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Sky is Not the Limit

The EU Space Strategy for Security & Defence

By

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Abstract

On March 10th, 2023 the European Union presented its first-ever European Union Space Strategy for Security and Defence, having as an objective to protect its space assets, defend its interests, deter hostile activities in space and strengthen its strategic posture and autonomy. This action is one of many that the EU has taken as far as the Security & Defence sector is concerned in the framework of its Strategic Compass, the latest security strategy that was approved on March 21st, 2022, only a few weeks after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The paper briefly analyses the EU's historical background as a security provider, presents the context of the European Union Space Strategy for Security and Defence, highlights several recent developments regarding the Security & Defence and Space sectors, analyses the data presented throughout the occasional paper and proceeds to an assessment of the future prospects of the European Security & Defence sector, based on the contemporary geopolitical conditions of the security environment.

Key Words: European Union, Security & Defence, Strategic Compass, Strategy, Space, Global Commons, Resilience

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Table of Abbreviations

| | |
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| 3SOS | Safe, Secure and Sustainable Outer Space |
| CFSP | Common Foreign and Security Policy |
| CSDP | Common Security and Defence Policy |
| DITB | Defence Industry Technological Base |
| DPCI | Defence Projects of Common European Interest |
| EC | European Commission |
| ECSC | European Coal and Steel Community |
| EDF | European Defence Fund |
| EDIS | European Defence Industrial Strategy |
| EEAS | European Union External Action Service |
| EEC | European Economic Community |
| EO | Earth Observation |
| ESA | European Space Agency |
| EU | European Union |
| EUSSSD | European Union Space Strategy for Security and Defence |
| FDI | Foreign Direct Investments |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| HR/VP | High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission |
| IPCEI | Important Projects of Common European Interests |
| ISAC | Information Sharing and Analysis Centre |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NSS | National Security Strategy |
| OEWG | Open-Ended Working Group |

| | |
|------|---|
| PNT | Positioning Navigation and Timing |
| S&D | Security & Defence |
| SDA | Space Domain Awareness |
| SDA | Space Domain Awareness |
| SIAC | Single Intelligence Analysis Capability |
| SS | Secure Communication |
| SST | Space Surveillance and Tracking |
| UN | United Nations |

1. Introduction

On March 10th, 2023 the EU presented its first-ever “*European Union Space Strategy for Security and Defence (EUSSSD)*” (Picture 1), a Joint Communication of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) and the European Commission (EC) aiming at protecting its space assets, defending its interests, deterring hostile activities in space and strengthening its strategic posture and autonomy (EEAS, 2023).



Picture 1: Factsheet (1st page) of the EU regarding its Space Strategy for Security & Defence

Photo Source: <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/EU%20SSSD%20Factsheet.pdf>

The aim of this paper is to present the context of the “*European Union Space Strategy for Security and Defence*,” in addition to the emerging dynamics in the space domain. Its importance lies not only in the fact that it provides current information contributing to the existing literature regarding the European security and defence, but also because space is considered to be one of the most crucial domains for several policy fields. Its main conclusion is that the most important factor for the EU as far as achieving the objectives in the Security & Defence sector is concerned is ensuring solidarity among the EU member states and that adapting to the conditions of the contemporary security environment is essential for the survival of the EU.

The research method of this paper is the qualitative analysis, while its structure comprises a brief analysis of the EU’s historical background indicating its evolution from an economic union to an ambitious security provider, the presentation of the context of the 2023 “*European Union Space Strategy for Security and Defence*” in addition to several recent developments regarding the Security & Defence and Space sectors, an analysis of the data presented throughout the occasional paper and an assessment of the future prospects of the European Security & Defence sector, based on the contemporary geopolitical conditions of the security environment, and some final concluding remarks.

2. The EU as a Security Provider

The EU was founded in 1951 as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), aiming at the enhancement of the solidarity of the European states and the promotion of peace through pooling coal and steel production. In 1957 the ECSC was transformed into the European Economic Community (EEC), allowing its member states to expand their cooperation in several fields of the economy, leading among others to a Common Agricultural Policy in 1962 and a Customs Union in 1968 (European Union, n.d.). In 1993 the EEC was transformed into the EU under the Maastricht Treaty, and addressed security issues for the first time establishing the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) which aims at the preservation of peace and the strengthening of international security (EUR-Lex, n.d.).

