

THE BEST DEFENCE: WHY THE EU SHOULD FORGE SECURITY COMPACTS WITH ITS EASTERN NEIGHBOURS

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SUMMARY

- The European Union and its member states have yet to start upgrading EU policies to their declared ambitions of a more geopolitical and strategically sovereign EU.
- The EU spends more on support for Eastern Partnership countries than the United States does, but Washington has long taken care of security sector reform and capacity building there.
- If the EU is to be more geopolitically influential in its own neighbourhood, it needs to start developing strategic security partnerships with key neighbours to the east and the south.
- The bloc should do so by creating a security compact for the Eastern Partnership, comprising targeted support for intelligence services, cyber security institutions, and armed forces.
- In exchange, Eastern Partnership countries should conduct anticorruption and rule of law reforms in the security sector.
- The EU should treat this compact as a pilot project that it will implement with important partners in the Middle East and Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Europe, with its fondness for multilateralism and soft power, looks increasingly out of touch with global events. The growing brutality of international politics poses new dilemmas for the European Union, which could become increasingly unheard not just in global affairs, but also in its neighbourhood. Indeed, that process has already started. The EU seems ever-less relevant in Syria and Libya; divided over the eastern Mediterranean and Turkey; absent from diplomacy around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; and apprehensive about its future relationship with the United States.

But the bloc is trying to adapt. In recent years, the EU has shifted from a somewhat defensive ‘resilience’ agenda to a more ambitious foreign policy stance. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, and numerous member states have been pushing hard to create an EU that is more ambitious on the global stage and more assertive vis-à-vis other powers. They call for this in different ways. Von der Leyen speaks of the need to build a more geopolitical Europe. Borrell calls on the bloc to use the language of power. French President Emmanuel Macron advocates for a more strategically autonomous Europe, and has impatiently sought to bolster Europe’s foreign policy ambitions. There is clearly a broad consensus that Europe needs to adopt a more assertive posture in international affairs.

The next challenge for the EU is to become more geopolitical not only in speeches, but also by adopting policies that meet the need for more assertive behaviour. A stronger Europe will need to be based on stronger alliances. The EU will not achieve much as a unilateral actor. Of course, the bloc should reinvigorate its close security links with the US, Canada, and the United Kingdom, as well as other democracies, such as Japan, Australia, and South Korea.

But the EU should also start investing in alliances with new partners. While it is good to maintain old alliances, new ones are also necessary. This means cultivating and boosting security, intelligence, and even military partnerships with a few selected partners, primarily in the EU’s wider neighbourhood – the Mediterranean region, eastern Europe, and Africa.

This paper argues the EU should launch a series of security compacts – a new way for Brussels and EU member states to work together in strengthening Europe’s network of strategic partnerships. Through such security compacts, the EU’s institutions and member states, along with a few third countries close to the bloc, would seek to intensify their cooperation in matters of security,

intelligence, and defence. This paper describes why such compacts are needed and how they could operate in a few Eastern Partnership states. Although the paper focuses on some Eastern Partnership countries, the idea of security compacts is scalable. In parallel to establishing such stronger security partnerships with Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, the EU should also implement such compacts with countries such as Tunisia, Morocco, and several other African states.

THE EU'S MARGINALISATION IN ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD

The EU is largely irrelevant to the toughest geopolitical challenges in its southern neighbourhood: the conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Israel-Palestine, as well as the hostile dynamic between Iran and several Arab states. The EU's influence in eastern Europe is not yet as weak as it is in the south, but its prospects are troubling. And this is not because of the actions of other powers – be they the US, China, or Russia – but because the EU has chosen to concentrate almost exclusively on political and socio-economic objectives, and to avoid developing security and defence partnerships with its eastern neighbours.

