

# The Contribution of Small States to European Security and Defence

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This briefing paper is published as part of a series of three research-based half-day seminars organised by the IIEA with the support of the ERASMUS+ and the Nortia academic network. The paper focuses on the contribution of small states, including Ireland, to the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy.



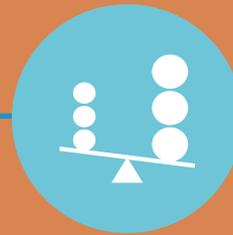
# The Contribution of Small States to European Security and Defence

## Strengths and weaknesses of the EU for small states?

Collective contribution to international peace and crisis management

Soft power approach

New defence initiatives

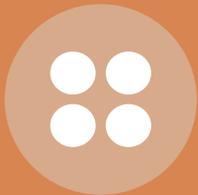


No shared strategic vision among states

Uneven distribution of power and resources

## Strengths and weaknesses of small states

Agile and responsive



Combination of bilateral and multilateral

Brand advantage



Vulnerable to external shocks

## Ireland's scorecard in Europe:

Strength in peacekeeping



Global diplomatic influence

Resource constraints



# Introduction

Despite the expanding range of threats in specific areas such as cyber, providing security to nations and citizens remains a constant obligation of states. The size of a state is no longer the key determinant of its ability to respond given the interconnected set of threats and risks and their diversity. Within this more volatile context, small states have much to gain through cooperation with European and international partners.

## The Power of the Pack

The EU has substantial capacity in defence and security acting collectively through its Member States. There is also the potential for EU Member States to improve their own defence capacity through cooperation. Leadership in this area has however been lacking even though there are signs of change in the new European Commission. The creation of the new Directorate General for Defence Industry and Space, the designation of a geopolitical Commission, and the ongoing negotiation of a multi-billion-euro European Defence Fund (EDF) all suggest that these debates are accelerating.

Which capacity gaps should be filled and does the EU effectively serve the security and defence needs of its smaller Member States?

First, there is the need for clarity of thought, action and approach. A number of questions merit consideration: to what extent does the EU today take a soft power approach? In matters of security and defence in the future, the EU must bridge the gap between what it says and what it does. Is such an approach appropriate to all the security challenges that the Union and its Member States face? The EU has the capacity to marshal a wide range of policy mechanisms in support of its security goals; from the diplomatic and political through economic and trade mechanisms and now some military-security tools. Further discussion is needed on the added value of a hard power approach and how the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is effectively communicated to citizens?

On the question of whether and how the EU serves the security and defence of small states, there are several moving parts. Recent developments in EU defence provide new sources of funding dedicated to CSDP – notably the European Defence Fund and the new European Peace Facility. Both could assist smaller states in part-financing capabilities and operations.

There is no shared strategic vision among EU Member States on defence matters. The range of geographic priorities (Nordic, Eastern, Mediterranean), historical diversity, core policy differences (as on the use of nuclear deterrence) and the uneven distribution of power and resources account for some of the barriers. However, there are also opportunities. It is still of interest to small states to pool and share and to train and cooperate with European counterparts in operations and missions in pursuit of shared goals for peace and security.

The potential for small states to take a cooperative approach in security and defence can best be framed at a political level. An integrated approach allows small states to broaden their experience in defence programmes and collectively to contribute to international peace and crisis management through the Union's political and military structures – where small states carry greatest weight.

In February 2020, the EU had 6 ongoing military missions and operations and 11 ongoing civilian missions overseas. The EUCAP Somalia civilian mission demonstrates the scope of such CSDP missions in contributing to maritime law enforcement capability.

### **EUCAP Somalia Mission**

- *supports the maritime police units around the ports*
- *contributes to the development of the Somalia Coast Guard*
- *assists with broader police development*

Security cooperation is also further enhanced by the EU's partnerships with third countries such as Australia and the US. As an example, in December 2018, the Council of the EU also adopted conclusions on an EU strategy on India, which indicated an interest in enhancing security and defence cooperation. These common security interests include crisis management, peacekeeping and peacebuilding as well as cooperation on cyber, non-proliferation and maritime security.

