

## Prospects for Development of the Defense Sector of Central and Eastern Europe in the Conditions of Russian Aggression

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**Abstract:** The scientific article identifies the prospects for the development of the defense sector of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the context of Russian aggression. In particular, it is noted that the war in Ukraine has become a catalyst for the search by European countries that have struggled with balancing military power and the social security system. It is emphasized that the policy of upholding common security interests, intensive interaction of allied countries, strengthen the positions of all parties, strengthen the basis for bilateral and multilateral relations, and increase the arsenal of means for responding to common threats. The need to strengthen the European defense budget in general and individual countries of the European continent, the development of their military-industrial capabilities is indicated, and the prospects for deepening internal cooperation in the defense industry, the creation of a European army, subregional alliances of countries, the development of new formats of interaction with NATO and the European Union, and the establishment of partnership relations with the United States and allied countries are identified. The arguments are presented that the construction of joint defense enterprises for the production of ammunition with the help of partner countries, the expansion of their own production of new technical equipment, the involvement of NATO member states in exercises within the framework of the Northern European military alliance, the deployment of new forces of the North Atlantic Alliance in the region in order to prevent the occupation of countries or their parts will contribute to increasing the defense capability of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in modern conditions. The conclusion is made that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe should resist today's changes in the security paradigm through more effective coordination of defense spending, increasing the role of the European Defense Agency and increasing financing of the defense industry.

**Keywords:** security, defense sector, military-industrial complex, policy, interaction.

## 1. Introduction

Security challenges and hybrid threats that the modern world faces under the influence of globalization and geopolitical shifts – wars of aggression on the European continent, aggressive nationalism, imperialism, requests for spheres of influence, geopolitics, proxy wars and rollback of civil rights (Kobets & Golubiak, 2023) – require an appropriate operational response from the international community. European countries have begun to feel the critical consequences of the aggravation of such problems as military interventions, terrorism, migration, organized crime, pandemics, human rights violations, uncontrolled growth of geopolitical ambitions of international actors and a number of other dangers. These factors have given European states a clear awareness of the need to create a common strategy in the field of security and defense. Instead, the return of a brutal war to Europe, accompanied by full-scale Russian military operations on the territory of Ukraine, which are causing genocide of the Ukrainian people, has become an indicator that European security is under extreme threat and the adoption of a security and defense strategy is an urgent decision (Ivasechko & Tsebenko, 2022).

The full-scale Russian military invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has become a particularly alarming wake-up call for Europe. EU countries have quickly broken old taboos: Germany has decided to spend more on defense and provided military assistance to a country at war; Denmark has reversed its 30-year refusal to participate in the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (hereinafter referred to as the CSDP); Sweden and Finland have applied for NATO membership; In 2024 Poland began building fortification lines on the border with Russia. Construction as part of the "Eastern Shield" project is planned to be completed by 2028 (Yurchenko, 2024). This has forced countries, primarily those that are neighbors of the aggressor country, to reassess the risks to their security in the new geopolitical reality, and some of them to reconsider their policy of neutrality.

Most NATO member states have increased defense spending to levels not seen since the fall of communism – this year alone, it amounts to \$70 billion. Much of the country's equipment is being purchased to replace Soviet equipment sent to Ukraine. The countries are also trying to rapidly build up military potential, which most countries have neglected for decades, the publication writes (Eastern European Countries Increase Defense Spending by Record Amount, 2024).

