



## **A EUROPEAN SECURITY STRATEGY AT THE SERVICE OF PEACE**

Contribution of the COMECE Secretariat in view of  
a future European Security Strategy

### **INTRODUCTION**

The European Union is facing the most serious security challenges in decades. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, instability in the EU's neighbourhood, growing geopolitical rivalry, hybrid threats, cyberattacks, terrorism, organised crime and the erosion of the international rules-based order require a comprehensive and credible European response.

In this context, the strengthening of European defence capabilities is legitimate and necessary. European citizens rightly expect the Union and its Member States to ensure their security and protect the values on which the European project is founded.

At the same time, the current geopolitical environment should not lead Europe to lose sight of its original vocation as a project of peace. The European Union was created precisely to overcome the logic of confrontation and to build lasting peace through cooperation, solidarity and the rule of law. This vocation remains as relevant today as ever.

The future European Security Strategy should therefore combine stronger defence capabilities with renewed investment in diplomacy, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, international cooperation and multilateralism. Security policy must remain firmly oriented towards the strategic objective of peace and grounded in respect for human dignity, fundamental rights and the common good.

COMECE wishes to offer five recommendations in this regard:

1. Keep peace as the strategic objective.
2. Expand the threat assessment beyond military risks.
3. Strengthen conflict prevention and creative peacebuilding.
4. Reinforce democratic oversight and ethical accountability.
5. Embed the Security Strategy within a broader European Peace Strategy.

### **A. Recent developments at EU and global level**

The announcement of a future European Security Strategy comes amid profound geopolitical transformation. Growing tensions, weakening multilateralism and ongoing armed conflicts, particularly Russia's aggression against Ukraine, are reshaping Europe's security environment.

The EU has primarily responded by strengthening its defence dimension. Recent initiatives, including the White Paper on European Defence – Readiness 2030, the SAFE instrument, increased defence spending and the Preparedness Union Strategy, reflect a growing awareness that Europe must assume greater responsibility for its own security.

At the same time, global military expenditure continues to rise, while funding for conflict prevention and peacebuilding has reached record lows. This trend risks reinforcing a dynamic in which military responses increasingly dominate policy choices.

As discussions on the next Multiannual Financial Framework progress, it is essential to ensure that investments in defence do not undermine **investments** in areas that are crucial **for peace**, including diplomacy, conflict prevention, development cooperation, humanitarian assistance, as well as socio-economic and ecological justice.

## B. Catholic Church's perspective on war and peace

The Catholic Church understands **peace as more than the mere absence of war**. Peace is rooted in justice, respect for human dignity, solidarity and the integral development of peoples. Building peace therefore requires addressing the root causes of conflict, including poverty, injustice, exclusion and environmental degradation.

At the same time, the Church recognises the right and duty of States to ensure the security of their citizens and acknowledges the **legitimacy of lawful self-defence** when all peaceful means have failed. The use of force, however, must always remain exceptional, exercised under strict legal and ethical conditions and in full respect of international humanitarian law.

Applying these principles to the current geopolitical context, Pope Leo XIV [has warned](#) against a growing normalisation of war and a renewed global arms race. While recognising the legitimate need for defence, he has insisted that security policies must remain oriented towards peace and accompanied by diplomacy, dialogue and multilateral cooperation.

The Holy Father [has also stressed](#) that technological developments in warfare, particularly artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons systems, require robust ethical governance, meaningful human control and clear accountability.

The [Church's contribution](#) to current debates on European security is therefore twofold: to support a realistic and responsible approach to security and defence, while ensuring that peace, human dignity and the common good remain at the centre of political decision-making.

## C. Five policy recommendations

### Recommendation 1: Keep peace as the strategic objective

The strengthening of European defence should not be regarded as an end in itself, but as a means to protect human lives, safeguard fundamental values and preserve peace.

The EU's commitment to peace is not only a **moral responsibility** rooted in its history, but also a **legal obligation** arising from the Treaties. The future European Security

Strategy should therefore ensure that all security and defence policies remain clearly oriented towards the objective of promoting peace, preventing conflicts and strengthening international security.

**Public communication** surrounding defence policies should equally reflect this orientation. Defence investment should not primarily be presented as an instrument of economic competitiveness or industrial growth, but rather as part of a broader effort to ensure security and peace.

