

From Recipient to Contributor: Ukraine's Rearmament and Its Implications for the EU Security Architecture

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Published January 2026

Editor: Inés Furic Lamas, IE University

Abstract

The Russian invasion of 24 February 2022 triggered an extensive and fast-paced military equipment procurement effort which became one of the biggest since the Cold War ended. Having geopolitically ambitious neighbours requires substantive militarisation policies, which have been the primary focus of attention inside Ukraine's government, as nearly 34% of Ukraine's GDP in 2024 was allocated to the military cause, making it the largest military burden globally. The article draws conclusions based on defence expenditure data, EU policy frameworks, and security analyses to examine how Ukraine's unprecedented and rapid rearmament influences the security architecture of the European Union. Whilst having to continuously face Russian aggression, Ukraine has been developing its own hybrid warfare technologies, including drone warfare, enhanced air defence systems, and its own long-range cruise missile called "Flamingo" capable of reaching almost 3,000km inside enemy territory. These military advancements begin to influence the EU's capability development and defence industrial policies, including initiatives such as ASAP and EDIRPA. The article concludes that the only scenario in which Ukraine's rearmament enhances the EU's security architecture is when EU policymakers demonstrate sustained political commitment, consistent funding mechanisms, and the full integration of Ukraine's military experience into the EU's defence planning.

Keywords: Deterrence, Ukraine's rearmament, EU's security architecture, military cooperation

1. Introduction

The militarisation of Ukraine has been highly contested since its independence in 1991. However, rearmament of the Ukrainian military only reached its pivotal point after the Russian full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022. Western aid and extensive domestic military expenditure were the main factors behind Ukraine's militarisation

process. The discussion revolves around the rearmament of Ukraine, the evolution of its land and air military capabilities, Western aid, the dynamics of the war, and their direct implications for the territorial and economic security of EU Member States. It is estimated that more than USD 250 billion of military and humanitarian aid has been allocated by Western nations to Ukraine since the

Russian full-scale invasion in 2022.¹ This figure suggests that Ukraine's internal struggle for sovereignty and stability is not exclusive to Ukraine but directly affects the EU's integrity. The article aims to answer the research question: "How has Ukraine's post-2022 rearmament reshaped the EU security architecture?" The primary focus throughout the article is explicitly focused on land and air security. Throughout the article, a mainly qualitative policy analysis is used as part of the methodological approach to coherently implement the military secondary research sources into the overall argument.

Hybrid warfare in the 21st century presents security opportunities, but also aids in pinpointing areas of improvement in current military strategies. Thus, the Ukrainian example is an excellent strategic tool for EU Member States to develop and adapt to the modern realities of war. Ukraine has evolved from receiving military and humanitarian assistance into a vital strategic ally which helps Europe build its defense systems and security framework. In general, there is a rapidly growing agenda of increasing the military spending budget among EU Member States, with the prominent leaders being the Baltic States and Poland.²

2. Background

Policy decisions taken by the Ukrainian government since 1991 have had a crucial impact on the state, the nation, and its citizens. The collapse of the Soviet Union

led its satellite countries into a state of confusion, where various military resources and personnel had to be distributed fairly and justifiably among their members. Military personnel and nuclear arsenal distribution amongst the ex-Soviet states was concluded at the meeting between Boris Yeltsin, Leonid Kravchuk, and Stanislaus Shushkevich, in the Belovezhskaya Forest in Belarus.³ This proclaimed the end of the Soviet Union and the founding of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).⁴ The nuclear arsenal was agreed to be a mutually controlled matter, whilst the military issue was far simpler: those military bases and personnel that were situated on the soil of the newly formed nations had to take an oath of allegiance to their new country, as proposed by the Ukrainian government at the time.

