



ALIGNING SHIELDS: GREECE'S INTEGRATION INTO THE EU CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

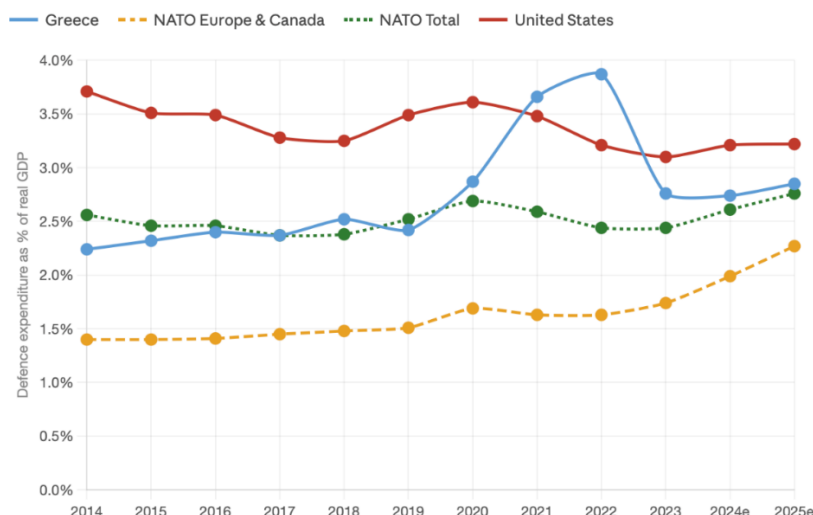
This paper examines the extent to which Greece has integrated European Union capability development instruments into its national defence policy and administration. Focusing on five core instruments (i.e., the Capability Development Plan, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, the Overarching Strategic Research Agenda, the Permanent Structured Cooperation on Defence and the European Defence Fund), the authors argue that Greece has achieved substantial integration, particularly where EU frameworks align with national strategic priorities and offer tangible industrial benefits. The analysis draws on national defence planning documents, legislative acts, and stakeholder engagement to assess the depth of integration across both intergovernmental and supranational instruments. The authors find that geostrategic imperatives, economic recovery goals, and political aspirations collectively drive Greece's active and structured engagement with EU defence capability processes.

Keywords: Greece | EU capability development process | EU defence

Over the past years, the European Union (EU) has progressively evolved from a civilian (i.e., economic and regulatory) entity into an emerging defence actor, primarily by developing a dense web of defence industrial and capability development instruments, leveraging its legislative power and its ability to mobilise money.¹ This evolution accelerated after Brexit, which removed one of the main sceptical voices on EU defence integration, and after the first Trump administration, which raised concerns about NATO's willingness to protect the Old Continent (Jones, 2020), but most importantly after Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which transformed threat perceptions and pushed member states to reconsider long-standing defence underinvestment (Nones, 2024). Alongside existing agencies and initiatives, the EU has introduced numerous schemes to finance collaborative defence research and development, foster a more integrated and competitive European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB), and boost production capacity and joint procurement.

For Greece, this transformation intersects with distinct national security priorities. As a frontline state in the Eastern Mediterranean, facing persistent tensions and threats in the Aegean, instability and wars in the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and hybrid threats (e.g., weaponisation of migration flows). These drivers help explain why Greece has consistently ranked among the highest defence spenders in NATO as a share of GDP, exceeding 2% of GDP every single year since 2024 (Figure I), and why it firmly supports the EU's efforts to become a credible defence industrial player.

Figure I: Greece's defence expenditure as a percentage of real GDP in comparison to NATO Europe & Canada, NATO Total and the US (2014-2025)



Data source: NATO (2025)

¹ The authors would like to thank Mr George Matsoukas, Junior Research Fellow, at the ELIAMEP's Defence Hub, for his valuable research assistance.

In light of the above, this paper examines the extent to which Greece has integrated EU capability development instruments into its national defence policy. It argues that Greece has successfully integrated these instruments into its national defence policy, particularly when they align with its national strategic priorities and offer tangible industrial and technological benefits.

For the purposes of this paper, integration is understood as a process that goes beyond formal participation in EU frameworks. It encompasses the internalisation of EU-level priorities into national defence planning documents, the creation of institutional structures to manage engagement with specific instruments, the convergence of national procurement and capability development priorities with those identified at the EU level, and the use of EU funding mechanisms to advance nationally defined objectives. Mere awareness or ad hoc involvement in EU initiatives does not meet this threshold, though the depth of integration naturally varies across instruments, reflecting both their distinct governance structures and the constraints imposed by the classified nature of much of the relevant material.

