



12/28/2021

## Europe's Rapid Deployment Force



The Rapid Deployment Forces of the European Union, Photo Credit Source: MATHIEU CUGNOT

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# The European Union's Decision to Create a Rapid Deployment force by 2025

## The Eurasia Center's US-European Program



French and Italian service members pull vehicles out of the dirt during a training exercise in Latvia (Ints Kalnins/Reuters)

On November 9, 2021, the European Union (E.U) devised a plan to create a Rapid Deployment Force that would allow the E.U. to respond to threats within and around its borders, without American support. This plan is expected to be implemented by 2025, consisting of a military force of 5,000 soldiers. The primary causes for its implantation are the ongoing refugee crisis on the Poland-Belarus border and the build-up of Russian military forces in the region.

### **Brief History**

The creation of a unified European rapid deployment force is not a novel concept as the proposal has roots dating before the formation of the European Union in 1993. Great Britain, France,

Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg signed the Brussels Treaty in March, 1948. Their treaty provided collective defense; if any one of these nations was attacked, the others were bound to help defend it. In 1952, France advocated for the creation of the European Defense Community (EDC). The original proposal by the General Commissioner of the French National Planning Board, Jean Monet, and the French Premier and former Defense Minister, René Pleven,<sup>1</sup> sought to align France, Italy, and West Germany in an attempt to curb Soviet influence in Europe and protect Western Europe's borders. However, the signed 1952 "Treaty of Paris," creating the European Defense Community, failed to be ratified due in part to the recent creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 and promises made for the accession of West Germany into NATO in 1955 as an independent nation. It would be many years until another attempt was made to align Europe in a similar agreement. The European Defense Agency, established in 2004, is an agency of the European Union (EU) that promotes and facilitates integration between member states within the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) to synchronize military capabilities, defense research, and policy to support European defensive policy. With Brexit, Great Britain is no longer a participating member the European Union's Defense Agency.

### **The Creation of the European Union's Rapid Deployment Force**

Throughout the Cold War, NATO's primary objective was to ensure the security of Western Europe. However, due to recent developments, there is a need for a flexible deployment force. Rather than incorporate all 30 members of NATO with diverging interests of transatlantic policy, the European Union's solution is a Europe-first effort to best protect European interests.

Since 1945, the U.S. has maintained a strong presence in Europe through military bases in NATO countries. However, after the Cold War the United States reduced its presence in Europe, particularly Germany, and a number of resources were diverted to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Currently, US efforts to combat a rising China are diverting more defense resources from Europe. In response, the European Union's Rapid Deployment Force does would not rely on U.S. support. According to the 28-page draft proposal stating the creation of the defense force, supporters argue

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<sup>1</sup>Pastor-Castro, Rogelia. *The Quai d'Orsay* (2006)

that "We need more rapidity, robustness, and flexibility to undertake the full range of military crisis management tasks, called the "Strategic Compass."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, not all 27 member states would need to contribute to the force; however, any military deployments would require unanimous consent. The European Union has paid for Greek border guards to stop the influx of refugees from Turkey. So, the boundaries of the European Union are being tested, even with respect to its new relationship with Great Britain regarding the fishing dispute with France.



NATO Defender Exercises focus on European nations, East and West, training together. Photo Credit: Exit News

As previously mentioned, two key developments that have increased security concerns and thus support for the force, were the refugee crisis on the Poland/Belarus border and the current build-up of Russian troops along the borders of Ukraine and Belarus. Although recent relations between the European Union and Poland have been troublesome due to the LGBTQ+ violations of the Polish judiciary, the affirmation of the Border Protection Act, which limits the movement of people and

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<sup>2</sup> Coakley, Amanda. Poland's Twin Crises. Foreign Policy (2021)

imposes extensive fines by the European Union, highlights EU's solidarity with Poland regarding the border crisis.<sup>3</sup> The decisions by the European Union to express solidarity to Poland is primarily due to the rapid incursion of economic refugees and Russian aggression. Currently, the European Union alleges that Belarus's dictator, Aleksandr Lukashenko, and Russian President Vladimir Putin created the crisis as a punishment to the European Union for the imposing sanctions and creating chaos in the region. Furthermore, there is a growing security concern due to the joint military exercises by Russian and Belarusian forces, the buildup of Russian troops near Ukraine, and the recent affirmation of Russian claims of Crimea by Belarus. All these elements are viewed as potential risks to the European Union's security.

The deeper concern will be whether European nations will consider the fact whether the NATO defense umbrella will be able to effectively hold off conventional threats from the East. Despite all the recent war games being conducted in Europe, combining a mixture of Western and Eastern European nations under a NATO Defender Europe Banner, will this strategy be effective in protecting the sovereign borders of nations facing Russia's recent demands of NATO out of Eastern Europe. The red lines that Putin is demanding may be the turning point of a frustrated strategy toward Ukraine, in which, diplomacy has not yielded any results except a frozen conflict in which Russia has suffered the brunt of economic sanctions from the West.

