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TURIN MANIFESTO FOR EUROPEAN DEFENCE
Towards a European System of Common Defence

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TURIN MANIFESTO FOR EUROPEAN DEFENCE

Towards a European System of Common Defence

This document deals with the establishment and characteristics of European defence from a federal perspective¹. Its aim is both to respond to the immediate political needs of the war in Ukraine (section 1), and to explore three broader questions: how to build a political and institutional framework for common defence actions, effectively constituting a *de facto* European defence government and paving the way to a European Defence Union (section 2); how to create a European System of Common Defence as the core of the European Defence Union (section 3); and how the political and institutional model proposed here reflects a specific characteristic of federal statehood, namely the duality of defence systems (section 4). Section 1 focuses on the current situation in 2024; section 2 outlines the framework for action of the next European legislature (2024-2029); section 3 proposes the new institutional framework which should be approved by the end of the next legislature, i.e., by 2029, and implemented in the following decade; section 4 provides the theoretical underpinnings that apply to all the stages described above.

¹ The text was closed on 20 March 2024.

Document drafted by a working group consisting of members of the Turin section of the European Union of Federalists: Oreste Gallo, Francesco Mazzaferro, Domenico Moro, Antonio Padoa Schioppa e Stefano Rossi (all in a private capacity, unrelated to their current affiliations).

1. The urgencies of 2024

Faced with unprecedented global geopolitical instability, Europe is set for a challenging 2024. From a security perspective, Europe is subject to the military threat of Russian neo-imperialism at a time when American attention to the defence of Europe is waning. In concrete terms, after having resisted the Russian invasion for two years, Ukraine is running out of ammunition, armaments, and men. This is also because the US Congress (the largest supplier of ammunition) is unable to release funding to Ukraine for domestic electoral reasons, while Europe (which confirms and strengthens its financial aid) does not have sufficient industrial capacity to fill the gap. In Washington, the American election campaign reveals the strength of old isolationist instincts, compounded by the anti-NATO and anti-EU rhetoric of Donald Trump, who is leading in the polls. Even in Europe, the degree of consensus on the steps to be taken to defend Ukraine is at risk, as revealed by the controversy following Emmanuel Macron's statements at the end of the summit of European leaders he convened on 26 February in Paris. Part of the differences between European leaders – and, in particular, between Macron and Scholz – can be explained by the electoral needs of the upcoming European elections on 9 June. But there is more.

By declaring that the actions of Europe in defence of Ukraine should have no limits and that the sending of ground troops in the future cannot be ruled out, Macron

projects into the present the fear that Europe, in a few months, will be faced with a new irremediable reality: Ukrainian armed forces are overwhelmed and much of the country is occupied; Zelensky and his government are in exile or only manage to control some western regions of the country, while a puppet government is installed in Kiev; last but not least, Putin is ready to declare Russia's annexation of territories in other parts of the region. According to many interpreters and commentators, Macron has in mind the precedent of the Munich Conference that gave the green light to Hitler's expansionism in 1938. Should these fears materialise, Macron's concerns would be entirely justified. From a European perspective, such a scenario would threaten the very existence of the European Union. The inability to guarantee the security of a future Member State, and by extension, parts of its own territory, would cast serious doubt on the Union's ability to function effectively and fulfil its purpose.

By ruling out the sending of troops and denying Ukraine the German Taurus long-range missiles, Scholz projects another fear into the present, a fear that stems from the following scenario: Russia, faced with European intervention 'on the ground', considers European states to be co-belligerents and attacks their troops both in Ukraine and in their home countries; the situation escalates into a spiral of war events; followed by the expansion of the war across the entire continent; the Europeans find themselves involved in a high-intensity

war without US support and must face a nuclear military power alone; and finally, the people of Europe population rebel and delegitimise governments and institutions. According to many interpreters and commentators, Scholz had in mind the precedent of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in June 1914, which was followed by events that led perhaps unintentionally to the outbreak of the First World War. Scholz's fear of this scenario materialising would also be justified. From a European point of view, this outcome too would pose risks to the survival of the European Union, since many anti-European political movements, particularly widespread in recent years in much of the Union, would blame Europe for their countries' involvement in a potentially nuclear war.