The paper is structured into three main sections. First, it briefly outlines five core instruments and initiatives of the EU capability development process, namely i) the Capability Development Plan (CDP), ii) the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), iii) the Overarching Strategic Research Agenda (OSRA), iv) the Permanent Structured Cooperation on Defence (PeSCo), and v) the European Defence Fund (EDF). Second, it explains why Greece views this process positively from geostrategic, industrial-economic and political perspectives. Third, it assesses the level of Greek integration of the aforementioned five instruments and initiatives into national planning and practice.

WHY GREECE VALUES THE EU'S CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

Greece's enduring support for EU capability development instruments is deeply rooted in historical geostrategic imperatives. During the Cold War, Greece joined NATO in 1952, as part of the Alliance's first enlargement, reinforcing its southeastern flank against the Soviet Union. Consequently, Greek security doctrine was overwhelmingly shaped by the bipolar confrontation, with the perceived 'threat from the north' (i.e., the Balkans and the Warsaw Pact countries) dominating predominantly Greek security preoccupations (Dimitras, 1985; Valinakis, 1994). Throughout the Cold War, the country's defence planning, force posture and military doctrine were therefore embedded within NATO's collective defence architecture and closely aligned with Allied priorities.

The events of 1974 constituted a major turning point for the Greek foreign and defence policy. The Turkish illegal invasion of Cyprus, alongside the American and NATO's positioning during that crisis, as well as the illegal occupation of more than 36% of the island since then, highlighted the risks associated with excessive dependence on a single security provider (Tsakonas & Tournikiotis, 2003). In response, Greece withdrew from NATO's integrated military structure in August 1974, after the Alliance's failure to prevent Türkiye's phase two of its illegal invasion of Cyprus (Operation Attila II).² Although Athens rejoined NATO's integrated military structure in 1980, the illegal invasion and occupation left a lasting imprint on Greek strategic culture. Rather than abandoning NATO, Greece gradually adopted a more pragmatic policy of diversification, seeking to complement the Alliance with stronger EU and bilateral security arrangements (Blavoukos & Politis Lamprou, 2025; Tsakonas, 2019).

Such considerations have been further exemplified in the 1990s, especially since 1995, Türkiye has officially held a 'casus belli' threat if Greece extends its territorial waters from 6 to 12 nautical miles in the Aegean based on its inalienable sovereign right under international law (UNCLOS), while repeatedly violating the Greek airspace (Hellenic National Defence General Staff, 2025). Against this backdrop, the gradual emergence of the EU as a security and quasi-defence actor has been welcomed in Athens. Türkiye's status as a NATO ally but not an EU member-state further accentuates Greece's strategic stance in cultivating a robust and autonomous EU defence posture.

Overall, with the notable exception of the immediate aftermath of Türkiye's illegal invasion of Cyprus, Greece has consistently regarded NATO as the cornerstone of collective defence, while supporting a stronger EU defence dimension, rejecting the decoupling of any European initiative from NATO's structures. Thus, Greece sets to kill 'two birds with a stone': first, it advocates and invests in the development of a European defence architecture, in which Türkiye is not a member, and second, it envisages such an architecture as reinforcing and complementary to the Alliance's overall military effectiveness.

From an economic and industrial point of view, Greece views the EU capability development process as an opportunity to move from being primarily a 'consumer' or a 'buyer of off-the-shelf systems' towards becoming an integrated player in the European defence value chain. During the debt crisis, Athens had limited capacity to provide incentives for its domestic defence industry and relied heavily on foreign suppliers and investors (Kamaras, 2023, pp. 5-7). While Greece is considered a major defence spender relative to its GDP, the domestic

² Greece officially returned in October 1980. The then Prime Minister of Greece, Constantinos Karamanlis, had stated that *"Greek bitterness is not aimed against the American people, the American legislative bodies or the American press...it is aimed against the American Administration, both for its support of the dictatorship and for its pro-Turkey attitude in the Cyprus drama"* (TIME, 1974).

defence industrial base contributes only about 0.6% to GDP, underscoring the country's longstanding dependence on foreign suppliers. (Karatarakis, 2026). As the country recovers, EU instruments, particularly the funding tools, such as the EDF, offer new avenues to support defence and dual-use industries, foster innovation, and connect Greek companies and research institutions to transnational consortia (Blavoukos et al., 2026). Greece's 2017 National Defence Industrial Strategy acknowledges the fact that the participation of the domestic DTIB *"in financed European programmes implemented by joint ventures and even involving partners outside the defence sector would enhance the level of knowledge achieved and create the conditions for the development of upgraded technology and/or dual use products"* (Hellenic Ministry of National Defence, 2017).

