

BUILDING A STRONGER EUROPE:

Liberal Visions for
Security and
Defence



EUROPEAN LIBERAL YOUTH
LYME

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Introduction

Following the previous editions in 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025, the **European Liberal Forum (ELF)** with the support of **LYMEC (European Liberal Youth)** and our Spanish partner **Fundalib (Foundation for the Advancement of Freedom)** organised the 'Liberal Hack' youth event about **Security and Defence in Europe**. A hackathon is an event with a capped time frame, typically lasting between 24 and 48 hours, where teams of professionals cooperate intensively on innovative projects. In the case of our hackathon in Madrid, Spain, which took place in April 2026, our participants had 24 hours to develop their proposals. Here, politically active young individuals - students, activists, and young professionals - gathered, committed to developing concrete liberal policies that benefit the European Union (EU) as a whole.

The Liberal Hack 2026 centred on exploring **Security and Defence in Europe** in a way that is liberal, strategic, and future-oriented. European security is facing challenges driven by geopolitical volatility, hybrid warfare, rapid technological disruption, and shifting defence requirements. These developments call for a comprehensive reassessment of Europe's security and defence architecture as shaped in the post-Cold-War framework.

Strengthening European security and defence is essential to ensure a strong, secure, and competitive Europe. Five teams of three participants tackled four key focus areas within the broader topic of EU Security and Defence: Conscription and Civic Duty, Defence Industry, Resilience: A Whole-of-Society Approach, and Defending Liberal Democracy against Hybrid Threats.

The hackathon consisted of both expert sessions and hacking time. During the expert sessions, the participants gained insights into the technicalities of European Security and Defence applied to the four topics they were working on. They also received a workshop on how to pitch their project. After these sessions, the five groups presented their

work to the jury: Francesco Cappelletti, Yevheniia Kravchuk, and Roxana Nicula. The groups presented innovative solutions to EU Security and Defence challenges and succeeded in designing actionable, coherent, innovative, and liberal policies to tackle their chosen challenge.

In the following pages, you will find all five projects developed by the groups and the policy proposals they produced.

Project 1

From Scrolling to Knowing: A Youth Guide to Fighting Disinformation



From Scrolling to Knowing: A Youth Guide to Fighting Disinformation

Group Members:

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Background

Social media has evolved into the primary means of spreading disinformation, with young people being a key target group. Because hybrid (disinformation) attacks by foreign actors are intended to destabilise society as a whole, initiatives such as [EUvsDisinfo](#) were launched by the EU, intending to mitigate divisive effects. While these initiatives provide a basis for fighting disinformation, the youth are rarely part of the solution. Therefore, this project targets 15 to 25-year-olds to incentivise peer-to-peer dialogue as well as to include them in policymaking. By transforming those most vulnerable into ‘Guardians’, we can move away from less relatable ‘top-down’ communication, instead focusing on training youth to conduct their own fact-checking. By empowering them to share their findings online, we ensure that information is distributed by trusted, age-appropriate voices rather than external authorities. Ultimately, this approach strengthens societal resilience as a whole, benefiting both the targeted young people and the integrity of the European informational space.



Scope

According to a [survey](#) undertaken by the European Parliament, 42% of young people identify social media as their primary source of political news, with 76% of young people believing that they had previously encountered false or misleading information online. Social media has become one of the easiest channels through which young people can be targeted: it is a minimally regulated information space where thousands of accounts, preferences, and interactions can be manipulated by automated systems or bots. In this technologically advanced environment, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between factual reporting and propaganda, independent civic actors, and paid accounts.

As more of our lives shift into digital spaces, it is crucial for EU countries to adapt and address the risks posed by anti-state propaganda targeting youth. Recent cases show an increasing number of attempts by external actors such as Russia to influence or recruit teenagers and young adults to engage in disruptive or illegal activities within EU countries. Such recruitment efforts, driven by propaganda, contribute to growing mistrust in state institutions and make it even harder for young people to differentiate truth from manipulation. To ensure that EU countries can effectively respond to hybrid threats and attempts by external actors to undermine or fragment democratic societies, we need a policy approach that addresses the root causes and early stages of disinformation, while protecting those most vulnerable to it. Collaboration with schools and educators is essential for building a cross-institutional response. Strengthening trust between young people and the EU will ultimately contribute to a more resilient and empowered society.

Stakeholder Engagement

The stakeholders that are required for this project can be broadly divided into two focused categories: supranational stakeholders (such as the European Commission) and local stakeholders (such as the European Ambassador Programme). While supranational stakeholders are required to ensure smooth cross-border cooperation, local stakeholders are essential to reach youth for this project in an informal and more approachable as well as accessible manner. This informal approach on finding participants, should ensure that people from all socio-economic backgrounds participate and provide a balanced point of view. For supranational coordination, the European Commission and relevant committees of the European Parliament should be called upon to in-

clude youth in decision-making regarding the fight against disinformation. To provide the future peer-to-peer fact-checkers with sufficient tools, stakeholders such as the [East StratCom Task Force](#) or the [European Digital Media Observatory](#) should be included as service providers of an accessible toolkit for quick fact-checking. To reach and recruit young participants in the project on a local level, actors such as the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions or ambassadors of the Young European Ambassadors Programme should be included as stakeholders to build a rapport in an informal way.

Main Provisions

The proposals outline a comprehensive way to address the spread of propaganda in EU countries amongst young people as well as allowing the youth to contribute to the eradication of one of the challenges they face.

From Scrolling to Knowing: A Youth Guide to Fighting Disinformation is a hands-on initiative for young people to tackle and dismantle disinformation campaigns online, while also more actively engaging with different EU institutions and projects. The way of engagement and incentives to participate would be tailored to each specific region, but the project should first be implemented where the highest numbers of young people are seen to be engaging with anti-state propaganda.

Structured discussion cycles: EU institutions such as European Parliament or European Commission offices in different states organise discussion cycles with educators, psychologists, social media communication analysts, anti-state disinformation experts and young people, to figure out what measures should be taken to engage groups of people most affected by it and successfully address it.

Peer-to-peer dialogue: Participants of the programme should be taught to communicate concepts of mis-/dis-/malinformation and educate peers about recent cases of these. It is especially important to engage people in ways that make it easy for them to understand and participate. That is why easy vocabulary and creative social media communication should be prioritised.



