



INTEGRATION OF THE EUROPEAN CAPABILITY PROCESS IN MEMBER STATES' ADMINISTRATION

The Finnish case

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ABSTRACT

Over time, the EU has established multiple instruments and processes to increase the synchronisation of member states' defence planning practices and to push for more cooperation in executing their capability development plans. However, the results have so far been limited. To help understand why this is the case, this ARES Group Comment studies how Finland navigates the EU's complex defence landscape. The paper examines to what extent the different EU capability development tools are – or are not – relevant for Finland and why this is the case. It argues that the EU instruments – especially those with funding attached – have become increasingly important for Finland in recent years, and that this trajectory is likely to continue. At the same time, the EU tools' role should not be overemphasised, as several factors continue to limit Finland's engagement and ambition.

Keywords: Finland | capability development | EU defence tools

Since the 2000s, the EU has adopted several instruments and processes that aim at increasing the synchronisation of member states' defence planning practices and at fostering cooperation between them in developing their military capabilities. The EU tools have been introduced in various waves. The 2000s saw the establishment of the European Defence Agency (EDA) and the Capability Development Plan (CDP), meant to help identify priority areas and opportunities for capability-related cooperation. In the latter part of the 2010s, both external and internal challenges pushed the EU to extend its defence activities. This led to the launch of the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defence Fund (EDF), each addressing different parts of the capability development process. With the beginning of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, the EU's defence policy has once again entered a new phase. Defence is currently among the EU's core priorities, as the Union seeks to facilitate and reinforce member states' efforts to support Ukraine, (re)build their own defences and strengthen Europe's defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB). Since 2022, the EU has set up the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act (EDIRPA), the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) and the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) instrument. Importantly, all of them use financial incentives to encourage member states to get involved, highlighting the EU's growing – albeit still limited – role in funding European defence (for an overview, see Iso-Markku and Helwig, 2026).

Despite the EU's broad palette of defence tools, available analyses show that collaboration between member states at the different stages of the capability development process is limited at best, with the 2022 CARD report noting that cooperation "remains the exception rather than the norm" (European Defence Agency, 2022, p. 7). Is this because the EU instruments are not fit for purpose? Or because member states are unwilling – or unable – to use them? To provide answers to these questions, this ARES Group Comment focuses on the case of Finland. It examines how Finland navigates the EU's complex defence landscape, analysing to what extent and for what reasons Finland does, or does not, engage with certain EU instruments and processes. The paper starts by briefly outlining what role the EU plays in Finnish defence policy. It then moves on to a more detailed analysis of Finland's experiences with the EU's capability development instruments and processes, starting with the defence tools that were established prior to 2022 and then turning to the newest EU initiatives. The paper ends with a short summary of the main findings.

THE ROLE OF THE EU IN FINNISH DEFENCE POLICY

The role of the EU in Finnish defence policy has evolved considerably over time, reflecting changes in Europe’s security environment as well as in Finland’s own defence orientation and thinking. For a long time, two factors set Finland apart from the EU’s mainstream and conditioned the relevance of the Union’s defence efforts for the country. First, because of its geographic location, Finland has always considered territorial defence the main task of its Defence Forces – even during the 1990s and the 2000s when many European states increasingly geared their militaries towards crisis management tasks, which were also at the heart of the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Second, until the early 2010s, Finnish defence policy was coloured by the country’s military non-alignment, which limited Helsinki’s willingness to engage in defence cooperation. While Finland was relatively supportive of, and actively involved in, building the CSDP, it initially wanted the EU to focus solely on external crisis management. This allowed for the core of Finland’s defence policy – territorial defence – to remain a strictly national undertaking (Pesu et al., 2020, p. 18).

However, all this started to change in the 2010s. Above all Russia’s first invasion of Ukraine in 2014 formed a watershed moment for Finland, pushing the country to leave military non-alignment behind and to opt for a policy of “alignment” instead (Pesu and Iso-Markku, 2022, pp. 10-11). This meant that Finland started to appreciate the potential of defence cooperation for strengthening its national defence capability, boosting deterrence, and increasing the probability of receiving military assistance in case of a conflict or war (Prime Minister’s Office, 2017, p. 16). In this spirit, Finland strengthened its ties with Sweden, Norway, the US and NATO (without becoming a member of the alliance until 2023), and joined diverse defence cooperation formats such as the European Intervention Initiative, the Framework Nations Concept and the Joint Expeditionary Force (Pesu and Iso-Markku 2022, pp. 38-40). Within the EU, Finland’s alignment policy translated into a positive view of almost anything the Union could do to help boost the military capabilities of EU member states or European defence at large. Consequently, Finland was very supportive of the new EU defence tools launched in the latter part of the 2010s, including PESCO and the EDF. Not being a member of NATO, Finland was also one of the very few member states that showed interest in giving more substance to the EU’s mutual defence clause, Article 42.7 (Pesu et al., 2020, p. 21).

