

Focus: Positions of the French presidential candidates on defence and Europe [FR](#) [FR](#) [FR](#)

Despite the Ukrainian crisis, France is preparing for the first round of its presidential election, which will take place on April, 10th. 12 candidates are officially registered, and 6 are estimated with above 5% of votes.

The French Institute on International Relations (IFRI) gathered the candidates' programmes on defence topics and on the French-German cooperation, from budget to international alliances.

For those estimated above 5%, on **budget and format for the armies**, positions expressed are as follow:

- Jean-Luc Mélenchon (La France Insoumise, radical left-wing): wish of a new White Book to define a new global model for France's independence, without any external constraints such as the 2% GDP rule
- Yannick Jadot (Les Verts, ecologist): wish of a new White Book
- Emmanuel Macron (La République en Marche, center): continue the ramp-up to reach **€50b in 2025**, and double the number of reservists by 2027.
- Valérie Pécresse (Les Républicains, right-wing): exclude the defence spending of the Maastricht debt rule and reach a defence spending of **€65b in 2030**
- Marine Le Pen (Rassemblement National, far-right): reach a defence spending of **€55b by 2027**
- Eric Zemmour (Reconquête, far-right): bring the Army's operational forces to 100.000 soldiers, and raise the pay of military personnel by 20%. Reach a defence spending of **€70b in 2030**.

For the **armament industry and equipment**

- J-L Mélenchon: establish a national preference for armament purchases, and nationalise key companies
- E. Macron: purchase new material: 60 additional Rafale, 5 new nuclear-propelled submarines, 1250 armoured vehicles. Develop breakthrough innovations against the new threats (cyber, space, ...)
- V. Pécresse: develop a second aircraft carrier by 2038
- M. Le Pen: reinforce France's sovereignty and independence, and ensure adequate equipment
- E. Zemmour: be equipped with 2 aircraft carriers, 8 SSN, and review France's participation to European armament programmes

On **military and international alliances**:

- JL Mélenchon: quit NATO, refuse the clash of civilisations, and only intervene under a UN mandate
- Y. Jadot: reinforce the European Defence, and create a common European force of 5.000 soldiers
- M. Le Pen: quit NATO and its integrated command.

On the **French-German relations** in defence and security and the international stage:

- JL Mélenchon: quit the SCAF and MGCS programmes, to develop French programmes, for which interested nations could plug in, with mutual positive conditions. Stop reinforcing a "so-called Franco-German couple for which Berlin has very few consideration"
- E. Macron: continue the ongoing cooperation, no additional proposition
- V. Pécresse: build a powerful Europe, with an autonomous defence capacity. Reinforce the French defence industry through innovation and European public command
- E. Zemmour: review the ongoing cooperation. "Only count on ourselves for our geostrategic security"
- M. Le Pen: quit the structuring cooperation projects with Germany, specifically the SCAF and MGCS. No support to the German "claim" to the French permanent seat in the UN Security Council

Industry

Airbus announces the choice of the Italian Avio-Aero engine for the Eurodrone [EN](#) [FR](#)

In an aircraft programme, manned or unmanned, the engine is always a very sensitive choice, as it represents an average of 30% of the total cost. In addition, for a defence programme, the choice is not only technical or financial but also represents a question of procurement and sovereignty.

For the Eurodrone, Airbus has announced on March 25th its choice for the Catalyst engine from Avio Aero. Despite having its headquarters in Italy and plants in Europe, the company was acquired by GE Aviation, a branch of the American General Electric. Therefore, it has raised some worries about the sourcing of the equipment and the presence of ITAR components: while the objective of the Eurodrone programme is to replace the dependency to the American drone Reaper for the MALE capacity, this could create a new dependency to the United States. ITAR is a regulation that allows the United States to control the exportation of the components it is applied to.

Airbus has justified its decision on technical and financial basis, arguing it had "superior performance, lower development risks, best growth potential". In addition, the Catalyst engine is developed and manufactured in Europe, mainly Poland, and a clause in the contract stipulates it must be ITAR-free, by replacing any ITAR component. However, the French Safran, the other contestant with its Ardiden engine, argued its solution was the only "truly European". Some French deputies and senators from many parties also reacted to the announce, declaring it was a bad signal for the European defence industry. But the engine's choice is Airbus', as long as it meets the requirements, and as the contract with the OCCAR has been signed on February 25th, it is now this organisation which represents Germany, France, Italy and Spain in front of the aircraft manufacturer.

European Union military cooperation and external operations

The German Bundestag has discussed and approved the extension of two military operations [DE DE DE](#)

Operation "Sea Guardian" is a naval-driven undertaking in the Mediterranean Sea, where NATO warships and aircraft combat terrorism and arms smuggling. (Not to be confounded with Operation "Irinii": successor to Operation "Sophia", active in the same region, but conducted by the European Union Naval Force and with the objective to enforce the UN-arms embargo against Libya).

Running since July 2016, "Sea Guardian" is the successor of Operation "Active Endeavour". The latter was still a remain of NATO's mutual defence clause, dating back to 2001. Now the German parliament has decided to extend the operation, in which its navy is taking part, for one more year, until the end of March 2023.

The most significant change to the mandate is that the highest possible number of active soldiers has been reduced by 100 sailors. However, this only minimally affects the effectiveness of the operational force, since this number is far from being achieved: currently there are two German warships with a total number of 196 sailors involved.

The second operation, "UNMISS", is a UN-peacekeeping mission in the Republic of South-Sudan. For Germany, it includes a rather small force of 50 soldiers who fulfil mostly logistical tasks. In February this year, the German parliament has decided on resuming the mission as planned. The mission has been active since April 2005.

