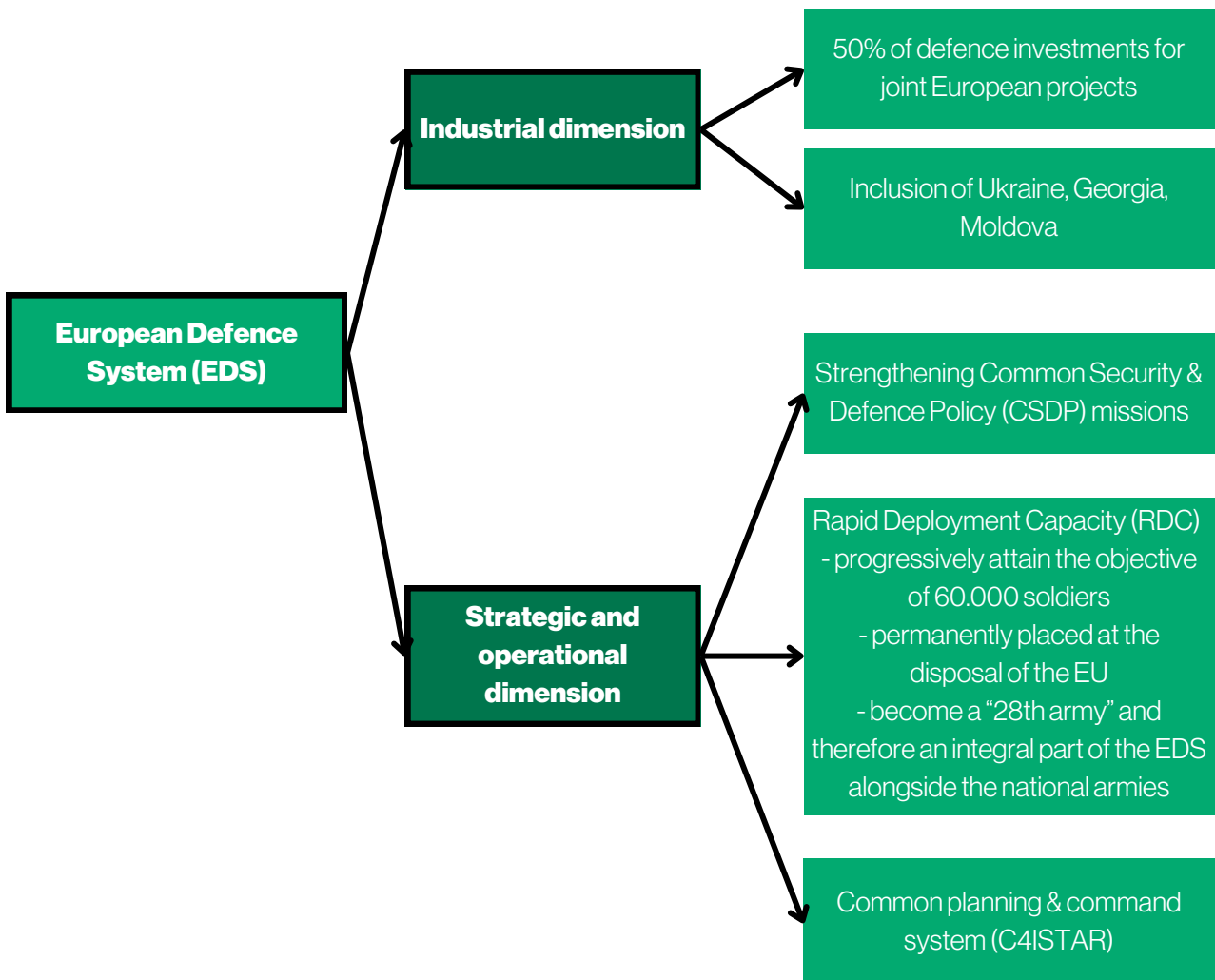
Moreover, it is necessary to fully associate the European Parliament in terms of conferring to the Common Defence the proper political authority and control, also by way of an interim Inter-Institutional Agreement with the European Council, pending a federal