Incentivise fact-checking and share it: Young people who decide to be ambassadors of this programme would be incentivised with different opportunities that the EU can offer and would be constantly kept in touch with representatives of EU institutions.

Special status as ‘Youth Flaggers’ under DSA Article 22: According to the Digital Services Act of the EU, so-called ‘Trusted Flaggers’ must receive higher priority when reporting content on social platforms. While granting this status to youth is unrealistic, it would be preferable to have young people trained in fact-checking should be given higher priority elevated in priority queues of social platforms to enable rapid and decentralised takedowns.

Protection against harassment: Participants of the programme have to be protected against harassment by foreign actors. On the internet, this can be achieved by legally denying the subject of a report access to the names of the ‘Youth Flaggers.’

Protection under the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive: In 2024, the EU approved a directive to increase protection for people being sued for their ‘public participation’. To prevent strategic lawsuits against fact-checkers, the national implementations of the directive should cover independent fact-checkers.

Implementation Roadmap

Phase 1: Evidence Mapping and Stakeholder Mobilisation

Conduct comprehensive and verifiable data collection on disinformation trends, hybrid threats, and youth media consumption across participating regions, in cooperation with universities, civil society organisations and cybersecurity agencies. Map existing youth initiatives, fact-checking networks, and digital literacy programmes to identify gaps and best practices. Identification of key vulnerabilities among youth populations, including algorithmic exposure, low media literacy, and targeted influence campaigns. Establish a coalition of supranational bodies (e.g., East StratCom Task Force, Young European Ambassadors). Begin consultations with tech platforms and EU bodies on legal feasibility of the ‘Youth Flagger’ priority queues aligned with DSA Article 22 and integration of youth-flaggers into Anti-SLAPP protection frameworks.

Phase 2: Toolset Development and Capacity Building

Design and roll out of a structured Youth Digital Resilience Framework including training modules on media literacy, critical thinking, hybrid threat awareness, and creative social-media communication. Establish formal partnerships with schools, universities, and youth organisations to integrate training into both formal and non-formal education systems.

Introduce a certification mechanism to recognise and validate youth competences in countering hybrid threats. Partner with the European Media Observatory to provide youth-friendly fact-checking tools.

Phase 3: Pilot Implementation and Communication

Initiate pilot projects in selected regions, enabling youth to respond to disinformation.

Launch of targeted social media campaigns promoting fact-based narratives and digital responsibility. Integrate training with practical activities, including simulations, hackathons, and rapid-response exercises. Implement a public communication campaign highlighting the role of youth in strengthening democratic resilience. Introduce the ‘Youth-Flagger’ in pilot regions with high exposure to anti-state propaganda.

Phase 4: Scaling, Policy Integration, and Impact

Evaluate the pilot’s success in mitigating disinformation and consolidate the legal status/protection of youth-flaggers in Anti-SLAPP frameworks. Expand the programme to additional regions, with particular focus on high-risk and underserved communities. Publish evidence-based policy recommendations addressed to national governments and international institutions.

Liberal Approach

Our policy recommendations are liberal because they focus on empowering young people rather than controlling the available information. The approach strengthens individual autonomy by teaching youth to think critically for themselves, how to verify information, and participate in public debate. This aligns with core liberal values



such as free expression, open dialogue, and personal responsibility. When addressing hybrid threats like disinformation, liberal policies prioritise long-term, education-based solutions instead of restrictive measures or censorship. By working with schools, youth organisations, and civil society, the proposal supports open democratic engagement and avoids limiting access to information or freedom of speech. Focusing on 15 to 25-year-olds is essential, as they are both the most active online and the most exposed to manipulative content. The goal is not to regulate what people can say, but to strengthen awareness, responsibility, and resilience. By promoting critical thinking and fact-checking skills, the policy contributes to a society that can resist disinformation while upholding liberal democratic principles.

Impact

The aim of our proposal is to increase young people's resilience to disinformation and in this way reduce the spread of false information within general society over time. First, through implementing peer-to-peer media literacy education, we will enable students to recognise fake news online and teach them to pay attention to the specific topics that are prone to having large amounts of misinformation. Second, it strengthens critical thinking skills, ensuring that young people do not passively accept content they encounter on platforms like TikTok or Instagram but instead question, verify, and evaluate it. The policy also generates long-term societal benefits. As more media-literate youth grow into adults, the overall population becomes less vulnerable to manipulation through hybrid threats and disinformation campaigns. This contributes to greater democratic stability by fostering informed citizens who can participate responsibly in public debate without being easily influenced by false narratives. Ultimately, the policy not only addresses short-term challenges—it helps build a stronger, more informed society that is harder to manipulate in the future. An educated population is more resilient because people rely on critical thinking rather than reacting emotionally or accepting the first information they encounter.

Project 2

Break Glass in
Case of War:
Liberal
Approach to
Military Service



Break Glass in Case of War: Liberal Approach to Military Service

Group Members:

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Marius Gobet (Young Green Liberals, Switzerland)

Valentyna Riznyk (The ZeMolodizhka, Ukraine)

Background

As Europe's security environment darkens, conscription is returning to the continent's political agenda. Croatia has revived the draft, the Nordic and Baltic states already maintain conscript-heavy forces, and Germany has introduced mandatory conscription screening.

The policy question at hand involves a sharp tension between individual liberty, since conscription entails the forced military service of young Europeans and the defence needs considered essential to Europe's security. A further problem is conscription's inherent inequality. In many countries, conscription still involves explicit gender-based discrimination, while even in the Nordic countries that have extended conscription to women, women account for only a small share of conscripts. This produces unequal outcomes in practice, even where formal equality exists in law. Selective conscription systems also concentrate the burden of national defence on a narrow slice of society deemed eligible, who make a disproportionate sacrifice for everyone else. Conscription also amounts to intergenerational burden-shifting, placing burdens on the young.