The NATO exercise Cold Response 2022 is taking place in Norway [DE EN DE](#)

Every second year since 2006, NATO gathers in Norway for the "Cold Response" exercise. This time, it takes place from mid-March to the 1st of April 2022 and included participants from 27 out of 30 NATO-countries. The objective is to ensure that western forces are able to adapt and work in a cold environment, whether that be at land, sea or in the air.

Regarding the geographical and strategic proximity to the war in Ukraine, it must be stated that there is no link to those recent events. As stated, "Cold Response" is a regular, long-planned exercise, whose repetition has been communicated to the Russian government as early as January 2022. Additionally, NATO has invited Russia (who has decided to refuse the offer) and OSCE observers to minimise any potential feelings of aggression.

However, it can't be denied that an exercise called "response" in such proximity to Russia is conducted with a certain reactive scenario in mind.

We don't want to forget the four US-soldiers who sadly died while participating at this year's "Cold Response" exercise: On March 18th 2022, their V-22 Osprey transport aircraft crashed, presumably due to bad weather and flying conditions, killing the crew inside. What happened exactly is still being investigated, however, this incident tragically shows why it is decisively important to train in such a harsh environment.

International relations

Germany details a new security strategy [EN DE](#)

In consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms Annalena Baerbock, has announced a new German security strategy in order to adapt to the "new realities on our continent". Most notably, that includes a €100 billion investment to put the Bundeswehr back to an effective form. The money will be spent on modern technology like communication equipment and cybersecurity-systems as well as the building of an ammunition supply for defence purposes. The minister of defence, Ms Christine Lambrecht, the parliamentary commissioner of the armed forces, Ms Eva Högl and the inspector general of the Bundeswehr, Mr Eberhard Zorn, all welcomed this decision.

Additionally, Germany will pay the full 2% national budget to NATO and therefore impact the European- and transatlantic defence as well. Baerbock said herself: "Our strength is international unity [...] the EU is currently formulating for the first time an extensive policy strategy and the initiative comes from Germany."

The new plan is known by the catchphrase of creating a "new strategic compass", therefore outlining the geographical approach of this undertaking.

More specifically, this translates into reinforcing NATO's eastern flank: Until now, battlegroups were circulating only in the three Baltic states and Poland. Now, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania will be added and therefore effectively cover the entire Russo-European borderline. However, Baerbock made absolutely clear that this step forward in defence policy does not include any German-owned nuclear weapons and that "disarmament and arms control will remain a central pillar of our [German] security."

Staying true to her party, the Greens, Annalena Baerbock also claimed that a reliable energy supply meant abandoning fossil energy and consistently working towards the direction of renewable energy sources, that are placed and maintained on European territory.

European Union military cooperation and external operations

The European Council met with Joe Biden on March 24th and 25th [EN EN](#)

From March 21st to March 25th, many European meetings took place, dealing with the dense geopolitical situation.

On March 21st, a Foreign Affairs Council met together. It addressed the main decisions and orientations from the Versailles summit. It also repeated the European call for a ceasefire in Ukraine, and met with M. Nicu Popescu, the Moldavian Foreign Minister also responsible for the European integration. They discussed the further cooperation in Mali, whose format recently changed, and approved the Strategic Compass paper in a common meeting with the Defence Ministers.

From March 24th to 25th, a European Council took place in Brussels, with Joe Biden as a special guest, in person. They discussed their coordinated response and the economic sanctions imposed to Russia and Belarus. They also addressed the question of Europe's dependency to the Russian gas, and announced that the United States would deliver 15 billion m³ of liquefied gas this year, when Russia provides 10 times more.

The American president continued his visit in Poland, 100km away from the Ukrainian border, where he delivered an offensive speech against Vladimir Putin. He declared that the Russians should not dare to "moving on one single inch of NATO territory" and that Putin was "a butcher". He also provoked some diplomatic troubles when, leaving his prepared speech, he added that "this man cannot remain in power", words immediately corrected by his administration as concerning his power over his neighbours.

The Strategic Compass has been adopted by the Councils [EN EN EN](#)

The Strategic Compass, a White Book project for the European Union, has been approved on March 21st by both Councils of Foreign Affairs and Defence meeting together, and endorsed by the European Council 4 days later. The process, started under the German presidency of the Council, was from the beginning planned to be finalised during the French presidency, despite the war in Ukraine.

The 64-pages document addresses 5 points: The world we face, Act, Secure, Invest, Partner, the fourth latter having been already unveiled at the end of 2021. The more detailed review identified concrete propositions for each:

- To Act:
 - Establish a strong EU Rapid Deployment Capacity of 5000 troops
 - Be ready to deploy 200 fully equipped CSDP mission experts in 30 days
 - Conduct regular live exercises on land and at sea
 - Enhance military mobility
 - Reinforce the EU's military and civilian CSDP missions and operations by a more robust decision-making process and greater financial solidarity
 - Make a full use of the European Peace Facility to support partners
- To Secure
 - Boost its intelligence analysis capacities
 - Develop a hybrid, a Foreign information interference and a cyber diplomatic toolbox
 - Develop a EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence and a EU Cyber Defence Policy
 - Strengthen the EU's role as a maritime security actor
- To invest:
 - Exchange on national objectives on increased and improved defence spending
 - Provide incentives to engage in collaborative capability development
 - Boost defence technological innovation and reduce technological and industrial dependencies
- To Partner
 - Strengthen cooperation with NATO, the UN and regional partners (OSCE, African Union, ASEAN)
 - Develop tailored bilateral partnerships with like-minded countries and participation to missions

As declared Josep Borrell, it is a "guide for action" for the EU policy by 2030. A first significant step has been taken, but the implementation of some measures may still cause some troubles down the way.