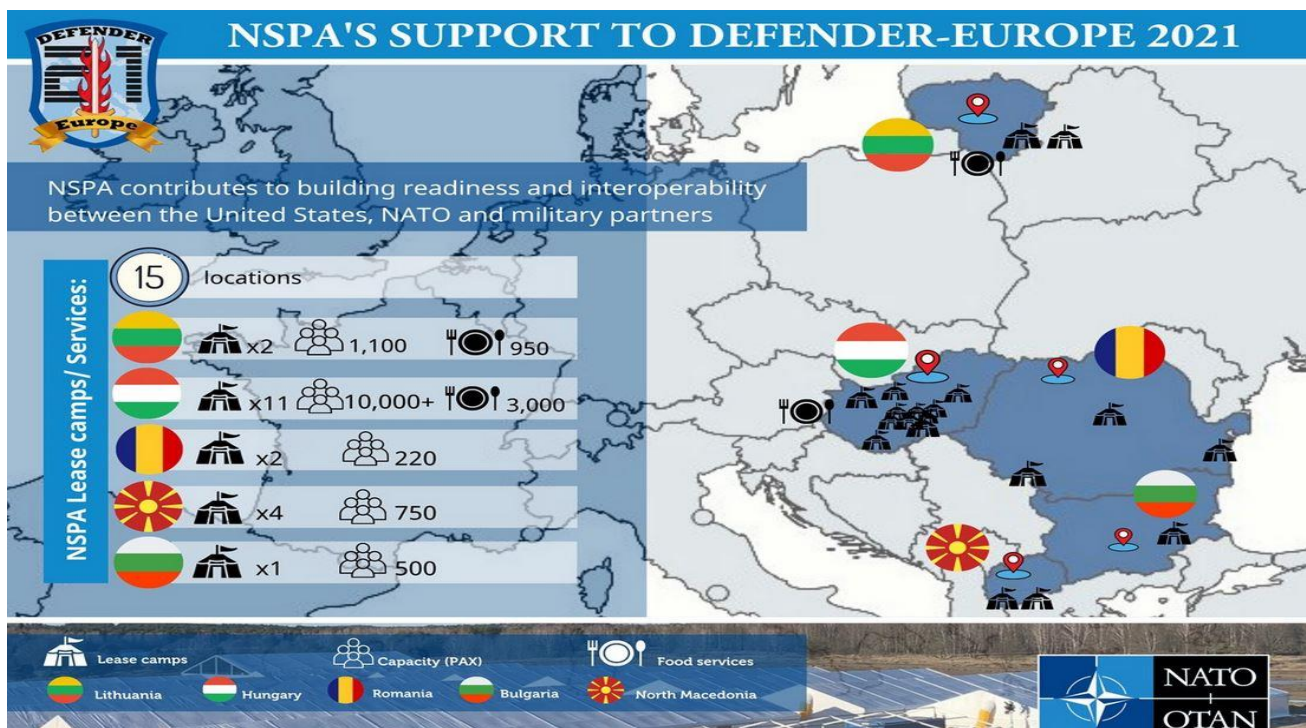
### **Conclusion:**

The European Union stresses the need to create a flexible defense force in response to Russian threats in Ukraine and the security risks from the Polish refugee crisis. A smaller defense force, without American assistance, could allow more flexibility in the deployment of troops without the need for transatlantic support. Furthermore, an increased American involvement could further offset the balance of power in the volatile region and further Russian escalation. A conflict between the European Union and Russia is unlikely, yet not entirely impossible. The current deployment of Russian forces to the Ukrainian and Belarusian borders could be a result of Russian posturing in order to test the European Union's response. The situation could easily develop into a conflict due to the high levels of uncertainty of the Russian intentions. In response to a possible attack, the

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<sup>3</sup> Emmott, Robin. EU to Aim for Rapid Deployment Force. Reuters. (2021)

European Union could seek the Rapid Deployment Force as a direct and flexible response to Russian efforts in the region. The ongoing Polish refugee crisis is another instance that calls for increased security efforts on the European Union border. This crisis, orchestrated by Belarusian President Lukashenko, has undermined the European Union's authority. The European Union was founded on the principle of unity of each of the 27-member states. Currently, due to recent developments, this unity is being put to the test. Time will tell if the European Union possesses the capabilities to maintain its security and avert confrontation from outside forces threatening its borders.



Europe may decide to create a more robust force than envisioned by NATO – Image Credit NATO

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