Flagship European defence projects of common interest

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The European Parliament adopted by 448 votes to 122, with 38 abstentions, a resolution on flagship European defence projects of common interest.

Members noted an overall increase in defence spending by EU Member States, which demonstrates their determination to respond to the deteriorating security environment, with some Member States having met or exceeded NATO's spending target of allocating 2% of their GDP to defence expenditure by the end of 2025.

Despite their increased efforts in defence, the EU and its Member States still face **persistent gaps** in collective strategic capabilities in areas such as air and missile defence, artillery systems, missiles and munitions, drones, strategic assets, cyber domain, AI and electronic warfare, ground combat and maritime security.

Parliament stressed that to address capability gaps, it is necessary to establish **autonomous strategic enablers** without which the Member States' armed forces cannot effectively conduct joint military operations. To develop defence capabilities and fill existing gaps, Members emphasised that all European efforts in this regard should be carried out in close coordination with NATO, with the aim of strengthening industrial cooperation and interoperability. They insisted that acquisitions under flagship projects be made jointly by participating Member States and that these projects contribute to the objective of achieving **40%** joint procurement in the defence sector by the end of 2027.

Developing defence capabilities through flagship projects in priority areas

Parliament took note of the European Council's approval of the 'Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030' and of the Member States' willingness to develop **four initial European Readiness Flagships** – the European Drone Defence Initiative, the Eastern Flank Watch, the European Air Shield and the European Space Shield.

Members therefore called on the Commission, participating Member States, and the European Defence Agency (EDA) to clearly define, for each of these projects, the specific objectives, timetable and implementation steps, funding proposals, governance mechanisms, technological scope, and expected scale. They stressed the need **for an operational concept and clear governance** to determine the role of each party, particularly in situations with cross-border implications, for example, when a hostile drone flies from one Member State to another. The design and implementation of these projects should be comprehensive and ensure that they integrate conventional defence elements alongside advanced technologies to guarantee operational sustainability in the event of protracted conflicts.

Participating Member States are urged to ensure that the milestones of each project are met, to finalise the capability coalitions outlined in the roadmap, and to do everything in their power to launch the flagship projects swiftly. According to Members, the flagship projects offer a tremendous opportunity to strengthen the competitiveness, efficiency, and innovative capacity of the European Defence Industrial and Technological Base (EDITB).

Identifying and ensuring the proper set-up and implementation of flagship projects

Parliament stressed that the objectives of flagship projects must be aligned with those of agreed EU defence objectives and coherent with NATO targets for capability development. It emphasised, furthermore, that they should address **innovative technological areas** for defence and contribute to the development of cutting-edge defence capabilities that respond to the requirements of modern warfare, including the rising need to network military multi-domain operations, operate deep and precise strikes and counter drone attacks, in full compliance with international humanitarian law.

Parliament also stressed that flagship projects should aim to foster closer cooperation and innovation in governance mechanisms at EU level and between Member States. **Good governance** of flagship projects must be based on a shared vision and effective coordination between the Commission, governments, military headquarters and public procurement agencies of the EU Member States, as well as defence industry stakeholders. Flagship projects could benefit from and build upon the cooperation already established under PESCO and the European Defence Fund (EDF).

Members also stressed the need to foster **stronger synergies between research, innovation, and industrial development** within the EU's defence ecosystem. They called for the involvement of the widest possible range of industrial players in flagship projects, including mid-cap companies, SMEs, and start-ups.

Governance of flagship projects and the role of Parliament

Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to further present proposals for flagship projects addressing the development of defence capabilities. It stressed that the selection of flagship projects should be merit-based and rely on transparent procedures, ensuring balanced geographical participation and preventing the concentration of decision-making or industrial benefits in a limited number of Member States. Parliament commits to exercising its scrutiny, legislative and budgetary roles in relation to the coordination, implementation and financing of flagship projects.

Long-term financing

Parliament called for adequate and dedicated funding under the next multiannual financial framework to ensure the long-term financing of flagship projects. Such funding should not compromise the funds allocated tor other strategic areas of the EU defence budget. Part of this funding should be directed towards training, skills development, and personnel retention initiatives.

Members urged Member States to consider systematically earmarking part of their national defence budgets for the development of partnership initiatives and the acquisition of defence equipment produced under flagship projects in areas where joint efforts generate added value.