According to the military alliance, Eastern European countries account for five of the seven largest defense spending in NATO as a percentage of gross domestic product this year. Poland ranks first, exceeding 4.12% of gross domestic product. Less than a month after the invasion of Ukraine, parliament approved legislation that increased the budget and created a special fund to finance expensive purchases. Estonia is in second place with 3.43%, followed by the United States of America (hereinafter referred to as the USA) with 3.38%, Latvia with 3.15%, Greece with 3.08%, Lithuania with 2.85%, Finland with 2.41%, Denmark with 2.37%, the United Kingdom with 2.33% and Romania with 2.25% (Eastern European countries increase their defense spending by a record amount, 2024). Also, against the backdrop of the war, which is gaining momentum every day, the EU has had to jump over itself, taking a number of decisive steps that would have previously met with resistance from various sides. Among them is the EU decision to finance the supply of lethal weapons, which was applied to a third country for the first time; strengthening their defense cooperation in the context of a new perception of the threat; readiness to provide EU membership for the eastern bloc of neighbors (Wojna w Ukrainie: Posłowie przedstawiają swoją wizję przyszłego bezpieczeństwa Europy. 2022).

Cooperation between European countries in the field of security and defense in the 20th–21st centuries has a long history, rich in various projects to ensure peace and security in the region. At the same time, against the backdrop of Russian aggression against Ukraine and the aggravation of Russian-NATO relations, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have faced new challenges and threats, which prompt them to reconsider the vectors of foreign policy implementation, development of the defense sector and other areas.

In recent years, cooperation between European countries in the field of security and defense policy, their activities and interaction with NATO, the European Union and other institutions, has attracted the attention of politicians, lawyers, and security experts, which is caused by changes in approaches to ensuring the security of individual European countries against the backdrop of the crisis in Russian-Ukrainian relations, as well as growing global uncertainty caused by the neo-imperial ambitions of Putin's Russia. These factors have turned security and defense policy into a central item on the agenda of the vast majority of European countries.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The security and defense policy of European countries has traditionally aroused considerable interest among both European and American researchers, including, in particular, S. Croft, E. Hochleimer, A. Kaiser, O. Kotlyar, O. Martynov, G. Peters, P. Pierson, I. Yakovyuk and others. At the same time, the relevance and practical significance are caused by issues related to the revision of the defense strategies of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which are geographically located close to the military actions on the territory of Ukraine, which militarily determines it. Therefore, the scientific achievements of these and other scientists are an important basis for this study.

The purpose of the scientific article is to analyze the main threats and prospects for the development of the defense sector of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the context of new geopolitical challenges and Russian aggression. To achieve this goal, the following tasks must be performed: to analyze current trends in the development of defense and other areas of individual countries of the European continent; to study the military and defense policy of NATO and the EU; to outline the current and strategic actions of Ukraine's partner countries in countering the aggression of the Russian Federation; based on the data obtained, to determine the vectors of development of geopolitics and the defense sector of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

## **3. Methodology**

The answer to the research question is given by analyzing scientific and analytical literature and existing political documents. In addition, a qualitative research methodology is used to analyze and interpret data, in particular, a hermeneutic research technique is used within the framework of a descriptive and conceptual framework to study the prospects for the development of the defense sector of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe against the background of the current geopolitical situation. The scientific publication uses such methods as historical; comparative; systemic; structural-functional, analysis and synthesis. The historical method made it possible to trace changes in the priorities of world political, legal and economic alliances, individual European countries in accordance with external circumstances; the systemic method allowed to study the features of activities in the defense sector since the active phase of the war in Ukraine; the structural-functional method contributed to the identification of features and problems for the implementation of a common defense policy in the security dimension; the analysis made it possible to identify trends in the activities of world actors, Central and Eastern European countries in the defense sector; The synthesis helped to form general conclusions, in particular on the role of NATO and the EU in ensuring peace and security, based on individual data.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1. Current trends in the development of the defense and other spheres of individual countries of the European continent**

Against the background of the above geopolitical events, fundamental changes have taken place in the NATO Strategic Concept: the approach of "deterrence through retaliation" has been transformed into a new one – "deterrence through prevention", which means preventive response and prevention of the occupation of any territories of the Alliance member countries. It also involves closer interaction, integration in defense planning, an increase in joint military spending, an increase in military contingents and other additional requirements. The key decisions were to strengthen the forward presence, redeploy military personnel from the member states of the North Atlantic Alliance to the territory of the Baltic countries and increase NATO battalion tactical groups located in individual countries to brigade size (Paliy, 2024).