After the start of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, Finnish defence policy underwent yet another significant change. In response to the Russian aggression, Finland abandoned the last remnants of its earlier non-alignment, applying for membership in NATO in May 2022 and joining the alliance in April 2023. This step has been described as the

biggest change to Finland's defence system since the end of the Second World War (Pesu and Iso-Markku, 2022, p. 13). Thanks to its close partnership with the alliance prior to 2022, Finland's integration into NATO has progressed relatively smoothly. However, adapting Finland's defence structures, processes and mindset to NATO membership after decades of self-reliance will require much more time – not least because the alliance itself is also going through significant changes. At the same time, even as a NATO member, Finland continues to highlight the importance of maintaining a credible national defence capacity in the spirit of Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty (Pesu and Iso-Markku 2022, p. 21), thereby building on well-established national processes and practices.

Finland's NATO accession means that the alliance is now the lynchpin of the country's defence policy. Nevertheless, Finland continues to emphasise the value of the EU as well. In a context in which Europe faces an aggressive Russia while also being pushed by the US to take greater responsibility for its own security, Finland sees NATO and the EU as being complementary forces, each possessing specific strengths that can be leveraged to bolster European defence (Ministry of Defence, 2024b, p. 86). For Finland, it is important that both NATO and the EU understand Russia as a long-term military threat – and prepare themselves accordingly. From Finland's point of view, the EU's principal advantages lie in its legislative and financial power. These can be harnessed to foster the development of member states' defence capabilities, the EDTIB, as well as military mobility. In Finland's view, the EU should also develop its activities in the cyber and space domains (Ministry of Defence, 2024b, p. 83). Furthermore, Finland would like the EU to strengthen its preparedness to counter hybrid threats and to safeguard critical infrastructure. Recently, Finland has explicitly promoted its own concept of comprehensive security as a role model for the EU, emphasising the importance of preparing for all types of crises (Ministry of Defence, 2024b, pp. 83-84).

While Finland considers it crucial that all EU member states do their part to strengthen European defence capabilities and readiness, the government of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo has also stressed that "frontline states" like Finland will likely bear the main responsibility – and should duly be the main beneficiaries of the available EU resources (YLE News 2025). Finland's long-standing economic struggles, which constrain the fiscal space at the national level, have further emphasised the role of EU funding.

CDP, PESCO AND CARD: A MIXED BUNCH

In principle, Finland considers the CDP an important part of the EU's defence architecture. After all, the EU's defence activities should be guided by a careful analysis of the Union's strategic environment and focus on the identified priorities. For this reason, Finland contributes to the CDP reviews. However, the CDP is different in nature from the national defence planning processes and the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP), which Finland – like many member states – considers to be the primary planning mechanisms.

In Finland's case, the significance of the CDP from a strictly national point of view was long limited, as it focused on the capabilities the EU would need for external crisis management, not for defending Europe or EU member states. However, the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was a definite turning point in this sense, meaning that the CDP now addresses Europe's defence needs from a very broad perspective. On the other hand, the focus may be too broad: the 2023 CDP revision resulted in altogether 22 capability development priorities with no ranking between them, making it difficult to speak about "priorities".

Overall, the CDP is an additional consultative instrument rather than an essential part of Finland's defence planning. While Finland compares its national capability development plans with the CDP priorities, the CDP has no direct influence on Finland's national planning processes. Instead, Finland's national defence planning is primarily driven by the threat landscape Finland faces, distilling it into concrete capability needs while bearing in mind the necessity to get the most out of the available resources. As a new NATO ally, Finland also pays particular attention to the capability targets apportioned to it through the NDPP. Ideally, the CDP could act as a transmission belt to convert NATO's capability targets into the EU context. However, for various reasons, the level of cooperation between the EU and NATO remains limited, meaning that there is no formal link between the CDP and the NDPP.

Finland's view of CARD is rather similar to its view of the CDP. Finland has actively participated in the different CARD cycles, but these have so far not led to any very concrete results. While a few letters of intent considering joint procurement of certain capabilities have been signed by varying groups of member states, only one – on loitering munitions – has so far progressed further. However, Finland is not part of that endeavour. Overall, the varying national interests of member states continue to complicate cooperation between them. Regarding many military capabilities, past procurement decisions have set individual member states on different tracks, constraining their ability and willingness to collaborate long into the future.