However, three years later, at the Budapest Memorandum in 1994, Ukraine agreed to accept the nuclear disarmament deal with the US and Russia, who swore to provide security against any external threat. An estimated 1,900 nuclear warheads were given up by the Ukrainian government. This is known to be a widely contested internal security decision, and is also one of the leading reasons why Ukrainian stability is now scrutinised and targeted by its "hostile neighbour".⁵ Ukraine is a geographically diverse country, with vast amounts of

¹ Tom Edgington, "Ukraine Weapons: What Military Equipment Is the World Giving?," *BBC News*, July 1, 2022, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62002218>.

² In terms of military spending as a share of their GDP.

³ Newly elected presidents of Russia, Ukraine, and the chair of the Belarusian Supreme Soviet in 1991 respectively

⁴ Brian D. Taylor, "The Soviet Military and the Disintegration of the USSR," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, no. 1 (2003): 17–66, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26925260>.

⁵ Paul Adams, "Ukraine Gave up Its Nuclear Weapons in 1994. Now It's Asking Why," *BBC*, December 5, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crl3ndxglwxx>.

mineral resources in the East, access to the Black Sea in the South, the Carpathian Mountains in the West, and rare chernozem soil in the south-eastern parts which enable Ukraine to be Europe's breadbasket. Besides this, Ukraine borders four EU and NATO countries: Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. Whilst Ukrainian sovereignty and security are crucial elements for the stability of the whole European Union and NATO Member States, it also shares similar historical memories with other nations that were subject to Russian influence. Whether it is Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, or Bulgaria, all of the above were affected by Russian borderless geopolitical ambition at certain times in history.⁶

The post-2022 Russian invasion entailed an objective of demilitarising Ukraine and shifting it further away from NATO and the EU; however, the Ukrainian military power ranking has only risen through the charts amongst other world nations. Billions of dollars have been injected into the Ukrainian economy by its Western partners in the form of military and humanitarian aid.⁷ The development of domestic drone and missile technologies, and mass mobilisations, have shown that Russian actions aimed at meeting their war objectives since 2022 have actually

driven Russia further away from achieving them. This is due to Ukraine becoming a heavily militarised state with innovative hybrid warfare technologies and the fact that its military personnel can operate on any type of equipment, whether it is old Soviet or modern NATO systems.

What does this mean for EU Member States? The European Union gets a rising military power as an ally, with a valuable skillset in modern warfare. Ukrainian air defence system professionals are already on the ground in Poland, Romania, and the Baltic States providing training to their partner nations on how to operate those systems. The credit has to be given to the EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine), aimed at strengthening the Ukrainian Armed Forces to defend Ukraine's territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, and to deter and respond to possible future military offensives by Russia and other potential aggressors.⁸

3. Analysis

Ukraine's role in adopting European security standards has been transformed.⁹ This trajectory shows that Ukraine's rearmament does not solely serve as a matter of national security, but as a strategic asset for the European Union's defence on its eastern flank. For example, the

⁶ CFR Education, "Modern History and U.S. Foreign Policy: Europe and Eurasia," CFR Education from the Council on Foreign Relations, 2025, <https://education.cfr.org/learn/reading/modern-history-and-us-foreign-policy-europe-and-eurasia>.

⁷ Reuters, "Aid to Ukraine: How Much Have Kyiv's Western Allies Provided?," *Reuters*, March 4, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/how-much-aid-have-ukraines-western-allies-provided-2025-03-04/>.

⁸ European Union, "EU Military Assistance Mission in Support of Ukraine | EEAS," www.eeas.europa.eu, November 15, 2025, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eumam-ukraine_en?s=410260.

⁹ Francisco Márquez and De La Rubia, "Analysis Paper Receive E-BULLETIN Visit the WEB," 2025, https://www.defensa.gob.es/documents/2073105/2726226/la_integracion_de_ucrania_2025_dieeca48_eng.pdf/00e4dff6-78cf-1c06-592d-9b6b22a386b2?t=1750323767465.

Verkhovna Rada has approved a revised budget amendment raising defence spending to nearly USD 70 billion, which shows the transformation in the way Ukraine has adapted to ensure its own internal security.¹⁰ The shift in mindset of the Ukrainian government also stems from the previously mentioned EUMAM initiative, in which EU countries have institutionalised Ukraine's integration into EU defence standards.