In 2003 the EU issued its first European Security Strategy (Council of the European Union, 2022), while in 2007 reinforced CFSP through the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon. In 2011 the EU established the European External Action Service (EEAS) in order to

implement the CFSP through the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (Krentz, 2023), and in 2016 issued its second security strategy known as Global Strategy (EEAS, 2019). Since 2003, the EU has established several CSDP missions, demonstrating its enhanced security role; a role that has been gradually strengthened through time.



Picture 2: The four pillars of the 2022 Strategic Compass of the EU

Photo Source: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-03-21_strategic_compass.pdf

On March 21st, 2022 – approximately a month after Russia’s invasion in Ukraine – the Council of the EU approved the third security strategy of the EU entitled “*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*” (Koukakis, 2022a). Strategic Compass aims to make the EU a stronger and more capable security provider by 2030 by strengthening its security and defence policy (Council of the European Union, 2022), through a plan of action that is structured around the four pillars (Picture 2).

3. The context of the EU Space Strategy for Security & Defence

The “*European Union Space Strategy for Security and Defence*” is a 17 pages-long strategic document comprising an introduction, five main parts and a conclusion part, that defines the framework in which the EU institutions and its member states need to act in order to accomplish the EU objectives regarding the space domain.

3.1 Introduction

The introduction part (European Commission, 2023:1) of the EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence entitled “*Space as a Strategic Domain*” begins by stressing the EU’s space assets that constitute it a global space power, such as the existing Galileo and Copernicus, and the IRIS² program that is about to be launched. Moreover, it emphasizes that space is a critical domain for the strategic autonomy not only of the EU but for its member states as well, also noting that it is an increasingly contested area, as several space powers such as Russia and China are developing anti-satellite and counter-space capabilities, also noting that:

“The EU and its Member States will continue to promote the preservation of a safe and secure space environment and the peaceful use of outer space on an equitable and mutually acceptable basis. The EU recognizes outer space as a global commons. It is committed to the mutually reinforcing role of transparency and confidence-building measures, by reducing the risks of misperception, miscalculation, and unintended conflict escalation.”

3.2 The Space Threat Landscape

Its second part (European Commission, 2023:2-3) is entitled “*The Space threat landscape*” and comprises of three sub-parts, the first of which under the title “*Defining the space domain*” defines space domain as the domain that:

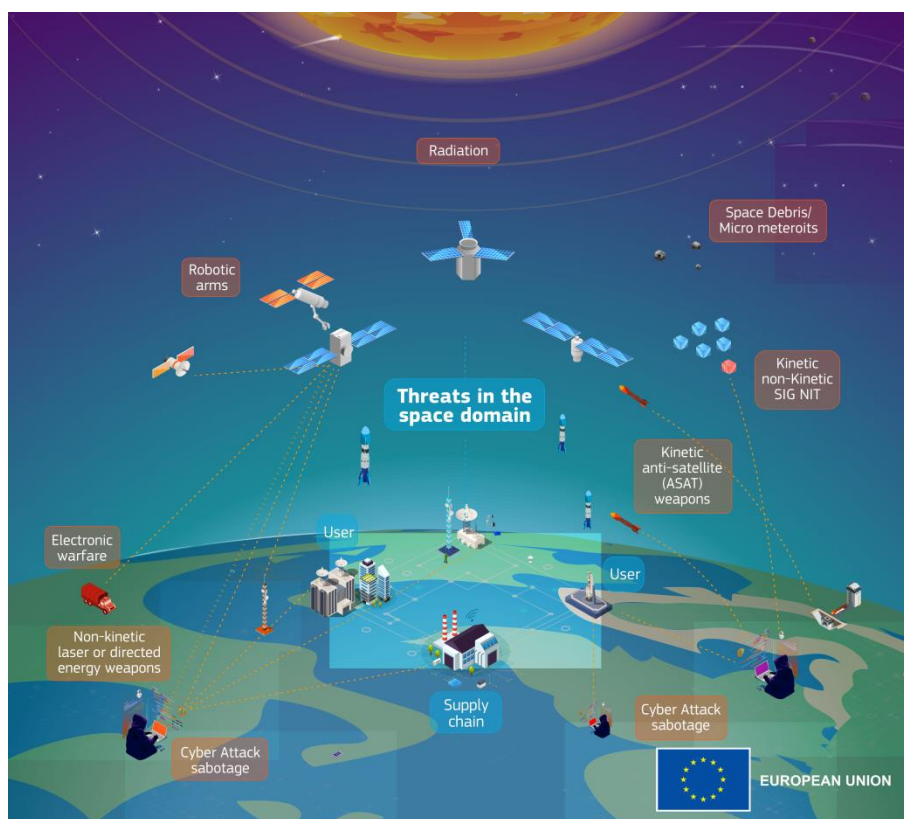
“[...] includes any element relevant for the functioning of space systems and the delivery of space-based services in the EU and the Member States, e.g.: the outer space environment, the various relevant orbits and spacecraft and related information on the systems they belong to, the ground and launch infrastructure, radio frequency links, user terminals and cyber. It also includes the underlying industrial space sector.”