On the positive side, the annual CARD reports provide Finnish defence planners with useful information about the general state of European defence.

Member states' differing interests and priorities have also limited the success of PESCO. When PESCO was first launched, Finland expressed strong support for the instrument (Raivio, 2017). Although Finland remains supportive, its own experiences with PESCO have been mixed. Regarding PESCO, Finland has been interested both in the binding commitments and in some of the capability development projects. Viewing Russia as a long-term military threat, Finland considers it vital that all of Europe takes defence seriously. The PESCO commitments are viewed in Helsinki as one way to nudge other member states in the right direction. Against this backdrop, Finland has actively participated in the ongoing process of reviewing and updating the PESCO commitments. Finland has, for example, been in favour of including NATO's new defence spending pledge – 5% of GDP to be used for security-related expenditure, 3.5% to defence proper – into the PESCO commitments. In Finland's view, the other PESCO commitments – concerning areas such as capabilities, operational readiness as well as research and development – should be ambitious as well. At the same time, Finland has no illusions about the chances of achieving quick breakthroughs in any of these areas.

In terms of the PESCO projects, Finland has emphasised the importance of some broader areas of cooperation. These include military security of supply, critical infrastructure protection, military mobility, as well as the countering of space and hybrid threats (Ministry of Defence, 2024b, p. 83). However, in practice, Finland's own participation in PESCO projects has been rather limited and selective. As of spring 2024, Finland was a member of eight PESCO projects and an observer in 15 projects. Moreover, Finland acted as the coordinator of one project, the Arctic Command & Control Effector and Sensor System (ACCESS). The ACCESS project was launched as part of the fifth wave of PESCO projects, starting in 2023. It explores the possibilities to make use of recent technological trends such as miniaturisation and convergence to produce a new generation of transceivers, which would combine different functions related to situational awareness in one single piece of equipment. In addition to Finland, Estonia, France, and Sweden also take part in the project, with Bulgaria, Germany, and the Netherlands acting as observers (European External Action Service et al., n. d.).

As part of the sixth wave of PESCO projects in spring 2025, Finland proposed a new PESCO project called Quantum Enablers for Strategic Advance (QUEST), which it now coordinates. The project seeks to leverage quantum technologies in defence applications, including in positioning, territorial surveillance, as well as air and missile defence (Finnish Government, 2025a). The project reflects Finland's strong willingness to invest in new technologies, and the

quantum technology in particular, also in the defence sector, making use of the world-class quantum ecosystem that has developed in the country. Apart from QUEST, Finland also joined the new Medical Treatment Facility Role 2 Forward-Capability Development (MTF R2F-CD) project alongside France and Belgium.

Overall, PESCO is still seen as a potentially useful instrument, but there is also a sense in Helsinki that it lacks strategic guidance. In recent years, PESCO has lost some relevance compared to the defence instruments that can directly tap into funding from the EU budget. This has allowed the European Commission, as the manager of the EU budget, to play a bigger role in the defence field, whereas the EDA's relative importance and influence have decreased. While Helsinki may not be as allergic as some member states to the Commission's increased defence ambitions, it would also like to see the EDA become a stronger actor.

THE EDF: AN ATTRACTIVE TOOL

Of the existing EU instruments, Finland is particularly interested in and supportive of the EDF, which is also the most sizeable of the instruments that are funded directly from the EU budget (Ministry of Defence, 2024b, p. 85). With its research and development focus, Finland believes that the EDF can make an important contribution to the long-term competitiveness and innovation capacity of the EDTIB – and thereby of course also help Europe address concrete capability gaps or acquire entirely new capabilities. Moreover, Finland views the EDF as a framework that truly brings European defence companies together, creating valuable cross-border networks and supply chains (Helwig and Iso-Markku, 2020).

Apart from its potential to strengthen European defence at large, the EDF offers clear benefits for Finland and the Finnish defence industry. As Finland is a small state and its defence industry consists primarily of small and medium-sized enterprises, the national resources for R&D are limited. Through the EDF, Finland and Finnish defence companies can therefore take part in some projects that would likely not be possible in the national context. At the same time, many Finnish companies have developed cutting-edge technologies in niche fields. This means that they are well placed to compete for EDF funding – provided that the EDF offers a level playing field for all defence companies regardless of their size, which is how Finland wants the EDF to operate.

Despite Finland's good experiences with the EDF, Helsinki's long-standing concerns about the distribution of the EDF funds have not completely evaporated (see Helwig and Iso-Markku, 2020). Finland is still somewhat worried that the Commission's view of creating a European

defence market mainly refers to the consolidation of the European defence industry around major industrial players from the big member states. Finland, by contrast, emphasises the importance of equal opportunities for all defence companies, diverse supply chains and security of supply. Another drawback of the EDF is that it – like all EU defence instruments – comes with a heavy administrative burden. For a small state like Finland, this is a big challenge.

