



European governments need to be ready to fight tonight to deter Russia

As the US withdraws from its commitments to European security, and Russia intensifies its hostile activity across the continent, Europe needs to rapidly improve its deterrence by rearming. A new policy brief from the Centre for European Reform, with the support of the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF), [‘Rearming Europe for deterrence: Short-term priorities and policy options’](#), by [Armida van Rij](#), outlines steps European governments can take in the next 1-2 years to accelerate rearmament, deterrence and readiness efforts.

The policy brief outlines steps across three areas: winning public support for rearmament, ensuring operational equipment and capabilities, and building a pipeline of personnel and skills for deterrence. It argues that European NATO allies need a realistic assessment of which capabilities are ready to ‘fight tonight’ and close any gaps the assessment identifies by investing in the servicing of existing equipment and stockpiling munitions and other supplies.

As defence budgets grow, European governments no longer have to choose between building up the European defence industrial base and acquiring equipment quickly from non-European allies – they can do both. Where European production capacity already exists or can be scaled up quickly, such as for ammunition, drones, and certain air defence systems, buying European should be the default option. For urgent requirements where the production shortfall is too large to fill quickly at an acceptable cost, equipment can be procured from non-European allies.

Governments also need to ensure a pipeline of armed forces personnel trained to use existing equipment and scale up capabilities available by improving pay packages for serving personnel and introducing flexible service commitments. The report warns armed forces’ stringent physical entry requirements currently screen out people who would be fit to serve in roles essential in modern conflict such as cyber and drone operations, logistics management and data analysis.

The brief argues governments should think more creatively about the skills needed for national security, and facilitate the use of existing skills in the civil workforce for defence. Governments should put more emphasis on whole of society efforts, and make better use of the civilian population to contribute to the defence of Europe by training them to spot fake news, report suspicious drone or other activity and improve cyber security at home and in workplaces.

The author, Armida van Rij, said: *“Despite significant investments in defence spending since 2022, gaps in Europe’s readiness remain. That Germany’s army’s readiness was lower in 2025 than in 2022 shows the scale of the challenge. But there are steps governments can take to contribute to better readiness in the short term, like ensuring the equipment European NATO allies already have is fully serviced and has a pipeline of trained personnel to operate it.”*

Notes for editors:

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