Scope

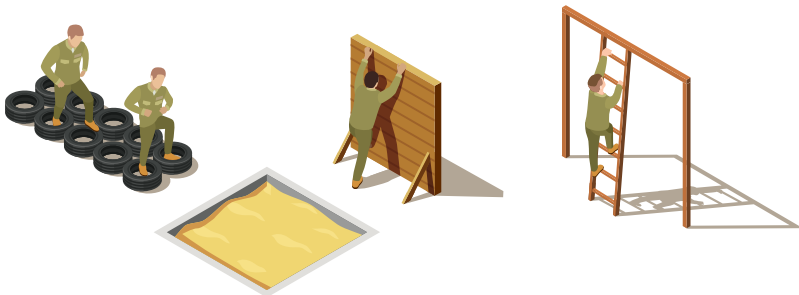
This proposal addresses how liberals must balance the requirements of defence with individual liberty. As a result of the return of great power competition and the continuing threat posed by actors such as the Russian Federation, countries across Europe are actively looking at considerable increases in the size of their armed forces in terms of troop numbers. This has reached a magnitude where a range of states are returning to the old idea of conscription as they struggle to recruit and retain an adequate quantity of troops.

As liberals, we affirm that there must be a primacy of volunteer service to build Europe's fighting forces to the maximal extent possible, with conscription to be relied on only as a last resort. Volunteer service must be incentivised. This shall be done through adequate pay, benefits, working conditions, and institutional excellence.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that volunteer forces may not be enough. Conscription should only be employed where necessary and should be minimally invasive. That is, any conscription must only require from citizens what is necessary and be designed in a manner that safeguards their current and future opportunities and freedoms.

New forms of civic duty are called for: Europe should establish a Volunteer European Guard. A single common European structure in which citizens from the entire Union may participate jointly. This programme would provide a common basic military education over a few months, after the completion of which participants could enlist in their home country's military to continue further with specialised military training. This programme would provide a strategic reserve through a reservoir of skilled personnel. Furthermore, it would serve to increase European cohesion and sense of identity through common service and camaraderie.

We would like to note that as defence and conscription remain national competences, this proposal focuses on EU-level coordination, support, and policy guidance rather than binding legislative action.



Stakeholder Engagement

National governments: Member States hold primary responsibility for the design and implementation of conscription and civic service systems. They must ensure that participation frameworks are transparent, inclusive, and adaptable, offering both military and civilian service tracks. Governments should also establish clear legal safeguards and incentives to balance civic obligation with individual choice.

Local and regional authorities: They are key to the practical implementation of civic duty programmes. It is at this level that concrete service opportunities are created: in communities, hospitals, emergency services, and social projects. They ensure that programmes are adapted to local needs and help build trust in the system.

Defence and security institutions: Ministries of defence, national guard units, and civil protection services are responsible for the military dimension and broader national security components. They must integrate new service formats, including reserve and hybrid models.

Educational and research institutions: These institutions support evidence-based policymaking by assessing public attitudes, measuring programme outcomes, and developing innovative service formats. Educational systems should integrate civic responsibility and preparedness, fostering a culture of participation from an early stage.

Citizens and youth: Citizens are both participants and drivers of the system. A modern civic duty framework must prioritise flexibility and agency, allowing individuals to choose how they contribute through military or civilian service. Building trust and social recognition is essential to ensure long-term engagement and legitimacy.

EU institutions and agencies: They provide the strategic framework for developing models of conscription and civic duty across Member States. The European Commission should ensure policy coherence, safeguard fundamental rights, and support coordination. The European External Action Service (EEAS) can facilitate dialogue with partner countries and promote European approaches to resilience and societal preparedness.



Main Provisions

Pillar: All Volunteer Force

A bedrock of defence policy should remain a strong professional army composed of willing, well-motivated volunteers. Where European countries struggle with recruitment, the cause is often not a lack of civic spirit, but inadequate pay, poor living conditions, and low service quality. Europe should therefore focus first on fixing these failures by offering soldiers fair compensation, decent conditions, and demanding but meaningful service. Given the hidden economic costs of conscription, a professional force may prove less expensive once all costs are properly accounted for.

As the defence consensus increasingly points to the need for large war-time reserves capable of replacing depleted troops, shorter forms of voluntary non-career military training are also worth expanding. Manning the reserve with willing volunteers produces valuable self-selection, attracting those who are more motivated, better suited, and more likely to serve effectively in Europe's defence. Individual choice also helps curb abuses common in conscript forces, including hazing, exploitative pay, and the misuse of authority.

Pillar: Conscription

Conscription, while appealing to the personal responsibility of citizens, is by its nature a considerable infringement of the liberty of the individual. As such, it must be used sparingly, only when it is absolutely necessary. The history of modern conflict shows that in any large enough war, states have had to rely on some form of conscription, as Ukraine illustrates to this day. At what point does the defence of our liberal democracies justify compelling citizens to defend it?

In any case, if used, conscription must be designed so as to respect the personal integrity of the individual. Any training obligations must allow for flexibility in how they are fulfilled and ensure the rights of the conscripts are respected.

Pillar: Volunteer European Guard

European security and the volunteer military forces of its Member States should be augmented with a Volunteer European Guard. This shall be a Union-wide initiative open to the citizens of the bloc and primarily aimed at young people. Participants would undergo a single European standard basic military course for a duration of around 3-6 months. Upon completing this course, participants would be provided the option to integrate into the armed forces of their country as a reservist or ca-

reer soldier, in which role they would continue on to specialist military education according to national and specialist curricula.

This programme would serve to further a range of objectives:

First, it would be European cohesion. Not unlike the Erasmus programme, participants will forge their European identity through joint service and camaraderie with fellow recruits from across the bloc. Participating citizens will gain a basic military and emergency preparedness education and gain a close understanding of European defence. As with an internship, they will also be able to see if military service is a good fit for them. Member States' militaries will gain access to a pipeline of high-quality recruits. This additional reservoir of citizens with military personnel will also increase the military potential of Europe and thus serve to reinforce deterrence.

Implementation Roadmap

Phase 1: Policy Design and Alignment (0–6 months)

EU institutions, primarily the European Commission and European External Action Service, initiate a policy framework for a military, including voluntary military and civilian tracks. Member States conduct national consultations to assess legal constraints, public attitudes, and existing capacities. Academic and research institutions provide evidence-based assessments on recruitment gaps, social acceptance, and cost-efficiency.