### **Recommendation 2: Expand the threat assessment beyond military risks**

Military threats deserve increased attention in the current geopolitical context. However, security cannot be reduced to its military dimension alone.

**Human security** is also threatened by poverty, forced displacement, environmental degradation, climate change, pandemics, organised crime, social fragmentation and democratic erosion. These factors often constitute underlying drivers of instability and violent conflict.

The future European Security Strategy should therefore adopt a **comprehensive understanding of security** integrating political, economic, social, environmental and humanitarian dimensions, and effectively **addressing the root causes of insecurity and conflict**.

### **Recommendation 3: Strengthen conflict prevention and creative peacebuilding**

Preventing violent conflict remains more effective, less costly and more humane than responding to crises once they have erupted.

In line with the recommendations of a [recent European Parliament report](#), the EU should significantly reinforce its capacities in preventive diplomacy, mediation, early warning, civilian peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation.

Particular attention should be given to:

- strengthening early warning and conflict analysis capacities;
- investing in local peacebuilding initiatives and civil society partnerships;
- enhancing cooperation with regional and international organisations;
- supporting mediation and dialogue processes;
- integrating conflict prevention across relevant policy areas.

The Union should continue to pursue an **integrated approach** mobilising diplomacy, trade, development, humanitarian aid, climate, migration and human rights policies in support of human security and sustainable peace.

In the negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework, **adequate resources** must be preserved for diplomacy, conflict prevention, civilian peacebuilding, development cooperation, humanitarian assistance, education, public health, as well as for policies promoting social cohesion and climate action.

In pursuing a creative approach to peacebuilding, the EU may also explore partnerships with a broader range of actors, including **religious and faith-based actors**, as encouraged by the [EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy](#). Their trusted presence in local communities, including hard-to-reach areas, and their

holistic, long-term approach make them **valuable partners** in crisis response, peacebuilding, mediation and reconciliation.

#### **Recommendation 4: Reinforce democratic oversight and ethical accountability**

**Necessary, proportionate and adequate investments** in European defence capabilities must be accompanied by robust democratic oversight, transparency and ethical safeguards.

Arms should never be treated like ordinary commercial goods. Increased defence spending should therefore remain subject to **effective parliamentary scrutiny** and **strong accountability mechanisms**.

Particular attention is required regarding emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and autonomous systems. Technological innovation must remain at the service of human security and peace.

COMECE calls for:

- meaningful human control over all decisions involving the use of lethal force;
- clear accountability throughout the chain of decision-making;
- strict ethical and legal standards governing defence-related research and innovation;
- strengthened European guidelines on the development and deployment of military technologies.

A stronger European defence policy should also be accompanied by responsible and transparent arms export controls, effective implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty and renewed engagement in multilateral arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament efforts.

The EU should continue promoting effective multilateralism, strengthen cooperation with the United Nations, NATO and the OSCE, and contribute to **rebuilding an international peace architecture** based on trust, cooperation and respect for international law.

#### **Recommendation 5: Embed the Security Strategy within a broader European Peace Strategy**

The future European Security Strategy should form part of a broader and coherent European vision for peace.

COMECE therefore encourages the European Union to **develop an overarching European Peace Strategy**, building upon existing instruments such as the EU Global Strategy and the Strategic Compass. A strategic framework on Peace may also complement the European Consensus on Development and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid as part of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus.

Such a framework would:

- promote a shared understanding of peace across the Union;
- strengthen policy coherence between security, development and humanitarian action;
- reinforce civilian peacebuilding capacities;
- enhance preventive diplomacy and mediation;

- improve the Union's ability to address both visible and less visible drivers of insecurity and conflict.

The preparation of such a strategy should involve broad consultations with Member States, EU institutions, civil society, faith communities, academia and other relevant stakeholders.

## CONCLUSION

Europe needs stronger security and defence capabilities. Yet genuine and lasting security cannot be achieved by military means alone.

The European Union was founded as a peace project. In a rapidly changing geopolitical environment, Europe is called not only to protect itself, but also to remain a global actor for peace by promoting dialogue, multilateral cooperation and human dignity.

Security and peace are not competing objectives. Rather, security should serve the overarching objective of a just and sustainable peace, which should guide Europe's strategic choices in the years ahead.