The dispute between Macron and Scholz during this acute crisis phase has significantly undermined the credibility of the European Union. If Macron's objective was to create 'strategic ambiguity' about how and when Europe would intervene, the method chosen and the reactions elicited have had the opposite effect, reinforcing Putin's belief that – although NATO is fully operational, as demonstrated by the large-scale joint training manoeuvres underway in recent months – Europe lacks the political will to act against Russia in Ukraine, especially without US involvement. Likewise, if Scholz's aim was primarily to reassure the Germans that their territory will never be at risk of attack, whatever the outcome of Putin's aggression in Ukraine, this hope is now weaker

after his statements, because Putin is moving towards regaining strength and territorial control of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, starting with the Baltics, and he is convinced that Europe will let him do so in the event of American disengagement.

The spectacle of public dispute between the two largest countries of the Union reveals the risks of political fragmentation and institutional disintegration. The dream that Putin has been cultivating for at least a decade, namely the disintegration of the European Union and the reconstitution of a Russian system of power that incorporates in one way or another a large part of the Slavic world, could soon come true without the Russian President having to continue to use force beyond Ukraine.

How can Ukraine and Europe be saved from Putin's aims without endangering peace on the continent? Following the public dispute, the first steps towards reconciliation took place on 15 March in Berlin, as part of a meeting in the form of the Weimar Triangle between Macron, Scholz and the Polish Prime Minister, Donald Tusk. During the press conference, a joint initiative of the three countries was announced, to be extended to the European Union, to ensure the delivery of more long-range weapons. However, it is essential to realise that even an increase in military and financial aid from the European side (which is necessary) does not guarantee Ukraine's security, after Putin secured a blank cheque by killing his only credible political rival, manipulating elec-

tions and getting himself elected by an 87% majority on a war agenda. Many observers now expect the re-elected Russian President to further escalate the invasion, announcing a shift from a special military operation to a patriotic war. After all, Putin does not recognise Ukraine's historical right to exist as a state independent of Russia.

It is therefore necessary for the EU to think innovatively about an immediate solution that permanently prevents Putin from winning the war. The institutional elements of this solution are:

- I. the EU Member States agree to use force to prevent the territorial collapse of a future Member State, also in light of the mutual defence clause included in Article 42 of the Treaty on European Union (based, *inter alia*, on strengthening international security);
- II. Member States will then send a European expeditionary force to ensure Ukraine's territorial security whenever necessary, starting in 2024 (this occurs outside the procedures established by the treaties, and on a voluntary basis);
- III. the European Union recognises that not all Member States are ready for these actions, but it nevertheless endorses their initiative, supporting those who participate, for example, in terms of joint financing; and
- IV. all commitments already undertaken by the Union (in particular regarding the financing and transfer of arms to Ukraine) are fully respected.

2. Laying the foundations for European defence during the next legislative term (2024-2029)

At the time of writing, it is impossible to predict whether there will be sufficient political consensus to implement the proposal included in section 1. Will the European Union make a quantum leap in its ability to take security decisions when faced with the risk of a Ukrainian military reversal? It is to be hoped that, despite the complexity of the procedures following the June elections, Europe will not remain paralysed.

The political framework that will emerge from the European elections will in any case be the one that will define the conditions for the foundations of European defence. This section considers, first, the question of the necessary public consensus that will have to accompany the process of the *de facto* birth of a European Defence Union. Second, it describes the existing forms of military cooperation on which such a Union in the making can be based without the need for immediate Treaty reform. However, this reform remains inevitable in the medium term (and is discussed in section 3).

When we refer to the necessary consensus of public opinion - the first theme of this section – we do not expect that, as a prerequisite for implementing common defence actions, public squares in Europe will be filled with citizens clamouring for Europe to take to the milit-

ary field to protect their security. Rather, we understand that, in the European framework, as in any democratic system, it is and remains essential that defence policy is subject to the direction and consensus of political majorities and that there are mechanisms for controlling and verifying the use of force through common actions. Without these tools, there is a risk of a serious disconnect between policy and public opinion. This divergence can only make it impossible, in the medium term, for the Union to play an effective role in defending its own security. In this sense, it is desirable to hold a public debate on defence among the political forces competing in the European election campaign in spring 2024.

