

STRATEGIC CONVERGENCE?

The Security Partnerships of the
European Union and the Global South

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Introduction:

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I. Introduction

The new dynamics of global power and the future of global partnerships

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The current fragmentation and securitisation of the international order are compelling states to thoroughly rethink how they forge alliances as they seek new ways to promote development, ensure security, and push for more stable and predictable economic relations. Amid the complexity and dynamism of the current global security architecture, key players such as the European Union (EU) and major Global South countries such as Brazil, India and South Africa urgently need to develop innovative and collaborative frameworks to navigate today's multifaceted challenges more effectively. Comprehensive cooperation frameworks between global and regional players are becoming crucial and will remain so if constructive solutions to specific challenges are to be achieved.

The recent waves of interconnected crises, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and the pressing fight against climate change, should not be seen as isolated incidents. They form part of a broader process of geopolitical and economic reconfigurations that are challenging rules-based governance, exposing systemic vulnerabilities and contributing to an increasingly multipolarised world (dis)order.

The transatlantic alliance is a clear example of today's global reconfiguration. President

Trump's return to the White House has raised serious concerns about the cohesion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), its support for Ukraine, and the broader commitment of the United States (US) to the European integration project, which it historically supported throughout the 20th century. Furthermore, the Trump administration's political discourse continues to fuel authoritarian tendencies, undermine multilateral institutions, and increase polarisation both within the United States and beyond. Similarly, current US foreign policy is accelerating the EU's efforts to pursue greater strategic autonomy, defend the rules-based order and uphold global cooperation with a broader set of partners, both in rhetoric and in practice.

Meanwhile, China continues its rapid ascent as a global competitor, shifting its role from the 'world's factory' to that of a global investor. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China's technological expansion have been central to extending its influence across the Global South and to repositioning its relationship with the West, from one of economic interdependence to strategic competition. This has also enabled China to present itself as an alternative to a Western-led system in providing infrastructure and meeting financial needs. In short, China's strategy for reshaping the global order involves strengthening economic and security ties with

the Global South and asserting the legitimacy of diverse political systems, while consolidating its discursive power on the international stage.

However, the balance of power within the Global South has also shifted. Emerging powers such as Brazil, India and South Africa are increasingly challenging China's bid for singular leadership and are leveraging their growing economic and geopolitical weight to amplify the collective voices of the Global South. These countries are also capitalising on the decline of multilateral engagement among traditional powers. They have recently led discussions on reforming the global financial architecture, advocating for new mechanisms to address debt crises and promote fair global taxation at platforms such as the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4). This push for change highlights the demand for a more equitable and representative system of global governance. Similarly, emerging middle powers are showcasing a new model of leadership by participating in flexible coalitions and engaging in South-South cooperation. This form of leadership does not revolve around a single hegemonic power, but centres instead on a more inclusive, democratic and pragmatic approach to interstate collaboration.

This new dynamic poses a significant test for the EU's foreign policy, which must now define its own direction in a world of flexible cooperation. The EU is already starting to explore alternative partnering arrangements, such as Security and Defence Partnerships (SDPs), whilst also making progress in concluding trade agreements with strategically relevant countries and regions, including Mexico, Mercosur, Indonesia and Singapore.

In this context of political and value-based fragmentation, global players are moving toward greater self-reliance, with regions increasingly turning to flexible coalitions. The

EU's pursuit of open strategic autonomy (OSA), alongside the rise of non-Western forms of multilateralism, reflects an urgent need to hedge against global instability by engaging in innovative forms of cooperation.

This report, compiled by the Global Policy Center (GPC), seeks to analyse how new security partnerships can be built between the EU and leading middle powers. It brings together scholars from the Brazilian Center of International Relations (CEBRI), the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), and the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD) to share their perspectives on this changing landscape. The sections offer author insight into each country's core priorities, strategic framing, and prospects for more effective security and defence partnerships with the EU, identifying areas for alignment, divergence, and potential collaboration. We hope that this report will enrich the ongoing debate.

**COMPREHENSIVE COOPERATION
FRAMEWORKS BETWEEN GLOBAL AND
REGIONAL PLAYERS ARE BECOMING
CRUCIAL AND WILL REMAIN SO IF
CONSTRUCTIVE SOLUTIONS TO SPECIFIC
CHALLENGES ARE TO BE ACHIEVED.**

2. New security partnerships between the EU and the Global South

2.1 THE EU AT A CROSSROADS: STRATEGIC AUTONOMY OR TRANSATLANTIC REALIGNMENT

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THE LOGIC BEHIND ‘PARTNERING’

The EU is at a critical inflection point. While it has responded to recent threats and crises with increases in defence spending and military mobilisation, true resilience requires far-reaching transformation. The EU must make deeper, systemic changes to its political and security architecture to effectively confront both external and internal challenges. This transformation is essential if the EU is to adapt and thrive in this new era.

Yet the EU’s ambition to become a credible global player has often been undermined by its own internal contradictions. The lack of a clear, unified strategic vision for its role in the world, combined with the diverse priorities of its 27 Member States, has frequently led to a reactive and crisis-driven foreign and security policy. This inconsistency is further compounded by the absence of a strong executive authority and a unified military structure with a clearly defined strategic roadmap.

However, the unreliability of the US under President Trump as well as the challenges posed by China’s coercive diplomacy have become a major impetus for both the EU and countries across the Global South to strengthen relations: shared vulnerabilities provide strong incentives for a strategic reorientation to diversify alliances, reduce over-reliance on traditional partners and enhance collective autonomy. This strategic shift is most clearly reflected in the EU’s 2022 Strategic Compass,

which outlines an ambitious plan of action to boost the bloc’s OSA and its security and defence policy by 2030.

The Strategic Compass is designed to make the EU a more capable security provider by increasing its capacity and willingness to act, bolstering its resilience and boosting investment in defence capabilities, while working with partners to achieve these goals and safeguard its values and interests. The future of the EU lies in a new, coherent strategic position that aligns geopolitical capabilities, economic resilience and the capacity to build flexible international coalitions.

‘Partnering’ is one of the EU’s cornerstones in pursuing open strategic autonomy. To make this work, EU policymakers are striving to ensure greater coordination between economic, foreign and institutional policies as opposed to managing them in isolation. By investing in strategic foresight and building flexible coalitions, the EU can play a more active role in shaping a more stable, inclusive and rules-based order, instead of simply reacting to shifts in the international system. Furthermore, the EU seeks to cooperate with “like-minded” partners. The EU’s new strategic partnerships are built on a shared commitment to democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law. This strong convergence of shared values serves as the bedrock for more comprehensive cooperation across various sectors.

THE EU'S NEW SECURITY AND DEFENCE PARTNERSHIPS

The EU's Strategic Compass, which was adopted by the 27 EU Member States in 2022, sets out a series of objectives for working with partners at multilateral, regional and bilateral levels to strengthen security and defence cooperation. These goals include enhancing dialogue, improving joint situational awareness, conducting joint training exercises and building capacity. The Strategic Compass also identifies new priority areas for collaboration, such as countering threats from emerging disruptive technologies, disinformation, and hybrid and cyber-attacks, as well as expanding collaboration and operational coordination in climate security, space defence, joint strategic foresight, satellite imagery sharing and gender-responsive conflict analysis.

The EU has been actively partnering at all levels since the adoption of the Strategic Compass. It has reinforced its ties with NATO in key areas such as support for Ukraine, cyber threats, military mobility, and operational collaboration at the multilateral level. In fact, a new EU-NATO Task Force on critical infrastructure has been set up. In January 2022 the EU adopted the Council Conclusions on taking the UN-EU strategic partnership on peace operations and crisis management to the next level, setting the priorities for 2022-2024. This aligns with its joint efforts to work on crisis management and peace operations in regions such as the Central African Republic and Somalia.