In addition to objective concern for their own national interests and security, active support and consistent assistance to Ukraine from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is determined by a number of factors: an understanding that there is an interconnectedness of the security of the states of this region, in particular Ukraine; the desire to encourage key states of Western Europe to confront the Russian threat and strengthen security guarantees in the region; the need to eliminate external threats in the long term.

In this aspect, a specific example can be the positive experience of the Baltic countries, the strengthening of whose foreign policy positions and subjectivity at the regional and European levels is based on the

effective actions of their leaders in defending national interests and, at the same time, tangible support for Ukraine in times of war. The decisive factor was the significant strengthening of transatlantic cooperation and partnership relations with the United States, which clearly expressed its readiness to protect the Baltic countries in the event of a threat from the Russian Federation.

In Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, bilateral agreements on defense cooperation with the United States have been in force since 2017 for enhanced cooperation in the field of security and defense, which, in particular, determine the status and conditions of the deployment of their US military on the territory of each of these three countries. In 2023, an agreement was reached on an agreement on in-depth defense cooperation between Finland and the United States (The United States and Finland concluded the fifth round of negotiations for a defense cooperation agreement, 2023). Also in December 2023, an agreement on defense cooperation between the United States and Sweden was signed (U.S. signs Defense Cooperation Agreement with Sweden, 2023).

Strengthening the defense capabilities of the Baltic countries is primarily carried out through intensive modernization of defensive weapons, procurement of missile systems, air defense systems, modernization of the armed forces, etc. They are rapidly increasing military spending to replenish their own defense reserves. It is worth noting that the results of the Vilnius Summit (Vilnius Summit Communiqué. NATO, 2023) include, among other things, guaranteeing annual defense spending at least 2% of gross domestic product, which therefore becomes a mandatory condition. Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania in 2022-2023 concluded bilateral agreements with the United States (Security of Supply Arrangement) on security of supply in the defense sector to ensure priority military needs, purchase of weapons and special equipment, which contributes to increasing security guarantees in these countries (Paliy, 2024).

NATO countries, together with permanent contingents based in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, regularly conduct military exercises. In particular, within the framework of joint actions with other Alliance countries, the airspace protection mission is being strengthened – the NATO Baltic Airspace Patrol Program is in operation. In addition, in March 2023, NATO and the EU jointly created a specialized task force on the resilience of critical infrastructure, which extends to energy, transport, digital infrastructure and space (Launch for NATO EU Task Force: Strengthening our resilience and protection of critical infrastructure. European Commission, 2023). This concerns the coordination of actions, in particular regarding underwater infrastructure. Prolonged and intensive military operations on the territory of Ukraine are pushing the countries of this region to plan their own and joint defense projects. In Latvia, which did not conduct mandatory conscription after joining NATO, from January 1, 2024, conscription is mandatory for all citizens of the country (Saema adopts State Defense Service law, 2023). During the Russian-Ukrainian war, launched by the Russian Federation in February 2022, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, with small financial and other resources, constantly provide multi-level assistance to Ukraine, acting as de facto advocates of its national interests in matters of maximum provision of weapons, strengthening air defense, security guarantees, accession to NATO and the European Union, sanctions policy towards the Russian Federation, etc. At the same time, the Baltic countries demonstrate a clear course towards strengthening their defense capabilities and protecting national security.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine, unleashed in 2022, prompted Finland and Sweden to reconsider their neutrality policy. In March 2023, a crucial declaration of intent was signed to combine the air defenses of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden into a joint force. This step will help NATO compensate for the gaps in air cover in the Baltic Sea region, where Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia have much smaller air forces. As a result, the implementation of this project after Sweden's accession to NATO will turn the northern region of Europe into one of the Alliance's strongholds (Musienko, 2024). Nordic defense cooperation should now be renewed within NATO after Sweden and Finland join the Alliance. Cooperation within NORDEFCO becomes more relevant in the conditions when all the countries of Northern Europe will be members of NATO: there is an opportunity to coordinate the defense of the Northern region more effectively. According to the head of defense of Norway E. Kristoffersen, membership of all the Nordic countries in NATO makes it possible to use airspace across borders, that is, a much larger territory for operations, more bases for landing and the ability to transfer their own forces from south to north through Sweden and Finland. In addition, as members of NATO, all countries in the region are obliged to support each other ("A new era for Nordic defence" with every Nordic country a member of NATO, 2024). In March 2023, an agreement of intent was signed to unite the air defense of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden into joint forces.