In the last decade, the EU has contributed billions of euros in aid and loans to its eastern neighbourhood. It has hosted dozens of summits, beefed up its diplomatic presence, struck free-trade agreements, improved energy security, and liberalised travel and visa regimes there. The bloc's achievements are numerous. But some of them are reversible. The EU's eastern neighbours are under a constant assault from propaganda, foreign and illicit funding for political parties, cyber attacks on critical infrastructure, intelligence subversion, and even overt military action.

In the past, the EU largely left it to a few smaller member states and the US to strengthen the resilience of eastern neighbourhood countries in matters of security and defence. The US took the lead in providing Eastern Partnership countries with assistance on defence reforms, intelligence cooperation, and cyber security. Having done so, the US also gained “premium” leverage in countries such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova.

To be sure, the US and the EU worked together to insist on critical reforms in ways that helped the bloc advance its goals. But, if it is to avoid being at the mercy of the US security guarantee (and the vagaries of US domestic politics), the EU needs to develop its own capacities and security partnerships in its neighbourhood.

PREMIUM US SECURITY PARTNERSHIPS

At first glance, the United States' security relations with Eastern Partnership countries resemble the EU's – they are equally low on ambition, and parts of the US political establishment show a European-style intellectual restraint on security matters in the eastern neighbourhood. But Washington's security outreach has been far more effective and decisive in covering key policy areas and synchronising them with other political efforts. Although it is not very visible to the general public, this targeted support has earned the US influence that the EU cannot always match – particularly in Ukrainian politics.

The first of these key policy areas is intelligence cooperation. The US intelligence community has cooperated with its Georgian, Moldovan, and Ukrainian counterparts for years, providing them with information on malign Russian activities and military operations, terrorist threats, and other issues. The US has unmatched capabilities in areas such as communications intelligence (intercepting calls and emails), signals intelligence (measuring and locating electromagnetic emissions from troops and military systems), and satellite photography. As Andrei Bogdan, a former head of the Ukrainian presidential administration, argued in a recent interview: “without the US, we are like blind cats. We don't know anything about the war, about Russia, about drug smuggling.”

Because they have consistently provided this information for years, the US intelligence services have gained considerable trust in Eastern Partnership countries. In the pre-Trump era, the US used this relationship to compel some eastern European intelligence services to reform. There have been important successes, as well as setbacks, on this front. But it is clear that the US has not been completely absent in this area.

The US has also supported the reform and retraining of police forces and investigative police units. The most successful US-backed police reform took place in Georgia, providing new training schemes and manuals (and leading to a dramatic increase in salaries, as a way to eliminate corruption). A

similar reform in Ukraine transformed the old militia into a new police patrol force, and was conducted with the help of former Georgian policymakers such as Eka Zguladze. However, in contrast to Georgia, vested interests in Ukraine's Ministry of Internal Affairs prevented successful reforms from extending into other branches of the police.

Meanwhile, the FBI has actively tracked down cyber criminals, money launderers, terrorist financiers, and drug smugglers in the region. The agency's liaison officers in Eastern Partnership countries provide material for local law enforcement agencies to act upon. (This can be a frustrating business, as organised crime groups are sometimes deeply interwoven with local administrative and political structures.)

US services have provided support and expertise to nascent cyber security institutions and cyber crime departments in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. MITRE Corporation, a US-funded agency charged with helping American public institutions improve their cyber security, has assisted Ukraine, Moldova, and other countries in the same way.

For decades, the US has used "soft" military support to strengthen its ties to local armed forces and otherwise support them. The George HW Bush administration placed a particular emphasis on counter-terrorist operations – providing training and material support to Georgia at the cost of around \$60m per year, and to Moldova on a more limited scale. American military advisers and other personnel, as well as US financing, were instrumental in transforming the Georgian Ministry of Defence from a post-Soviet hotbed of corruption into a modern governance structure. (The deficiencies of Georgian defence policy – of which there were plenty – primarily concerned the political level rather than the administrative one.)