Regionally, the EU has strengthened its cooperation with the African Union (AU), providing over €730 million to support African-led peace processes through the European Peace Facility (EPF). This funding is being used to deliver training and equipment to bolster peace operations, particularly those targeting groups such as Boko Haram. The EU also launched its first Structured Dialogue with the Economic Community of West African States

(ECOWAS) in early 2024 to discuss security in the Sahel. The EU has continued to cooperate with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on a broad range of security and defence issues such as maritime threats and the erosion of international law based on their shared interest for a free, open and secure Indo-Pacific region. In April 2025, the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) held the second EU-GCC Regional Security Dialogue to discuss broader security issues including counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, drug trafficking and international organised crime, building on the momentum generated as a result of the adoption of the EU-GCC Strategic Partnership.

The adoption of the Strategic Compass led to the deployment of a new model of bilateral security and defence partnerships (SDPs), under which the EU has to date signed eight agreements with 'like-minded' partners: Norway, Moldova, South Korea, Japan, Albania, North Macedonia, the United Kingdom (UK) and Canada. SDPs with Australia, Switzerland and India are also expected to be signed soon.

SDPs provide a non-binding, tailor-made, mutually beneficial framework for enhanced political dialogue and coherent, consistent and comprehensive cooperation on peace, security and defence. The aim is for these partnerships to be more than just statements of intent: they are designed to deliver value and real capabilities to strengthen European defence. Furthermore, SDPs contain a review clause allowing for adjustments to be made to their content based on progress or new developments.

While there are common areas of cooperation across SDPs, the focus of each SDP depends on each partner's specific needs and characteristics. This individualised approach, while requiring more political resources, is an innovative way to adapt European security and defence policy to

a changing global and regional scenario. For instance, the partnerships with Albania and North Macedonia include cooperation on protecting cultural heritage, while the agreement with Norway has a unique provision for consular matters. Furthermore, the SDP signed with Norway has a strong focus on defence-industrial initiatives while the SDP signed with Japan focuses on the interconnectivity and interdependence of Europe and the Indo-Pacific through cooperation on maritime security and in outer space.

Although SDPs are tailored to each partner, the current alliances can be divided into three categories. The first comprises non-EU NATO allies such as Norway, the UK, and Canada. These are the broadest ranging partnerships as they build on pre-existing defence and security ties established through their common membership of NATO. These SDPs create a more structured framework for strategic dialogue and political coordination, complementing the allies' existing bilateral ties with EU Member States and filling gaps where the NATO framework does not provide sufficient scope for cooperation. Furthermore, considering the current unpredictability of US foreign policy, SDPs also serve as channels for defence diplomacy and mutual reassurance with countries that possess advanced defence-industrial capabilities.

The second category of SDPs is linked to the EU's enlargement process. By signing partnerships with EU candidates such as Albania, Moldova, and North Macedonia, the Union aims to counter Russia's growing influence in the Balkans. These agreements facilitate cooperation in combating hybrid threats and disinformation campaigns and help these candidate partners to align with the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). This, in turn, supports the uptake

of EU standards, ultimately fostering the enlargement process and limiting Russia's geopolitical outreach.

The third category of SDPs is with global partners in the Indo-Pacific region, namely Japan and South Korea. These agreements differ in their scope and aim to dovetail with the EU's broader global strategy. Japan and South Korea, as technologically advanced countries, offer significant potential for cooperation on capability development and defence-industrial collaboration. These partnerships are especially important in fostering strategic exchanges, as both the EU and its Asian counterparts are affected by increasing Sino-American competition.

SDPs are not formal alliances or security guarantees. Instead, they serve as 'gateways' for each partner to cooperate with the EU on security and defence projects, while their scope is determined by political will and shared values. The European External Action Service (EEAS) is responsible for negotiating and concluding these agreements, which are then signed by the EU's High Representative and the respective partner country's minister.

SDPS PROVIDE A NON-BINDING, TAILOR-MADE, MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL FRAMEWORK FOR ENHANCED POLITICAL DIALOGUE AND COHERENT, CONSISTENT AND COMPREHENSIVE COOPERATION ON PEACE, SECURITY AND DEFENCE.



THE WAY FORWARD: POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL ALIGNMENT

Debates on how effective SDPs are in strengthening EU foreign and security policy often centre on implementation issues. These difficulties arise from the lack of clear distinctions between formal and informal partnerships in EU policy documents, as well as from the use of diverse, sometimes overlapping diplomatic instruments across different policy objectives. Yet SDPs represent a major shift in the EU's strategic thinking. Unlike previous standardised forms of external engagement, these partnerships overcome earlier limitations by creating mutually beneficial, tailor-made cooperation frameworks that prioritise the needs of each partner. However, the primary challenge for SDPs to be successful lies precisely in defining and formalising these shared interests. While SDPs provide a framework for enhanced political dialogue at the highest level, they lack a detailed roadmap for cooperation.

SDPs are not a quick fix for enhancing cooperation with key partners. Their success hinges on sustaining strong political commitment on both sides to capitalise on the value provided by formalising these partnerships. Notwithstanding, SDPs are becoming more relevant to partners and will continue to be important in the future, given the EU's renewed efforts to push initiatives and investments in the security and defence industry.

The EU's political will is underscored by massive financial commitments such as the ReArm Europe Plan, which aims to leverage €800 billion in defence spending and includes financial instruments and innovation schemes such as the EU Defence and Innovation Scheme (EUDIS). This comes in addition to Member States' commitment to increase their NATO defence and security-related spending to 5% of GDP by 2035. This unprecedented surge in defence investment clearly signals that the

EU has the political will to become a credible, sovereign security actor. Furthermore, in the White Paper for European Defence—Readiness 2030, the EU has proposed a series of measures to close capability gaps and build a strong defence industrial base by aggregating demand for and encouraging the collective procurement of defence equipment in seven priority areas.

Consequently, the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) regulation adopted by the Commission has set up a new financial EU instrument to support defence investments for Member States, candidate countries and countries having signed an SDP with the EU. The SAFE instrument aims to raise up to €150 billion to provide loans to interested Member States. These funds are intended to support a swift and significant increase in defence capabilities through common procurement initiatives. This mechanism helps Member States to negotiate specific, mutually beneficial, bilateral or multilateral agreements with the EU, enabling their respective industries to participate in these procurement projects.

Signing an SDP is a pre-requisite for non-EU countries to become involved with the Union's SAFE funding initiatives. Therefore, SDPs enable third countries to negotiate better conditions for their industries to participate in EU defence joint procurement projects. Although the EU's SAFE initiative aims to break down national barriers, the instrument includes a strong 'buy European' emphasis: 65% of its value must come from companies based in the EU, the broader European Economic Area, or Ukraine.

THE PRIMARY CHALLENGE FOR SDPS TO BE SUCCESSFUL LIES PRECISELY IN DEFINING AND FORMALISING THESE SHARED INTERESTS.

FINANCING SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Is there a conflict between spending on security and spending on sustainable development? The answer is not straightforward, but with the new SDPs, what may look like a conflict on the surface does not actually create major problems in practice. While the increasing securitisation of EU policy, and the introduction of large defence funding instruments such as the SAFE regulation, raise legitimate concerns about resources being diverted from development aid, the design of the SDP framework itself helps minimise this conflict.

There are two main reasons why this does not occur in practice. SDPs are based on mutual interests and they are non-binding. They do not mandate financial contributions from the partner country. Instead, they provide a gateway for technical cooperation and, for some partners, access to EU-led defence initiatives. The goal is not to replace development funding but to support a stable environment where development can take root.