Phase 2: Legal and Institutional Setup (6–18 months)

National governments adapt legislation to prioritise voluntary service while defining clear conditions under which conscription may be used as a last resort. EU-level coordination mechanisms are established to support interoperability, including standards for training, mobility, and mutual recognition. Defence ministries and civil protection agencies design modular service formats (short-term training, reserve schemes).

Phase 3: Pilot Programmes and Capacity Building (18–36 months)

Local and regional authorities launch pilot programmes in sectors such as emergency response, healthcare, and infrastructure resilience. A 'Volunteer European Guard' pilot is introduced, coordinated at EU level but implemented nationally. Investment is directed toward improving pay, conditions, and incentives for volunteers. Civil society organisations support outreach and recruitment, particularly among youth.

Phase 4: Scaling and Integration (3–5 years)

Successful models are scaled across Member States. Reserve systems are expanded, ensuring rapid mobilisation capacity. Education systems integrate civic preparedness modules to normalise participation. Private sector partners contribute through skills training and employment pathways for participants.

Phase 5: Evaluation and Adaptation (ongoing)

Continuous monitoring by EU institutions and independent bodies ensures effectiveness, inclusiveness, and proportionality. Adjustments are made to maintain the primacy of voluntary service while preserving the option of limited, rights-respecting conscription if required.

Liberal approach

These recommendations uphold human dignity and individual liberty by treating forced service as an exceptional measure rather than a normal policy tool. They promote equality before the law by resisting the imposition of disproportionate burdens on a narrow demographic, typically young men, and they protect citizens from abuse by framing conscription as an emergency power subject to strict limits rather than as a routine instrument of governance. At the same time, they strengthen Europe's defence by directing resources toward effective, professional, and properly equipped military capacity. Finally, they safeguard vulnerable groups, including conscripted teenagers, by requiring fair pay, safe conditions, and basic protections.

Impact

The policy's main impact is to shift conscription from a routine manpower tool to a strictly limited emergency measure, thereby aligning defence policy with liberal principles while improving effectiveness. By prioritising professional forces, competitive pay, and modern capabilities, it strengthens military readiness and directs resources toward units that can actually deploy. At the same time, it makes the true costs of defence more transparent, reducing reliance on hidden taxation through underpaid compulsory labour. The policy also reduces the unequal burden placed on young people, while ensuring that those who are conscripted receive fair compensation, safe conditions, and basic protections. By introducing clear thresholds, time limits, and oversight, it curbs the risk of abuse and bureaucratic expansion. Overall, the reform delivers a more credible, accountable, and sustainable model of defence that secures Europe without normalising coercion.

Project 3

The Bottleneck Break: An EU-wide Strategic Reserve for the European Defence Industry



The Bottleneck Break: An EU-wide Strategic Reserve for the European Defence Industry

Group Members:

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Joel Hernandez Machin (Joventut Nacionalista de Catalunya, Catalonia)

Maria Frandsen (Radikal Ungdom, Denmark)

Background

Since the end of the Cold War, reduced geopolitical tensions have led to significant downsizing of military capacities across Western states, reflecting a broader expectation of lasting stability in Europe. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has fundamentally challenged this assumption and exposed critical vulnerabilities in European defence systems, including limited stockpiles, fragmented procurement, and insufficient industrial capacity. At the same time, shifting U.S. strategic priorities have raised increasing doubts about the reliability of long-term security guarantees for Europe, as attention pivots towards other regions such as the Indo-Pacific.

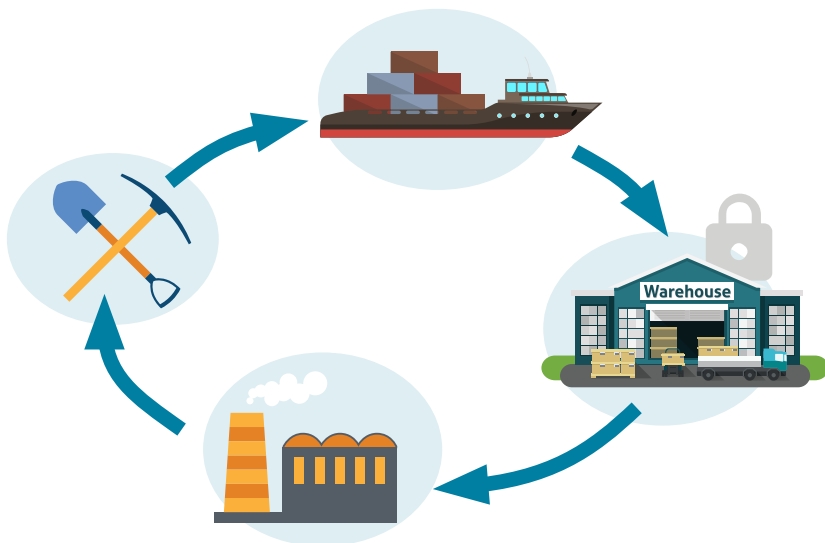
This evolving geopolitical landscape underscores the need for the EU to assume greater responsibility for its own security and defence capabilities. In response, the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) aims to strengthen cooperation among Member States, enhance production

capacity, and promote joint procurement in order to reduce external dependencies and ensure a more resilient and autonomous European defence posture.

Scope

By 2030, Europe will face a rapidly deteriorating security environment shaped by renewed interstate conflict, intensified great-power competition, and increasing dependence on external suppliers for critical defence inputs. Despite rising defence spending, nearly four times more military equipment is now being procured than ten years ago. Often, it is procured from non-EU suppliers, exposing significant vulnerabilities in supply chains for essential components, raw materials and technology.

This proposal addresses the integration of coordinated strategic reserves within the European Defence Agency (EDA). The creation of EU-coordinated strategic reserves within EDA would place defence resilience at the intersection of industrial policy, security policy, and internal market integration. By systematically identifying and stockpiling critical components and raw materials, the EU can reduce reliance on third countries and mitigate the risks associated with fragmented national procurement strategies. Such a mechanism would enable Member States to pool resources, stabilise supply chains and ensure rapid access to essential



materials during crises. It would strengthen the Union's ability to respond collectively to security shocks, while enhancing interoperability and long-term defence readiness. While initiatives such as Security and Action for Europe (SAFE), the European Defence Industry Programme and the White Paper on European Defence Readiness 2030 aim to strengthen production capacity and interoperability, the EU still lacks a structured mechanism to ensure the physical availability of critical inputs in times of crisis. The absence of EU-level reserves increases the risk of supply disruptions, political dependency, and delayed response in emergency situations. Ultimately, this proposal reframes resilience not only as increased production, but as guaranteed availability through shared European strategic reserves.