Under the 1997 NATO-Ukraine cooperation agreement, the US provided training to, and engaged in joint exercises with, Ukraine – particularly in maritime surveillance, common air support operations (not least air transport), and peace support. For this, the US created a Partnership for Peace training centre in Lviv, where it has shouldered most of the NATO effort. In 2004 Kyiv deployed 1,600 soldiers to Iraq following the US-led invasion of the country, embedding them in the Polish contingent.

The US scaled up its support for Ukraine after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and invasion of Donbas. The US is the lead nation within the Joint Multinational Training Group, which trains Ukrainian soldiers on the platoon, company, and battalion levels in combined-arms manoeuvre warfare. The Yavoriv training centre now retrains and educates the Ukrainian army in Western procedures. The Ukrainian army was deeply grateful for the training programme, as it improved the

force's combat effectiveness. Having visited Donbas several times since 2015, the authors of this paper can testify to the “Westernisation” of Ukrainian military in recent years.

Joint manoeuvres take place both bilaterally (involving the US Army or US Airforce and their Ukrainian counterparts) or in NATO operations under de facto US leadership. For instance, Rapid Trident is a joint land-forces exercise that is held once a year in western Ukraine. It provides training in joint combat operations for up to 3,500 soldiers. As many as 14 nations participate in the exercise, which is co-hosted by the US and Ukraine.

The US is also at the heart of command post exercise Joint Endeavour 2020, in which American commanders lead both Ukrainian and NATO troops in a simulated rapid response. Clear Sky 2018 was a NATO-Ukrainian exercise designed to familiarise Ukraine with the procedures of NATO air operations and flight management. The exercise, to which US Air Forces in Europe was the biggest contributor, took place under US leadership. In 2020 the US sent B-52 strategic bombers stationed in the UK to operate alongside Ukrainian fighters. The deployment of these nuclear-capable aircraft served as a deterrence signal to Russia. The US and Ukraine also co-host the Sea Breeze exercise each year (with participation from other NATO partners) to train for a variety of naval contingencies. Since their launch in 1997, the exercise has grown in scale and length, and now focuses on more demanding scenarios than counter-piracy and anti-smuggling operations.

The US has also supplied military hardware to Eastern Partnership states. Along with the uniforms and other personal equipment it supplied to Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, the US has provided infantry weapons, light armoured vehicles, and aircraft ammunition to Georgia (predominantly with counter-terrorism in mind). And it also delivered 75 Javelin anti-tank missile launchers and several missiles to Georgia. The US supplied the Georgian armed forces with tactical radios – a low-profile but nevertheless effective measure, as the Russian armed forces have much more trouble intercepting communications on digital, frequency-hopping radios than their Soviet-made predecessors. However, by the time of the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, the US had only provided small numbers of these devices.

In 2018, following a series of heated debates over the issue, the US supplied Javelins to Ukraine (37 launchers in the first batch, and more later on). And the US provided anti-materiel and long-range sniper rifles and artillery-spotting radars to Ukraine, which the latter used in trench warfare in Donbas. The US donated light vehicles to the Ukrainian army but, because they had seen heavy use in Iraq and Afghanistan, few of them remain operational. Nevertheless, US deliveries of command and control equipment, secure military communications tools, night vision devices, and intelligence gathering systems have been effective combat enablers for the Ukrainian armed forces.

Before the inauguration of Donald Trump as US president, one major advantage of US assistance was that it was well coordinated between the US embassy in Kyiv, the National Security Council, the State Department, and the Defense Department. Intelligence support, training, education, and exercises were embedded in an overall US policy on each Eastern Partnership country that comprised economic, diplomatic, and defence assistance. Hence, the US had considerable leverage and influence in Eastern Partnership countries, especially in supporting institutional reform and the rule of law. Unsurprisingly, the rule of law, reform, and democracy agenda has suffered a heavy backlash in Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova since the Trump administration ended much of that coordination.