In today's conditions and for the future, the only security reality for the Nordic countries is collective defense within NATO. Therefore, cooperation within NORDEFCO becomes more relevant in the conditions when all the countries of Northern Europe become members of the Alliance: there will be an opportunity to coordinate the defense of the Northern region more effectively (Musienko, 2024).

After Finland's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance and the expected accession of Sweden, NATO's influence in the Baltic Sea region is significantly increasing, which has a positive effect on the security of the region. The forced rearmament of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania is favorable for Ukraine, because it frees up the weapons needed by the Ukrainian side. In the event of further strengthening of the defense of the Baltic countries, they transfer a share of the old weapons to Ukraine in order to strengthen our state accordingly.

#### 4.2. Prospects for increasing European defense capabilities

European defense is one of the policies of the European Union (hereinafter referred to as the EU), which began in the 1990s with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, which established the EU in its modern form. Today it is called the Common Security and Defence Policy (hereinafter referred to as the CSDP) and coordinates civilian and military missions between EU member states.

The EU does not have an army or a single commander-in-chief. Instead, countries provide troops and resources for joint missions. These are coordinated through the European External Action Service. The financing of common defence is largely handled by individual countries, although there are funds at EU level, such as the European Defence Fund (Fratsyvir, 2024).

One of the most common questions about EU defence policy is how it relates to NATO and whether it duplicates the alliance's functions. In fact, they have different roles. NATO focuses on collective military defence. CSDP is on broader crisis management, which includes both civilian, diplomatic and military tools to address security challenges. When it comes to full-scale conflicts, the EU relies on NATO or individual member states that take the lead in these operations (Fratsyvir, 2024). It is worth noting that with the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the EU increased defense spending – both due to Ukraine's needs and to strengthen its own defense capabilities. In 2023, they reached a record 270 billion euros. For comparison, in 2010, the EU spent 194 billion euros on defense. In 2022, the EU adopted the "Strategic Compass", which became the roadmap for European defense policy until 2030 (A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence – For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security, 2022). However, changes in the context of the situation on the European continent, caused by the war in Ukraine, dictated certain new requirements for overcoming security crises, which led to a reassessment of threats by the European Union in the approved strategy (Sheiko, 2021).

Since the publication of the European Strategic Compass on 21.03.2022, the EU has begun to "raise its geopolitical position", announcing a significant increase in defense spending and the development of the EU's rapid deployment capabilities by 2025 (A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence – For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security, 2022). At the same time, NATO remains the "mainstay" of defense for most European states, including the countries of Northern and Eastern Europe. For example, the rapid reaction force, which includes a 5,000-strong force that does not grant the EU strategic autonomy, is not intended to replace NATO or integrate the national defense capabilities and competencies of the member states.

So the question arises: If the "Strategic Compass" is not a way to strengthen the EU's ability to act as a full-fledged security actor, what are the alternatives? One of the interesting options, which is actively supported by some experts and politicians, is the creation of a "real European army" (Fratsyvir, 2024). However, the budget for this is currently lacking. In addition, the purchase of weapons and investments require joint work of all EU member states, which is a rarity today.

