

THE NETHERLANDS

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Traditionally, the Netherlands has been a strong supporter of a transparent, competitive and rule-based EU defence market. Dutch defence industry is highly internationalized, meaning openness to European, transatlantic as well as third-country cooperation is economically and strategically of vital importance. Furthermore, the Netherlands armed forces depend on numerous high-tech US weapons systems.

However, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 the Netherlands has become an advocate of a more integrated European defence market. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has exposed major shortcomings in Europe's defence industrial capacity, ammunition production and supply-chain resilience. Against that backdrop, the Dutch government supports to strengthen the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) to improve military readiness, to enhance security of supply and to strengthen Europe's ability to respond to future crises.

Dutch EDTIB policy

The Netherlands considers the EDTIB to be technologically advanced and internationally competitive, but nevertheless weak. Dutch policy points at the fragmentation of the European defence market as the root cause problem. Defence procurement is still largely organised at the national level, resulting in duplication of capabilities, limited economies of scale and insufficient coordination of demand. From the Dutch perspective, these shortcomings result in inefficiencies, insufficient production capacity and vulnerabilities in supply chains. Dutch policy therefore supports measures to stimulate market integration, joint procurement and industrial cooperation, and innovation.

Joint procurement has a particularly important place in Dutch EDTIB policy. The Netherlands views collaborative procurement as one of the most effective means of reducing fragmentation, increasing interoperability and providing industry with predictable demand signals. Larger and more coordinated procurement programmes can help strengthen the EDTIB while improving value for money and accelerating capability delivery.

The Netherlands supports measures to improve security of supply and reduce critical strategic dependencies. The war in Ukraine demonstrated that European production capacity for ammunition and other defence materiel was insufficient for a prolonged high-intensity conflict. Dutch policy therefore favours strengthening production capacity, mapping critical

supply-chain vulnerabilities and diversifying sources of supply. However, the objective is not complete self-sufficiency. Rather, the Netherlands advocates reducing critical dependencies while maintaining access to international supply chains and partners.

Innovation represents another important pillar of the Dutch approach. The Netherlands considers technological innovation a key strength of the European defence sector but argues that innovation is often adapted too slowly. Dutch policy therefore supports measures that simplify procurement procedures, facilitate participation by small and medium enterprises, strengthen cooperation between industry, knowledge institutions and defence organisations, and enable the continuous integration of new technologies into military capabilities.

The Dutch position

The Netherlands position vis-vis the creation of a European defence market reflects an overall change in Dutch policy since the early 2020s, when the term “open strategic autonomy” started appearing regularly in government documents. Europe should be capable of protecting its essential security and economic interest, while remaining open to trade, investment, competition and cooperation with international partners. Consequently, the Netherlands supports initiatives such as the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) and the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP). Dutch policy has embraced new approaches, including joint procurement mechanisms, government-to-government arrangements and long-term framework contracts.

Simultaneously, the Netherlands keeps emphasizing the need for competition, transparency, openness and continued cooperation with NATO allies and global partners. Dutch defence companies are heavily integrated into multinational production networks. There are relatively few prime contractors, but many specialised suppliers in areas such as sensors, radar, aerospace, maritime systems, optics and high-tech components. They need participation in European, NATO as well as global supply chains. Therefore, the Netherlands supports strengthening the EDTIB but remains cautious about extensive European preference and industrial protection. It favours strategic openness over a protectionist interpretation of European strategic autonomy, in order to remain connected to NATO non-EU allies and transatlantic supply chains.

RESSOURCES

- BNC fiche 1 - mededeling Europese Defensie-Industrie Strategie en Verordening Europees Defensie-industrie Programma (05-03-2024; rijksoverheid.nl)
- Key Messages of the Netherlands on the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) (16-01-2024; rijksoverheid.nl)
- Defensie Strategie voor Industrie en Innovatie 2025-2029 (04-04-2025; rijksoverheid.nl)