WHY EU MEMBER STATES HAVE UNDERPERFORMED

Some EU member states have established security and defence cooperation initiatives with several of the EU's eastern partners. But these initiatives are fragmented, poorly coordinated, and not very resourceful. They are often equivalent to just a small fraction of US cooperation with these states. And they are not embedded in a wider diplomatic and economic strategy at the EU level. Scattered across individual states and ministries, the initiatives are a relatively ineffective diplomatic tool for Europe – even when taken collectively.

The EU supported judicial reform in Georgia by providing training for judges, prosecutors, prison officers, probation staff, police investigators, public defenders, and lawyers. Like the US and individual European countries, the EU has made significant financial contributions to Georgia's Public Defender and State Audit Office, which oversees areas such as government spending (and is roughly equivalent to a Western court of audit). The bloc has also supported the country's state aid system, with the aim of increasing access to justice. On "hard" security, the EU Monitoring Mission still conducts patrols in Georgia. But it has neither entered separatist territories nor blocked Russia's

efforts to move the Ossetian “border” further inwards, to Georgia proper.

Following the 2008 war, the West imposed a de facto arms embargo on Georgia that largely halted its defence modernisation efforts. After the Georgian Dream Party came to power in 2012, and following the shock of the 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine, some countries softened their stance on Georgia. Tbilisi was allowed to acquire French-made airspace surveillance radars and Mistral and VL MICA air-defence systems in 2017. Deliveries of the Mistral system are complete, but the deal for the VL-MICA fell apart in 2019. Although Georgia badly needed the system, it proved to be too expensive. And, as France does not have instruments on a par with US foreign military aid that facilitate such big-ticket purchases, the sides could not find a way to finance the deal.

Since 2003, Georgia has tried to participate in as many military missions and cooperation programmes with the US and the EU as possible, including those in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, and Mali. It hoped this would translate into political support for its NATO and EU membership pledge, but that assumption proved to be wrong. Furthermore, Georgia has undermined its own security by reorganising the military to meet the demands of expeditionary warfare, particularly by (temporarily) ending conscription in 2016. It was only in 2017 that Georgia adopted a national defence posture that suited its own needs. And American advice was, again, crucial to bringing this change about. But the opportunity to participate in courses and exchange programmes in Western military education facilities has Westernised the Georgian officer corps much more than those of many other post-Soviet armies. Indeed, most Georgian officers have undergone training in either the US, the UK, or Germany.

Since 2014, the EU has significantly upgraded its support for reforms in Ukraine, especially in relation to the rule of law and civil society. On top of this, the bloc has launched the EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) in Kyiv – along with branches in Lviv, Kharkiv, Odesa, and Mariupol – to coordinate project implementation, provide advice, and monitor security sector reform. The EUAM has been active on all aspects of reform to the non-military security sector: the judiciary, the prosecutor’s service, the police, intelligence agencies, and so on. The EU has also financed reforms to public administration, decentralisation, and public procurement, which have had a positive effect on the security sector. In Brussels, the Support Group for Ukraine coordinates the EU’s efforts with those of individual member states.

The EU has also supported the establishment of a more robust cyber security architecture in Ukraine, particularly in relation to the 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections. After Russia closed the Kerch Strait to Ukrainian civilian traffic in 2018, the EU financed the construction and renovation of alternative transport routes and logistical infrastructure to circumvent the Russian naval blockade.

And the bloc funds Ukrainian counter-disinformation efforts, especially in relation to the war in Donbas.

Overall, the EU provides substantial support to Ukraine. But it is striking that such support does not include hard security efforts. The EU's member states have only partly compensated for this. Most of them have provided help for soldiers wounded in the war in Donbas. But only a few allow Ukrainian officers to take part in military education courses and national training programmes (those that do include Germany, Poland, Romania, and Lithuania). The UK deployed a relatively large contingent of soldiers to Joint Endeavour 2020 – an exercise that also involved the US and Canada – to enhance interoperability between the Ukrainian Army and NATO forces. The exercise coincided with Russia's Kavkaz 2020 manoeuvre on Ukraine's borders, sending a deterrence signal.

The Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian brigade is the biggest structure for training and manoeuvre between European and Ukrainian armed forces. And there is also the Visegrád Battlegroup, which usually includes small contingents from Ukraine and Georgia. Lithuania has donated phased-out equipment to Ukraine for the war in Donbas, such as heavy machine guns and other light weapons. Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria have at various stages provided spare parts for the Ukrainian army's armoured vehicles (usually from stocks of former Warsaw Pact or Soviet equipment that they have phased out of their forces). Lithuania, Poland, and Bulgaria have delivered ammunition and other lethal aid to Ukraine.

European countries also provide aid through the framework of NATO support for Ukraine. This involves reforms to the Ministry of Defence, defence planning, and procurement, as well as the command, control, communications, and computers trust fund. The fund – led by Canada, Germany, and the UK – is designed to improve Ukraine's secure communications and command and control hardware. By drawing on US support, Ukraine was able to phase out insecure communication devices for troops deployed to Donbas by 2018 (but not for the rest of the army). The logistics trust fund, led by Poland and the Netherlands, is designed to reform the Ukrainian Army's supply chain. And the cyber trust fund, led by Romania, increases the armed forces' cyber resilience and incident response capabilities, in line with a corresponding civilian effort. However, at their core, all these trust funds rely on US-supplied equipment or expertise.

Romania has been the main EU member state to have provided security assistance to Moldova. It has done so to support the independence of its neighbour as much as possible. In Moldova, the EU focuses on rule of law issues, particularly election integrity and the separation of powers, rather than detailed security sector reforms. The political situation in Moldova permitting, Romania supports the

country on cyber security, and investigative and police capacity building. The EU has also funded the roll-out of the TETRA secure communications system for Moldova's police and border guards. But the bloc has not proposed similar projects on a significant scale to other security institutions.

The EU and its member states have launched many initiatives in the security sectors of Eastern Partnership countries, but they are less than the sum of their parts – for several reasons. Firstly, they receive relatively little funding. Most of these initiatives are run by small and medium-sized EU member states, which have the political will to act but lack resources. Larger member states have been reluctant to play a major role in such efforts, while the EU – the only European player with significant financial power in the eastern neighbourhood – has only a limited remit to channel funds into security cooperation.

Secondly, the EU and its member states have mostly focused on soft security cooperation – involving the police, the courts, or prosecutors. They have shied away from military and intelligence engagement. Accordingly, the EU has chosen to be much less influential than it otherwise could be on core functions of states in its eastern neighbourhood. The bloc's lack of interest in tackling hard security issues solves nothing. If the EU chooses not to deal with these problems, countries in the region will only seek other partners or persist with their current approach to reform – which can be destabilising in itself.

THE EU'S SHIFT FROM SELF-RESTRAINT TO RETRENCHMENT

There are many reasons why, in the last two decades, the EU and most of its member states have generally avoided significant security cooperation with Eastern Partnership countries. During this period, the security apparatuses of most EU member states have prioritised counter-terrorism or international stabilisation missions. And the two largest EU countries have had their own set of motivations: Germany has generally been reluctant to engage with security challenges, and France has only had a limited interest in eastern Europe.

Meanwhile, in Eastern Partnership countries, the security sector has been riddled with corruption and dysfunction – and they have not always been champions of reform. This has certainly hampered cooperation with the EU. The bloc and its member states have proposed security cooperation with

Eastern Partnership countries mostly as a way to motivate them to contribute to EU-led stabilisation missions. This is despite the fact that Eastern Partnership states primarily need support in transitioning from Soviet-style defence organisation and planning to the “total defence” concepts that the Baltic countries, Sweden, and Finland have implemented.

The challenge posed by Russia is another significant reason why many EU member states have avoided security cooperation with Eastern Partnership countries. Several important EU member states try to limit Eastern Partnership countries’ security ties with the West in the hope that this will help achieve a new balance of power with Russia. Within this balance of power, so the argument goes, the EU and Russia would better respect each other’s geopolitical sensitivities.