Joint European action is possible if there is a common political will at both European and national parliamentary and governmental levels. A common institutional framework is crucial to translate this political will into consistent initiatives. Broad public consensus on the purpose and justification for using military force is required to establish a link between political will and common action. In the European context, this also means ensuring that this public consensus is as homogeneous as possible among the Member States that want to join forces. In practice, formulating common political will necessitate close collaboration between institutions of the Union and those of the Member States.

For European institutions and public opinion to align on the purposes and methods of the use of force, there needs to be a shared understanding of the necessity

for action and the priorities at stake. This perception requires a democratic debate involving political forces and civil society. During the last parliamentary term (2019-2024), the European Union proceeded in this direction. Notably, the Council (21 March 2022) and the European Council (24-25 March 2022) adopted the 'Strategic Compass for Security and Defence', and the Conference on the Future of Europe, held between May 2021 and May 2022, emphasised European defence in its conclusions.

However, it is only with the start of the electoral campaign for the European elections in June 2024 that the question of defence has been placed at the centre of the European political debate, as evidenced by the multiple positions taken by politicians of different backgrounds and nationalities, both at government level and within the EU institutions. A combination of two already discussed developments enabled these expressions of political will to be manifested: the perception that Putin's army could prevail on the battlefields of Ukraine and the fear that Donald Trump could win the next presidential elections in the United States. In the worst-case scenario, Europe could soon be exposed to the '*de facto*' convergence of Putin and Trump's policies, to the detriment of Europe.

The recent congress of the European People's Party (7-8 March 2024) illustrates the new centrality of the defence question in Europe. But proposals on the need to establish a European Defence Union have also sur-

faced in recent weeks from many members of the European Socialist Party, Renew Europe and the Greens. At the same time, at a more institutional level, on 5 March, the European Commission approved the first European Defence Industrial Strategy.

The proposals – put forward so far during the European election campaign – include, among other things, the appointment of a European Defence Commissioner, the establishment of a Council of Defence Ministers and a specific Parliamentary Defence Committee within the European Parliament. It is crucial that, in the field of defence, the political role and public visibility of all three European institutions (Commission, Parliament and Council) are strengthened during the next parliamentary term so that a 'de facto governance' function of the European defence capability can be initiated.

One of the tasks of the upcoming European legislature will be to continue the political reflection started during the election campaign, ensuring that there is sufficient political consensus around the proposals. The world order is in fact facing a decline in multilateral cooperation, which puts Europe's ability to remedy the disorder in its neighbouring regions through diplomatic and commercial means alone in serious difficulty. Thus weakening the European Union's ability to address instability in its neighbourhood:

- the Middle East (with the conflict in Gaza between Israel

and Hamas, but also with the actions of the Yemeni Shiite rebels against commercial traffic in the Red Sea and the unresolved problems in Lebanon and Syria);

- West and sub-Saharan Africa (with the expulsion of UN and European troops from Mali, Benin and Burkina Faso, where it is now Russia that supports the local military regimes against the ongoing attempt by Islamist militias to create caliphates, and the weakening of institutions in Chad);
- and northern Africa (with the perpetuation of civil war in Libya, the failure of the Arab Springs in Tunisia and Egypt, and the risk of increased migratory movements).

All this will require a complex effort on the part of Europe and its governments during the next parliamentary term: it will be necessary to devise common policies for long-term development, but also for the control and orderly management of migratory movements and, when necessary, to counter security threats. The European Union and its Member States (including Italy) have important common interests with all neighbouring regions, but these are at risk due to a lack of security.

In this second part of the second section, we explain that the European Union already possesses the institutional framework to launch military operations, contin-

gent upon consensus in society and sufficient political unity among Member States. These instruments are available to a 'de facto government' of European defence and can be used to immediately convert popular and political consensus into action.

