

DOI 10.36074/logos-19.12.2025.011

MAIN MECHANISMS OF MILITARY COOPERATION BETWEEN UKRAINE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION UNDER CONDITIONS OF FULL-SCALE WAR

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The article analyses the transformation of the military-political partnership between Ukraine and the European Union in the context of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. It is argued that the war has not only reshaped the architecture of European security, but has also driven the EU's evolution from a primarily "normative power" into an actual defence actor capable of financing, coordinating and operationally supporting military missions. The study demonstrates that the current stage of cooperation is no longer limited to political declarations or humanitarian assistance, but is forming a new model of interaction in which Ukraine is gradually becoming a co-creator of the EU's common defence space.

Special attention is paid to the functioning of key instruments of military support – the European Peace Facility (EPF), the EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine), as well as defence-industrial initiatives linked to PESCO, the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS). The article shows that the EPF, used for the first time to provide large-scale deliveries of lethal weapons to a state at war, has created a precedent of shared financial responsibility of EU Member States for the security of the European space. At the same time, EUMAM Ukraine has become a systemic tool for the professionalisation of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, having trained more than 80,000 service members according to NATO and EU standards. These processes have not only raised Ukraine's level of military capability but have also accelerated its integration into the European security space.

An important component of the study is the legal analysis of Ukraine's participation in EU military missions without EU membership. Ukraine has become the first state effectively involved in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) at the operational level, which has created a new form of "associated

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security membership". This format, on the one hand, strengthens Ukraine's position and facilitates its approximation to EU standards, while, on the other hand, it may become a source of risk if it is transformed into a permanent model of "integration without enlargement".

Another section is devoted to defence-industrial cooperation, which is gradually acquiring a tangible, material dimension: the creation of maintenance and production hubs in Poland, Slovakia and Romania, integration into the supply chains of leading European defence corporations, and Ukraine's participation in joint research projects and technological programmes. Such partnership is considered as the basis for forming a single defence market and technological base that will ensure Ukraine's sustainable access to European defence resources.

The article also argues that strategic Ukraine–EU cooperation goes beyond temporary assistance and is shaping a new paradigm of European security. The war acts as a catalyst for institutional change within the EU, where Europe is gradually moving from reliance on NATO to the development of its own defence agency and autonomy. Ukraine has become not only a recipient of assistance but also an active participant in building a common EU defence system. Therefore, the key prospective directions of further integration are identified as: harmonisation of legal mechanisms, joint arms production, securing long-term funding for security programmes, and deepening cooperation in the sphere of cyber and digital security.

Thus, the military partnership between Ukraine and the EU is conceptualised as a systemic process of shaping a new European security model in which Ukraine acts not merely as an object of support, but as a co-creator of the strategic architecture of Europe's defence. This, in turn, lays the groundwork for Ukraine's full EU membership and for strengthening the stability of the European continent as a whole.

Introduction

With the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, the European security system underwent a radical transformation. The European Union, which had traditionally operated as a politico-economic bloc, was forced to rapidly adapt to the new reality and became an active provider of military support to Ukraine. Gradually, the EU has evolved from a "normative power" into a de facto participant in a system of collective defence of the European space [6]. Since then, the military partnership between Ukraine and the EU has become not only a forced consequence of war, but also a strategic avenue for shaping a common security policy.

The State and Dynamics of Ukraine–EU Military Cooperation

In 2025, the European Commission confirmed that the overall volume of military and financial assistance to Ukraine from the EU and its Member States had

exceeded €63 billion, of which more than €6 billion had been channelled through the European Peace Facility (EPF) [3]. This mechanism provides reimbursement to Member States for the transfer of weapons, equipment and ammunition to Ukraine and thus represents an unprecedented step in the development of the Union's defence dimension.

First, the European Peace Facility has, for the first time, been used to finance large-scale deliveries of lethal weapons to a country at war. This practice contradicted the earlier concept of the EU as a “normative power” focused primarily on diplomacy, sanctions policy and humanitarian assistance. The use of the EPF for direct military support marked the EU's transition from a passive role to that of an active defence actor engaged in the material support of war.

Second, the introduction of this mechanism represents the first case of joint reimbursement to Member States for the costs of weapons deliveries – that is, financing actual combat assets from an off-budget EU fund. This created a precedent for collective financial responsibility for the defence of the European space, which had previously been considered a sphere of exclusively national competence.

