

DENMARK

By **Christine Nissen**, Chief analyst, Think Tank Europa

Denmark's engagement with the EU internal defence market carries a legacy it has yet to shed. The Edinburgh opt-out (1993–2022) never barred Danish entities from EU-funded defence research, but it kept “EU” and “defence” institutionally apart in Copenhagen for three decades. The 2022 referendum, prompted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, saw 66.9% of Danes vote to join the Common Security and Defence Policy, and political and public support for EU defence cooperation has grown further since. Yet the habit persists: Denmark fields only a small team on defence-industrial matters at its EU representation, has limited contacts inside the Commission and the EDA, and has struggled to get Danish industrial strengths recognised at EU level.

This partly reflects the industry itself: Danish defence firms are small, niche subcontractors and the country lacks the close state-industry ties found in France or Italy. Tellingly, over 80% of Danish defence-industry output is exported (about 31% to the EU, 23% to the US); the domestic state is a minor customer of its own industry, leaving less reason, or capacity, to build the strategic industrial policy that shapes EU-instrument participation.

The European Defence Fund illustrates the pattern. Officially Denmark sits in the successful camp: with the “big four” (France, Germany, Italy, Spain), Benelux and the Baltics, the Nordic bloc, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and associated Norway, is one of four regional groups capturing over 80% of the EU's €8 billion EDF budget, and by project count Denmark performs well (38 projects, 23% of all funded, second in the Nordics after Sweden). The quality-adjusted picture is weaker, though: Danish entities coordinate barely 1.8% of projects and receive the lowest average grant per participation among the Nordics (€344,000, against €1.2–1.5 million for Sweden and Norway), volume without strategic depth.

Denmark's response has been institutional rather than legislative: a national EDF roadmap, concentrated capacity, stronger coordination. The same pragmatism shapes its stance on revising Directive 2009/81/EC, where Danish MEP Henrik Dahl has pushed to simplify joint procurement. Yet Danish procurement officials note the Commission has twice postponed its own briefing to member states and National Armaments Directors on the revision — a lack of engagement Copenhagen reads as symptomatic of the transparency gap the reform should close.

On “European preference,” Denmark has shifted markedly: its 2025 choice of the French-Italian SAMP/T NG over the US Patriot, backed by demands for over DKK 10 billion in offsets, treats European sourcing as a security imperative, not protectionism, hardened by doubts about US reliability. Yet Denmark stays wary of a closed market, its air force still flies the F-35, for which Terma is a sole-source supplier, and values NATO interoperability alongside its new defence-technology pact with Ukraine. An effective EU market, for Copenhagen, means European preference paired with rules rewarding quality over size, faster and transparent procurement, and openness to partners like the UK, Norway and Ukraine.