## Impact of Brexit

The UK's departure is a moment for further reflection on the future of European security and defence and the role for small states. The assumption that EU defence policy may become more Franco-German-centric or perhaps that major decisions would be taken in new non-EU institutions, such as the proposed 'European Security Council', must give pause for thought. Still, small states are not without ambition or pragmatism but a seat at the table also implies the need and right to contribute. Estonia's participation in the European Intervention Initiative (EI2) is one example as well as its leadership on cyber defence in the EU and NATO.

## Small States: A Competitive Advantage?

Traditionally, the perception is that small states are more responsive to potential threats by virtue of their smaller scale. They are more vulnerable and thus must respond more quickly. The extent to which that response is effective, however, is contingent upon whether there are adequate resources to meet that threat.

Considering their heightened vulnerability to external shocks, small states should be proactive in establishing a national security strategy that is coordinated across the relevant channels (political, diplomatic, defence, security and development). This

needs management and direction at the highest national political level - pulling together relevant expertise and stakeholders. Small states again can excel here, benefitting from the more intimate nature of their policy making communities and associated ability to get key decision makers together more easily.

## Multilateral Channels

To leverage their weight and offset losses, small states will project their influence through both multilateral and bilateral channels. Multilateral frameworks in general benefit small states, insofar as their relative power tends to carry greater weight there than in bilateral negotiations. This said, small states may also prove to be beneficiaries of bilateral agreements where narrower interests are at stake - but still benefiting from the collective weight of EU partners.

## Brand Advantage

Small states are also said to have a 'brand advantage' in cases where they have built their reputation in sectors such as development aid, peacekeeping, human rights, gender equality and/or environmental sustainability. While this varies from state to state, depending on history and geography, it can provide a modest boost to credibility and effectiveness giving a comparative advantage to smaller over larger states. While this does not guarantee a favourable outcome in their peacekeeping or counterterrorism operations, it can offer a critical marginal advantage.

## Scale Advantage

Smaller states also perhaps enjoy greater latitude in challenging traditional strategic assumptions. The capacity to adapt, to be flexible, to be resilient, tends to be hardwired to the DNA of smaller players. Thus, small states have an advantage in serving as thought leaders and innovators - challenging the traditional and opening minds to alternatives.

Leadership is not the prerogative of the larger states and the political eco-system of the EU lends itself to small states being frontrunners in innovation.

## Ireland's scorecard in Europe

Despite its peripheral geographic positioning in Europe, Ireland's footprint on a global level is noteworthy. Knowledge of Ireland internationally and its associated global profile vastly outstrips its relative economic and political weight. On defence matters, Ireland has unique military experience in terms of interoperability within UN, EU and NATO commanded operations and a longstanding peacekeeping record.

Like many small states, however, Ireland's resources to meet new challenges such as cyber are tightly constrained. Its decision to join the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) in Estonia demonstrates both the flexibility and ambition at a national level. Ireland can further leverage its experience and profile at the multilateral level to project its influence more effectively overseas. With carefully targeted resourcing, Ireland could build substantially on its existing track record in military education and training and peacekeeping. It might also build new, world-leading capacities in the areas of cyber security and defence, development and women, peace and security. Creating centres of excellence in such fields would advance these efforts. Furthermore, a national defence college could also centralise expertise locally and draw international talent.

Ireland's unbroken record in UN peacekeeping has made significant contributions to international peace support operations. Over this time, Irish peacekeepers have gained invaluable experience in challenging military missions most recently in Mali and Somalia. Yet there is also scope to discuss the changing nature of peacekeeping in these more precarious environments. Ireland might usefully begin to focus greater attention

on Africa, integrating its experience on the continent in the development, human rights and security realms. This could substantially strengthen Ireland's overall capacity to contribute to the peace and prosperity of this critical neighbouring continent.

Ireland's potential to secure itself against external threats and to meaningfully contribute to regional and global security rests on three assumptions: adequate resources, political leadership and appropriate policy structures. Together, these can only be grounded in an inclusive and open debate. They can, in turn, most effectively be developed in cooperation with partners that share Ireland's values and interests in a just and secure world.

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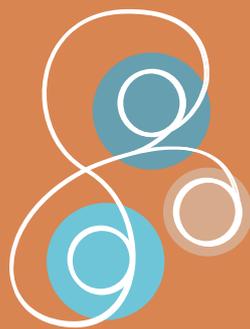
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