Politically, Greece's positive stance towards EU defence (industrial) integration is also informed by its broader aspiration to be at the core of the European integration process, after a period in which it felt marginalised during the debt crisis. With one of the highest defence spending levels in the Union as a percentage of GDP, Athens considers the defence domain an area where it can demonstrate added value and claim a place among the most engaged member states. Consequently, active participation and leadership in frameworks such as PESCO and the EDF serve a wider political objective: re-anchoring Greece in the inner circle of the European project (Blavoukos & Politis Lamprou, 2021).

GREECE AND THE EU CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Greece demonstrates substantial not only awareness but also integration of EU capability development instruments into its national defence planning and execution. While the integration of CDP, CARD and OSRA into national planning is challenging to examine using hard public data, given that most interactions remain classified due to their sensitive defence- and security-related content, Greek legislation, military modernisation plans and stakeholder meetings nevertheless indicate not only awareness but also well-established integration. The analysis below examines each core instrument, categorised into two major categories: intergovernmental and supranational instruments.

Greece and the intergovernmental instruments of the EU's capability development process

Greece's use of the CDP is best described as substantive. National defence planning documents and priorities, including the '2030 Agenda' and the 'Long-Term Planning of Defence Armaments of the Armed Forces 2025-2036' (LPDAAF 2025-2036) (Hellenic Ministry of National Defence, 2024, 2025b), show strong convergence with the CDP's 22 priorities

across military domains and strategic enablers. More specifically, in the maritime domain, the Hellenic Navy's submarine fleet renewal directly addresses CDP priorities in Underwater and Seabed Warfare. This effort is further exemplified by the procurement agreement between Greece and France for FDI frigates, with the first vessel already delivered to the Hellenic Navy (i.e., HN Frigate Kimon). Although the procurement of FDI frigates was strongly shaped by Greece's and France's strategic partnership, the former has increasingly sought to align such bilateral initiatives with CDP priorities, viewing its strategic relationships as vehicles through which it can simultaneously advance national defence requirements and broader EU defence priorities.

Air investments, including 4.5th and 5th generation combat aircraft target "Air Combat Platforms and Weapons", while the 'Achilles' Shield', which constitutes a multi-domain integrated defence initiative for the Eastern Aegean islands and Thrace, spans across most priority categories (Cicurel & Brody, 2026). Cyber and space efforts encompass operational cyber tools, satellite systems and C4ISR software, aligning with respective CDP priorities, as does the domestically developed 'Centaur' anti-drone system for counter-UAS operations. Concerning the land domain, the "Modern Fighter" upgrade programme seeks to modernise the individual soldier by 2030 through the provision of next-generation personal equipment, effectively shaping the "21st Century Greek Soldier". This includes an upgraded G3 rifle, a new sniper system, advanced Command and Control capabilities and uniforms integrated with sensor technologies (Hellenic Ministry of National Defence, 2025a).

Among strategic enablers and force multipliers, Greece advances C4ISTAR modernisation and personnel reforms (Hellenic Republic, 2026) in line with CDP guidance. Athens also highlights the Vertical Corridor's pivotal contribution to European military mobility, a critical and "essential" strategic enabler under the CDP and the Commission's Military Mobility Package (European Commission, 2025, p. 1; Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2026). The Vertical Corridor constitutes a multinational infrastructure axis, enabling efficient links between the Mediterranean and the Aegean, with key NATO bases in Eastern Europe and facilitating the rapid and efficient movement of troops and equipment, and supplies. This initiative exemplifies Greece's proactive alignment with EU capability objectives, transforming national infrastructures into collective European security assets.

On CARD, Greece's engagement is explicitly documented and institutionally embedded. A key milestone was the 21 February 2024 bilateral meeting at the Hellenic National Defence General Staff (HNDGS) headquarters in Athens, convened in light of the CARD process. It involved 25 Greek officers and representatives of the EDA and the EU Military Staff (EUMS),

while EDA's Capability, Armament and Planning Director, Mr Stefano Cont, stated that he recognised *"the high-level of ambition of Greece's defence planning and strong commitment in the CARD process, as an important tool in taking forward the EU's Strategic Compass"* (Hellenic National Defence General Staff, 2024). This engagement reflects a willingness to share information, coordinate planning and identify opportunities for cooperation at the EU level.