We consider the idea of creating a European army progressive. This will make it possible to protect the global legal order in the conditions of active expansionist policies and unjustified aggression of individual countries. In particular, this will increase Europe's independence from NATO and the USA by restructuring and rebalancing the transatlantic alliance; integration of military forces and means, creation of a common defense budget and a common army under the supreme command, the EU will oblige member states to coordinate their actions in the field of security and defense; the security of each Member State will be strengthened by a more effective and better prepared military apparatus, and the whole range of challenges that cannot be tackled in isolation will be addressed by the joint efforts of the Member States.

In 2024, a new defence-industrial strategy was adopted within the framework of the “Strategic Compass”, which should make the European defence industry more unified and reduce dependence on weapons from outside the EU.

Thus, threats such as: the pandemic; the war in Ukraine; the thawing of old conflicts, in particular in Transnistria – have triggered significant changes that are likely to remain the foundation for the future defence role of the EU and, perhaps, even gradually increase the EU’s ability to intervene as a military actor in symbiosis with NATO, a long-standing ambition that remains largely a mere aspiration. This could reinforce the trend in Europe towards greater emphasis on the use of hard power.

In the context of developing promising directions for the development of the defense complex of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, it should be noted that until recently, defense was an exclusively national issue. Each country has its own army and budget and spends a relatively large amount of money. To sum up, we have an annual defense budget of about 300 billion euros. However, these are not joint investments. A joint budget should be formed, in particular for the joint procurement of military equipment, in order to avoid duplication of systems and invest more effectively.

Defining the roles of the EU defense sector, we share the point of view of experts that it is unlikely that the aforementioned alliance will become the main defense coordination structure in Europe instead of NATO. At the same time, the EU can complement the Alliance, for example, in the fight against terrorism and in industrial cooperation.

After all, the perception of threats between different EU countries is different. In the right opinion of some scientists, this largely depends on geographical location and history. In the center, west and south of Europe, it took longer to realize the risks of the war in Ukraine (Fratsyvir, 2024). In view of this, countries located near the borders of the aggressor country should increase defense spending, consolidate their efforts in this sector in order to ensure national interests and protect their citizens. Therefore, we consider S. Biscop's remark to be correct that it would be an absolute mistake if the momentum that currently exists to strengthen Europe's defense was not used to strengthen integration (Biscop, 2022).

#### 4.3. NATO’s contribution to the current development of military-industrial capabilities in Europe

The security of Europe is of paramount importance to NATO and all Allies. In light of the events of recent years, NATO fully supports Ukraine’s inherent right to self-defense, as well as its right to choose its own security mechanisms. Since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, both NATO and Allies have provided Ukraine with unprecedented levels of assistance (Relations with Ukraine, 2024).

At the NATO Vilnius Summit in 2023, Allies decided on a multi-year assistance program to help rebuild Ukraine’s security and defense structures and move toward full interoperability with NATO. As a result of the summit, the Alliance’s Strategic Concept has undergone changes: instead of “deterrence through retaliation”, it is based on the position of “deterrence through nonaggression”, which involves deploying new NATO forces in the region to prevent the occupation of the Baltic states or parts of them. This involves building up and permanently deploying increased contingents of NATO troops in the territories of individual NATO member states. In addition, their national military plans are being integrated within the Organization, as well as the military plans of the United States with other NATO member states, and spending on common defense needs has been increased, in particular, ensuring guaranteed budget spending on defense for each country in the region at least at the level of 2% of their gross domestic product. At the Washington Summit in 2024, the Alliance member states decided to introduce the NATO Security Assistance and Training Initiative for Ukraine to coordinate the supply of military equipment and technology by the Alliance member states and partners and the organization of training. They also announced a Commitment to Long-Term Security Assistance to Ukraine, which will provide a core funding of at least €40 billion over the next year and a sustainable level of security assistance in the future.

