

## Brexit Brief: UK-EU defence and security cooperation <sup>[1]</sup>



### How does the UK's defence capability compare to the rest of the EU?

The UK is arguably the EU's strongest defence power. It is one of only two member states possessing 'full-spectrum' military capabilities (including a nuclear deterrent) and one of only five spending 2% of GDP on defence. It also holds a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and has the largest military budget within the EU.

### Will Brexit allow us to control our own defence and security policy?

The power to develop and implement security and defence policy lies with member states, not the EU. According to the Centre for European Reform 'all significant decisions regarding EU defence matters continue to rest with the member states'.

When decisions are made at EU level – on whether or not to deploy troops, for example – they require unanimity among member state representatives. Any member state can veto a decision. It has always been the choice of British government whether or not to deploy British troops.

### What does the UK currently contribute to EU defence and security activities?

The UK provides significant financial support to EU security activities through its contribution to the EU budget. We also provide personnel, expertise and equipment for EU missions, most notably maritime support to combat piracy off the horn of Africa and to prevent people smuggling in the Mediterranean. The Ministry of Defence's Permanent Joint Headquarters are the operational headquarters for some EU missions, including for Operation Atalanta.

Despite the UK's military power, it is not the biggest contributor to EU defence missions. UK engagement in CSDP missions has been relatively modest in comparison to its defence capabilities – ranking just fifth amongst contributors to CSDP military operations and seventh for CSDP civilian missions.

### How do the UK and EU cooperate on defence and security now?

The UK participates in EU security and defence initiatives through the CSDP). The CSDP was set up by the UK and France following the St Malo Summit of 1998 in response to the perceived failure of the EU to address the challenges of the Balkan wars. It was designed to allow EU member states to combine their security and defence efforts should the need arise.

The UK has vetoed closer integration and cooperation in EU defence: it has resisted <sup>[2]</sup> increases to the European Defence Agency Budget for the last six years, and in 2011 it vetoed <sup>[3]</sup> the creation of a single military headquarters in Brussels. So while the UK's military power makes it an important contributor, removing the UK from the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) could allow greater integration and ambition in EU defence policy.

### So what does our money go on?

Under the CDSP, EU member states pool funding and resources to achieve agreed common goals, including:

- humanitarian and rescue missions
- conflict prevention and peacekeeping
- joint disarmament operations
- military advice and assistance
- crisis management post-conflict stabilisation.

### What kind of activities does the CDSP involve?

The majority of the initiatives carried out through CSDP are civilian, as opposed to military missions, meaning <sup>[4]</sup> that they use non-military personnel and/or tools. EU missions have included: <sup>[5]</sup>

- European Union Force Althea, supporting the implementation of the Dayton Agreement in Bosnia Herzegovina
- European Union Force Atalanta, to combat piracy off the Horn of Africa
- Operation Sophia, which identifies and disposes of vessels used for people trafficking in the Mediterranean.

Involvement is not mandatory. Member states choose which operations they wish to be involved in, and no national troops can be deployed without the member state's agreement.

### **Will arrangements for cooperation on security continue post-Brexit?**

The UK Government has indicated its desire to maintain close engagement with the EU on defence after Brexit. Defence Secretary Michael Fallon has assured <sup>[6]</sup> EU partners that the UK will continue to play a 'proactive role' in tackling security threats, including illegal migration. In November it was reported <sup>[7]</sup> that UK government officials are working on plans to continue security cooperation once the UK has left the EU.

### **How might continued cooperation work?**

The Centre for European Policy Studies has suggested <sup>[8]</sup> that the UK might wish to continue to participate in CSDP missions as a third party. As of 2014, approximately 45 non-EU states have participated in CSDP operations. The CSDP also operates more formal 'framework participation agreements' with a number of non-EU countries, including Norway, Iceland and the US - although these agreements afford non-EU countries much less influence than member states in the mandate setting and initial planning process of missions

### **What will be the impact on the UK if existing arrangements are not maintained?**

If the UK ceases to cooperate through CSDP mechanisms, there are other ways in which it can contribute to and influence security and defence measures in Europe and beyond. These include NATO, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and bilateral agreements with member states. Brexit will not directly affect the UK's membership of or role in NATO.

Several experts have argued that Brexit would not reduce the UK's military power or position. The former head of the British army, General Sir Mike Jackson, has said <sup>[9]</sup> that the impact from departing the EU, 'is more of a policing and judicial matter rather than a military matter. The [UK's] military dimension is provided by NATO'. Full Fact <sup>[10]</sup> have argued that, after Brexit, the 'UK's ability to project military power will be largely unaffected' as it could exert influence through NATO or other, bilateral arrangements.

However, withdrawing from the CSDP would result in a loss of influence over EU missions and the UK Government would lose its veto over what missions the EU undertakes and the general goals of security and defence policy.

Copyright 2019 Institute for Government | [Home](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Accessibility](#) | [Site map](#) | [Contact](#) | [Work for us](#)

The Institute is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales No. 6480524 Registered Charity No. 1123926

---

#### **Links**

- [1] <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/brexit/brexit-brief-uk-eu-defence-and-security-cooperation>
- [2] [http://www.upi.com/Business\\_News/Security-Industry/2016/11/16/EU-approves-budget-increase-for-European-Defence-Agency/1391479327856/](http://www.upi.com/Business_News/Security-Industry/2016/11/16/EU-approves-budget-increase-for-European-Defence-Agency/1391479327856/)
- [3] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/eu/8645749/Britain-blocks-EU-plans-for-operational-military-headquarters.html>
- [4] <http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/cp090.pdf>
- [5] [https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/military-and-civilian-missions-and-operations/430/military-and-civilian-missions-and-operations\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/military-and-civilian-missions-and-operations/430/military-and-civilian-missions-and-operations_en)
- [6] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secretary-calls-on-europe-to-step-up-security-efforts>
- [7] <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/nov/18/defence-cooperation-talks-with-eu-could-delay-brexit-process>
- [8] <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/implications-brexit-eu%E2%80%99s-common-security-and-defence-policy>
- [9] <http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/media/160520-security-web-text.pdf>
- [10] <https://fullfact.org/europe/what-does-leaving-eu-mean-defence/>