Improved relations with Russia are a worthy strategic goal. But this quest for rapprochement relies on the false premise that various balances of power throughout history have been based on promises and assurances of mutual respect, as well as “gentlemen’s agreements” among great statesmen. This is a fantasy. International behaviour has rarely been gentlemanly. And balances of power have tended to last only when geopolitical rivals were willing to use economic and even military power to sustain such arrangements.

No regional power – and certainly not Russia (or Turkey, for example) – has made any effort to respect the EU’s security interests and sensitivities in its neighbourhood just because the bloc has been reluctant to engage in security cooperation with its neighbours. European self-restraint has not led to Russian self-restraint. Quite the contrary – as events in recent decades show. Each time the EU has avoided forceful action in crises ranging from Georgia in 2008 to Belarus in 2020, Russia has accelerated its interventions there. This took the form of either outright military force in Georgia in 2008; the deployment of specialists to beef up Russian clients in Belarus in 2020; or the covert use of both in Ukraine in 2014. One could add several examples in the Middle East that followed the same pattern. In this, Moscow has been fairly consistent.

For more than a decade, the West has been retrenching. And this has not made other powers less resentful of Western behaviour. During the presidencies of both Trump and his predecessor, Barack Obama, the West has steadily reduced its military deployments and foreign policy ambitions, while becoming less prone to lecture others on the virtues of democracy. This long Western retrenchment has not produced a corresponding improvement in geopolitical interactions with those who were supposed to be most irritated by such behaviour – Russia, China, Turkey, and Iran. Just the opposite: they have become more assertive in pursuing their ambitions and expanding their influence by all means, including military force. The EU has experienced an increasing number of targeted assassinations

, cyber attacks, and hostile information operations on its soil linked to these newly assertive powers. This suggests that, instead of being respected partners of these powers, the EU and its member states are becoming their victims. A softer, meeker EU posture in eastern Europe will not improve relations with Russia or stabilise the region.

The main lesson of recent decades is that the only way to gain influence and relevance is to become indispensable. Accordingly, in eastern Europe, it is highly unlikely that more EU retrenchment will automatically lead to an improvement in relations with other powers. To improve stability, the EU should strengthen eastern European states' capacity in not just the socio-economic and political domains, but also in such areas as security, intelligence, and defence. The bloc can do so using the following methods.

THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP SECURITY COMPACT

The EU should launch an Eastern Partnership Security Compact, either as a pilot project or along with similarly structured initiatives with key partners in the Middle East and Africa. This initiative would align the EU's funds and institutions with the capabilities of member states that are willing to boost security cooperation in eastern Europe. It could involve the Permanent Structured Cooperation or, perhaps, a European Commission task force modelled on the inter-agency Support Group for Ukraine. The effort could be funded by a mixture of EU financial and institutional support, as well as voluntary contributions from member states. The aim of the initiative is to make it much harder to destabilise the EU's neighbourhood through the use of various "hybrid" tactics. The security compact should focus on the areas detailed below.

Intelligence cooperation: Intelligence agencies are the first line of defence. However, post-Soviet intelligence services are also tools of political power, vulnerable to manipulation by politicians and corrupt actors. And they lack certain capacities, particularly intelligence gathering in areas such as signals intelligence. The EU can provide capacity building programmes, structural coordination on threats, technical support (particularly on cross-border signals intelligence), and military intelligence in return for deep reform to these services. This would involve increased public accountability, a reduction in competences and procedures that overlap with other law enforcement agencies, and provisions to curtail corruption.

