

## EUROPEAN DEFENSE AND CURRENT HYBRID THREATS

**Diana SOARE**

Political Sciences, The National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Bucharest,  
Romania

**Abstract:** *European defense is a phrase with multiple meanings and the use of which is common in the current context, incorporating concepts, strategies and aspirations that have as core the security of the European Union. Taking into account the evolution it has had over time and the hybrid threats it is now facing, the question arises of the relationship in which the two find themselves, how they influence each other and the existence of tools to effectively combat them. In the analysis of the problem, qualitative research will be considered in order to understand both the circumstances present in which the European Union is placed and the role it plays in the modern hybrid war. Thus, the article outlines the European defense through the prism of contemporary threats, emphasizing the effects they have on European stability and noting the solutions existing in their management.*

**Keywords:** *defense; European Union; hybrid threats; instability; security*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The current international society is characterized by a combination of features such as volatility, uncertainty and fear, while providing new definitions of defense and resilience concepts, capturing the development of a new global security culture. In this mosaic of changes, hybrid threats play a key role in cultivating the imbalance of states, reversing the meanings of the fundamental values and principles of democracy, realizing a distortion of them by making them vulnerable.

European security, a necessity that has been constantly preoccupying the European Union (EU) since its inception, is presently at a crossroads, facing events that will determine its very essence in the future. The importance of the development of the military dimension of the Union is distinguished by reference to the narrative offered by the United States of America, the context of the war in Ukraine and the special circumstances in which international society is located. Thus, the EU's security environment faces challenges both internally and externally that have the capacity to weaken the cohesion and identity of the Union.

The article aims to analyze the hybrid threats facing the Union, both theoretically and practically, focusing on the initiatives of the Member States on the military sphere aimed at combating them and strengthening the resilience of the EU. The search will also relate to latest events

that stress the obligation of States to enlarge their defense industry in order to develop capacities against the threats and risks they face and to implement vulnerability management policies.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over time, hybrid threats have encompassed a wide range of notions and explanations through which a description of them was made. In a general characterization, these are destructive activities organized and carried out by state and non-state actors, the main purpose of which is to compromise stability in various areas by identifying and capitalizing on vulnerabilities. Among the best known are cyber-attacks, disinformation and threats with military force.

Hoffmann (2007/2010) defines hybrid threats as a mixture of conventional weapons, asymmetric tactics and violence to achieve the proposed result. The subject is represented by the states, but it also focuses on the analysis of non-state actors, following from a military perspective the existing interests that determine the different administration of threats in the context of conflict. At the same time, it focuses on tactical and operational actions in war, their coordination and the effects they have on the chosen objective. On the other hand, Cullen (2018) captures the concept of hybrid threats as a confusing element that makes it difficult to understand the situation and facilitates the state of

uncertainty through the diversity of ways of achieving and multiplying them, while making it difficult to identify them in the future. He embodies the idea as a puzzle game whose components combine, each of them having various seating possibilities for creating a different overview.

Giannopoulos (2020) highlights the expansion that hybrid threats have made over time by testing the European security environment, emphasizing technology as a special feature of the present with a clear role in the development of hybrid threats. At the same time, he notes the official EU documents highlighting various approaches (operational, strategic, etc.) on the subject. In addition, he captures the effects that factors such as globalization and the pace of development of artificial intelligence have facilitated the evolution of hybrid threats.

Finally, the topic approached is directly motivated by contemporary global trends, being a complex field that requires constant research and permanent reporting to technological developments.

### 3. HYBRID THREATS AND EUROPEAN UNION

If in mathematics there are formulas for finding the unknown “*x*” and solving the problem, in hybrid threats the calculation expressions have abstract values, multiple variables and different results. Although each state faces particular vulnerabilities, a wide range of common threats targeting European Union Member States is noted. The positioning of the hybrid threat concept within the EU does not limit the geographical area to a certain level, nor does it simplify the interpretation of the concept.