Stakeholder Engagement

As the EU holds limited competences over defence policy, Member States are the key stakeholders to take into account. To advance this initiative, Member States are encouraged to reach an intergovernmental agreement under PESCO's mandate that allows for the creation of the EU's defence and security mechanism. In addition, high-power stakeholders, including the European Commission, European Council, Council of the EU, European Parliament, and EDA, will be instrumental in the formulation of legislative frameworks, coordination mechanisms, and financing instruments enabling the development of an EU-wide strategic reserve of critical components and raw materials, based on the Lisbon Treaty.

These actors will rely on key Treaty provisions to ensure both flexibility and coherence in decision-making, notably Article 31(1) TEU, which facilitates progress while respecting national sovereignty, and Article 44(1) TEU, which enables coalitions of willing Member States to implement specific reserve-related tasks, thereby supporting differentiated integration in accordance with Article 43 TEU. Furthermore, Article 42(7) TEU will underpin mutual assistance in the event of armed aggression, while Article 222 TFEU will strengthen coordinated responses to crises, including disasters and hybrid threats. Engagement will therefore focus on aligning institutional decision-makers, industrial actors such as SMEs, and financial partners like the European Investment Bank to enhance resilience, protect human security, and ensure secure and timely access to essential defence resources.

Main Provisions

One approach would be to expand the mandate of the European Defence Agency (EDA). It could monitor dependencies on third-country suppliers, support strategic reserves of critical raw materials and components, and coordinate long-term investment planning across Member States. This would strengthen supply continuity, address industrial bottlenecks, align national defence priorities, and reduce market fragmentation.

The EU should equally reduce its dependence on non-EU suppliers, particularly authoritarian regimes such as China. An EU-wide reserve mechanism under the EDA should guarantee access to critical materials during disruptions. The Critical Raw Materials Act could be amended to incorporate this mechanism, with Member States required to maintain reserves equivalent to at least 12 months of defence-industrial consumption.

Similarly, the EU should deepen cooperation with partners such as Canada, Australia, and Chile to diversify supplies of raw materials and rare earths. A crisis mechanism ensuring fair and reliable access to resources would reduce uncertainty, prevent production disruptions, and encourage long-term investment. These measures would support industrial growth, create jobs, strengthen European defence integration, and improve the EU's capacity to respond to security threats.



Implementation Roadmap

Phase 1: Institutional Establishment and Regulatory Framework

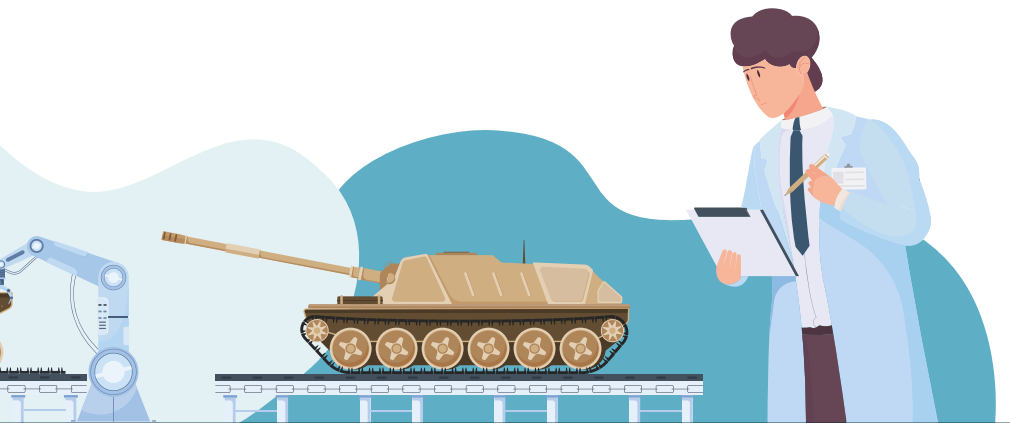
Establish a dedicated branch within the EDA, tasked with the procurement and supply of critical raw materials and components essential to the defence industrial base, with regard to the PESCO guidelines. This stage would include the development of a legal framework governing cooperation with Member States' reserve agencies, as well as the establishment of transparent pricing mechanisms. The agency would operate on a non-profit basis, ensuring that the acquisition and distribution of materials are conducted solely in support of strategic and industrial objectives.

Phase 2: Strategic Stockpiling and Demand-Driven Allocation

The agency would develop a comprehensive strategy for the acquisition and management of strategic reserves, based on systematic analysis of demand across Member States' defence industries. These reserves would be made available to national authorities upon request, particularly in cases where domestic stockpiles are insufficient to sustain the production capacity of both public and private defence manufacturers.

Phase 3: Supply Chain Diversification and Resilience

With 'Establish and secure alternative trade routes for the procurement of critical raw materials and components, with the objective of diversifying supply chains. This approach aims to reduce strategic dependencies on external state actors that do not align with EU values, thereby enhancing the resilience and autonomy of the European defence industrial ecosystem.



Liberal Approach

The proposal is rooted in a liberal approach which the mechanism is based on principles of institutionalised cooperation contributing to increasing trust, efficiency, and collective resilience among EU Member States. The introduction of a legal framework for pricing, procurement, and distribution reflects a commitment to predictable, rules-based systems, core to liberal governance traditions. The non-profit nature of the division within the EDA guarantees stability. The agency's actions support market rules, rather than replace them. Ensuring the steady supply of raw materials and components mitigates the potential shocks that could disrupt the private and state-owned industry. In addition, this mechanism explicitly supports both state-owned and private defence firms, respecting the liberal economic principles of mixed economies and competition. Lastly, this proposal aims at reducing dependence on non-liberal states that the EU now relies on for resource imports, granting preference to actors that share the EU's core principles such as rule of law, free market, and citizens' rights.