Such capacity building would involve investment in a new generation of intelligence officials –

through both training in the EU for those from Eastern Partnership countries, and through revisions to local curriculums, education schemes, career paths, and personnel management systems. In Ukraine, the EUAM proved invaluable in liaising with local services on their needs, as well as in judging the progress (and, unfortunately, regression) of intelligence reform. Building on the EUAM's experience, the EU could establish intelligence liaison offices in Tbilisi and Chisinau. It would also be advisable for the EU to create an Eastern Neighbourhood Intelligence Support and Coordination Cell in Brussels. The cell would coordinate assistance (as the support group does) and facilitate practical exchanges of intelligence. The EU could also channel funds into support for its member states' intelligence partnerships with Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova.

The EU should pay particular attention to the linkages between money laundering, other financial crime, and subversive actions by hostile intelligence services. The EU is still behind the curve of the US in adopting common and stricter rules for financial transparency and countering white-collar crime. The burgeoning scandal around German payments company Wirecard – a formerly prestigious enterprise allegedly used for sanctions busting and financing covert intelligence operations – should serve as a warning signal in this. In addition to adopting much stricter rules in these areas, the EU needs to strengthen cooperation between intelligence services and financial investigators. Needless to say, as Eastern Partnership states are equally affected by such threats – or are the target of hostile operations involving illicit finance – the EU would then need to export its upgraded regulations to these countries and work more closely with local investigative agencies.

Cyber security: All Eastern Partnership countries face significant cyber security challenges. In recent years, they have re-established or reformed their cyber security institutions (comprising cyber incident response teams, cyber forensic capabilities, and specialised departments within the police and intelligence agencies). But these institutions remain weak and under-resourced. And they have to counter some of the most skilled and aggressive cyber adversaries the world has to offer.

Consequently, Eastern Partnership states have been forced to call on foreign partners (mostly the US) for assistance in cyber security, even for tasks such as auditing their vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure. Clearly, there is ample scope for better coordinated, larger-scale cooperation on cyber security between the EU, its member states, and willing Eastern Partnership countries. Such cooperation could include mutual intelligence sharing and learning on cyber threats, assistance in securing government communications and critical infrastructure, and even efforts to bring these partners closer to the EU standards on the roll-out of 5G – covering the vexed issue of Chinese communications supplies for critical infrastructure.

Soft security and defence cooperation: Military assistance, training, and equipment will have to

be part of the effort (despite the fact that these are highly controversial areas). Yet, as it stands, the EU is doing very little even in the soft dimension of this field – be it in education, training, organisational procedures, planning, doctrine, or tactics. By boosting these areas of defence interaction, the EU would go a long way towards improving defence sector performance in Eastern Partnership countries and educating future generations of allies. Many EU member states would be willing to back such soft cooperation, while Brussels could significantly scale up such efforts if it dedicated some of its neighbourhood funds to the effort. This could involve relatively cheap measures, such as admitting officers from Eastern Partnership countries to the military Erasmus programme, funding Eastern Partnership officers' studies in military academies across the EU at various stages of their careers, and providing experts to revise military education and training in Eastern Partnership countries. For example, if the EU funded 50 scholarships per year for mid-career officials in Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, this would gradually boost these countries' capacity to reform and cooperate with the bloc in the security sector. The EU could also expand the European Security and Defence College's role beyond civilian crisis management training, to facilitate or even organise armed forces' officer and national defence training.

Eastern Partnership states and the EU have engaged in common exercises in the past, but they often related to soft scenarios such as counter-terrorism, international stabilisation, and maritime security. Close to the city of Lviv, Ukrainian battalions receive training in combined-arms manoeuvre tactics from the US, Canada, and the UK (and, occasionally, the Baltic states and Poland). Given that Ukrainians are highly appreciative of the mission, it is unfortunate that EU member states rarely provide trainers on their own or deploy many troops to manoeuvres in Ukraine. Finally, joint command post and staff exercises on possible scenarios, involving both civilian and military leaders from EU member states and eastern neighbourhood countries, would help the latter fine-tune and streamline their contingency planning. This would also familiarise EU decision-makers and planners with sensitive developments in Eastern Partnership countries. Due to the war in Donbas, Ukraine has received some attention from NATO and select EU member states. But Georgia and Moldova have received little attention, despite having an equal need for training, manoeuvre exercises, and stress-tests of national security concepts and contingency plans. Scandinavian countries could be ideal training partners for Georgia as it stress-tests the implementation of its new total defence concept.