Regarding the OSRA and the CapTechs, Greece's integration is less visible.. Participation in CapTech activities and workshops indicates engagement with EU-level research coordination mechanisms. Greek representatives view CapTechs and Category B projects as strategic arenas for shaping future opportunities, where innovation stems from networked positioning. In particular, the Head of the EDF Department at the Hellenic Ministry of National Defence, had accurately observed that *"[i]n a world where innovation does not start from the product but from strategic positioning, CapTechs and Category B programmes are the space where tomorrow's opportunities are built"*, proving that Greece encourages and actively promotes involvement in OSRA-related activities. Athens has also hosted CapTech discussions, contributing to its engagement with the OSRA framework (Hellenic General Directorate for Defence Investments and Armaments, 2018). Nevertheless, no evidence of quality, concrete and/or fruitful integration within national administrative structures can be found in open-access sources.

Moreover, Greece's participation in PESCO, with an overall participation in 17 projects and a coordinating role in 6 of them, out of 74 PESCO projects in total, is not merely indicative of quantitative engagement but also reflects a deliberate integration of PESCO into national defence planning and structures. Compared with other participating member-states, Greece ranks after France (20), Germany (16) and Italy (15) in the coordinating role, while its performance outperforms that of other similar-sized participating states, such as Portugal (3), and of participating states with more robust DTIBs, such as Spain (5) (Hofer & Leuprecht, 2026). The distribution of these participations is closely aligned with Greece's strategic priorities, suggesting that involvement in PESCO is policy-driven. This approach reinforces the broader argument that EU capability development instruments are incorporated into national policy, where they provide tangible added value to the country's and the military's priorities.

More precisely, in 2021, the Ministry of National Defence established a position within the Permanent Representation of Greece to the EU, the 'Liaison Officer for PESCO projects', to ensure that project selection is not ad hoc but is linked to national needs and priorities (Hellenic Ministry of National Defence, 2021). In particular, the Liaison Officer is appointed directly by the Minister of National Defence and maintains direct communication with the Minister's Office, thereby minimising bureaucratic bottlenecks and facilitating the rapid

transmission of capability development-related information. Notably, Greece was the first member-state to establish such a position, doing so while the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP) was still in operation and before the launch of the EDF. This early institutional adaptation demonstrates that Athens recognised, at an early stage, the growing importance of EU defence-industrial initiatives and sought to position itself proactively within the emerging capability development framework. In practice, this means that the Greek participation in PESCO is filtered through capability requirements already identified at the national level and, subsequently, matched with EU cooperative frameworks.

The sectoral distribution of Greek participation (Table I and Figure II) further supports this conclusion. A significant share of projects falls within the maritime domain, which corresponds directly to Greece's operational environment and force structure needs, given the country's geostrategic focus on the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean, where naval presence is critical. As Table I shows, most of the projects in which Greece participates are considered promising, based on their objectives. Importantly, most of the maritime projects it participates in aim to develop, improve or integrate capabilities and are therefore capability-oriented, not merely administrative or procedural.

Table I: Thematic distribution of Greece's participation and coordination role in PESCO projects and their objectives

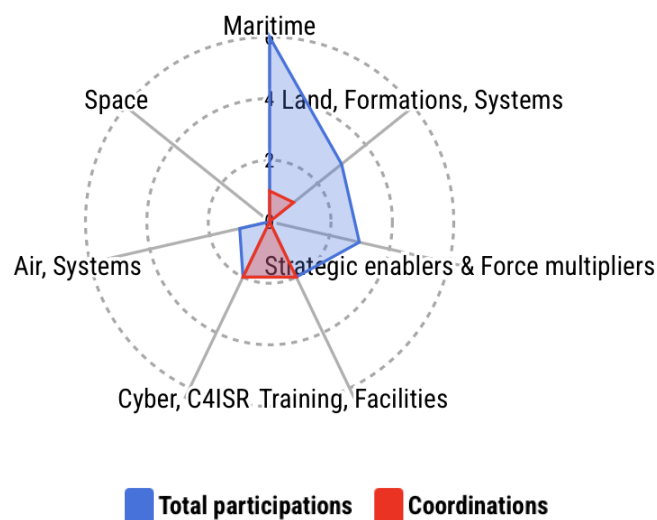
	Project title	Abbreviation	Domain	Objective	Type of participation
1	<u>Upgrade of Maritime Surveillance</u>	UMS	Maritime	<i>"enhance the EU's maritime situational awareness by integrating existing maritime surveillance capabilities—land-based, aerial, and naval— and enabling real-time information exchange between EU Member States"</i>	Coordination
2	<u>Joint EU Intelligence School</u>	JEIS	Training, Facilities	<i>"establish a Joint EU Intelligence School in order to train EU military and non-military personnel in Intelligence disciplines"</i>	Coordination
3	<u>Cyber Threats and Incident Response Information Sharing Platform</u>	CTIRISP	Cyber (C4ISR)	<i>"the sharing of cyber threats information, the strengthening of MS cyber defence capability and the strengthening of response in cyber incidents, demanding multinational cooperation"</i>	Coordination

