

Towards an EU–Ukraine alliance: A plan for an EU–Ukraine Joint Training Mission



GEOPOLITICS
& DEFENSE

POLICY BRIEF
MARCH 2025

The question of the peacekeeping mechanisms and security guarantees that Europeans could offer Ukraine has become a central point of debate. The objective is to ensure that any future ceasefire is not based solely on non-credible commitments from Russia, which may simply seek to consolidate its capabilities before resuming aggression against Ukraine. A broader objective is to anchor Ukraine within the European security architecture.

1. Ukraine's contribution to European security

Since at least 2022, Ukraine and its capacity for resistance have played a crucial role in Europe's security by focusing Russia's attention. As long as Russian forces have to concentrate most of their resources on the Ukrainian front, their ability to concentrate on other parts of Europe's eastern flank

– or to attack another European country – is significantly reduced. This constitutes an invaluable security guarantee offered by Ukraine to Europe. It is precisely this contribution to European security that the emerging European security architecture should seek to preserve and organise in the long term.

This is even truer in the current context, as the Trump administration has warned that its contribution to European security is mainly about 'empowering Europe to own responsibility for its own security'.¹ This new reality makes Europeans increasingly dependent on one another when it comes to defence. If the credibility of European defence can no longer rely on the prospect of massive US deployment in case of war, then it must rely on the unfailing unity of Europeans in the face of Russia, from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea. In other words, Europeans should rely more on the Ukrainian contribution.

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1 US Department of Defense, *Opening Remarks by Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth at Ukraine Defense Contact Group*, 12 February 2025.

II • Coordinating the northern and southern segments of Europe's eastern flank

This shift calls for a re-conceptualisation of Europe's eastern flank, which can be conceived as consisting of two segments: the northern segment, from Finland to Poland, and the southern segment, in Ukraine. Europe's security now depends largely on the coherence of European defence along these two segments. For its part, Russia will probably attempt to decouple them so that it can concentrate its troops on one segment without being threatened on the other. This could mean resuming aggression against Ukraine without having to fear a strong European reaction or attacking a NATO country without fearing a strong Ukrainian reaction.

As such, if Ukraine were to feel abandoned by Europe and accept a form of neutralisation, it could constitute a great danger to European security as a whole. It would enable Russia to plan a focused attack on the northern segment, for example, against the Baltic states, without fearing a Ukrainian counter-offensive in the south. Conversely, a Ukraine anchored firmly in the European security architecture would be a key strategic asset, forcing Russia to divide its forces between two fronts – one facing the Baltic states and one facing Ukraine – which would considerably reduce its offensive capacity.

Security guarantees to Ukraine should therefore not be seen as a one-way commitment, but as the foundation of a mutual relationship – in other words, an alliance.

III • The case for an EU initiative

How should such an alliance be organised? The format currently favoured in intergovernmental meetings in Paris and London relies on an ad hoc coalition of willing states, ready to provide material support to Ukrainian forces or even to deploy troops to Ukraine.

In comparison with more institutionalised multilateral formats, the ad hoc format offers the advantage of speed and flexibility. However, it also has longer-term weaknesses, particularly in terms of coordi-

nation capacity. If the aim is to establish a coherent security architecture between the northern and southern segments of the eastern flank, a more structured coordination mechanism may be useful. It would serve as a stable link between the European and Ukrainian forces, between the forces present in Ukraine (Ukrainian or European), and those stationed in the northern segment under the NATO framework. Plans to provide security guarantees to Ukraine through ad hoc coalitions of the willing should thus be complemented by a more institutionalised framework.

The simplest and most effective solution would be to invite Ukraine into NATO, which would fully integrate the northern and southern segments of Europe's eastern flank. However, the Trump administration's refusal to consider NATO membership for Ukraine and, more generally, its refusal to contribute to security guarantees for Ukraine means that this option must be ruled out, at least for the next few years. A European-Ukrainian alliance should therefore be conceived outside the Atlantic Alliance, complementing it along the southern segment.