Hard security cooperation: The EU should build on Ukrainian participation in the Visegrád Battlegroup to engage other Eastern Partnership countries in such initiatives. The Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian brigade could serve as a model for affiliating Eastern Partnership countries' military units with those of EU member states. As well as providing more opportunities to engage in joint exercises,

these units could be tightly linked to the EU battlegroups roster and serve in EU missions and operations. Joint US-Ukrainian exercises provide a template for common drills to train for robust defence scenarios – such as those involving inter-state warfare – and make such initiatives part of a wider deterrence routine. Over the years, these exercises have steadily increased in complexity and sophistication, providing an indicator of the effectiveness of previous training and education efforts. Similar exercises under the EU umbrella – including Georgia and, if appropriate, Moldova – would raise the EU’s political profile and strengthen its influence in the region.

Hardware cooperation: Given that several European armies have ample experience in modifying and upgrading Soviet legacy equipment, the European Defence Fund could support joint programmes with local manufacturers in Eastern Partnership states to produce upgraded and “de-Russianised” versions of combat vehicles, artillery systems, air-defence systems, and individual weapons systems for local militaries. As there is a fairly large global market for tuning and upgrading Soviet legacy equipment, such projects may eventually pay off economically, through exports. One could also envisage a foreign military sales programme akin to that of the US – under which the EU’s partners could acquire European military equipment using special loans. The availability of such funds can be conditioned on the wider rule of law and accountable governance agenda, thereby reinforcing European influence far beyond the security and defence portfolio.

Cooperation on arms control: Military cooperation should also include arms control. Europe can assist Eastern Partnership countries by partially offsetting the effects of Russian non-compliance with arms control treaties. For example, as Russia has banned Ukrainian planes from flying over Russia under the Open Skies Treaty, Canadian aircraft have hosted Ukrainian inspectors. Members of the EU could do the same thing. And European satellite imagery could replace aerial photography in areas where Moscow has banned it, such as Crimea, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia.

A STRONGER EUROPE IN ITS EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

These recommendations are bound to be problematic for some EU member states. For many of them, there should be no further EU or NATO enlargement to the east. They believe that the best road to greater European stability is a new European security architecture, which could include commitments on neutrality and non-alignment from some neighbouring countries.

However, one should not conflate security cooperation with enlargement. Plenty of EU member states

engage in security cooperation with countries such as Israel, Lebanon, and Mali without linking this activity to the enlargement debate. The same is possible in Eastern Partnership countries. During the cold war, European states that were not members of the European Community or NATO, such as Switzerland and Sweden, had a much closer relationship with the West – including on military and defence industrial matters – than the contemporary EU does with Eastern Partnership countries. And this is despite the fact that some Eastern Partnership states are more closely aligned with EU foreign policy than are accession candidates such as Serbia.

Regardless of the debate on a “new European security architecture”, security is not created through roundtables and diplomatic notes of protest, but through structures that deter aggression, foil covert operations, protect public institutions, and defend the rule of law. The best pillars of stability in the EU’s neighbourhood are strong states built on a framework of resilient security and defence institutions. Such institutions would defend these countries not just from corruption and poverty, but also from hybrid threats and subversion. And they would serve the EU’s interest in making its eastern neighbourhood more stable and more resistant to external security pressure.

If it is indeed ready to become more geopolitical and strategically autonomous, the EU should stop being afraid of its own shadow on security matters. Unless it begins to deal with issues that have long made it uncomfortable, the bloc will limit its influence, effectiveness, and strategic sovereignty. It is time for the EU to start investing much more in security cooperation with a few key partners in its eastern and southern neighbourhoods.

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