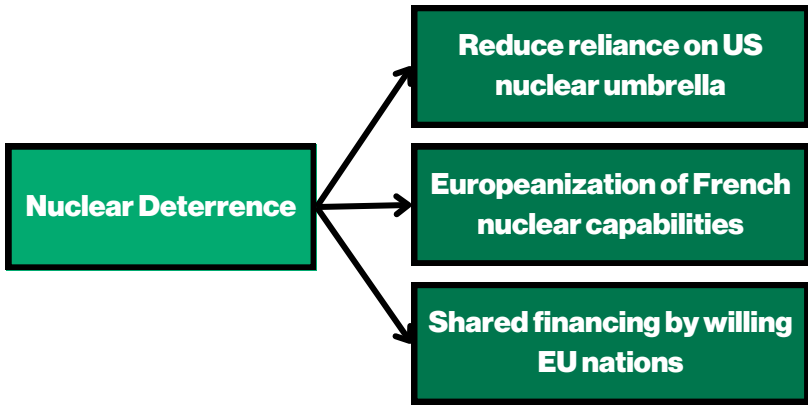
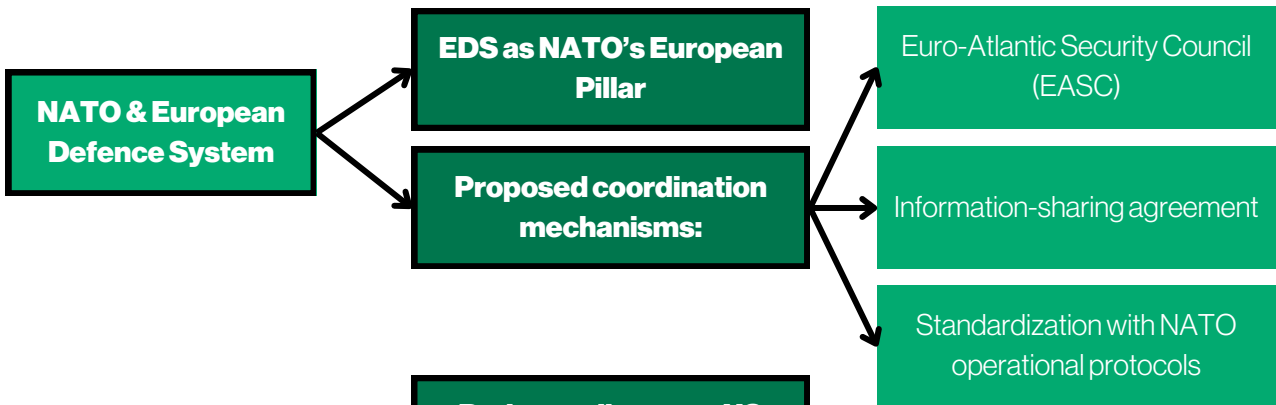
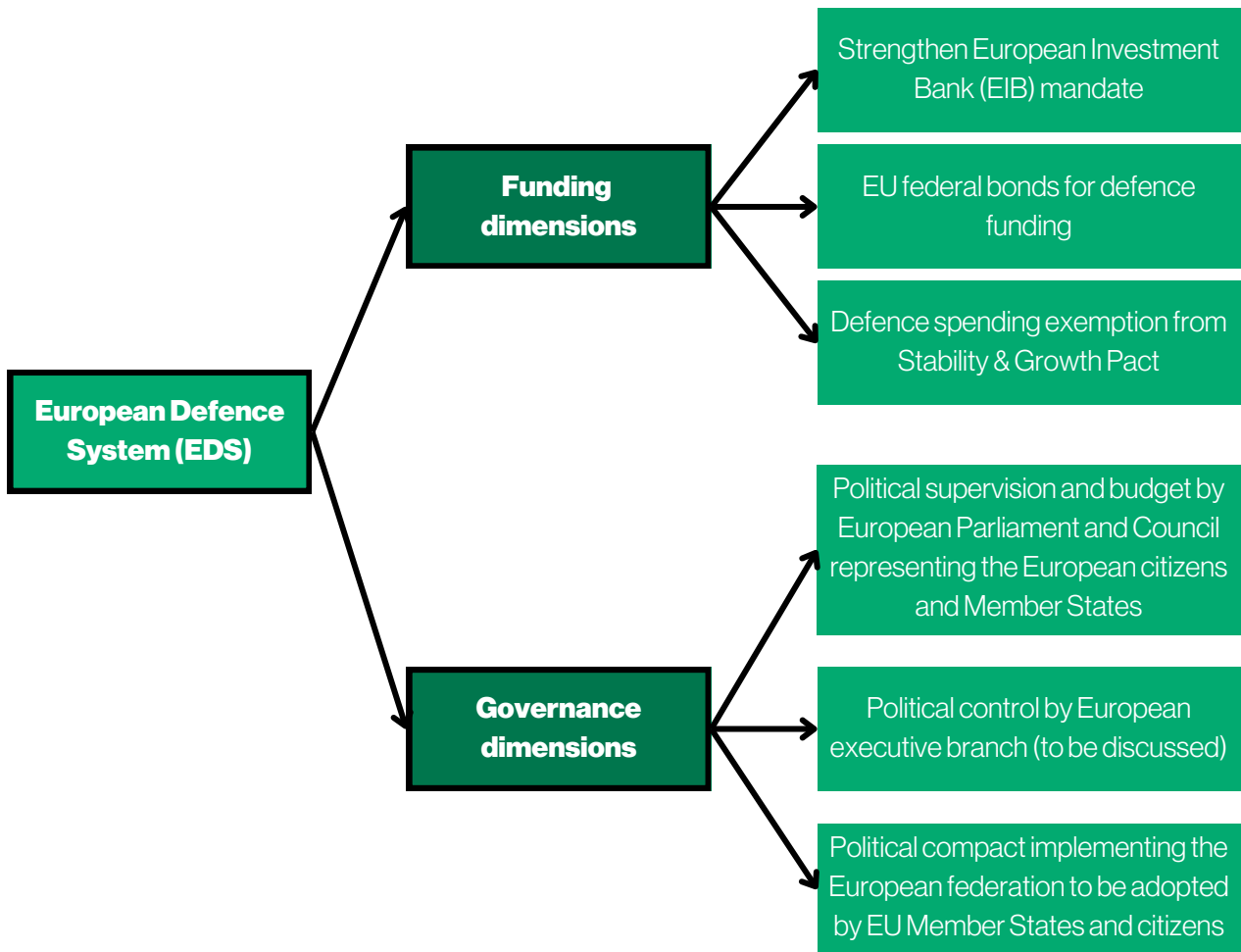
reform of the Treaty, which will ensure inter alia that the EDS can be financed by the ordinary EU Budget.

This reform is necessary to ensure the proper fiscal power and democratic governance needed to address this existential question at EU level to protect EU members states and citizens.

As Friedrich Hölderlin said, “*wherein lies the danger, grows the saving power*”.

Now as in 1950, we need to develop creative efforts commensurate with the dangers that Europe is facing.





Decisions can no longer be postponed

Mario Draghi



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UEF activities are



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