In addition to political and financial support, NATO’s practical assistance to Ukraine has also been significantly increased. Since February 2022, under the Comprehensive Assistance Trust Fund, the Alliance has implemented a number of projects that have provided assistance in various areas, such as: combat rations, fuel equipment, clothing, medical supplies, shelters and generators, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear detection and protection, explosive ordnance disposal and demining equipment, counter-UAV equipment, and communication systems (Relations with Ukraine, 2024).

The Alliance continues to support Ukraine's self-defense by providing urgently needed non-lethal equipment and supplies under the Comprehensive Action Plan, including contributions from NATO partners, rebuilding damaged military infrastructure (including three training centers), demining

Ukraine's territory and helping it develop its own demining capabilities; Rehabilitation of wounded personnel of security and defense structures, their return to service or reintegration into civilian life.

At the 2024 Washington Summit, Allies decided to launch the NATO Security Assistance and Training Initiative for Ukraine (NIU) to coordinate the provision of military equipment and training by Allies and partners, and to provide logistical support to Ukraine. The initiative aims to provide a framework for providing security assistance to Ukraine in the long term, providing enhanced, predictable and coordinated support. The NIU, which will operate on the territory of Allies, will support Ukraine's right to self-defense in accordance with the UN Charter. In addition, Allies leaders announced a Commitment to Long-Term Security Assistance to Ukraine, which provides for the provision of military equipment and equipment, assistance and training to build a Ukrainian armed force capable of defeating Russian aggression today and deterring it in the future. As of July 2024, more than 20 Allies and partners have signed bilateral security agreements with Ukraine, providing it with long-term security guarantees (Relations with Ukraine, 2024).

Despite the fact that NATO has publicly called the Russian Federation the most significant and direct threat to the security of its allies, the question arises about Hungary and Slovakia, two NATO countries that are breaking off relations with the rest of the Alliance. They continue to maintain contacts with the Russian Federation and see strategic value in further cooperation with it. For example, at the final briefing in Prague on March 21, 2024, after a meeting in the Visegrad format, the heads of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia and Hungary stated that they would not participate in financing the Czech initiative to purchase 800 thousand artillery shells for the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It is undeniable that such actions by NATO member states are not consistent with its peacekeeping policy.

#### 4.4. The European Union's action to strengthen the defense sector

With the escalation of military threats around the world, especially on the European continent, the danger to Europe has only increased. In addition to traditional military capabilities – tanks, artillery or ammunition – any effective support from united alliances is important. For the first time, the EU has provided military support to a country at war, including with lethal weapons. As of November 2024, the EU and its member states had mobilized over €27 billion in military support. More than 34,000 Ukrainian soldiers had been trained across the EU (EU boosts defense readiness by providing financial support for joint defense procurement for the first time, 2024).

It is essential that member states place more orders in the defense industry and increase production capacity as soon as possible. To accelerate these efforts, the European Commission has developed new instruments on supporting the production of ammunition and on strengthening the European defence industry through joint procurement (EDIRPA) (EU boosts defence readiness with first-ever financial support for joint procurement of defence products, 2024).

The European Commission has approved funding for five cross-border projects to support more coordinated and efficient defence procurement among EU Member States. Under the instrument for strengthening the European defence industry through joint procurement (EDIRPA), each of the five projects will receive €60 million. As the scale of joint procurement will provide greater economic benefits, important defence capabilities will become more accessible to the armed forces of Member States. Joint procurement of products will also increase the interoperability of the armed forces of Member States. Clearer prospects and greater predictability, accompanied by large contracts, will strengthen European industry and allow it to adapt its production capacities to Europe's defence needs. Overall, joint procurement will strengthen the defence readiness of the EU Member States. The European Commission has announced the first EU-funded projects supporting the joint procurement of critical defence products by Member States in three areas: air and missile defence systems; modern armoured vehicles; and ammunition. The total procurement value of the five selected projects exceeds €11 billion, demonstrating the significant impact of EU funding. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the programme in mobilising significant defence investments across the EU (EU boosts defence readiness with first-ever financial support for joint defence procurement, 2024).