In 2016, the European Commission (EC) and the EU High Representative (HR/VP) approved a key document on hybrid threats, namely the communication Joint System for Countering Hybrid Threats: a European Union Response (EC, 2016). In the same year, the European Commission introduced initiatives to strengthen the EU's capacity to respond to threats. Thus, a general framework for them at EU level has been developed. The EU's Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS), approved in 2016, underlines the need for a relationship between the resilience of the Union and its external actions (EUGS, 2016). Following the adoption of the European Defense Action Plan by the EC, the European Council established the European Defense Fund (EDF).

In spring 2024, the Council validated the Guidance Framework for the practical establishment of EU Hybrid Rapid Response Teams in the fight against hybrid threats<sup>1</sup>. Also at the beginning of last year, the European Commission and the High Representative adopted a Joint Communication on a new European Industrial Defense Strategy (EDIS, 2024) and the European Defense Industry Programme (EDIP, 2024). These measures accentuate the need for EU Member States to increase their defense capabilities to improve and develop the military field.

According to the European Defense Agency (EDA) Annual Report (2024), projects such as the autonomy of the Remote Pilot Aircraft System (RPAS) and collaborations for the development of unmanned autonomous vehicle (UAV) and drone technologies began in 2024, for the purpose of intensifying EU capacities. Isaac Diakite, the Project Officer Air Superiority, emphasizes that

integrated air and missile defense is a complex and multifaceted issue that is fundamental to any successful defense strategy (EDA, 2024:12).

Thus, the foundations on which the defense plan is built are highlighted, having a clear understanding of the existing resources, the probability of success of the projects and the risks existing in their implementation.

As regards defense, capacity building for EU resilience is vital to countering these threats. In this respect, it is necessary to focus the defense industry on modern technologies that determine investments in systems and prototypes. Thus, the European Union has developed the concept in its official documents over time, setting its principles, priorities and interests, while relating to the trends of the international security environment and featuring the vision, directions of action and means of achievement in the field of European defense.

### 4. CHANGES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Currently, European Union Member States are targets of hybrid threats. The latest defense investment statistics show that defense spending in 2023 amounted to 1.3% of GDP for the EU (Eurostat, 2025), as shown in Figures 1 and 2. This demonstrates a general awareness of the need to

<sup>1</sup> The Strategic Compass for Security and Defense was the basis of the hybrid toolkit for the development of new means of detection and response to them.



the era of the peace dividend is long gone. The security architecture that we relied on can no longer be taken for granted. Europe is ready to step up. We must invest in defense, strengthen our capabilities, and take a proactive approach to security (DIS, 2025).

The EC president stresses the need to prioritize the development of the European defense industry in relation to the dynamics of international society and the role that the European Union plays in this context. Moreover, it is noted that Member States are resonating with this orientation towards defense investments, in EU values and objectives in order to create a proper framework for its consolidation.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The European Union is facing unprecedented events such as disinformation, cyberattacks and interference in the electoral process of states by hostile actors, who have the ability to change current social, political and economic trends, the complexity of these contemporary hybrid threats is determined by the novelty and uncertainty of the present.

The article theoretically analyzed the concept of hybrid threats, capturing some Union documents that led to more effective management of actions to combat risks and reduce vulnerabilities, aiming to increase EU capabilities. Also, the projects on the development of the defense industry of the Member States were emphasized, noting at a general level the attitude they approached regarding the European security, which is a priority in the present context. For the European Union to succeed, it is essential to identify threats and finance their removal capacities, harmonize policies and coordinate defense spending, at both EU and state level. Moreover, it is necessary to continuously improve the legal instruments in order to relate to the requirements of the current security environment that is under the sign of technology. In the end, the European Union's role in countering hybrid threats is fundamental, as it has the capacity and resources to counter action, and is closely linked to the defense industry of the Member States that make it up.

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