Impact

This policy's main impact is that it allows the EU to advance into its goal of enhancing its strategic autonomy, sovereignty, and independence in an increasingly volatile and illiberal international environment. Through this proposal, the EU is guaranteeing stable growth and secure supply chains for the European industrial base, specifically in defence, which will essentially help to foster economic growth and the creation of jobs for EU citizens. As conflicts are on the rise, the EU should be equipped with this type of policy to strengthen its capacity for crisis management. Thanks to the Strategic Reserve Mechanism, Member States will have access to the EU's strategic reserves of critical resources and rare earth minerals by 2030. Finally, security is fundamental for the protection of liberal democracies. By creating the necessary conditions for the European Defence Industry to revive, the EU is protecting the rights and the wellbeing of more than 450 million people across the EU against authoritarian threats.

Project 4

Making the
Case for Europe:
A New Forum to
Fight Disinforma-
tion in an Era of
Hybrid Threats



Making the Case for Europe: A New Forum to Fight Disin- formation in an Era of Hybrid Threats

Group Members:

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Dániel Kovács (Renew Europe, Hungary)

Background

The expansion of the EU is the single greatest driver of growth for liberal democracy in the world. Authoritarianism is responding in a new era of hybrid warfare. Hybrid threats from Russia and other hostile foreign actors, most notably covert influence operations and disinformation campaigns have focused specifically on undermining European unity, weaken pro-European sentiment, and reduce societal trust in European institutions. At present, European countries lack coordination in sharing expertise and tackling disinformation and malign covert influence.

To more effectively combat these hybrid threats and to better promote narratives and initiatives of a pro-European nature, the EU should establish a disinformation forum to serve as a driver for cross-continent cooperation. The initiative will cover both the EU and candidate countries and will involve institutions, governments, NGOs, think tanks, and movements with an interest in combating anti-European operations.

Scope

At its core, this proposal seeks to address shortcomings in European security arrangements. Disinformation and foreign influence operations can heavily undermine European unity and thereby compromise the security of the continent within a polarised world of competing (and frequently hostile) powers. Individually, European states find themselves under-resourced and ill-equipped to tackle disinformation and covert influence from malicious actors. Greater cooperation and coordination in this field would be vital to enhance both the immediate and longer-term security of Europe, particularly in the following ways:

Greater cohesion amongst European allies: Strong unity and greater European coordination are a key element of our security. Bringing together relevant stakeholders across Member States builds relationships between them, enhances their individual expertise, and ensures that no Member State finds itself under-resourced in tackling hybrid threats, marking a considerable immediate improvement to European security.

Enhancing security with our partners: Candidate countries for EU membership are commonly targeted by Russian disinformation in an attempt to prevent the further spread and reinforcement of liberal democracy. As High Representative Kaja Kallas has stated, **'Enlargement is security policy by another name.'** Assisting candidate countries in this regard protects and perhaps even accelerates the timetable for EU enlargement, building the crucial pillar of long-term European security.

Stakeholder Engagement

At an institutional level, these stakeholders are the ones with the power to take the various actions identified by the forum in order to tackle disinformation. In the context of the forum, these are the stakeholders who require the information while also being able to provide some information themselves from their own experiences. These stakeholders include:

(i) European Institutions, (ii) National governments and agencies of Member States, (iii) National governments and agencies of candidate countries.

Civil Society: By drawing upon the knowledge of stakeholders from across civil society, institutional stakeholders are in a better position to identify the key actions they require. In the context of the forum, these are the stakeholders who provide information and can specifically provide more in-depth insights from their specialised focus. Including these stakeholders also increases the pool of expertise available to access as part of the forum, which would be of particular benefit to smaller Member States and candidate countries. These stakeholders would include:

(i) NGOs, (ii) Think Tanks, (iii) Social Movements, (iv) Academia, (v) Independent Media, (vi) Industry Actors.

Main Provisions

Disinformation and covert influence operations chiefly revolve around narratives. Hostile soft power operations in politics, media, or academia, as well as the spread of false information all serve to create sentiments that can fuel anti-democratic and anti-European narratives. In the immediate term, countering these harmful sources of misinformation is of the utmost necessity. However, this is only a short-term mitigation of a wider problem. In the longer term, it is also imperative that strong, clear, coherent pro-European narratives can thrive. This forum would be an instrument for cross-European efforts in both of the above aims, providing the key element of coordination.

Coordination of Information

(i) Knowledge sharing

Drive the development of methods for monitoring, identifying, and documenting cases of misinformation.

Establish shared databases of known malign actors and their activities.

Detail experiences in dealing with covert operations including elite capture, targeting media, academia, election interference.

(ii) Exchange of best practices

Build cross-European capacities to tackle hybrid threats.

Facilitate the sharing of best practices amongst European colleagues.

Adopt and adapt successful existing strategies from countries with greater hands-on experience in tackling disinformation and foreign operations such as Ukraine or the Baltics.

Coordination of Resourcing

(i) Pooling of existing resources

Identify which Member States are most lacking in their own resources. Ensure efficient allocation of collective resources to where they are most needed for capability development.

Reduce costs by pooling where possible, avoiding unnecessary duplication of resources across Member States.

(ii) Allocation of funding

Provide additional EU funding for counter-disinformation efforts.

Distribute funding to where it is most required.

Finance efforts/campaigns from non-state actors that contribute to tackling hybrid threats.

Support initiatives, particularly from civil society, focused on the promotion of democratic, European values, especially in countries undergoing Europeanisation.

Coordination of Actions

(i) Countering disinformation and malign covert operations

Coordinate cross-national responses, campaigns and initiatives which provide solidarity and support to those most severely impacted by disinformation.

Deliver joint efforts in aiding countries affected by election interference, soft power operations, media capture, elite capture, and economic coercion.

(ii) Promotion of European values

Build and support pan-European initiatives, campaigns and efforts aimed at promoting democracy, liberalisation, and pro-European sentiments, both within EU Member States and in neighbourhood countries.

Expand and develop European exchange initiatives to expose young people in candidate countries to European values first-hand (e.g. the expansion of the Erasmus programme or the development of similar programmes).