Moreover, the second sub-part entitled “*Counterspace and threats in the space domain*” stresses that space threats – contrarily to other safety threats – are intentionally hostile activities, that several actors use their counterspace capabilities – which can take several forms – not only to demonstrate capabilities but also to deter their competitors and gain an information advantage or deny them the use of their space systems, and that third countries are also exploring their capabilities in the space domain. Thus, in order to assess space threats the EU needs to implement a comprehensive analysis of the space, ground and cyber capabilities and behaviors, and – according to the third sub-part entitled “*Towards a shared understanding of space threats*” – increase its strategic understanding in related issues by exploiting its Single Intelligence Analysis Capability (SIAC) in addition to the military and civilian intelligence services of its member states. To this end, the EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence defines that the HR/VP will prepare a classified annual space threat landscape analysis that includes the evolution of counter-space capabilities.

Its third part (European Commission, 2023:3-7) is entitled “*Enhancing the Resilience and Protection of Space Systems and Services in the EU*” and comprises of four sub-parts, the first of which under the title “*An EU-wide security framework for the protection of space systems, information sharing and cooperation on space security incidents*” notes that despite the fact that several member states have already issued rules regarding the use of space, the absence of a common EU framework might affect the

competitiveness of the EU's space industry and security, which is why the EU will promote an EU Space Law, the integration of space security standards, the exchange of information on space threats, the exchange of best practices among commercial entities on related subjects, and the coherence with NATO standards.

Its second sub-part entitled “*Strengthening the technological sovereignty of the EU space sector*” stresses the need to reduce the EU's strategic dependencies on third countries in order to increase the resilience of space infrastructure and ensure security of supply, mainly by leveraging the Horizon Europe and the European Defence Fund (EDF), establishing new industrial alliances related to space and defence technologies, using the Important Projects of Common European Interests (IPCEI), and the collaboration with European Space Agency (ESA) in order to develop EU space technologies.



Picture 3: Threats in the space domain

Photo Source: https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/document/download/3aac0394-8be0-4c2d-8956-54e8af5032f1_en?filename=Infographics%20-%20Threats%20in%20the%20space%20domain.pdf

3.3 Enhancing the Resilience and Protection of Space Systems and Services in the EU

Its third sub-part entitled “*Addressing risks to security in the space sector in the EU*” underlines that the EU’s security is interconnected with the protection of its supply chains, thus certain controls are needed as far as dual-use exports and Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) are concerned. Moreover, the EU – in order to reduce future risk and ensure competitiveness among its member states – is working on multiple sourcing of the most critical technologies and components, in addition to ensuring that its procurement rules guarantee maximum security of supply.

Its fourth sub-part entitled “*Developing capabilities, including EU autonomous access to space, to increase resilience*” emphasizes on the variety of space capabilities that can enhance space resilience, and the essential role of the EU autonomous, responsive and versatile space access, also providing inter alia for the establishment of an Information Sharing and Analysis Centre (EU Space ISAC), the production of a roadmap to reduce strategic dependencies on space technologies, the development of joint programming between the EDF, the EU Space Program and Horizon Europe, and the proper application of several EU initiatives such as the Chips Act and the Critical Raw Materials Act.