- As already mentioned, Article 42 of the Treaty on European Union includes a mutual defence clause. It states that if an EU Member State suffers armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States are obliged to provide it with aid and assistance with all the means at their disposal. This mutual defence obligation is binding on all Member States.
- The Treaty rules also provide for procedures (such as constructive abstention in Article 31.1 TEU, structured cooperation in Article 46.1 and 46.2 TEU) which facilitate joint actions, if there is a broad majority of Member States ready to pool their human and material resources.
- The European Union has an EU Military Committee (EUMC), and an EU Military Staff (EUMS). In the event of a crisis, the Military Committee takes over the management of military activities and issues instructions to the EU Military Staff.
- The two structures must be strengthened. Their role could be made politically and institutionally even stronger if the Military Committee and the Military Staff were placed directly under the High Representative (or alternatively the European Council) instead

of the current predominantly administrative seat within the Council. It is also crucial to expand resources. The European Military Staff has 200 people, the NATO Military Staff has 6,800 people.

- The 'Strategic Compass' approved by the European Council contains a commitment to create a corps of 5,000 operational personnel by 2030, which would constitute the first core of armed forces' personnel mandated and recruited directly by the EU, and not of personnel made available by the Member States.
- Outside the framework of the treaties, the Eurocorps offers an immediately operational instrument (with 1,000 Military Staff) if a consensus is reached among the Member States that signed the Strasbourg Treaty as 'Framework States': Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Spain and Poland. As has happened in the past with agreements concluded outside the EU (Schengen, European Space Agency), the medium-term success of these decentralised endeavours much depends on whether they can be anchored in EU policies. A further strengthening could come from the decision of the five associated states (Austria, Greece, Italy, Romania and Turkey) to participate fully in the structure. A 'Turin' manifesto cannot help but forcefully plead that Italy becomes a full member of the Strasbourg Treaty. Italy should also promote the integration of Eurocorps into the Union's legal framework, which is possible even without amending the EU treaties.

With these institutional instruments, the European Union would contribute to the military defence of its own territory (together with NATO and the armies of the Member States), strengthening the executive military missions that are already the responsibility of the Union and also intervening in missions outside its borders. As discussed below, given sufficient political will, there is nothing to prevent the *de facto* creation of a European Defence Union within the existing framework of the European treaties.

3. Creating a 'Common European Defence System'

The considerations and proposals in Section 2 apply as preliminaries to those in Section 3. The history of European integration has seen several multi-phase institutional processes, in which the deepening of policies and the construction of institutions were based on defining more ambitious objectives to tackle emerging crises.

One might ask why the creation of a 'European System of Common Defence', i.e., a permanent and institutionalised framework based on constitutional norms, is only proposed here at the end of the process. Based on the experience of other European integration processes, it is true that reaching an agreement by 2029 means seeing its full implementation only 10 years later. Others argue that European defence can only be

achieved through the reform of existing treaties, which must therefore precede the process, and that the priority is to review them according to the procedure for initiating a convention.

Support for a progressive approach based on the existing institutional framework rests on these arguments:

- *Timing.* We find ourselves in a situation of great instability that must be remedied with existing tools. It is an emergency that cannot be avoided. Waiting for the outcome of a treaty change at the current stage is equivalent to evading the European Union's historic task of guaranteeing its future.
- *The risks.* Experience shows that the creation of a federal European Defence Union will not be an easy task. The transition will be difficult for some Member States. It is too risky to attempt this under the present circumstances, considering the potential for defeat (as happened with the European Defence Community in 1954 and with the European Constitution in 2005).
- *Political will.* More than the improvement of the institutional framework, what matters is a consensus on what needs to be done. It is necessary to demonstrate that there is a common political will, which the EU has not always managed to forge, as seen in the Balkan wars in the last decade of the previous century.
- *The precedents of the birth of other federations.* If we look at the federalist precedent of the birth of the

United States of America, we realise that compared to the current EU, the thirteen American colonies had a far weaker institutional framework prior to declaring their independence and war on Great Britain.