Implementation Roadmap

Phase 1 - Establish new 'Disinformation Forum'

Created as an independent, permanent working platform for coordination and dialogue, with shared databases, initiatives, and resources. Consist of a small permanent secretariat for administrative functions, as well as advancing and monitoring relevant actions. Recurring summits on a bi-annual basis, bringing together stakeholders for forward-looking engagement and proposal of future initiatives.

Phase 2 - Actively countering disinformation

Bringing together relevant expertise across stakeholders to assist in coordinating and implementing actions to address existing hybrid threats. Placing a specific focus on covert actions and the spread of misinformation which seek to create Eurosceptic sentiment and undermine European unity, trust in European and democratic structures and institutions, and European aspirations in candidate and partner countries. Achieving greater European cohesion via mitigating the negative effects of disinformation and covert campaigns which sow disunity, thereby enhancing the continent's overall security.

Phase 3 - Promotion of pro-European values

Supporting local actors and coordinating cross-continent campaigns that raise awareness about the benefits of the European project, advocate for pro-European values, and promote liberal democratic governance. In particular, supporting these actions in prospective Member States and other neighbourhood partners (e.g. Moldova, Georgia) to accelerate the potential timeline for enlargement and to further facilitate ongoing processes of Europeanisation. Contributing to Europe's long-term security through a neighbourhood of like-minded free, democratic countries.

Phase 4 - Global partnerships for liberal democracy

The potential exists to expand this initiative beyond the immediate neighbourhood by involvement of fellow liberal democratic allies (e.g. Japan, Canada) and organisations (e.g. NATO) in the forum and to extend help to facilitate processes of liberalisation and democratisation in non-European countries as well. Using the forum as a clear example of European leadership in advocating for liberal democratic governance, thereby increasing Europe's influence on the global stage and promoting positive democratic change across the world.

Liberal Approach

The EU as a political project is inherently liberal, encouraging democratic values in both its existing Member States and potential candidate countries who see their future in Europe. Efforts to bring together European countries to further support these ideals make our values more resilient to the threats posed by authoritarian regimes. In a time of global political uncertainty and a failure by the U.S. to play a leadership role in the world, Europe must come together and resist attempts by authoritarians to divide us.

The proposed forum promotes a Europe that is united, bringing together both existing and prospective EU Member States to resist attempts by malicious actors to advance euroscepticism and divide our European project. With access to the full degree of information available, individual Member States and other relevant stakeholders become as best equipped as possible to determine their response to misinformation and foreign influence operations in their own domestic contexts.

Impact

This project will result in a more cohesive Europe, both amongst our Member States and in cooperation with candidate countries. European countries which lack the capabilities to tackle disinformation will benefit from the experience and best practices of those countries which have had to endure the most severe covert influence operations and disinformation campaigns. Under-resourced programmes to tackle this issue will benefit as resources and finances are pooled at a European level. In the long term, this forum will support the enhancement of liberal democracy in the EU and allow candidate countries to benefit from it. As has been stated previously, a cohesive and enlarged EU is a more secure EU. Europe will be more prepared for other hostile actions from Russia or China because of the cohesion established between countries.

Project 5

Ready, Steady:
EU action plan
for preparing a
safe and united
Europe



Ready, Steady: EU action plan for preparing a safe and united Europe

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Background

We propose to create an EU resilience action plan in collaboration with EU institutions (European Commission, European Parliament, Council), in which Member States implement the plan in their own way, while the Commission monitors execution, evaluates effectiveness, and ensures continuous improvement. Europe must be ready and prepared, not only to act when crises arise. Resilience is a powerful soft power tool against global threats. Therefore, an EU resilience action plan would strengthen unity and represent a step toward a more federal Europe. This matters because the [latest Eurobarometer survey](#) shows that global developments create widespread concern among EU citizens. Security fears are high: conflicts near the EU (72%), terrorism (67%), cyber-attacks from non-EU countries (66%), and natural disasters worsened by climate change (66%). Additionally, 89% believe Member States should act in a more united way. Therefore, this strategy must reach and involve every EU resident.

Scope

Threats are rising every day, and EU survey data shows that inhabitants are increasingly concerned and expect the EU to act. At the same time, many people do not follow government guidance, ignore informational materials, or are simply unaware that such resources exist, as seen in cases like Slovakia. This highlights a key gap: awareness is not only about understanding threats and risks, but also about knowing clearly what actions to take. Existing programmes show partial success but also clear limitations. In the Netherlands, for example, more than half of the population still does not have an emergency kit at home, according to research by Ipsos I&O. Following the large-scale government campaign 'Denk Vooruit,' **44% of inhabitants now have a kit**, an increase of nine percentage points compared to 2025. This demonstrates that such initiatives can work, but also that further efforts are needed to reach a broader audience. One particularly difficult group to engage is young people. Traditional communication methods often fail to reach them effectively. A key solution is the use of influencers and digital platforms, which can communicate preparedness measures in a relatable and accessible way. Finally, resilience is an EU-wide priority, which calls for greater harmonisation of national resilience plans. If inhabitants travel within the EU, it is crucial that similar approaches apply across Member States. This consistency would reduce confusion and chaos in emergencies, ensuring that inhabitants know what to expect and how to respond, regardless of where they are in the Union.

Stakeholder Engagement

Resilience only works if as many people as possible are included. Therefore, this action plan should be developed in close collaboration with the governments of the Member States and EU institutions, ensuring both coordination and flexibility in implementation. Since young people are particularly difficult to reach, we propose working with influencers from across all Member States. The recent initiative by the European Commission to invite content creators demonstrates the value of involving them in discussions and learning from their perspectives. While influencers are sometimes viewed negatively, their impact continues to grow. This makes them essential partners in effectively communicating resilience strategies. In addition, youth organisations should be included to strengthen meaningful youth engagement. We also aim to involve civil society actors, such as NGOs and social networks, which have strong bottom-up knowledge of how to reach different groups with-

in society. This way information can reach people in an organic way, without the presence of power dynamics. We propose initiating structured dialogues between these stakeholders as soon as possible, given the increasing importance of resilience. The goal is to jointly develop an action plan and implement it across Member States. The European Commission should monitor progress, assess effectiveness, and identify areas for improvement. Where necessary, stakeholders should reconvene more frequently to share perspectives, exchange best practices, and provide practical recommendations to continuously update and strengthen the strategy.