3.4 Responding to Space Threats

Its fourth part (European Commission, 2023: 7-9) is entitled “*Responding to Space Threats*” and comprises three sub-parts, the first of which under the title “*Detecting and characterizing space threats*” stresses the vital role of related intelligence, near real time use of lessons-learned, shared space-domain-understanding among member states, as well as establishing Space Domain Awareness (SDA).

Its second sub-part entitled “*Attributing and reacting to hostile behaviors in the space domain*” underlines that the decision to attribute a space threat to a third country and respond to that threat is based on specific decisions of the Council of the EU that need to be amended in order to cover space threats and establish a Space Threat Toolbox, and that a horizontal group under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) should be created in order to facilitate the mobilization of relevant expertise in case of space threats.

Finally, its third sub-part entitled “*Space exercises for readiness and interoperability*” is referred to the conduction of regular exercises in the space domain under the collaboration of the HR/VP, the EC and the member states in order to enhance the EU’s and its member states’ counterspace capabilities.

3.5 Enhancing the Use of Space for Security and Defence

Its fifth part (European Commission, 2023:10-14) is entitled “*Enhancing the Use of Space for Security and Defence*” and comprises three sub-parts, the first of which under the title “*EU space systems and services supporting security and defence*” emphasizes the need for a more systematic cross-fertilization between the EU defence & security and space sectors, establishing strict rules for the delivery of security-sensitive products, embedding military and security user requirements in the design of EU space systems, and encouraging new synergies. As far as critical space services are concerned, the document stresses the importance of the Positioning Navigation and Timing (PNT), the Earth Observation (EO), the Secure Communication (SS), the Space Domain Awareness (SDA), and the Space Surveillance and Tracking (SST).



Picture 4: Factsheet (2nd page) of the EU regarding its Space Strategy for Security & Defence

Photo Source: <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/EU%20SSSD%20Factsheet.pdf>

Its second sub-part entitled “*Fostering innovation and competitiveness*” notes that the space domain plays a significant role not only for the industrial sector but for service-delivery as well, stressing that one of the goals of the EC is to facilitate collaboration among start-ups of the security & defence and the space sectors.

Its third sub-part entitled “*Developing skills, education and training*” emphasizes on the need to enhance the space security & defence capabilities of the EU and its member states – due to the respective shortage of expertise – by mapping the space security & defence educational and training activities and contribute to the upskilling and reskilling in the space industry by developing inter alia a EU Space Academy.

3.6 Partnering for Responsible Behaviours in outer Space

Its sixth part (European Commission, 2023:14-17) is entitled ‘*Partnering for Responsible Behaviours in outer Space*’ and comprises five sub-parts, the first of which under the title ‘*Promoting norms rules and principles for responsible behaviours in outer space*’ stresses the risk of a future arms race in the space domain which much be prevented through cooperation among states using a specific instrument, in accordance to the *1967 Outer Space Treaty* and the *United Nations (UN)* principles.

Its second sub-part entitled ‘*Engaging with the United Nations on space and security*’ emphasises on the EU’s status as an observer to the UN, providing it the opportunity to engage in matters related to the space domain, and reiterates the EU’s support to the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) also noting that regulating the behaviour of actors in the space domain by establishing a “*Safe, Secure and Sustainable Outer Space (3SOS)*” is one the main challenges for both the EU and its member states, an action that is being promoted by public diplomacy.

Its third sub-part entitled ‘*Partnering with the US on space security and defence*’ underlines the importance of the mutually beneficial EU - US cooperation that has been active since 2009, encouraging similar actions in more areas relative to the space domain.

Its fourth sub-part entitled ‘*Dialogue with third countries on space security*’ notes that dialogue with like-minded states as far as the security & defence in space is concerned is crucial for avoiding conflicts, which is why the EU is already engaging or

will engage with several states such as Japan, Canada, Norway, the United States in order to align strategies.