This does not mean that only the launch of a 'European System of Common Defence' would provide a complete and stable institutional structure to the European Defence Union. This could happen based on an overall amendment to the existing treaties, or perhaps, more likely, through the conclusion of a new treaty among those who are willing. In the latter case, the additional treaty could assign new control functions to existing European institutions *vis-à-vis* its signatories. This can be explained by the likelihood that, at the beginning, the system would not include all Member States. Following the same dynamics as other policies, however, it is likely that the 'hard core' will strengthen to eventually include all or almost all of the Union.

At the heart of the 'European System of Common Defence' there would be a 'European Rapid Deployment Force'. It would report institutionally to the President of the European Council, receive political guidance from the President of the Commission and be held accountable to both the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament (the Parliament would be the only legislative chamber which would express trust or confidence in the Commission). Such a structure, similar to a 28th EU army, was proposed by an SPD working group in the Bundestag in October 2020.

Furthermore, the Common European Defence System would also include the armies of the Member States. According to the procedures requiring the consent of the Council of Ministers and Parliament, the European Rapid Deployment Force could request additional contributions from Member States' armies to carry out joint missions.

We still need to think about the size, the legal structure, the political and military articulation with NATO, etc, but some principles can be proposed. The European Rapid Deployment Force would be ready to defend the entire territory of the Union, while the national armies would have defensive responsibilities of their respective territories, but would exercise permanently with the European defence force, would be equipped with fully interoperable systems and would be capable of going into action for larger missions under the control of the European military command. One could think, for example, of regional and functional specialisations, whereby some national armies, if necessary, would assume specific auxiliary tasks related to air or naval missions, cyber or space warfare. France would have the military function of ensuring nuclear deterrence, also taking into account that many Member States are signatories of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. But decisions on the European use of nuclear weapons would be an integral part of the European institutional framework.

4. Defence and the federal state model

Everything proposed in the previous sections, whether it refers to the actions needed in 2024 or describes the final architecture of the European Defence Union, is inspired by the principle that defence should not be an exclusive competence of the Union. In fact, a European System of Common Defence is established, with a European Rapid Deployment Force at its centre, but the competences of the national armies are maintained, within the framework of the European System of Common Defence. The national armed forces remain in place; they continue to have a national mandate and are obviously further bound by the constitutional obligations of their own legal systems. In theory, it cannot be ruled out that they could go to war separately from the other components of the Common European Defence System. Only under exceptional conditions, and with the agreement of Parliament and the Council, would they be called upon to contribute to joint military actions, for example, in implementation of Article 42 of the EU Treaty. However, a gradual harmonisation of weapon systems, training and training practices, etc., is necessary to allow them to operate together, albeit exceptionally, under the twelve-star flag.

This configuration does not mean a 'unitary' solution, with a single army, would technically not be feasible. Rather, it is a conscious result of the duality (both political and institutional) that characterises European statehood.

In political terms, even when it achieves the configuration of a complete European federation, the Union will in fact remain characterised by a double democratic legitimacy, at the national and European levels, which is both rooted in the history of the continent and characteristic of federal systems. There are areas where consensus has been reached to establish exclusive competence. In other (and equally important) areas, competence will remain shared. Finally, in still other areas, national, regional, or local competences will prevail over European ones. In the area of defence, this complexity will have to be considered. The European federal people that the European Defence Union will protect are in fact a composite people, living in territories exposed to diverse threats of different origins, without a common military history (and indeed with a past of dramatic internal conflict).

In the defence field, the political legitimacy of the European Union will depend on its ability to respond to common challenges with common instruments, and to specific challenges with specific instruments. This dual model, created at the time of the foundation of the United States at the end of the 18th century and consolidated across the Atlantic in the following centuries until the world wars led to an almost complete centralisation of the American armed forces, is the model that can better inspire the structural features of the European Union and therefore promises greater consensus in the exer-

cise of the arduous task, in the coming decades, of defending Europe in a phase of growing global political instability.

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CENTRO STUDI SUL FEDERALISMO

Piazza Vincenzo Arbarello, 8

10122 Turin - ITALY

Phone 011 15630 890

info@csfederalismo.it

www.csfederalismo.it