3.1 Ukraine's Strategic Role in Europe

Since 2022, Ukraine has effectively turned into a war economy, dedicating an extraordinary share of national resources to defence. According to SIPRI, Ukraine's military expenditure reached about USD 64.7 billion in 2024, amounting to roughly 34% of GDP, the highest military burden in the world. Moreover, essentially all domestic tax revenues were absorbed by defence spending, with social and economic spending largely financed by external aid.¹¹ This war-economy posture has direct security implications for the EU. By absorbing the bulk of Russia's conventional land warfare capacity, Ukraine effectively creates a forward buffer for the EU's eastern Member States. This does not eliminate the threat to Europe, but it alters its nature: instead of facing large-scale conventional invasion risks in the short term, EU states confront spillover risks, hybrid attacks, and long-range coercive threats while Ukraine contains the main conventional confrontation.

At the industrial level, EU instruments such as the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) and the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA) explicitly link support for Ukraine with a long-term effort to expand European defence production. ASAP, adopted in 2023 with an EU budget of around €500 million for 2023–2025, aims to increase EU ammunition production capacity to 2 million artillery shells per year by the end of 2025, partly to meet Ukrainian battlefield demand, and partly to refill depleted EU stocks.¹² Taken together, these developments justify the analytical claim that Ukraine's rearmament has become a catalyst for an emergent European defence industrial and doctrinal integration, pushing the EU away from a mainly civilian crisis-management actor towards a more conventional security provider. Beyond being a recipient of support, Ukraine increasingly acts as a functional contributing component of Europe's security architecture. Its geography, bordering Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania, has long made it strategically important, but the war has turned Ukraine into a live testing ground for modern high-intensity, drone-heavy, electronic-warfare-intensive conflict. The lessons learned on Ukrainian soil are now being integrated into NATO and EU military planning, from air defence to dispersed logistics and resilience against long-range strikes.

¹⁰ The Ukrainian Parliament.

¹¹ Xiao Liang et al., "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2024," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, April 27, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.55163/avec8366>.

¹² European Union, "Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP)," Defence Industry and Space, 2023, https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/asap-boosting-defence-production_en.

A central argument here is that Ukraine is evolving from a security consumer to a security contributor for the EU, which is visible how Ukrainian officers and specialists increasingly provide training and operational feedback to European partners, especially in air defence and drone warfare. EU documents and analyses now treat Ukraine's experience as a reference point for European capability development, rather than as an isolated crisis.¹³ Political proposals such as the Commission's broader plan to "rearm Europe", with up to €800 billion in combined public and private investment, explicitly link Ukraine's defence to the need for a more autonomous and robust European defence posture.¹⁴ This reconfiguration affects EU Member States in at least two strategic dimensions. First, Ukraine's continued resistance enhances deterrence by denial: Russia faces a heavily armed, hardened adversary backed by a deep coalition, making further territorial expansion into NATO territory less plausible in the short term. Second, Ukraine's integration into training missions, procurement schemes, and potentially future defence frameworks creates *de facto* security arrangements that may precede formal membership in NATO or the EU, but already tie Ukraine closely into Europe's security ecosystem.

¹³ European Council, "EU Military Support for Ukraine," Consilium, 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/military-support-ukraine/>.

¹⁴ Jon Henley, "EU Chief Unveils €800bn Plan to 'Rearm' Europe," the Guardian (The Guardian, March 4, 2025), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/mar/04/eu-plan-to-bolster-europes-defences-could-raise-800bn-for-ukraine>.

3.2 Risks and Vulnerabilities for EU's Security

Certain risks arise from the EU's dependency on Ukraine's rearmament that directly concern European Member States.

There is the problem of sustainability and aid volatility. Recent updates from the Ukraine Support Tracker show that monthly military aid commitments fell sharply in mid-2025, despite new NATO coordination instruments such as the Prioritized Ukraine Requirements List.¹⁵ This supports the argument that political fatigue, shifting priorities, and domestic constraints in donor states can undermine the consistency of support, precisely at a time when Ukraine's war economy is structurally dependent on external funding for non-military expenditure.