Third, this format of cooperation has institutionally consolidated a new level of defence policy integration within the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The EU now not only coordinates a common diplomatic position but in fact acts as a financial and logistical hub for defence cooperation, which has changed the very nature of the Union – from a purely civilian association into a hybrid security actor.

In this context, one of the key elements of interaction is the EU mission for the training of Ukrainian service members – EUMAM Ukraine. As of autumn 2025, more than 80,000 Ukrainian military personnel have been trained within the mission's framework, and its mandate has been extended until 2026 with funding of around €409 million [5]. The training model is based on an adaptive approach: programmes are constantly adjusted in line with emerging challenges on the battlefield, in particular in the areas of counter-UAS and counter-drone warfare, logistics, cyber defence and command-and-control coordination. This format contributes to the integration of Ukrainian units into NATO and EU standards.

At the practical level, cooperation is further enhanced through Ukraine's access to European defence initiatives such as PESCO, the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS), which is aimed at developing joint arms production [7]. This creates a foundation for the gradual integration of Ukraine's defence sector into the EU's broader security system.

With regard to the legal and institutional aspects of the partnership, the European Union acts within the framework of its Common Security and Defence Policy, regulated by the Lisbon Treaty and a series of Council decisions. Ukraine has

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become the first state effectively taking part in EU military missions without being a member of the Union. This has created a unique precedent of legal cooperation: a partner state is involved in operations and training programmes while simultaneously having the status of candidate country [4].

This precedent is of exceptional significance for the legal and institutional development of the CSDP, as it demonstrates for the first time the possibility of deep integration of a third state into the EU's military structures without formal membership. Ukraine's participation in EU missions effectively extends the scope of the Lisbon Treaty beyond the Member States. Although the treaty does not explicitly provide mechanisms for full participation of candidate countries in military operations, the EU has created for Ukraine a hybrid model of legal cooperation that combines elements of associated participation with the procedural autonomy of the CSDP. This format points to the flexibility of the EU's legal system and its ability to adapt to the extraordinary circumstances of war on the European continent.

Moreover, this case erodes the traditional divide between the EU's "internal" and "external" policies. If previously participation in CSDP missions had been an exclusive prerogative of Member States, Ukraine has now been granted access to mechanisms of operational planning, joint exercises and defence financing. This constitutes a new model of cooperation that can be characterised as "associated security membership" – an intermediate form between partnership and full integration.

In turn, the legal precedent of Ukraine's participation creates a normative basis for reforming the CSDP towards a more open security architecture, allowing strategic partners to be involved in joint missions without violating the principle of Member State sovereignty. This broadens the EU's potential to act as a regional security alliance, in which collective defence can encompass candidate countries or associated partners.

Therefore, it can be argued that Ukraine's participation in EU military missions has created a unique legal and political precedent, opening the way towards the establishment of a new-type European system of collective security – one in which the line between membership and partnership becomes conditional, and the key criterion for participation is shared responsibility for Europe's security.

On the one hand, this is a positive trend because it:

- enhances Ukraine's agency: the state is no longer a passive recipient of assistance but a co-creator of European security, involved in decision-making and operational practice;
- builds trust and institutional interaction, bringing Ukraine closer to EU standards and procedures more rapidly than the classic enlargement process;

- strengthens Ukraine's position in membership negotiations, as the state demonstrates not only political but also defence readiness to integrate into the common security system;

- shapes a new concept of an expanded security space in which membership is defined not only by formal criteria but also by one's contribution to the common cause.

On the other hand, there are risks that require caution:

- if the EU were to institutionalise this “intermediate” model as a permanent arrangement, there would be a danger of “getting stuck” in the status of associated partner, participating in missions without having a decisive vote in strategic decisions;

- such a scenario might blur membership criteria and offer the EU a convenient formula of “integration without enlargement”, potentially freezing the process of full accession;

- in political terms, this would create an asymmetry of influence, whereby Ukraine fulfils part of the obligations of a Member State but does not enjoy the full spectrum of rights.

Legal constraints concern above all the procedures for technology transfer and arms-export control. The absence of complete harmonisation of standards between Ukraine and the EU generates regulatory barriers in licensing, certification and joint procurement [9]. In this context, there is a need to establish a joint legal framework that would unify procedures and accelerate decision-making in crisis conditions.