Picture 5: Factsheet (1st page) of the EU regarding its European Defence Industrial Strategy

Photo Source: https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/european-defence-industrial-strategy-factsheet_en

Its fifth sub-part entitled ‘*Partnership with NATO on space security and defence*’ stresses the importance of the EU - NATO framework of strategic cooperation – which included space domain as one of the areas of cooperation – that was set through the 2022 Strategic Compass and was reaffirmed by the 3rd EU - NATO Joint Declaration on January 10th, 2023, also noting that space has been transformed from a capability to a strategic domain.

3.7 Conclusion

The concluding part (European Commission, 2023:17) of the European Union Space Strategy for Security & Defence reiterates the EU's commitment to the protection of its security interests and the enhancement of its resilience, emphasising on the importance of the space domain as according to the respective part:

“Space systems and services in the EU contribute to the strategic autonomy of the EU and its Member States. They are key assets that will contribute to shaping the future competitiveness, prosperity and security of the EU for next generations.”

4. Recent EU Developments Regarding the Security & Defence and Space Sectors

Remaining committed to the objective set in its 2022 Strategic Compass *“to make the EU a stronger and more capable security provider”* (European Council, 2022), the EU has proceeded to several novel actions regarding the Security & Defence sector, that – in addition to the accession of Finland & Sweden to NATO, despite some initial difficulties posed by Turkey and Hungary (Koukakis, 2023a) – are aspiring to enhance its respective capabilities. These actions are the following:

✓ The issuance of the *“European Defence Industrial Strategy”* (EDIS) on March 5th, 2024 aiming at the establishment of a more responsive and resilient European Defence Industry and the development of a defence readiness culture among its member-states (Koukakis, 2024a).

✓ The signing of the *“EU - Moldova Security & Defence Partnership”* on May 21st, 2024 to further enhance their cooperation in order to address common challenges in a better way and improve Moldova's resilience (Koukakis, 2024b).

✓ The adoption of the *“Strategic Agenda 2024-2029”* on June 27th, 2024 which set security as one of the major priorities of the EU by defining *“A strong and secure Europe”* as the second of its three Pillars (Koukakis, 2024c).



Picture 6: Factsheet (3rd page) of the EU regarding its Space Strategy for Security & Defence

Photo Source:

<https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/EU%20SSSD%20Factsheet.pdf>

✓ The establishment of a “*Commissioner for Defence and Space*” on July 18th, 2024 by the President of the European Commission (Ursula von der Leyen) appointing Andrius Kubilius –the former Prime Minister of Lithuania – as the EU’s first respective Commissioner (Koukakis, 2024c), also directing him inter alia to present a “*White Paper on the Future of European Defence*” within one hundred (100) days, define “*Defence Projects of Common European Interest (DPCI)*,” oversee the implementation of the “*EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence*,” and propose an “*EU Space Law, common EU standards and rules*” for space activities, and the publication of a “*Space Data Economy Strategy*” (European Commission, 2024a).

✓ The endorsement of the “Niinistö report” entitled “*Strengthening Europe’s civil and military preparedness and readiness*” on October 30th, 2024 (European Commission, 2024b), whose author stresses that the EU needs to step up its efforts in regard to the security & defence sector, also stating that:

“During the first decades after the Cold War, it became easy to think that security is not something that is a very present concern in our daily lives. Yet, in fact, we need security for everything. This applies equally to individuals, communities, States, and the whole European Union. We cannot see and feel security when we have it, which makes its loss all the more dramatic and painful” (European Commission, 2024c).

5. **Analysis & Assessment**

One of the first points that must be highlighted is the definition of global commons – part of which is the (outer) space domain– and the clarification of the basic principles that guide their use. To this end, the United Nations (UN) informs the public that:

“[...] Global commons have been traditionally defined as those parts of the planet that fall outside national jurisdictions and to which all nations have access. International law identifies four global commons, namely the High Seas, the Atmosphere, the Antarctica and the Outer Space. These resource domains are guided by the principle of the common heritage of mankind. [...]Historically, access to most of the resources found within the global commons has been difficult and they have not been scarce. However, the advancement of science and technology in recent years and the increased demand for resources is leading to an increase in activities such as fisheries, bioprospecting, navigation, flight, scientific research, and the laying of submarine cables. At the same time, our planet is facing critical environmental challenges, most importantly climate change and global warming, the depletion of the Ozone layer, and rapid environmental degradation in the Antarctica. If business as usual prevails, these

trends will likely worsen and will negatively impact the global commons' capacity to provide ecosystem services for human well-being. The international community acknowledges the need to conserve these resource domains for development and human well-being, and has adopted a number of conventions and treaties to govern global commons [...]" (United Nations, 2013).