The power asymmetry with Russia remains structurally disadvantageous for the EU if Ukraine is seen as a stand-in defender. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Ukraine's military expenditure in 2024 reached a substantial USD 64.7 billion, yet this only matched about 43% of Russia's estimated spending of USD 149 billion for the same year.¹⁶ This directly represents disbalance of military expenditure and shows that the current military approach is not sufficient enough to withstand Russia's capabilities. Thus, the EU must

¹⁵ KIEL Institut, "Ukraine Support Tracker: Military Aid Falls Sharply despite New NATO Initiative," Kielinstitut.de, 2025, <https://www.kielinstitut.de/publications/news/ukraine-support-tracker-military-aid-falls-sharply-despite-new-nato-initiative/>.

¹⁶ France 24, "Global Military Spending Hits Record \$2.7 Trillion in 2024, Sharpest Rise since Cold War," the France 24 (FRANCE 24, April 28, 2025), <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20250428-conflicts-military-spending>.

realise that depending solely on Ukraine's capabilities to withstand such a war machine as a buffer is an overestimation.

The EU faces increasing hybrid attack threats because its enhanced relations with Ukraine have created additional security risks. Member States take on more important combat roles because they actively participate in military operations through training exercises and logistics support and joint cyber and electronic warfare operations. The situation creates conditions which might lead Russia to use asymmetric retaliation through cyber attacks and spread false information and control of energy supplies and deliberate infrastructure damage. The EU has identified these combined threats through its own risk assessment processes.¹⁷ The security benefits of Ukraine's military growth need the nation to build its defensive systems which will protect against potential attacks. The combination of these elements produces the following assessment about Ukraine's post-2022 re-armament: The security of EU Member States improves through Ukraine's post-2022 re-armament but this benefit depends on European political backing which must support a complete re-arming plan and deterrence strategy and demonstrate genuine ability to protect against hybrid attacks and escalation threats. The complete organizational framework of Ukraine protects the nation from becoming vital yet unsupported because European powers lack sufficient

¹⁷ Davide Genini, "How the War in Ukraine Has Transformed the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy," *Yearbook of European Law*, April 11, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/yel/yeaf003>.

teamwork abilities.

4. Policy Recommendation

It is crucial for European policymakers to understand that a long-term structured partnership agreement with substantial aid will provide Ukraine with real defence mechanisms and allow it to provide Europe with its own resources as well. This would work more efficiently than short-term partnership agreements and delayed military aid. Such a framework would not only reassure Ukraine of the EU's ongoing support, but it would also allow the EU to benefit from Ukraine's operational experience and incorporate its capabilities into larger European security strategies.¹⁸

Another critical task for the EU is to increase and expedite its own defence manufacturing. Despite gains achieved through initiatives such as ASAP and the European Defence Fund, European countries continue to struggle to supply ammunition, drones, and air defence systems on the scale required for contemporary conflict.¹⁹ To solve this, the EU could advocate for more industrial collaboration between Member States and Ukraine, such as joint manufacturing lines. Ukraine's combat experience makes it an ideal partner for developing and testing

¹⁸ European Council, "European Defence Industry Programme: Council and Parliament Reach Provisional Agreement," Consilium, 2025, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/10/16/european-defence-industry-programme-council-and-parliament-reach-provisional-agreement/>.

¹⁹ Cynthia R Cook, "Industrial Roadblocks: Producing at Scale and Adopting New Technologies," Csis.org, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chapter-14-industrial-roadblocks-producing-scale-and-adopting-new-technologies>.

contemporary military technology. Furthermore, stronger industrial collaboration might boost both Ukraine's resilience and the EU's long-term deterrent posture.