From our perspective, a legal framework for joint security policy between Ukraine and the EU should be based on a combination of principles of mutual defence solidarity and the legal autonomy of the parties. It would be appropriate to conceive this as a hybrid model between an international treaty and EU internal law, ensuring institutional compatibility and minimising bureaucratic obstacles.

Legal format. The most appropriate solution would be to conclude a framework agreement on defence partnership, similar in status to the Association Agreement but focused on security mechanisms. It may build upon Articles 42–46 of the Lisbon Treaty (CSDP) and include a special annex for Ukraine as a candidate country. This would provide legal grounds for participation in joint missions, industrial programmes and training without the need for the Council of the EU to adopt a separate decision in each case.

Procedural harmonisation. The framework should enshrine a joint decision-making procedure in crisis situations, including a streamlined coordination mechanism between the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Council of the EU and the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine. For this purpose, a permanent

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coordination platform, “Ukraine–EU Defence Dialogue”, could be created with an advisory but operational mandate.

Technical and institutional integration. An essential component of the framework should be mutual recognition of standards, certifications and security procedures. This implies the introduction of a unified format for classified information exchange (taking into account levels such as “NATO Secret” / “EU Restricted”) and the harmonisation of procedures for the export/import of defence technologies.

Guarantee mechanism. Within the framework, it would be possible to anchor a mechanism of collective responsibility similar to Article 42(7) TEU (the mutual assistance clause), committing the EU to treat an armed attack on Ukraine as a threat to European security. This would not amount to full mutual defence (as in NATO), but would provide a politico-legal basis for rapid reaction. Such a norm is particularly relevant given that Ukraine borders a state that poses a direct threat to Europe and is engaged in an open military confrontation with it, while on the other side it faces a de facto dictatorship under significant external control by Russia. In this configuration, Ukraine acts as a buffer shielding EU countries from a direct military conflict.

Financial and industrial dimension. The framework should regulate Ukraine’s access to EU defence funds (EPF, EDF, ASAP) without the need for special derogations in each instance. This would secure predictability of funding and encourage the participation of Ukrainian enterprises in joint European defence-industrial consortia.

Such a legal framework would thus become a bridge between associated partnership and full membership, legalising the existing practice of Ukraine’s participation in EU missions and programmes and ensuring institutional symmetry between the scope of obligations and the level of access to decision-making. It is not an alternative to membership, but a transitional form of legal integration that would bring Ukraine closer to real functioning within a common European defence space.

Defence-Industrial Partnership and Technological Integration

Defence-industrial partnership and technological integration emerge as crucial aspects of cooperation.

As a strategic direction, industrial integration can be highlighted. The European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) envisages the creation of a single EU technological base, into which Ukrainian producers of weapons and ammunition are gradually being integrated [8]. At the Ukraine–EU Defence Industry Forum in May 2025, intentions were confirmed to establish joint production lines in Poland, Slovakia and Romania. This allows optimisation of logistics, standardisation of supplies and reduction of production time for equipment.

Beyond high-level arrangements, there are already concrete steps that demonstrate the gradual integration of Ukrainian defence enterprises into the European market and technological base. For example, cooperation with the KNDS (KMW–Nexter) consortium has led to the deployment in Ukraine of service and production facilities for the maintenance of European-standard artillery systems and armoured vehicles, with a view to moving towards the manufacture of selected components.

In parallel, production cooperation is being built with state-owned defence groups in Central European countries. The Polish PGZ and the Czech Czechoslovak Group are integrating Ukrainian enterprises into their supply chains in such areas as ammunition production, repair and overhaul, and the manufacture of components for armoured vehicles. Slovak companies, including MSM Group, are involved in the joint production of ammunition of both Soviet and NATO calibres as well as in the creation of joint repair centres. An important instrument of technological convergence has been the inclusion of Ukrainian manufacturers in EU framework programmes such as ASAP and EDIRPA, which promote production standardisation, the unification of technical requirements and access to a shared technological base. Since 2024, Ukraine has participated in a number of research projects in the fields of unmanned systems, electronic warfare and sensor technologies in partnership with the European Defence Fund. Thus, industrial integration has clearly moved beyond political declarations and is taking on specific, material forms: from the conception of joint enterprises and production hubs in Poland, Slovakia and Romania to the incorporation of Ukrainian companies into European supply chains and technical standards. This indicates the emergence of a genuine architecture of a common defence-industrial space aligned with the EU's strategic objectives under its Defence Industrial Strategy. In parallel, cooperation in digital and cyber security is evolving. The EU is financing cyber-security support programmes under the Digital Europe Programme, which encompass the establishment of joint Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CSIRTs) and training for Ukrainian specialists [10]. This complements military cooperation with technological components that are critical in the context of hybrid warfare.