However, it must be stated that the EU still lacks key defence capabilities, which requires close coordination to fill gaps, avoid duplication and strengthen industrial capacity.

The European Defence Agency (hereinafter referred to as the EDA), together with the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and European Commission instruments, is implementing an action plan to support such efforts, such as the European Defence Fund. Projects implemented under PESCO should focus more on the core of defence

capabilities, such as warships and other types of weapons. Through the ammunition initiative, the EDA will launch joint procurement of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and military equipment.

The defence industry is an area where close cooperation between intergovernmental bodies responsible for EU defence policy, such as the EDA, and the Commission services responsible for the European budget is very important. Without a strong European defence industry, there will be no European strategic autonomy or strategic responsibility. At the same time, European countries are not yet very consolidated on this issue, as experts estimate that more than two-thirds of the military equipment purchased by the European army comes from outside Europe (EU increases defence readiness by providing financial support for joint defence procurement for the first time, 2024). The problem of access to public and private funding for the EU defence industry also needs to be addressed urgently.

Looking at the long term, defence innovation is indeed crucial. However, the latest data from the EEA shows a rather negative trend: spending on defence research and technology in Europe is decreasing. This trend needs to be urgently reversed in order to develop modern defence capabilities. The EEA Defence Innovation Centre can play an important role in this.

We must recognize the urgency of improving the geostrategic environment in the field of defense of the EU, which has certain tools for this, in particular a special agency – the EDA, which should set priorities, promote cooperation in the field of defense and lead defense innovations. The transformation caused by the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine should be transformed into a sustainable and strategic European defense culture.

In general, we note that the EU has managed to come a long way from individual proposals on how to intensify cooperation between EU member states and non-member states in the field of security and defense, to specific approved plans that look quite ambitious (Zagumenna, 2023, p. 16). The EU was able to restore its defense capabilities and significantly advance in security policy thanks to a holistic vision of this process, the presence of a large number of relevant structures, programs and instruments.

#### 4.5. Ukrainian issue

Committed to shared values and interests, and in line with the European Council Conclusions and the Joint Declaration in Support of Ukraine of 12.07.2023, the policy of the EU and its Member States is aimed at ensuring, together with partners, a long-term security commitment to Ukraine that will enable it to defend itself, resist attempts at destabilization and deter acts of aggression in the future (Shared Security Commitments between Ukraine and the European Union, 2024).

EU countries, such as France, the Czech Republic, Poland and others, provide military assistance to Ukraine, but this is mostly through national programs or through NATO mechanisms. The EU as an institution is only beginning to shape its defense policy through initiatives such as the European Defense Fund and the Strategic Compass.

We note that the EU provides Ukraine with significant economic and investment assistance. Since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, Ukraine has received 43.5 billion euros in military assistance from the EU, and in the first half of 2024 it signed 13 agreements with EU countries on both military cooperation and arms supplies. In addition, Ukraine has become part of the European Defense Industrial Strategy, which, according to the EU, will support the potential of the Ukrainian defense industry, integrate it into the European defense industrial base and bring it closer to EU membership (Fratsyvir, 2024). At the same time, these funds are mainly aimed at stabilizing the economy, implementing reforms and social needs (Petrenko, 2024). In our opinion, in the future the EU is able to become a stronger “player” in the defense sector if its military-industrial complex and defense policy are consolidated. Currently, the political and strategic interests of the EU and the US regarding Ukraine differ somewhat from each other. The US sees it as part of its broader strategy to contain Russian influence and protect the international order, while the EU is more focused on stabilizing its eastern neighborhood and supporting democratic reforms. As of today, the EU does not have a unified foreign and defense policy at the level of a single state. It acts through its institutions and decisions that require agreement among all member states, which significantly complicates a rapid response to crisis situations.