From the Finnish perspective, the most important concrete EDF project has so far been the so-called FAMOUS programme, in which Finland acts as the lead nation. The industrial coordinator of the project is Finland’s biggest defence company, Patria, owned to 50.1% by the Finnish state. Altogether nine member states (apart from Finland also Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, France, Latvia and Spain) and a total of 35 companies participate in the programme. FAMOUS is an acronym that stands for Future Highly Mobile Augmented Armoured Systems. The FAMOUS programme “optimizes synergies, standardization, commonalities, innovative technologies, and interoperability capabilities in All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) and Light Armoured Vehicle (LAV) and an upgrade to Main Battle Tank (MTB) capabilities” (Patria, n.d.).

The study phase of the FAMOUS programme was funded by the precursor of the EDF, the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP). The development phase – FAMOUS2 – was then selected as one of the projects to be funded from the EDF after the fund was officially launched in 2021. FAMOUS2 ran until 2026. The total budget of the first two phases of the FAMOUS programme was € 135 million, of which the EDIDP covered € 9 million and the EDF approximately € 95 million. The remaining amount, around € 28 million, was covered by the participating member states as well as through the investments of the participating companies (Patria, 2024). In April 2026, the Commission granted a further € 79 million to the FAMOUS consortium for the third phase of the programme (FAMOUS3), which will have a total budget of € 115 million (Patria, 2026).

In the Finnish context, the FAMOUS programme is linked to the Finnish Army’s Arctic Mobility programme, which seeks a replacement for the current fleet of old all-terrain vehicles that are to be decommissioned. Accordingly, the technologies developed in the FAMOUS programme are designed especially with the extreme weather conditions and terrain of Europe’s northernmost part in mind (Patria, n.d.). In the framework of the programme, Patria – alongside its partners – has developed a new armoured tracked vehicle Patria TRACKX, which was presented at the DSEI exhibition in the United Kingdom in September 2025 and could be ready for serial production in 2027.

Overall, the FAMOUS programme ticks all the boxes that Finland considers important with respect to the EDF. It has created a truly multinational consortium of partners around Patria, led to technological innovation and is about to produce a vehicle that addresses a very concrete capability need of the Finnish Defence Forces. FAMOUS can therefore easily be used as a flagship initiative within Finland, justifying Finland's active participation in EU defence cooperation. Ideally, it can also offer some valuable lessons for the Finnish officials and industrial actors involved, strengthening their possibilities to repeat a similar success in the future.

EDIRPA, ASAP, EDIP AND SAFE: INTERESTING OPPORTUNITIES

After 2022, the EU has introduced a host of new instruments to support Ukraine, enhance the military capabilities of EU member states, and strengthen the European defence industry. In principle, Finland has been supportive of all of them – and has tried to make the most of the emerging opportunities.

One of the five cross-border procurement projects chosen by the Commission in 2024 to receive funding from EDIRPA was the Common Armoured Vehicle System (CAVS) programme, in which Finland and Patria play a major role. The programme was initiated already in 2020 by Finland and Latvia with the aim of developing a new armoured vehicle system. Subsequently, Patria's 6x6 vehicle system was chosen as the platform for the programme. Since then, Sweden, Germany, Denmark, Norway, and the United Kingdom have also joined the programme, which has proven highly important for Patria.

In the case of the CAVS programme, the EDIRPA funding did therefore not lead to the setting up of a new cross-border project. Instead, the money simply enhances the functioning and visibility of an already existing major multinational procurement project and brings it closer to the EU framework. In practice, the EDIRPA funds allowed for establishing a dedicated project office for the CAVS programme within the Finnish Defence Forces Logistics Command Headquarters, facilitating the management of the project and the cooperation between the partners.

Like EDIRPA, ASAP also proved beneficial from the Finnish point of view. Nammo Lapua Oy received € 22.5 million to expand its capacity to produce 155-millimeter artillery grenade shells, and Nammo Vihtavuori Oy was granted € 10 million to increase the production of nitrocellulose and powder (Ministry of Defence, 2024a). Both Nammo Lapua Oy and Nammo

Vihtavuori Oy are part of the Norwegian-Finnish aerospace and defence group Nammo, Nordic Ammunition Company, which is jointly owned by the Norwegian government and Patria. As is the case with the FAMOUS programme, the funding received by Finland through EDIRPA and ASAP may be important for strengthening the government's, officials' and the industry's willingness to actively participate in the EU processes.