Furthermore, security cooperation in areas including hybrid threats, cyber resilience, and maritime security, which are core areas of SDPs, is essential for global, regional and national stability, which is the undisputed prerequisite for sustainable development. No long-term development investment can succeed without peaceful societies, resilient critical infrastructure, and protection from foreign disinformation and interference. The SDPs provide a necessary foundation for economic prosperity and development initiatives because they help strengthen stable global and regional security architectures.

SDPs aim to build a network of security and defence partnerships with 'like-minded' countries. In doing so, they serve to uphold the rules-based international order and reinforce

global democratic norms. This strategic alignment counters authoritarian influence and showcases the resilience of democratic nations, thereby directly strengthening the political conditions required for sustainable development and democratic governance. Therefore, SDPs represent a concerted effort to demonstrate that alliances grounded in democratic values can drive a more resilient and sustainable future.

From a practical perspective, this argument is further supported by the structure of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the EU's long-term budget. Although the EU has renewed its efforts to expand defence initiatives and investments, negotiations for the post-2027 MFF are still subject to intense political pressure to safeguard funding for the EU's cohesion policy, international climate finance, development aid, though it already provides 42% of the world's development aid through initiatives such as the Global Gateway, and other social priorities. Thus, while the European Peace Facility (EPF) and other security instruments provide resources for specific security needs, they have not fully replaced the separate and substantial funding streams spent on sustainable development.

IN PRACTICE, SDPS AND SECURITY INSTRUMENTS OPERATE IN A COMPLEMENTARY, RATHER THAN COMPETING FINANCIAL SPACE, ENABLING THE EU TO PURSUE BOTH 'HARD' SECURITY AND 'SOFT' DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN PARALLEL.

2.2 INDIA'S PRIORITIES FOR SECURITY PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE EU

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INDIAN PERCEPTIONS AND FRAMING OF ITS SECURITY PARTNERSHIP WITH THE EU

For many decades, India did not view the EU as a strategically relevant actor in its foreign policy priorities, due to the Union's lack of hard power and to India's preference to deal with EU member states bilaterally. However, in recent years, India's perception of this relationship has changed dramatically.

The EU has been at the forefront of the response to Russia's war against Ukraine, which has also exposed Europe's over-reliance on the United States for its security needs. It has coordinated military and financial support for Ukraine, led the sanctions regime against Russia, strengthened partnerships with a range of countries, and spearheaded multiple initiatives to bolster Europe's collective defence and industrial capabilities. As noted earlier, these include the EU's White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030, and the €800 billion ReArm Europe plan that includes the SAFE instrument. In addition, EU Member States have committed to increasing their defence and security-related expenditure to 5% of GDP by 2035 under the new NATO framework. These shifts in the EU's global outlook and its burgeoning role as a strategic geopolitical actor have opened up new opportunities for collaboration with India.

Today, the EU and India are strategically aligned in their outlook on maritime security, their respective approaches to China, and on the importance of diversifying military procurement

away from traditional suppliers, such as the United States and Russia. While the turmoil unleashed by US President Donald Trump's second presidency has accelerated the EU's need to boost its strategic autonomy, shared concerns such as the need to de-risk in critical sectors and maintain stability in the Indo-Pacific, stemming from wariness over assertive Chinese behaviour, have emerged as important drivers in the EU-India partnership. Meanwhile, Trump's imposition of 50% tariffs on Indian imports has derailed decades of progress on India-US relations, raising questions about the stability of the US-India security partnership. These disruptions have strengthened the case for a closer relationship between the EU and India on security and defence.

In June 2025, the Strategic Dialogue on Foreign and Security Policy was launched, reflecting the expanded scope of EU-India security cooperation, coupled with strong two-way political engagement. As the EU and India navigate an increasingly turbulent international arena, the bloc unveiled its new Strategic EU-India Agenda on 17 September 2025. The groundwork for this was laid during the landmark visit to India earlier in the year by the EU College of Commissioners. The new Agenda is divided into five core areas, one of which focuses on security and defence and encompasses new agreements, regional security, and traditional and hybrid threats.

This section examines India's priorities for an EU-India security partnership and puts forward recommendations for more effective collaboration.

TODAY, THE EU AND INDIA ARE STRATEGICALLY ALIGNED IN THEIR OUTLOOK ON MARITIME SECURITY, THEIR RESPECTIVE APPROACHES TO CHINA, AND ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSIFYING MILITARY PROCUREMENT AWAY FROM TRADITIONAL SUPPLIERS, SUCH AS THE UNITED STATES AND RUSSIA.



INDIA'S PRIORITIES FOR AN EU-INDIA SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

The EU and India are negotiating three frameworks to strengthen security and defence cooperation. A Security and Defence Partnership (SDP), similar to the agreements the EU has signed with Japan, South Korea and Canada, would provide a comprehensive institutional framework covering both traditional security threats and emerging strategic domains. An SDP would also enable Indian companies to apply for funding under the EU's SAFE instrument, which allows up to 35% of its funding to go to non-EU partners. Crucially, the fact that SDPs are not formal defence alliances, but flexible stepping stones for building cooperation platforms in mutually agreed areas, aligns with India's preference for more flexible security arrangements. Another key deliverable is the signing of a Security of Information Agreement (SIA) to govern the exchange of classified information, as set out in the new Strategic EU-India Agenda. This agreement could pave the way for India to participate as a third country in the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects.

REARMAMENT FOR EUROPE, AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIA

India already maintains robust bilateral defence ties with several EU Member States, including France, Spain, Germany, Sweden and Belgium, which are increasingly valuable partners in India's military diversification. These relationships, which involve co-developing defence platforms and collaborating in key technological areas, reinforce the case for engagement at the EU level.

As mentioned in the new Strategic Agenda, the EU's defence manufacturing and research expertise can support the expansion of India's defence-industrial base and modernisation efforts, while India's manufacturing capacity

can help meet the EU's growing need for reliable arms supplies. This is already happening in practice, with the German company Rheinmetall recently placing a ₹600 crore order for artillery shells from Reliance Defence in India.

India stands to benefit significantly from Europe's rearmament drive in the priority areas identified in the EU's White Paper, including ammunition, missiles, drones, and key components. It can supply competitive defence equipment while gradually gaining a solid foothold in Europe's defence manufacturing supply chains and industrial ecosystem. Indian firms are well-positioned to capitalise on this opportunity thanks to competitive advantages such as more cost-effective manufacturing, a cheaper yet skilled workforce, and its capacity to upscale production. These strengths have been boosted by government initiatives such as [Make in India](#), which have promoted the growth of indigenous defence manufacturing and exports. According to data from India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry, exports of ammunition and arms to EU countries were valued at \$67.4 million in 2023-24, whilst this figure had increased to US\$135.6 million in the first nine months of FY 2024-25.

Despite the emphasis on 'buy European', the bloc will require external partners to meet urgent defence needs. The EU can therefore benefit from cooperation with select trusted partners such as India, which share similar strategic interests and can make relevant contributions to European defence.

IT CAN SUPPLY COMPETITIVE DEFENCE EQUIPMENT WHILE GRADUALLY GAINING A SOLID FOOHOLD IN EUROPE'S DEFENCE MANUFACTURING SUPPLY CHAINS AND INDUSTRIAL ECOSYSTEM.