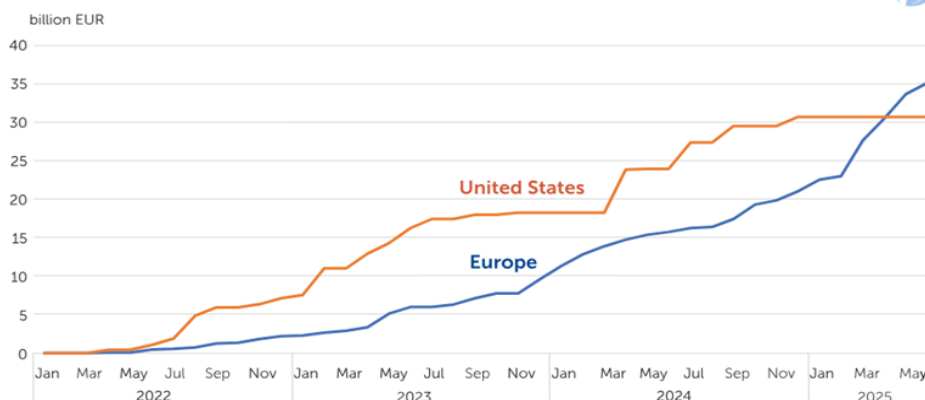
Challenges and Political Dimension of the Partnership

Despite large-scale support, the Ukraine–EU military partnership faces a number of barriers that add a political dimension and create challenges. Political volatility in Member States, driven by electoral cycles and the rise of populist movements, sometimes slows down decision-making. An example is the debates in the European Parliament on the volume of assistance under the EPF in 2024–2025 [1]. There also remains a risk of fragmentation of defence efforts due to the

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absence of fully centralised procurement. Nevertheless, recent trends indicate the formation of a new security paradigm: the EU is becoming a security subject rather than merely a donor, assuming political responsibility for the stability of the continent. According to experts at the Kiel Institute, in 2025 Europe for the first time surpassed the United States in the overall volume of support to Ukraine in the defence sphere, thereby demonstrating the EU's evolution towards a more self-sufficient defence structure [2].

Military Aid via Defense Procurement (Cumulative): US and Europe (2022–June 2025, billion Euros)



Note: This graph shows the cumulative value of military aid procured or planned to be procured from defense industries. Military aid drawn from donors' armed forces stockpiles or cases where donors do not specify the source of the weapons is excluded. In this graph, "Europe" refers to all EU member states, the United Kingdom, Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland.

Source: Ukraine Support Tracker (Trebesch et al., 2025)

ifw-kiel.de/ukrainetracker

This evolution is the product of several key factors. First, the election of Donald Trump in the United States was accompanied by growing pressure on European partners to increase defence spending and ensure greater autonomy in the security domain. Second, Russia's aggressive actions against European states – including reconnaissance drone incursions, airspace violations, cyberattacks and other provocative acts – have created a sense that the West's response to a potential conventional war is being tested.

At the same time, these developments have revealed NATO's limited readiness for rapid response to potential threats. Russia may have perceived this as a signal of insufficient speed and coordination in Alliance actions in the event of a sudden escalation. Under conditions of a swift offensive by Russian forces in border regions of NATO Member States, such a situation could call into question the effectiveness of the collective defence system and even pose risks to the Alliance's internal cohesion – precisely in the historical moment when it was created to prevent such scenarios.

Conclusions

In summary, the European vector of Ukraine's military partnership has become a key driver in shaping a new security architecture in Europe. Cooperation within EUMAM, EPF, EDF and EDIS goes far beyond temporary assistance and is gradually acquiring the features of a strategic alliance. For further development of this partnership, it is necessary to:

- harmonise legal mechanisms and standards in the defence sphere;
- establish permanent joint production facilities within the EU;
- secure long-term funding for support programmes;
- deepen integration into cyber and digital security systems.

Thus, the war has become a catalyst for a profound rethinking of European security policy. Ukraine is gradually transforming from an object of assistance into an active co-creator of a unified defence system – a transformation that constitutes a key precondition for its full EU membership and for strengthening the resilience of the entire European continent.

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