Using the example of relations with Ukraine, we can conclude that in political, economic and diplomatic support, the EU has significant influence and can be a long-term partner for other countries, including those that are not members of the aforementioned Alliance. To do this, it should significantly deepen integration in the defense sector. In turn, European countries that support real, rather than declarative peace, should focus on political and economic integration, while maintaining close defense ties with the United States, signing security agreements with other countries, and joining various formats of

cooperation and communication. European partners continue military support for Ukraine, including through revenues from frozen Russian assets. According to German Defense Minister B. Pistorius, the EU plans to use 1.4 billion euros of revenues from frozen Russian assets to purchase military materials, which will be delivered to Ukraine by the end of 2024, and 1.9 billion euros worth of materials will be transferred in early 2025. Also, the EU initiative “one million artillery ammunition for Ukraine” has been almost fully implemented, almost everything promised has already been delivered to the front (the EU will use €1.4 billion from frozen Russian assets for military purchases for Ukraine, 2024).

Cooperation has begun within the framework of the “Northern Group” – Ukraine. Countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland and the United Kingdom are uniting to strengthen the security and support of Ukraine. At the same time, a separate priority is precisely investments in the Ukrainian defense-industrial complex (12 European countries and Ukraine are uniting in a new format of defense cooperation, 2024). Some experts point to certain prospects for restoring the nuclear status of non-nuclear countries, in particular Ukraine, by creating a subregional union of different countries. This issue should be viewed primarily from the perspective of national interests (Orlova, 2024).

## **5. Conclusion**

The scale of challenges and threats to Ukraine and European countries from the aggressor state of the Russian Federation and its satellite Belarus has not decreased for almost three years. Joint actions of the countries of the European region, their close interaction with other countries in war conditions have acquired strategic importance for the national security of these countries and for global peace. The policy of upholding common security interests, intensive interaction of allied countries, strengthen the positions of all parties, strengthen the basis for bilateral and multilateral relations, and increase the arsenal of means for responding to common threats.

The war in Ukraine has become a catalyst for the search by European countries, which have struggled with balancing military power and the social security system, to make more efforts for their security capabilities. Therefore, there is no doubt about the need to strengthen the European defense budget in general and individual countries of the European continent. For the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, we see prospects for deepening internal cooperation in the field of defense industry, the creation of subregional alliances of countries, the development of new formats of interaction with NATO and the EU. Such projects as PESCO, the European Defense Fund, the European Peace Fund, which have proven their effectiveness and contribute to the development of national defense potentials of EU countries, can be effective in other countries of the region.

Against the background of the ineffectiveness of individual international organizations, the destruction of the international system of security agreements due to the destructive actions of the Russian Federation, NATO and the EU have proven more effective. Establishing more transparent, effective interaction and division of responsibilities between the EU and NATO, aimed at strengthening defense capabilities and developing military-industrial capabilities of countries, will be the most optimal option for the development of their relations. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe should strengthen their defense and security foundation precisely thanks to the above-mentioned institutions, as well as partnership relations with the USA and a number of European countries.

The defense capability of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in modern conditions will be enhanced by the construction with the help of partner countries of joint defense enterprises for the production of ammunition, the expansion of their own production of new technical means, in particular, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, the involvement of NATO member states in exercises within the framework of the Northern European military alliance, the deployment of new NATO forces in the region in order to prevent the occupation of countries or their parts. The idea of a European army should also be recognized as progressive, which will make it possible to protect global law and order in the conditions of active expansionist policies and unjustified aggression of individual countries.

As the positive experience of the Baltic countries, which are members of NATO, shows, their joint military and defense potential is strengthened through their regional interaction. A stronger and more combat-ready European defense will make a positive contribution to global and transatlantic security, the foundation of which remains NATO. Therefore, European countries must counter today's changes in the security paradigm by more effectively coordinating defense spending, enhancing the role of the European Defense Agency, and increasing funding for the defense industry.

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