A second point that must be stressed is the vital importance of strategy not only for the Security & Defence sector but for every policy field as well, because through the definition of ends, means and ways in addition to the threat/risk assessment – which are the basic four elements of every strategy (Meiser, 2016) – it provides the necessary framework for all subordinate actors (in this case the EU member states) in which they will implement their respective national strategies in order to promote their national interests. As far as the Security & Defence sector is concerned, it must also be noted that the most common grand strategy document issued in state level is called “*National Security Strategy*” (NSS) (Koukakis, 2023b).

A third point that needs to be clarified is that resilience in every sector is a crucial capacity not only for the EU and its member states but also for every state and non-state actor, as it allows it to successfully address existing and emerging threats of the security environment and seize opportunities to quickly recover from crises. This is highlighted in many strategic documents of regional and international (state and non-state) major actors (Koukakis, 2023c), such as the 2022 National Security Strategy of the USA (Koukakis, 2022b), France's 2022 National Strategic Review (Κουκάκης, 2022b), Japan's 2022 National Security Strategy (Κουκάκης, 2022c), the 2023 Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (Κουκάκης, 2023a), the UK's 2023 Integrated Review Refresh (Κουκάκης, 2023b), and Germany's 2023 National Security Strategy (Κουκάκης, 2023c).

Moreover, the contemporary security threats – as highlighted in the European Union Space Strategy for Security & Defence – differ significantly from the “*traditional*” military threats of the past, despite the fact that the use of military force is still an integral part of them as indicated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Koukakis, 2022a), the Armenia - Azerbaijan conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), the war in Gaza between Hamas and Israel, and several other regional conflicts. That is exactly why more and more states develop space strategies in order to promote the respective capability building and gain

advantage over other actors, transforming the existing “*arms race*” to a new “*space race*”(Zanidis, 2023).

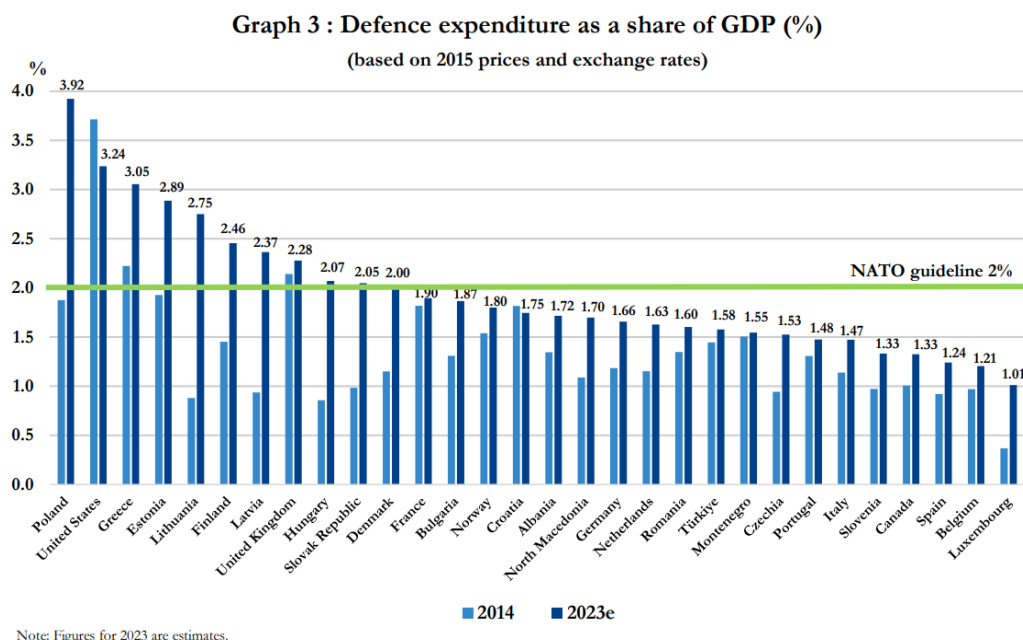
A fifth point that must also be understood is that due to the conditions of the contemporary security environment of polycrises and permacrises (Koukakis, 2023d), the effectiveness of the European Security & Defence is closely related to the collaboration of the European states in every related sector regardless of their membership in the EU, as partnerships ensure the increased effectiveness of the actions taken to counter several threats due to the military, economic and diplomatic support, the exchange of know-how, the promotion of innovation through research and development, etc. In other words, the collective effort is more effective than the sum of the effort of each state.