Main Provisions

The main provisions for strengthening the resilience of society require the EU to move beyond issuing recommendations and instead develop a concrete and coordinated action plan. Such a plan should focus on three core pillars: the building of a shared European resilience identity, the increase of public awareness, and the enhancement of cooperation between all institutions and communities across Member States, creating a harmonised preparedness plan.

A key idea is the development of a shared European resilience identity. This means that, wherever you are in the EU, people understand the same basic rules and know how to act in a crisis. It is built on common values such as freedom, solidarity, and the rule of law, and highlights that resilience is a collective European responsibility rather than just a national one. Whether facing political instability, environmental disasters, or security threats, having a shared approach ensures that inhabitants can respond quickly and effectively. In this way, resilience empowers people by giving them clear guidance and protection through unity. Another key element is the implementation of awareness campaigns designed to inform inhabitants about contemporary risks such as natural disasters and catastrophes, armed conflicts, shortages of supplies, and climate change. These campaigns should prioritise clear, accessible, and actionable information rather than abstract messaging with clearly structured action plans for civilians. Through media outreach and (in)formal public education initiatives, the EU can strengthen public understanding of how such threats impact democratic institutions as well as everyday life and how they should be perceived. Awareness also encourages civic participation. For this reason, cooperation with local communities, schools, and even digital influencers can help ensure that messages reach wider and more diverse audiences, making sure a wide range of stakeholders is engaged.

In addition, the EU should invest in interactive training programmes aimed at strengthening skills and preparedness. This training can cover areas such as crisis response, first aid, or survival skills. Through practical exercises and simulations, participants can develop a clearer understanding of how to act effectively in real-life situations. This also contributes to building long-term capacity within civil society.

Finally, the use of digital platforms and social networks is essential. A unified European online platform, available in all EU languages and languages of minority groups, could centralise reliable information and support coordinated responses during crises. NGOs can also use these tools to reach broader audiences, especially younger generations. Ultimately, resilience is most effective when every member of society is engaged. It is only through cooperation, shared responsibility, and simple, inclusive actions that a truly resilient Europe can be built.

Implementation Roadmap

Stage 1: Strategy & Common Goals

The EC proposes a Green Paper to initiate discussions on a European resilience plan. By involving the private sector and NGOs, the goal is to establish clear common objectives. While the framework is built around common scenarios, it emphasises the diversity of Member States, allowing partial freedom of implementation.

Stage 2: Specialised Implementation

Implementation must extend beyond common scenarios to address country-specific risks. For instance, Mediterranean nations like Greece or Spain require large-scale evacuation strategies for extreme forest fires, measures irrelevant to the Nordics. Conversely, Baltic and Nordic states must plan for extreme low temperatures. This ensures technical actions remain relevant to local geographical and climatic realities. Where similar risks exist, Member States are encouraged to harmonise their specific-case plans.

Stage 3: Accessibility of Information

Member States must prepare citizen-centric materials. To ensure universal access, documents should be available in both digital and physical formats, translated into official, minority, and local languages. This ensures easier spread of information and also upholds the rights to information and equality.

Stage 4: Awareness & Practical Engagement

Effectiveness relies on awareness campaigns and practical engagement. Information will be shared through schools, extracurricular activities, workplaces, and social networks. In a manner adequate to a person's age. Particular emphasis is placed on practical exercises, as hands-on experience ensures better retention than reading. Extensive social media campaigns with influencers or other social media personas will target diverse social groups to maximise reach.

Stage 5: Evolution

Ongoing discussions at both EU and national levels will ensure the continuous development and expansion of this cooperation. These conversations ensure countries can report and spread their best practices on how to do these campaigns and the learning process.

Liberal Approach

The Ready steady action plan is deeply rooted in liberal European values, emphasising collective responsibility and societal unity. Achieving a coherent response requires the active involvement and preparedness of every individual within EU borders. Consequently, all materials and campaigns will be universally accessible, regardless of language, origin, or socio-economic background which ensures more equality in terms of accessibility. Adopting a bottom-up approach, information will be shared through easily accessible written, oral, and visual formats using simplified language. This unified preparedness plan safeguards individual freedoms, providing certainty and empowerment. As systems function consistently across Member States, inhabitants know what to expect and feel safer. The system's sustainability rests on two elements. First, by integrating preparation measures into daily life, awareness will spread naturally across generations without constant state intervention. Second, the framework is dynamic, expanding according to the current situation. This ensures that the public receives evolving, relevant information and additional measures rather than mere repetition.

Impacts

The plan has a dual impact, addressing both internal and external perspectives. Internally, whole-society preparedness primarily saves lives by instructing those unaware of necessary crisis procedures. It reduc-

es anxiety, stress, and chaos by providing a clear structure of mutual expectations between inhabitants and governments. Furthermore, it protects the most vulnerable. When the majority can provide immediate care for themselves, state resources can be prioritised for the most disadvantaged inhabitants. Externally, a prepared EU signals to global actors that threats are taken seriously and that society is ready to respond to any crisis. This serves as a deterrence mechanism, discouraging external intervention without signalling aggression towards others. This dual function is possible because the plan addresses diverse crises and catastrophes, such as natural disasters, rather than focusing solely on armed conflicts. By demonstrating resilience across all levels, the EU projects strength and stability, ensuring that preparedness becomes a cornerstone of both individual safety and international standing.

European Liberal Forum

The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the official political foundation of the European Liberal Party, the ALDE Party. Together with over fifty member organisations, we work all over Europe to bring new ideas into the political debate, to provide a platform for discussion, and to empower citizens to make their voices heard.

ELF was founded in 2007 to strengthen the liberal and democrat movement in Europe. Our work is guided by liberal ideals and a belief in the principle of freedom. We stand for a future-oriented Europe that offers opportunities for every citizen. ELF is engaged on all political levels, from the local to the European.

We bring together a diverse network of national foundations, think tanks and other experts. At the same time, we are also close to, but independent from, the ALDE Party and other Liberal actors in Europe. In this role, our forum serves as a space for an open and informed exchange of views between a wide range of different actors.

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