4	<u>Helicopter Hot and High Training</u>	H3 Training	Training, Facilities	<i>"provide EU's Helicopter Aircrews specialized flight and tactical training, while operating in a "Hot-and-High" environment against known and new threats"</i>	Coordination
5	<u>One Deployable SOF Tactical C2 Command Post</u>	CP - SOCC for SJO	Cyber (C4ISR)	<i>"develop and operate one combined deployable Special Operations Forces (SOF) Tactical Command & Control (C2) CP for Small Joint Operations (SJO)"</i>	Coordination
6	<u>Main Battle Tank Simulation and Testing Centre</u>	MBT-SIMTEC	Land, formations, systems	<i>"developing an innovative simulation-based training and research center"</i>	Coordination
7	<u>Network of Logistic Hubs in Europe and Support to Operations</u>	NetLogHubs	Strategic enablers & Force multipliers	<i>"establish and operate a network of logistic hubs within Europe, entailing concerted operated logistic flow management capabilities, to ultimately support the deployment/ redeployment process and the sustainment of operations in order to improve strategic logistic support and force projection in EU Missions and Operations"</i>	Participation
8	<u>Military Mobility</u>	MilMob	Strategic enablers & Force multipliers	<i>"function as a platform for initiating, coordinating and guiding the work to be done to improve military mobility in Europe"</i>	Participation
9	<u>Deployable Military Disaster Relief Capability Package</u>	DM-DRCP	Land, formations, systems	<i>"Develop a Deployable Military Disaster Relief Capability Package (DM-DRCP) through the establishment of a specialized military assets package deployable at short notice within both EU-led and non-EU led operations"</i>	Participation
10	<u>Maritime (semi) Autonomous Systems for Mine Countermeasures</u>	MAS MCM	Maritime	<i>"deliver a world-class mix of (semi-) autonomous underwater, surface and aerial technologies and capabilities for maritime mine countermeasures for future acquisition with a focus on interoperability between systems"</i>	Participation
11	<u>Harbour and Maritime Surveillance and Protection</u>	HARM SPRO	Maritime	<i>"implement a deployable integrated capability system for the continuous protection of vessels, harbours and any other littoral and offshore critical infrastructure able to properly prevent and counter asymmetric (drones included) threats in a three-dimensional environment"</i>	Participation
12	<u>Armoured Infantry Fighting Vehicle / Amphibious Assault Vehicle /</u>	AIFV/ AAV/LAV	Land, formations, systems	<i>"develop and build a prototype of an EU Armoured Infantry Fighting Vehicles (AIFV), Amphibious Assault Vehicles (AAV), and Light Armoured Vehicles (LAV), along with related"</i>	Participation

	<u>Light Armoured Vehicle</u>			<i>subsystems with outstanding operational effectiveness"</i>	
1 3	<u>Deployable Modular Underwater Intervention Capability Package</u>	DIVEP ACK	Maritime	<i>"provide a full spectrum defensive (non-SOF) underwater intervention capability in support of EU/NATO missions, both at sea and in inland bodies of water"</i>	Participation
1 4	<u>GeoMETOC Support Coordination Element</u>	GMSC E	Strategic enablers & Force multipliers	<i>"enhance GeoMETOC support for EU CSDP missions and operations by means of an architecture - that will connect and improve significantly the EU's GeoMETOC capabilities by addressing EU GeoMETOC shortfalls, enabling cooperation and increasing interoperability between EU GeoMETOC stakeholders"</i>	Participation
1 5	<u>European Patrol Corvette</u>	EPC	Maritime	<i>"design and develop a prototype for a new Class of military ship, named "European Patrol Corvette" (EPC)"</i>	Participation
1 6	<u>Essential Elements of European Escort</u>	4E	Maritime	<i>"identify, define and develop within a collaborative approach, essential elements of any surface vessel that may be built in Europe from 2030 to 2045"</i>	Participation
1 7	<u>Air Power</u>	Air Power	Air, Systems	<i>"increase the air superiority capabilities of the armed forces of EU Member States"</i>	Participation

Data source: Decision CFSP 2025/1107 and PESCO Secretariat (n.d.)