MARITIME SECURITY

Since the EU and several of its Member States revealed their Indo-Pacific strategies, cooperation aimed at ensuring an open, stable, inclusive rules-based order in the region has become a central focus. The [EU's Maritime Security Strategy](#) considers the Indian Ocean as the gateway to the Indo-Pacific, where the EU and India share a mutual interest in safeguarding freedom of navigation and maintaining open sea lanes of communication for trade. The two sides hold an annual maritime dialogue, and the EU has recently joined India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative ([IPOI](#)), in addition to being a dialogue partner in the Indian Ocean Rim Association ([IORA](#)). In the Red Sea, EU and Indian naval missions have complemented one other in protecting commercial shipping routes from Houthi rebel attacks. They have conducted [joint maritime exercises](#) in the Gulf of Aden and the Gulf of Guinea as well as working together through the Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA) projects. As highlighted in the new Strategic EU-India Agenda, expanding operational collaboration between the Indian Navy and the EU's naval operations, particularly in the Western Indian Ocean, should be prioritised, as well as advancing capacity-building projects for Indian Ocean countries.

PERSONNEL SHORTAGES

A recent [report](#) by the management consultant firm Kearney estimates that Europe may need up 760,000 additional skilled workers to meet its new defence ambitions. This shortage spans roles such as mechanics, welders, technicians, engineers, product developers, and AI and STEM experts, and could become a major constraint in Europe's defence industry. This deficit could open up job opportunities for India's skilled workforce, who are well placed to fill these gaps.

HYBRID THREATS

Hybrid threats, such as sabotage, cyberattacks, and disinformation campaigns are now commonplace, and are waged mostly by authoritarian regimes targeting democratic countries. The EU has implemented measures, such as the [EU Hybrid Toolbox](#), the Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Toolbox (FIMI), and the [European Democracy Shield](#) to tackle these threats. The European Commission's inclusion of [China as a source of disinformation and interference](#), alongside Russia, brings opportunities for cooperation with India, which was the first country to ban the Chinese app TikTok as early as 2020. The new Agenda proposes collaboration with India on cybersecurity and hybrid threats, particularly through the EU-India Cyber Dialogue.

CHINA

The EU's White Paper identifies China as a systemic security challenge and highlights the security implications of its growing influence. Despite disengagement at the border and the resumption of high-level exchanges, India-China relations continue to be characterised by deep mistrust after the Galwan valley clashes in 2020 and China's support for Pakistan during Operation Sindoor.

THUS, NAVIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE EU IS A KEY PRIORITY FOR INDIA, ESPECIALLY IN THE LIGHT OF THE UNITED STATES' INCREASINGLY UNPREDICTABILITY.

COUNTER-TERRORISM

The inclusion of terrorism and extremism in the new Agenda, along with an explicit reference to the Pahalgam terror attack in April 2025, provides opportunities for closer bilateral cooperation with India, including exchanges on counter-terrorism practices and intelligence sharing. However, the EU's neutral stance on Pakistani terrorism remains an obstacle to deeper collaboration.

TENSIONS BETWEEN EU-INDIA FINANCING FOR SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

It is reasonable to question whether an EU-India shift towards a more securitised agenda could undermine their shared development goals. Globally, the development agenda has already been weakened by ongoing wars and an increasingly transactional international environment. In March, the fragile consensus around the SDGs came under strain as the United States rejected these multilateral commitments in favour of an 'America first' approach. Yet as demonstrated during its [G20 presidency](#), India has consistently sought to keep the development agenda on the table. Meanwhile, Europe has long been amongst the world's largest development providers, although some Member States are reducing their aid budgets to redirect funds towards security imperatives. However, The European Commission's proposal for the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework includes a new Global Europe instrument, which aims to double funding for external projects to over €200 billion

The EU and India already have a formal [Clean Energy and Climate Partnership](#), which includes cooperation on green hydrogen, offshore wind, and smart grids, and aligns with both the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. Reflecting asymmetries

in financial resources and technological capabilities, the EU is supporting India's National Green Steel Mission to decarbonise the country's steel sector, thereby contributing to global decarbonisation efforts. The two also work together through the International Solar Alliance (ISA) to make solar energy technology accessible to the Global South. A stronger, more equitable EU-India partnership on development, climate, energy, and technology could serve as a template for other North-South cooperation models and help bridge the North-South divide.

The [EU-India Connectivity Partnership](#), complemented by the EU's €300 billion Global Gateway to build digital, transport, health and energy infrastructure in developing countries, is based on the core principles of sustainability and democracy. Both partners have identified development projects in South Asia and India's Northeast region, which come with the added strategic objective of offering an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)'s promotion of regional integration is expected to unlock new economic opportunities not only for EU-India but also for Africa through, for instance, the EU-Africa-India Digital Corridor. The new Strategic Agenda reinforces continued engagement with [India's Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure](#) in small island states in the Indo-Pacific, alongside the new [EU-India Partnership on Humanitarian Assistance](#).

Moreover, in the context of "shifting aid landscapes and the rise of alternative development models", it gives added emphasis to the EU-India Administrative Agreement signed in June 2025 which enables joint investments in sustainable development projects in third countries.

These examples demonstrate that the EU-India partnership involves a robust development component. The EU and India are taking a more pragmatic approach to development cooperation that reflects shared strategic interests. The EU is moving away from traditional donor-recipient models and is redefining its partnerships with developing nations in the Global South on a more equal, transactional footing. For instance, promoting the [digital India Stack](#) together in other developing countries enables Europe to court the Global South, and strengthens India's championing of its causes. As [Adam Tooze](#) argued, "Development is inherently political, and the age of a politically neutral, universally endorsed development agenda is over". A fresh, more realistic approach may be more effective.

The EU's new defence arrangements will inevitably involve trade-offs due to budgetary and financial constraints. Yet the link between sustainable peace and sustainable development, as underscored by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, indicates the importance of addressing these priorities together. As the United States retreats from global aid and development, the EU and India have an excellent opportunity to jointly lead the way forward.

A STRONGER, MORE EQUITABLE EU-INDIA PARTNERSHIP ON DEVELOPMENT, CLIMATE, ENERGY, AND TECHNOLOGY COULD SERVE AS A TEMPLATE FOR OTHER NORTH-SOUTH COOPERATION MODELS AND HELP BRIDGE THE NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE.



2.3 THE EU–BRAZIL PARTNERSHIP AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

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THE EU–BRAZIL PARTNERSHIP. BALANCING ECONOMIC ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

The EU–Brazil partnership is built around the [EU–Mercosur](#) agreement, concluded in 2024 after two decades of negotiation. While its primary focus is trade and regulatory alignment, the accord also carries significant political weight, reinforcing ties between the two regions at a time of growing fragility in the multilateral system.

The EU–Mercosur agreement regained momentum as a strategic response to safeguard interregional cooperation at a time when the current US administration seemed poised to obstruct or weaken multilateral initiatives. This renewed drive was also facilitated by a changing international context in which environmental conditionalities, previously central to trade and diplomatic negotiations under earlier US administrations, no longer carry the same degree of political urgency. As a result, both sides found more room to manoeuvre around the economic and strategic dimensions of the agreement, although environmental concerns continue to remain part of the broader dialogue.

Although the agreement does not contain a specific chapter on conventional security, the section on government procurement is often viewed as a space that could be harnessed to foster closer cooperation, as it facilitates reciprocal market access and joint industrial projects. Historically, the Brazilian armed forces have maintained close ties with the US defence establishment. However, the key structural

programmes in the different branches of the Brazilian military are now being developed with European partners. These include the [French nuclear-propelled submarine program](#), the [Swedish Gripen fighter jet project](#), and the [Italian Iveco armoured vehicle initiative](#). Together, these ventures have positioned Europe as a core partner in Brazil's defence modernisation. They involve significant technology transfers, the establishment of local production facilities, and wider industrial spillovers in employment and innovation, all of which strengthen Brazil's domestic defence base.