Another option worth exploring is to involve the European Union (EU) in the coordination of the southern segment. The EU already operates a training mission for Ukrainian troops: the EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine). Twenty-four EU states plus Norway are participating in this mission, which has trained 75,000 Ukrainian soldiers, mainly in Poland and Germany. This mission could be adapted to a post-ceasefire context, where it could serve as a coordination framework between Europeans and Ukrainians.

IV • Planning a new joint training mission

A first step would be to move from a one-way logic to a two-way logic. This would involve not just training Ukrainian troops, but also organising joint training and exercising between EU and Ukrainian forces to facilitate the mutual sharing of experience. EUMAM Ukraine would thus be replaced by a new **EU-Ukraine Joint Training Mission (EUU-JTM)**. Ukrainian forces have conti-

nually adapted their practices, tactics and equipment to the emergence of a new art of war centred on drones and, more recently, robots and artificial intelligence. The aim of EUU-JTM would thus be to do between European and Ukrainian troops what NATO does between US and European troops, i.e. to promote interoperability through joint training and the convergence of practices and equipment. More generally, regular socialisation between EU and Ukrainian soldiers would facilitate the emergence of a common military culture, thereby facilitating long-term cooperation.

This military-level interoperability and mutual learning in the framework of an EU mission could also generate synergies with the EU's objective of **integrating the Ukrainian defence industry into the European Defence Technology and Industrial Base (EDTIB)**. This objective, set out in the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP), would find a practical complement with EUU-JTM. Tactical convergence between European and Ukrainian soldiers could serve as a basis for European Commission initiatives to encourage joint industrial projects between EU and Ukrainian companies. Conversely, the joint development of new weapons could be extended by the joint training of Ukrainian and EU soldiers in the use of these weapons.

Geographically, the possibility of conducting some EUMAM Ukraine missions on Ukrainian soil has already been raised.² In a post-cease-fire context, it would therefore be logical for Europeans to revisit the question. **Deploying EUU-JTM on Ukrainian soil would allow it to perform a 'tripwire' function**, similar to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence of multinational battlegroups before 2022. Without being able to make a substantial contribution to the defence of Ukrainian territory, which would still depend mainly on the strength of Ukrainian forces, this EU military presence, through the regular rotation of units from around twenty member states on Ukrainian territory, could complicate Russian strategic calculations and strengthen the credibility of European security guarantees. Conversely, this EU military presence in Ukraine

would facilitate **coordination with Ukrainian forces in the event of a Russian attack on the northern segment covered by NATO**, with a view to forcing the Russians to divide their forces on two fronts. This EU-Ukraine alliance would be reinforced over time, until Ukraine becomes a full member of the EU and benefits from Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union's mutual assistance clause.

Like EUMAM Ukraine, EUU-JTM would be placed under the command of the EU's Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC). The MPCC would find in this mission an opportunity to strengthen its structure and raise the level of its command capabilities. It would act as a privileged point of contact between EU armies and Ukrainian forces. It would also act in permanent liaison with NATO and, along with the NATO-Ukraine Council, help to maintain an **operational level coordination link between the northern and southern segments of the eastern flank**. Issues such as the potential impact on NATO's posture of sending European reinforcements to Ukraine in the event of a new aggression or the preparation of a Euro-Ukrainian counter-offensive in the south in the event of a Russian attack against a NATO member in the north could thus be discussed in this framework.

• Conclusion

As the United States seeks to reduce its involvement in European security, solidarity among Europeans has become more essential than ever. In the future, European security could depend to a large extent on the coherence of the bulwark that Europeans will be able to build against Russia, from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea, by closely coordinating the northern and southern segments of the eastern flank. A joint EU-Ukraine training mission would play a crucial role, **strengthening the political credibility of solidarity among Europeans, promoting mutual learning and interoperability among EU and Ukrainian soldiers, and stimulating EU-Ukraine defence industrial cooperation**. EUU-JTM could become a cornerstone of the future European security architecture.

2 EEAS, Foreign Affairs Council (Defence): Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell after the meeting, 25 May 2024.

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Le projet reçoit des financements du programme
This project is funded by the European Commission's
CITIZENS EQUALITY RIGHTS AND VALUES Programme
le projet est financé par le programme (CERV)
НОМЕР ПРОЕКТА: 40104-LE-01-2025