Figure II: Thematic distribution of Greece's participation in PESCO per total participations and coordinations



Source: Blavoukos & Politis Lamprou in Klapsis & Tzifakis (2025, pp. 63). Created with [Flourish.studio](https://flourish.studio).

Greece and the European Defence Fund

Greece's engagement with the EDF is both institutionally structured and strategically driven, reflecting a broader national effort to integrate EU funding mechanisms into national industrial and capability development policy. A central role in this process is played by the Hellenic Defence Innovation Centre (HDCI), which also operates as the National Focal Point (NFP) for EDF. The HDCI, in close cooperation with the General Directorate for Defence Investments and Armaments of the Hellenic Ministry of National Defence, performs several critical functions that go beyond simple administrative coordination. It actively supports consortia-building, facilitating connections between Greek companies, research institutions and potential European partners, thereby increasing the competitiveness of national actors in EDF calls (Hellenic Centre for Defence Innovation, n.d.-b). This has been confirmed by questionnaires sent to several Greek participating entities that have taken part in the EDF Calls throughout the period 2021-2025, which expect HDCI to become even more robust in the near future, while the large percentage of SMEs (i.e., approximately 48% of Greek participating entities³) and the relatively steady number of unique entities participating in the EDF Calls may also demonstrate the added value of Greece's institutional support (Blavoukos et al., [2026](#)). At the same time, it is responsible for mapping the Greek defence and dual-use industrial ecosystem, enabling more precise identification of national capabilities, technological niches, and areas requiring further development (Hellenic Centre for Defence Innovation, n.d.-a). This mapping function is particularly important in a rather fragmented industrial landscape, where targeted participation and well-defined procedures are indispensable.

This approach is embedded within a broader national strategy aimed at revitalising and upgrading the domestic defence industrial base. Participation in EDF projects provides access to EU funding, collaborative networks and the know-how of established EU prime contractors. By leveraging these opportunities, the Hellenic Ministry of National Defence aims to move from a peripheral role to a more active position within the European defence value chain.

³ Although no comprehensive study has yet examined the proportion of all SMEs selected for EDF funding over the entire 2021-2025 period, data from 2021-2024 indicate that SMEs accounted for 40.5% of all selected entities on average (Masson, 2025).

CONCLUSION AND WHAT LIES AHEAD

This paper suggests that Greece has moved beyond merely participating in EU capability initiatives to actively shaping and internalising them when they align with its priorities. If they do not align, Greece tends to upload its preferences to the EU level. Integration is genuine, as Greece views the EU's initiatives as force multipliers for national policies.

Looking ahead, Greece is likely to continue integrating the EU's capability development instruments into its national defence policy in a more structured manner. The geostrategic pressures it faces in the Eastern Mediterranean, the new economic conditions, and the need for a more capable Union make EU tools attractive channels for sustaining high levels of defence investment while maximising industrial returns. Given Greece's strong commitment to safeguarding freedom of navigation and its global shipping interests, naval and counter-UAS capabilities are likely to remain among its principal capability priorities. The operational deployment of the domestically developed Centaur anti-drone system aboard the Hellenic Navy vessel participating in Operation ASPIDES in the Red Sea illustrates how real-world operational requirements can reinforce national investments in capability areas that also feature predominantly in EU capability development priorities. At the same time, Athens is likely to remain committed to preserving the intergovernmental character of the EU's capability development process as a means to safeguard its vital national interests amid diverging threat perceptions across the Union. However, this does not imply limited engagement. On the contrary, making full use of intergovernmental frameworks requires deeper and more systematic integration at the national level in order to upload its preferences while downloading outcomes that serve its capability needs, including increased access to EU funding opportunities. In this sense, intergovernmentalism reinforces the need for strong integration, as it constitutes the most optimal way to maximise influence and industrial returns.

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