The [EMBRAER KC-390 military transport aircraft](#) illustrates the depth of Brazil–Europe defence cooperation. It was originally developed as a flagship project for the Brazilian Air Force, and was designed and manufactured by Embraer in partnership with European and regional allies, including the Czech Republic, Portugal and Argentina, which were each responsible for specific sections of the aircraft. This multinational approach distributed costs and risks while embedding the program within European supply chains, reinforcing its credibility in global markets. European countries have acquired 25 of the 38 aircraft sold to disclosed buyers, which has bolstered the project's commercial viability and ensures its long-term sustainability. The KC-390 thus demonstrates how joint defence projects can function as both industrial and diplomatic

instruments, advancing Brazil's strategic autonomy whilst consolidating Europe's role as a trusted partner.

However, the EU–Brazil partnership needs to be understood within a broader strategic framework that goes beyond trade and defence. Since 2007, both sides have maintained a Strategic Partnership that has established dialogue across a range of areas such as human rights, climate change, science, and innovation. During President Lula's first term, this framework was envisioned as a platform to strengthen Brazil's multilateral credentials and present the country as a sovereign global actor. Yet differences soon emerged. While the EU sought to advance liberal values and reforms to global governance, Brazil prioritised South–South cooperation and encouraged a pluralist, multipolar order. These contrasting approaches limited convergence on issues such as UN reform, peace operations, and human rights advocacy.

Under Dilma Rousseff, presidential diplomacy lost momentum, and cooperation became more pragmatic and technical, focusing on environmental sustainability, science and technology exchanges, and promoting investment rather than driving joint leadership in global governance. During the Bolsonaro administration, relations stagnated further due to Brazil's scepticism towards European integration and its preference for cultivating bilateral relations with the United States. Nonetheless, Bolsonaro's government endorsed an early version of the EU–Mercosur agreement, reflecting the tension between its ideological distrust of Europe and the pragmatic economic interests of domestic sectors, particularly agribusiness, seeking access to European markets.

Under President Lula's current administration, EU–Brazil relations have returned to the forefront of Brazilian foreign policy. For Lula, the

EU–Mercosur agreement is not merely a trade deal. Instead, it is a strategic tool to strengthen Brazil's multilateral diplomacy and broaden its playing field amid growing competition from the US and China. Yet, this renewed engagement remains conditional: Brazil's commitments to Mercosur cohesion and to sustainable development set clear limits on what can be negotiated. The partnership therefore functions as a vehicle for expanding Brazil's international agency and as a negotiation arena shaped by domestic and regional priorities.

Taken together, these dynamics demonstrate both the resilience and the limits of the EU–Brazil relationship. Trade and defence cooperation has deepened, yet important differences still remain in terms of how each country approaches multilateral governance and security. The partnership reflects shared ambitions of economic integration and technological exchange but also underscores structural differences in how each actor conceives autonomy and global order.

THE KC-390 THUS DEMONSTRATES HOW JOINT DEFENCE PROJECTS CAN FUNCTION AS BOTH INDUSTRIAL AND DIPLOMATIC INSTRUMENTS, ADVANCING BRAZIL'S STRATEGIC AUTONOMY WHILST CONSOLIDATING EUROPE'S ROLE AS A TRUSTED PARTNER.

A CONVERGING SECURITY LANDSCAPE: THE FIGHT AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Latin America's Southern Cone has drawn inspiration from European integration to consolidate a region of peace and stability. Although Mercosur remains an imperfect common market, it acts as a durable peace initiative among neighbours with a history of rivalry. The South Atlantic Zone of Peace and Cooperation initiative ([ZOPACAS](#)), proposed by Brazil and endorsed by the UN General Assembly, is another example of interregional cooperation, which links South American and African countries in efforts to prevent military escalation across the South Atlantic.

In this traditional understanding of security, both regions share an aspiration to build zones of peace and prosperity. Yet Brazil and the EU also face a parallel challenge: transnational criminality, contraband, and drug trafficking. South America, and especially the porous borders of the Amazon, remains a major source of the cocaine that is consumed in Europe. In response, Brazil and the EU have intensified operational cooperation through sectoral dialogues on organised crime, trafficking, and money laundering. Here, the EU's external partnership agenda finds clear alignment: Brazil prioritises border management and regional cooperation, while the EU focuses on disrupting illicit routes linking production in South America to consumption in Europe. Initiatives centring on judicial collaboration, intelligence sharing, and capacity-building illustrate how the partnership has moved from discourse to specific action.

Recent developments in US policy have introduced new strategic variables affecting both Latin America and Europe. The deployment of US naval forces to Venezuelan waters in 2025 has revived concerns about direct military involvement in anti-drug operations. Similarly, Venezuela's renewed territorial claims over Guyana's Essequibo region have heightened

regional instability. Thus, just as Europe faces the implications of US disengagement from Ukraine, Latin America confronts the risks of a more interventionist US posture closer to home. For Brazil, these dynamics underscore the strategic value of consolidating cooperation with the EU, not only in defence-industrial and peacebuilding initiatives, but also in tackling shared security threats such as transnational organised crime.

IN THIS TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF SECURITY, BOTH REGIONS SHARE AN ASPIRATION TO BUILD ZONES OF PEACE AND PROSPERITY. YET BRAZIL AND THE EU ALSO FACE A PARALLEL CHALLENGE: TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINALITY, CONTRABAND, AND DRUG TRAFFICKING.



RECONCILING BRAZIL'S AUTONOMY WITH THE EU'S STRATEGIC CONCERNS

The most pressing political challenge in EU–Brazil relations lies in reconciling Brazil's active participation in forums such as BRICS with European concerns over its [engagement with Russia and China](#). Brazil's role as a bridge-builder between North and South was evident in the alignment of the 2024 [G20](#) and 2025 [BRICS](#) declarations, both under its presidency, which emphasised multilateral cooperation and more inclusive global governance.

However, two complementary tracks will be required if cooperation is to move forward. Politically, both sides need to manage differences over global alignments while reinforcing areas of convergence such as peacebuilding, defence-industrial cooperation, and the fight against transnational crime. Financially, progress will depend on aligning EU green finance, digital and infrastructure investment, and sustainable development assistance with Brazil's domestic priorities, namely energy transition, climate adaptation, and social inclusion. Coordinated financing could bridge global governance ambitions and practical outcomes, ensuring that the partnership delivers both strategic and developmental dividends.

Although the EU–Brazil Strategic Partnership has long included political and security dialogues, there is still no formal *Security and Defence Partnership (SDP)* comparable to those the EU has established with other strategic allies. Creating such an instrument would formalise the cooperation already taking place at the operational and industrial levels, while providing a structured platform for dialogue on strategic autonomy, defence technology, and crisis management.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY MUTUALLY REINFORCE EACH OTHER

From Brazil's perspective, there is no contradiction between funding for security issues and funding for sustainable development. On the contrary, development is understood as a prerequisite for security. In the Amazon, illicit economies thrive where legal livelihoods are weak or absent. Sustainable development projects that generate employment, strengthen governance, and protect ecosystems therefore contribute directly to stability and law enforcement.

EU instruments such as the [Amazon Fund](#) and programmes linking climate, biodiversity, and resilience show how development financing reinforces security outcomes. By addressing the structural drivers of deforestation and crime, these initiatives improve border management and reduce the operating space of transnational criminal networks. Security and development funding therefore mutually reinforce each other, with sustainable development serving as a long-term investment in both regional and global security.