As far as intelligence is concerned, the EU – taking into consideration the expressed intention of using its Single Intelligence Analysis Capability (SIAC) in addition to military and civilian capabilities – seems to fully acknowledge the essential role it plays in absolutely every policy field regarding not only planning but also implementing a specific strategy, as intelligence can reveal besides existing and emerging threats/risks, vulnerabilities of the EU institutions and its member states, opportunities that can be seized, and alternative courses of action as well (Office of National Intelligence of the Commonwealth of Australia, n.d.).

The same applies for the establishment of a the new Commissioner for Defence and Space, as it is assessed that this action will ensure that all the planned objectives as far as the Security & Defence sector will be overseen, thus facilitate the promotion of all the respective changes and resolve any issues that might occur. The existence of a large number of administrative, financial and organizational tools – such as the high-level EDIG, SEAP, FAST, EDIP, CDP, CARD, PESCO, etc. – and the issuance of a ‘European Defence Industrial Strategy’ in order to establish a competitive and innovative Defence Industry Technological Base (DITB) will further support the aforementioned EU efforts.

Another point that needs to be highlighted is that the ongoing war in Ukraine was a catalyst for the Security & Defence sector of many European states, since it has led to the increase (Picture 7) of their defence expenditures as a share (%) of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the modernization of their Armed Forces, also proceeding to the signing of military agreements that provide for mutual military assistance in case they are

threatened by other actors, such as the “*Agreement between the Government of Hellenic Republic and the Government of the Republic of France on establishing a Strategic Partnership for Cooperation in Defence and Security*” (Κουκάκης, 2023d), and the “*Agreement between the Government of the Hellenic Republic and the Government of the United Arab Emirates regarding Joint Foreign Policy and Defence Cooperation*” (Εφημερίδα της Κυβερνήσεως της Ελληνικής Δημοκρατίας, 2022).



Picture 7: NATO member-states’ defence expenditure (2014-2023)

Photo Source: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/3/pdf/240314-def-exp-2023-en.pdf

Last but not least, it must be noted is that training and education, are two essential factors that contribute greatly to the effective implementation of any reform – such as the reform of the Security & Defence and especially the Space sector – and/or objective, as they result not only in capacity building but in the development of a (national) Security & Defence culture also promoting cooperation in several fields, thus enhancing solidarity between. Therefore, the establishment of an EU Space Academy can only be seen as a vital force multiplier.

6. Concluding Remarks

To conclude, it needs to be stressed that – despite the increased level of ambition of the EU as far as the Security & Defence is concerned – past experience has shown that the

EU member states have demonstrated a lack of will in regard to the implementation of several EU policies and strategies, due to several differences in their mindset, national interests, level of capabilities, etc. This is exactly why the most important factor for the EU as far as achieving the objectives in the Security & Defence sector is concerned is ensuring solidarity among the EU member states, keeping in mind that solidarity is one of the two core principles on which the EU was built (European Council, n.d.) and that adapting to the conditions of the contemporary security environment is essential for the survival of the EU. Finally, the European leaders must never forget the wise words of the “*father of Europe*” Robert Schuman that act both as a warning and a prompt, according to which:

“A united Europe was not achieved and we had war. Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan: it will be formed through concrete measures which bring about a *de facto* solidarity” (European Council, n.d.).

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