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Central and Eastern Europe in EU Defence Cooperation: An Analysis of Participation in Permanent Structured Cooperation and European Defence Fund Projects

The need to enhance European cooperation in defence and security has become increasingly urgent since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Participation in EU common security initiatives remains a pressing issue for Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. With their pivotal position, distinct historical experiences and perspectives on Russia and the war in Ukraine, and complex domestic politics, these countries face unique challenges in integrating into the European defence cooperation framework, including specific obstacles affecting their defence policies and markets.

Countries with established defence industries in the region —Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Czechia, and Poland—face particular challenges. Recent studies suggest their engagement in EU defence cooperation has declined since 2022. Is this truly the case? If so, what factors have driven the decline in engagement with EU-level defence cooperation since 2022? This paper examines these questions by analysing their involvement in Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects and European Defence Fund (EDF) projects. While PESCO projects offer insight primarily into governmental participation, EDF projects reflect private-sector engagement in cooperative defence initiatives.

Using a mixed-methods approach, this study first employs social network analysis to map participation in PESCO and EDF projects, coding involvement across all PESCO waves and awarded EDF projects from all funded calls for proposals to date. It then examines variations across Member States over time, focusing on the five CEE countries' roles within EU defence cooperation networks. Social network analysis provides insights into patterns of relationships, each country's role in the network, and key network properties, including clusters or sub-networks. This quantitative analysis is complemented by qualitative case studies of Romania and Bulgaria, which draw on policy documents, secondary sources, and interviews with policymakers and experts to uncover deeper patterns and drivers of participation in PESCO and EDF cooperation projects.

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Yes

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