THE MOST PRESSING POLITICAL CHALLENGE IN EU–BRAZIL RELATIONS LIES IN RECONCILING BRAZIL'S ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN FORUMS SUCH AS BRICS WITH EUROPEAN CONCERNS OVER ITS ENGAGEMENT WITH RUSSIA AND CHINA.

2.4 SOUTH AFRICA'S RELATIONS WITH THE EU: A MOVE TOWARDS GREATER STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT IN SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT?

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the international order has experienced increasing fragmentation and paralysis in key global governance institutions. A growing divide has also emerged between the Global North and the Global South over conflicting priorities in security and sustainable development financing. As leading countries in the Global North reallocate resources towards security, commitments to sustainable development initiatives in the Global South have begun to suffer. The following analysis examines whether South Africa and the EU can strengthen their strategic alignment on security and development priorities against a fragmented geopolitical order, especially in the light of cuts to development cooperation budgets in key European nations and the dismantling of USAID.

South Africa has relatively stable and constructive relations with the EU in trade and investment. Nearly half of the country's foreign direct investment (FDI) stock comes from the EU, making the Union South Africa's most significant source of investment and a key development partner. European investment is also diverse in nature and has supported the country's manufacturing base, which creates job opportunities in an economy marked by high unemployment.

With President Trump again at the helm in Washington, the EU finds itself reassessing its relations with the Global South as the

transatlantic partnership navigates rough waters. South Africa, along with other leading countries in the Global South, is also seeking to mitigate the consequences of recent shifts in White House policy. These developments create potential opportunities for strategic convergence as both sides adjust to a changing geopolitical landscape. However, this will require a deliberate strategy to foster greater cooperation among middle powers across the Global North and Global South to protect the core elements of the multilateral system from the destabilising effects of growing geopolitical rivalry between the world's major players.

The South Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, grounded in the Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA), has strengthened relations between the EU and South Africa in the post-apartheid era. The country is also the EU's only strategic partnership on the African continent. The 2025 South Africa-EU Summit concluded with several commitments recognising South Africa's regional and global role, including its stewardship of the G20 process. The following sections examine South Africa's strategic interests in its relationship with the EU, including areas of cooperation in international security and conflict resolution, and potential avenues for strategic convergence, including the potential for a Security and Defence Partnership between the EU and South Africa.

SOUTH AFRICA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS WITH THE EU

South Africa's [White Paper](#) on foreign policy underscores Europe's strategic importance, due in part to the large, highly attractive market that European integration has created. The EU is an important source of foreign direct investment and development cooperation for South Africa as its largest trading partner, as well as a primary market for attracting inbound tourism. Although domestic pressure in European countries has led to cuts in their development aid budgets, South Africa's relationship with the EU in sustainable development has remained significant. This is less because South Africa relies on foreign aid, and more because of the EU's wider approach to development cooperation and its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals. During the 2025 South Africa-EU Summit, the EU pledged to increase its support for South Africa's [Just Energy Transition \(JET\) programme](#), especially in the wake of the United States' withdrawal from its own commitments to the initiative.

South Africa also sees an opportunity to involve the EU in advancing what it terms the [African Agenda](#), which is built on the premise that without peace and security on the continent, there can be no sustainable development. South Africa's foreign policy interests with the EU therefore include securing EU support for Pan-African institutions such as the African Union (AU) and regional organisations such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to achieve their security and development objectives. This is a potential area for strategic convergence, though the development dimension is under strain as the EU and key Member States reallocate resources towards the war in Ukraine and their own defence build-up. To ensure greater strategic alignment, South Africa and other African partners are likely to encourage the EU to uphold its development commitments, as

outlined in the SDGs and the [AU's Agenda 2063](#). This is expected to be a key area of discussion at the EU-Africa Summit in November 2025.

While development cooperation will remain a key item on the agenda, South Africa and other African states will also be looking to ensure continued investment and access to other sources of concessional and commercial financing through tools such as the Global Gateway Initiative and multilateral development banks.

POTENTIAL AREAS OF COOPERATION IN INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

South Africa's reform agenda in multilateral institutions is primarily directed at bodies such as the United Nations and its Security Council (UNSC), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (WB). These institutions, which were established following the allied victory in World War II, have come under significant pressure to reform so as to better reflect the contemporary global political and economic landscape and the current balance of power.

In terms of conflict resolution, South Africa's [commitment to dialogue](#) has remained largely consistent since 1994. When the country has deployed its armed forces, it has mainly done so under the mandate of the United Nations (UN), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), or through African Union (AU) peacekeeping operations, including missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi, Sudan, and Mozambique. The EU has also supported the operationalisation of the [African Peace and Security Architecture \(APSA\)](#), and has even funded various [training initiatives](#) in Mozambique in recent years aimed at combating the security challenges in Cabo Delgado. This aligns with South African security and development priorities. However, South

Africa will continue to underscore the need for the EU to maintain its development commitments, as these are important to long-term peace and security on the continent.

South Africa's position on the peaceful resolution of conflicts is partly related to its own delicate transition from apartheid rule to a constitutional democracy, which required negotiating with former adversaries in order to chart a collective future. South Africa has also sought to portray itself as a reliable mediator in different conflicts across the African continent, prioritising mediation and dialogue amongst warring parties instead of taking sides and thus exacerbating conflict. It has also taken this approach towards the war in Ukraine, where it has been involved in the African Peace Initiative and has continued to engage President Zelensky and President Putin on ways to end the conflict through dialogue.

Within the United Nations, and during the periods in which South Africa has served as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, the country has consistently advocated for a closer relationship between the UN Security Council and the African Union's Peace and Security Council (PSC). It has also called for reliable funding of peacekeeping operations in Africa.

GIVEN THE EU'S SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE AU BUDGET, SOUTH AFRICA VIEWS ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EU AS IMPORTANT FOR SECURING MORE PREDICTABLE FUNDING FOR PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS IN AFRICA.

TOWARDS GREATER STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE EU?

In a changing geopolitical landscape where multilateral institutions are being increasingly threatened by the actions of the most powerful countries, middle powers need to work towards finding greater strategic convergence in their interests if the core elements of the global governance architecture are to be preserved. This is particularly relevant at a time when the Trump administration is currently exerting pressure on both its allies and its enemies through tariffs and a trade war with China.

Given South Africa's strategic interests with the EU and the areas for cooperation in international security and conflict resolution, there is a clear need for them to work together more closely both at bilateral level and on the African continent in order to address peace and security dynamics as well as development priorities on the continent. This approach aligns with South Africa's foreign policy objectives and would support ongoing investment, financing, and cooperation in peacekeeping missions. South Africa will also continue to seek EU support to advance the reform of the UN and its Security Council, as well as advocating for change in the Bretton Woods Institutions.

The EU has concluded a number of Security and Defence Partnerships (SDPs) since the adoption of the *Strategic Compass* in 2022, and is keen to establish further agreements in a changing security landscape. While an SDP with South Africa is unlikely in the short to medium term, the EU announced the creation of a peace, security and defence dialogue with South Africa to end conflict in Ukraine, Palestine and on the African continent during the 8th EU-South Africa Summit in March 2025. As the EU's only formal African strategic partner, South Africa is well placed to work with the EU in its peace diplomacy efforts, including mobilising the

resources needed to support peace initiatives. Given the need to reinvest in South Africa's defence capabilities, continued EU investment in its defence industry will also be key. Rheinmetall, a leading German defence industry supplier has already made significant investments in South Africa's defence industry, working with [Denel](#), the state-owned defence company, on manufacturing equipment such as missiles, artillery systems, helicopters and other military technology. South Africa is also likely to continue viewing the [European Peace Facility](#) as a strategically valuable mechanism for cooperation in peace, security, and development initiatives. It is also likely to welcome joint military activities between the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and European armed forces. These ongoing areas of collaboration provide practical ways to bolster existing cooperation mechanisms without the need to sign a Security and Defence Partnership (SDP). However, innovations such as enhanced dialogue on peace, security, and defence will always be welcome.