As for EDIP, set to continue the work of EDIRPA and ASAP, it is still early to say anything definitive about it from the Finnish perspective. The Finnish government has been interested in linking EDIP funding to the proposed European Defence Projects of Common Interest (EDPCIs) and, more concretely, to the so-called Eastern Flank Watch, encompassing the development of various types of capabilities, technologies and infrastructure to protect the EU's eastern border against hybrid and military threats. The project would directly contribute to the defence of Finland and other frontline states, thereby chiming well with the government's demands that the member states bordering Russia and/or Belarus should be the main beneficiaries of the EU's defence instruments and funding. At the same time, the exact nature of the Eastern Flank Watch project and its chances of success remain open questions.

Finally, Finland was one of the 19 member states to request a loan under the Commission-initiated SAFE scheme. SAFE sees the Commission borrow money on the capital markets and then lend it on to the member states with rather favourable conditions, including a relatively low interest rate and a long repayment period. However, in Finland's case, the financial aspect of the SAFE loans was not decisive, as the interest rate of the loans provided by the Commission is not significantly different from that of the loans that Finland itself could raise on the capital markets. To the extent to which there was a financial motivation behind Finland's participation in SAFE, this was mainly related to the opportunity to diversify Finland's loans.

The total sum requested by Finland from SAFE, € 1 billion, is not very sizeable compared to the amounts requested by many other member states, signalling that joining SAFE was primarily a symbolic move. By taking part, Finland wanted to emphasise its commitment to investing in defence and to strengthening the EU's defence dimension. Furthermore, through SAFE, Finland seeks to communicate to the other member states what kind of procurement plans it has, potentially generating some joint projects involving Finnish defence companies. As explained in a SAFE-related communication of the Finnish prime minister's office, "the main benefits of the SAFE instrument [for Finland] include increased orders for Finnish defence

industry projects together with partner countries and the strategic recognition of Finnish projects in the EU’s defence industry policy” (Finnish Government 2025b).

For Finland, it was very important that the priority defence product groups which the member states employing SAFE funding can invest in include ground combat capabilities. This is because of Finland’s own defence needs and national capability development plans, with the focus shifting to the Army as the major procurement processes of the Air Force (the F-35 programme) and the Navy (Squadron 2020) are coming to a close. As this example demonstrates, SAFE is unlikely to shape Finland’s procurement plans in any major way. Instead, it is an additional instrument that can be utilised to further the existing plans.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

The importance of the different EU instruments for Finland has grown over the recent years – and could continue to do so in the future. This is due to several developments. First, while many EU instruments and processes long revolved primarily around crisis management, they now address defence issues in a more holistic manner – indeed, most of them are increasingly geared towards meeting the challenges that Russia’s war against Ukraine poses for Europe. This aligns well with Finland’s own defence policy, which is almost exclusively focused on the Russian threat. Second, the level of EU defence funding has notably increased, making EU instruments more attractive for the Finnish government, especially as Finland’s own fiscal space has become more constrained following years of sluggish economic growth. Third, Finland can point to some concrete success stories related to EU funding, which makes it easier to justify domestically why Finland should actively participate in EU-level processes and instruments despite the administrative burden this entails. Even the Finnish Defence Forces – traditionally not overly enthusiastic about the EU – are gradually acknowledging the relevance and potential of EU defence instruments.

At the same time, the significance of the EU dimension in Finnish defence policy should not be overemphasized. In many ways, the existing EU instruments and processes are an “add-on” rather than an integral part of national planning processes and practices. Despite Finland’s predominantly positive attitude towards the EU’s defence dimension, Finland identifies several shortcomings in the way the EU instruments and processes operate. These limit the Finnish administration’s expectations and level of ambition. Importantly, the different EU instruments and processes do not form a very coherent or effective governance architecture. Above all, tensions between the intergovernmental side (member states and the EDA) and the

supranational side (the Commission) persist, resulting in turf-wars, information gaps and some inconsistencies. Similarly, while the roles and tasks of the EU and NATO may have become somewhat clearer in recent years, the relationship between them continues to be riddled with obstacles. This is unfortunate for states like Finland that are members of both organisations and view them as complementing each other. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, member states still have very different interests and priorities, which form a constant stumbling block for the EU's defence ambitions.

Overall, the different EU instruments are already an important part of Finland's defence policy – and their importance is likely to grow in the future. At the same time, Finland will continue to do many things on a national, bilateral or “minilateral” basis. The challenge – both from a national and a European perspective – will be to ensure some level of coherence between these diverse efforts.

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