Simultaneously, the EU should make greater use of Ukrainian experience in developing its own training and military plans. Ukraine has tremendous expertise in drone warfare, air defence, electronic warfare, and large-scale mobilisation, which is limited in many EU states. Besides this, Ukraine has recently developed a new ground-launched long-range cruise missile called "Flamingo", which is able to cover a distance of 3,000 km and deliver a payload of 1,150 kg, and is already being used to strike targets deep in Russian territory.²⁰ By legally incorporating Ukrainian instructors, analysts, and commanders into EU training missions, the EU will be able to respond more promptly to current combat conditions. This two-way interaction would improve interoperability and allow Member States to benefit from Ukraine's advances rather than relying exclusively on theoretical concepts.

Aiding Ukraine, on the other hand, increases vulnerabilities to external threats like cyber and misinformation attacks from Russia's side. In the past months, Europe's media already projected cases like GPS jamming, cyber attacks, and certain propaganda involvement when it comes to elections in Europe, thus cooperation and mutual integration of intelligence and

cyber warfare security mechanisms are crucial to defend from Russia.²¹ There is an equal necessity for strengthening the EU's security as supporting Ukraine in its resilience to defend the Eastern flank.

The EU needs to create ongoing financial backing which will sustain its current assistance programs. The extended bureaucratic processing of specific military aid and assistance packages shows how depending on political agreements can create security risks. A dedicated multi-year financing system for Ukraine would create necessary stability because it functions without connection to political election schedules. The plan would help Ukraine create dependable systems for acquiring resources and deploying forces while demonstrating to Russia that European nations will continue their backing regardless of European domestic political developments.

The EU needs to develop an integrated partnership with Ukraine which will enhance European defense capabilities while providing Ukraine with essential resources and training to fight against Russian military attacks. The new policy framework will protect Ukraine's future by creating a stable framework which will bring benefits to all European Union member states in the future.

5. Conclusion

²⁰ Bohdan Miroschnyenko, "Ukrainian Flamingo Missile with 3,000-Km Range Appears in New Video," *Ukrainska Pravda*, August 18, 2025, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2025/08/18/7526741/>.

²¹ Victor Jack and Laura Kayali, "Europe Thinks the Unthinkable: Retaliating against Russia," *POLITICO*, November 27, 2025, <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-thinks-the-unthinkable-retaliating-against-russia-nato-cyber-hybrid/>.

Ukraine's rearmament since the 2022 Russian invasion has been one of the largest security developments for the EU in recent decades. What looked to be a national survival fight has evolved into a broader shift in the European security environment, with Ukraine no longer viewed just as a weak neighbour, but as a more capable security contributor on the EU's eastern border. The historical context of Ukraine's early post-Soviet policies, combined with the immediate constraints of conflict, has driven the nation into a quick militarisation process that has direct implications for the continent's stability.

Ukraine has proved to be not only a consumer of Western foreign funds, but also a contributor to the EU's defence infrastructure and security architecture. Throughout history, it is clear that wars act as catalysts for technological advancements. The Second World War was a catalyst for the invention of radars, jet engines, computers, and atomic bombs. Similarly, the war in Ukraine has catalysed the advancement of air defence acoustic sensors, and AI-powered long-range drones and missiles, which are seen to be effective when it comes to targeting deep into Russian territory and shooting down air attacks on Ukrainian cities.²² Thus, the point of this article has been to explore what mutual benefits cooperation between Ukraine and the EU can bring to the table when it comes to ensuring security and defence.

The policy proposals offered in this paper emphasise

the necessity for the EU to transition from short-term aid packages to a more organised, predictable, and mutually beneficial defence engagement with Ukraine. Strengthening European defence manufacturing, incorporating Ukrainian knowledge into EU training and planning, strengthening resilience against hybrid threats, and building long-term funding structures are all critical tasks if Europe is to maintain its own stability in the coming years.

²² Alexander Query, "Ukrainian Defense Industry's Latest Innovations," UNITED24 Media, November 7, 2024, <https://united24media.com/war-in-ukraine/ukrainian-defense-industrys-latest-innovations-3430>.

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