Beyond development cooperation, which is coming under pressure in several European capitals, South Africa and the EU can still find convergence through other sources of concessional and commercial financing, including the Global Gateway initiative. This can still ensure development financing for South Africa and other African partners for projects aiming to build regional value chains and [cross-border infrastructure](#) such as the Lobito Corridor, where the EU is already involved through the Global Gateway initiative. This corridor links the DRC, Zambia, and Angola through the port of Lobito, and holds potential to enhance regional integration and ensure greater connectivity for regional and global trade.

Another area for potential convergence is support for South Africa's proposals for closer

relations between the UNSC and the AU Peace and Security Council, including more reliable funding for African peacekeeping operations. The implementation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) will require continued support for the AU and regional economic communities (RECs), an area where the EU has been one of the most significant development partners.

As South Africa is also a key provider of development finance on the African continent, there is room to explore opportunities for triangular cooperation to share resources and experience in deploying development projects. In this scenario, the EU could partner with South Africa on sustainable development initiatives in southern Africa and across the continent, in conjunction with the [African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund \(ARF\)](#), the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), and the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC). This would enable the pooling of scarce development resources across Africa.

WHILE AN SDP WITH SOUTH AFRICA IS UNLIKELY IN THE SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM, THE EU ANNOUNCED THE CREATION OF A PEACE, SECURITY AND DEFENCE DIALOGUE WITH SOUTH AFRICA TO END CONFLICT IN UKRAINE, PALESTINE AND ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT



3. Conclusions and policy recommendations

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CONCLUSION 1— THE EU'S SECURITY AND DEFENCE PARTNERSHIPS

In the context of today's fragmented global security order, the EU is increasing its investment in defence and proactively seeking new security cooperation pathways with Global South countries. As the United States' commitment to international partners becomes less predictable, and dissatisfaction grows with the quality of China's development financing and its hawkish creditor practices, a window of opportunity has opened for the EU to reaffirm its position as a reliable, principled, long-term security partner. The new generation of SDPs offers a framework for engaging a diverse set of countries on the basis of shared interests and tailored cooperation. While eight SDPs have already been signed, further strategic engagement with key Global South countries will be essential if the EU is to realise its geopolitical potential and contribute to a more stable international order.

To maximise the impact of SDPs and effectively engage key Global South partners, the EU should prioritise three strategic areas:

A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP PLUS AS AN ENHANCED FRAMEWORK TO STRENGTHEN POLITICAL COMMITMENT

Given the current geopolitical momentum, where partners are actively seeking alternatives to unreliable alliances, the EU must provide robust incentives to create and sustain high-level political commitment to signing SDPs in potential partner countries. The Union should foster the establishment of Strategic Partnership Plus (SPP) formats as the next step forward for SDPs, providing political motivation for deeper engagement today and in the future.

An SPP model would grant committed partners privileged access to specific EU instruments and high-level decision-making forums, moving the relationship beyond standard cooperation. This model cannot merely be a statement of intent; it must coherently reflect the value the EU attributes to the respective partnership. Incentives could include regular participation in relevant decision-making bodies, the negotiation of administrative arrangements with the European Defence Agency (EDA), enhanced access to the SAFE instrument, and structured contributions to CSDP missions and operations through Framework Participation Agreements (FPAs).

B PRINCIPLED PRAGMATISM AND FINANCIAL COMPLEMENTARITY

As negotiations for the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) advance, the EU must practice 'principled pragmatism' to avoid undermining its long-term geopolitical and public diplomacy goals in the Global South. While a stronger focus on security instruments such as the European Peace Facility (EPF) and the SAFE instrument is necessary, this cannot come at the expense of development commitments and financing.

It is therefore vital to ensure financial complementarity between security and sustainable development instruments. Negotiations for the upcoming MFF must safeguard and prioritise separate funding streams for development aid, international climate finance, and other related issues. Non-defence industry initiatives such as the Global Gateway are key to maintaining the trust and political goodwill of partners in the Global South. To reinforce their legitimacy,

SDPs must be clearly and consistently linked to global democratic norms and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnership for the goals). This alignment would demonstrate that SDPs are not solely geopolitical tools but are part of a concerted effort to improve governance, sustainable development and human well-being worldwide.

C EXPANSION OF SDPS TO AFRICA, LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

As the EU continues to consolidate its existing SDPs, due to their innovative and tailor-made nature, and moves towards finalising an agreement with India, it could consider expanding SDPs to Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean in the longer term. In particular, exploring potential SDPs with South Africa and Brazil could provide the EU with two relevant regional anchors to enhance cooperation in security, defence and sustainable development across the South Atlantic. When the time comes, the EU could expand tailored cooperation by building on already established agendas in:

AFRICA

Cooperation could be embedded in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) and the [Joint Vision for 2030](#). Future bilateral collaboration could prioritise training, capacity-building and equipment to combat instability, radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism, tackling the root causes of conflict, and supporting integrated approaches throughout the entire conflict cycle.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (LAC)

Dialogue could be grounded in the [EU-CELAC Strategic Partnership](#), with an emphasis on the non-military dimensions of security and shared transregional threats. Key areas could include countering transnational organised crime, advancing cybersecurity and digital security through capacity-building and infrastructure protection, and managing climate and environmental security risks. Linking security to democratic governance and the rule of law will be key to long-term stability.

CONCLUSION 2— EU-INDIA STRATEGIC CONVERGENCE

EU and India now share broad strategic alignment in several areas, driven by the EU's assertive defence investments and India's need to diversify its military supply chains. This convergence is fostering a pragmatic, interest-driven relationship that positions the EU and India as key partners in shaping a stable, rules-based Indo-Pacific order. This provides a unique foundation for advancing the EU-India partnership. Yet, both sides must still overcome major hurdles. Defence-industrial collaboration may be complicated by harmonised EU-level procurement regulations, and NATO commitments require the EU to clarify the scope of its financial engagement in the Indo-Pacific. In addition, India's ties with Russia obstruct technology transfers, while its focus remains attentive to how the EU's policy towards China advances. Overcoming these obstacles and forging greater strategic trust will be essential to moving the partnership forward. The following recommendations outline ways to enable more effective collaboration in security and defence.

A DEFENCE AND TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

Defence-industrial cooperation is key to the partnership. European and Indian firms should explore avenues for direct sales, joint ventures, and co-production of military equipment that can complement Europe's ambitious defence initiatives, modernise India's armed forces and contribute to diversification on both sides. India seeks greater access to military technologies, which is an area where Europe can play a critical role. Brussels should identify technologies that can be shared and work with Member States to streamline export controls. The EU-India partnership could establish an innovation-led

defence initiative based on joint R&D and collaboration between defence technology start-ups. India could also consider joining the EU Defence Innovation Scheme (EUDIS), using the India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) as a template.

B INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND MARKET ACCESS

Stable institutional mechanisms and market clarity are essential. The pending Security of Information Agreement (SIA) should be prioritised to unlock Indian participation in EU PESCO projects and facilitate key information exchanges. Concluding the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is a top priority and would facilitate EU-India defence cooperation. The diplomatic gap created by India's lack of a military attaché in Brussels must be addressed to sustain momentum in defence collaboration, as the EU has already appointed this figure in India. Indian companies could increase their participation in critical infrastructure projects, including the EU's expanding multimodal corridors for military mobility.

C GEOPOLITICAL ALIGNMENT

The EU and India must establish focused mechanisms to address shared security challenges. As the Russia-China "no-limits" friendship grows stronger, mapping developments, mitigating risks and sharing intelligence should become a priority in EU-India consultations. A dedicated EU-India working group involving regular discussions on China could coordinate responses to the Chinese challenge and its risks, especially as the

recent India-Pakistan escalations have reinforced security interlinkages between the Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic theatres. The EU and India should advance their maritime partnership through cooperation on maritime domain awareness, illicit activities, capacity-building and information sharing via the Indo-Pacific Regional Information Sharing programme. Exchanging best practices and deploying countermeasures against disinformation and hybrid threats is another key area of cooperation.

D HUMAN CAPITAL AND COLLABORATIVE PLATFORMS

Human resources and specialised platforms offer a unique opportunity for swift cooperation. The EU-India Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility could be leveraged to fill personnel shortages in the European defence-industrial industry with skills in India. As mentioned in the new EU-India Strategic Agenda, an industry-led EU-India Defence Trade and Tech Forum could be organised to bring together business leaders and start-ups to identify cooperation opportunities.

CONCLUSION 3— THE EU-BRAZIL PARTNERSHIP

The EU–Brazil partnership is built around the EU–Mercosur agreement, which serves not only as a trade deal but as a political instrument that reinforces multilateralism amid global instability. While political divergences persist, notably due to Brazil’s BRICS engagement versus the EU’s concerns over Russia and China, both sides see major incentives in managing these differences and deepening their strategic alignment.

Europe has become a key partner in Brazil’s defence modernisation and strategic autonomy thanks to major industrial projects and technology transfers between the two powers. Beyond defence, a key area of security convergence between the EU and Brazil lies in combating shared threats such as transnational organised crime and drug trafficking via judicial collaboration and intelligence sharing. Enhanced security cooperation requires a dual-track approach. Politically, both the EU and Brazil must manage global re-alignments while reinforcing convergence on shared security challenges. Financially, the EU’s green and digital finance should converge with Brazil’s sustainable development priorities to directly reinforce long-term stability and security. To further institutionalise this relationship and maximise mutual benefits, the following policy recommendations provide specific mechanisms to both support and deepen the security and defence dialogue between the EU and Brazil.

A DEFENCE INDUSTRY COOPERATION AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFERS

Negotiations for a potential SDP between the EU and Brazil must prioritise advanced industrial collaboration. Cooperation must move beyond current bilateral initiatives (KC-390, Gripen, Submarine Program) with EU Member States

to initiate new joint ventures at EU level in strategic high-tech domains, including space technologies, dual-use innovation, and advanced cybersecurity solutions. Furthermore, both parties must utilise the government procurement chapter of the EU–Mercosur agreement to facilitate reciprocal market access and joint industrial projects. This approach should prioritise investments that ensure technology and knowledge transfers, and local production, as well as developing expertise in Brazil’s defence industry. Permanent expert dialogues should be established to secure critical supply chains, share industrial best practices and align research and development efforts in defence technology.

B TRANSNATIONAL SECURITY AND MARITIME GOVERNANCE

Both the EU and Brazil face the destabilising effects of transnational organised crime originating in South America. To effectively combat this shared threat, collaboration should be formally strengthened through ZOPACAS, with both powers co-launching joint maritime surveillance and capacity-building initiatives. Operational cooperation could be strengthened by creating permanent, coordinated task forces to execute intelligence-led operations against drug trafficking, arms trafficking, human smuggling, money laundering, and environmental crimes (illegal mining, logging, wildlife trade). In addition, this should be supported by the establishment of information-sharing protocols between financial intelligence units and law enforcement agencies to strengthen mutual legal assistance and asset recovery, while developing interoperable risk-analysis tools to track illicit financial flows in supply chains linking South America to European markets.

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY

Since sustainable development is essential for long-term security, any future SDP must include dedicated financing for environmental security. The EU must align its green finance, and its digital and infrastructure investment with Brazil's priorities, treating security and development financing as mutually reinforcing. Existing EU instruments, such as the Amazon Fund, should be used to fund projects that directly contribute to good governance and law enforcement in areas threatened by illicit activities. In addition, a joint working group should be established to connect environmental and defence policies, addressing the security implications of illegal mining, deforestation, and climate-related migration. This would enhance both preparedness and prevention in the Amazon and the South Atlantic regions.

CONCLUSION 4— THE EU-SOUTH AFRICA PARTNERSHIP: BALANCING SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

EU-South Africa relations are shaped by diverging priorities: the Global North's growing focus on security and the Global South's pressing development needs. While existing cooperation in trade, investment, and peacekeeping remains robust, the EU's shift toward prioritising defence and its own strategic autonomy is perceived by South Africa as jeopardising vital development commitments which underpin long-term peace and stability in Africa. Therefore, true strategic alignment hinges on the capacity of both powers to forge and sustain converging interests. This requires the EU to recognise the intrinsic link between development funding and continental security, and for South Africa to leverage its strategic position to safeguard the core elements of multilateralism. While an SDP is unlikely in the short to medium term, the path to strengthening security and defence dynamics between the EU and South Africa lies in reinventing and reinforcing existing dialogues and financial instruments in the long term, ensuring mutual priorities are met without sacrificing the fundamental objectives of the SDGs and the AU's Agenda 2063. The following policy recommendations provide specific mechanisms to both support and deepen the strategic dialogue between the EU and South Africa.

A STRENGTHENING MULTILATERAL SECURITY COOPERATION

The EU and South Africa should intensify dialogue to enhance global security and promote effective multilateralism by focusing on two critical areas. First, securing the necessary political and diplomatic support within the UN to formalise a closer, more influential relationship between the UNSC and the AU's Peace and Security Council. Second,

collaborating in ensuring predictable, sustainable financing mechanisms for multilateral peacekeeping operations, leveraging existing EU contributions to ensure greater operational stability and to promote regional conflict resolution through dialogue and mediation.

B PRIORITISING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR CONTINENTAL PEACE AND SECURITY

To improve strategic convergence with South Africa, the EU must realign its focus by emphasising security through development rather than prioritising defence cooperation for security. The EU should consolidate its commitment to financing key Pan-African institutional frameworks, including the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), while ensuring sustained funding to reach the SDG and Agenda 2063 development targets in Africa. Prioritising specific investments such as South Africa's Just Energy Transition, integrating African economies into global value chains, especially in critical raw mineral value chains, and promoting local job creation are essential if the root causes of instability are to be tackled and long-term continental peace and security are to be realised.

C ACHIEVING PEACE IN UKRAINE

The EU should support South Africa's impartial role as a mediator in the war in Ukraine to facilitate just and lasting peace. The EU should seize the opportunity to advance peace dialogue between Ukraine and Russia by leveraging South Africa's peace-building proposals. These

include fostering solidarity for civilian protection, promoting de-escalation, guaranteeing essential security guarantees for both sides, and restoring critical global supply chains that are vital to African food security. Coordinated action on these steps is essential, given the conflict's global repercussions.

D ENHANCING BILATERAL DEFENCE COOPERATION

The EU and South Africa could consolidate bilateral defence cooperation by maximising engagement within existing mechanisms in three strategic areas: continuing joint military activities between the SANDF and EU Member States, specifically targeting joint peacekeeping operations across the continent; facilitating mutual investment to strengthen their respective defence industries; and utilising the European Peace Facility (EPF) as their primary strategic instrument. Deepening engagement with the EPF, in terms of military, technical and intelligence support, could serve as the basis for enhanced defence dialogue that could eventually lead to the signature of an SDP. This would facilitate access to the SAFE instrument for joint procurements and investments, which would support the reinvestment needs of both their defence industries.

