European Peace Strategy

European Peace Strategy

For a Shared, Human-Centered Future

A Strategy for European States, EU Institutions, Municipalities, and Civil Society Actors

42 proposals for active peace policy

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Redefining Peace and Security across Europe

This strategy is written for a moment at a time of profound rupture in Europe's security order. It does not assume consensus, shared threat perceptions, or the resilience of existing institutions. It offers practical starting points that can be pursued in parallel across different security traditions – while keeping open the political conditions for peace.

Europe stands at a historical crossroads. Europe is also facing an identity crisis: between proclaimed universal values and selective practice; between rules-based rhetoric and transactional power politics; between a promise of 'never again' and repeated failures to protect. In the face of ongoing wars, rising military expenditure, democratic backsliding, hybrid conflicts, the rapid spread of artificial intelligence across military, governmental and commercial systems, the intensifying climate crisis and the disregard for international norms, traditional concepts of security no longer suffice. Military instruments cannot replace diplomacy, international law and cooperative conflict resolution. This Peace Strategy proposes first steps in a transformative shift from militarized security toward human security and a nonviolent and cooperative approach to addressing the root causes of conflicts.

AI is rapidly reshaping security, power, and accountability across military, governmental, and commercial systems. Without democratic oversight and binding human rights safeguards, AI risks accelerating militarization, enabling mass surveillance and manipulation, and lowering thresholds for coercion and violence.

A global AI race is already unfolding, driven primarily by technological and geopolitical competition between the United States (US) and China and increasingly framed in terms of strategic dominance. In its logic, speed, and disregard for long-term human consequences, this dynamic carries disturbing parallels to earlier nuclear arms races: once capabilities are developed and deployed without binding limits, political control becomes harder, risks of escalation grow, and the consequences for humanity may become irreversible. Preventing an uncontrolled AI arms race therefore

requires early, binding and internationally agreed limits before technological momentum makes restraint politically impossible.

Human security does not prioritize territorial defense or military superiority, but the protection of people and the social and democratic conditions that sustain life in dignity: their physical safety, access to food and healthcare, economic livelihoods, political participation, ecological integrity, and social cohesion. This strategy presents an actionable framework for European countries to foster nonviolent, inclusive and sustainable security policies. While recognizing Europe's political diversity and diverging security traditions, this strategy takes the United Nations (UN) Charter, international humanitarian law, and international human rights law as indispensable reference points – while acknowledging that their application has been selective, contested, and at times undermined by those who claim to defend them. A credible peace policy must therefore combine legal commitment with political realism, accountability, and structural reform.

The current European security discourse is dominated by heightened threats against our security and the attempt to counter them by increasing military deterrence which results in a spiral of more threats. Fear of further wars is widespread, especially in light of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the wider rearmament dynamics it has intensified across Europe. China's fast increase of its nuclear capabilities is another worrisome trend. This development coincides with the broader disregard for international treaties and norms under the recent US administration. The erosion of norms is not only driven by open rejection, but also by selective enforcement, double standards, and impunity – dynamics that have damaged trust in Europe's commitments both within Europe and globally. Responding credibly to this crisis requires more than rhetorical adjustment: it demands far-reaching political, institutional, and economic change. Initiatives such as Readiness 2030 ("Rearm Europe") of the European Union (EU), NATO's 5% target for spending on rearmament, military infrastructure or national programs such as the German "Zeitenwende" as well as the well above-average growth rates in military budgets in Eastern Europe have fueled arms races, entrenched hostility, and diverted the focus and the resources away from diplomacy, civilian conflict prevention, and social resilience. Yet deterrence-centered approaches have repeatedly failed to prevent wars or atrocities. The

answer to war crimes and violations of international law cannot be new violations, but a consistent strengthening of international legal institutions, accountability mechanisms, and civilian protection. Under international law, military means may only be considered as ultima ratio and after all peaceful options have been seriously pursued are exhausted.

Many people and policy actors across Europe feel genuine fear: fear of escalation, of abandonment, of cyber disruption, of economic decline, of losing democratic control, and of living next to actors who ignore rules. This strategy starts from that lived insecurity. It argues, however, that sustainable security cannot be purchased through permanent rearmament, especially when it weakens social cohesion, democratic legitimacy, and the resources needed to prevent conflict in the first place.

On a global scale, multilateral cooperation is increasingly challenged by power politics, transactional diplomacy, and competing geopolitical and geoeconomic blocks. Actors associated with alliances in which China and Russia play the leading role increasingly seek to revise or circumvent existing rules and institutions to rebalance power and reduce Western dominance. At the same time, the Global South and emerging middle powers increasingly demand a fairer distribution of power, representation, and responsibility in international institutions.

Economic measures like the tariff regime of the US administration may try to reshape international relations, but their long-term effects remain uncertain. Yet this moment demands more than a return to familiar instruments. Reflecting on how conflicts, confrontations, and arms race dynamics have been transformed into less violent situations throughout history, this European peace strategy builds on proven and contemporary tools of peacebuilding, including civilian conflict prevention, mediation, dialogue facilitation, reconciliation, and post-conflict recovery. These tools remain necessary – but they are no longer sufficient without confronting the structural drivers of militarization, economic extraction, and unequal accountability that repeatedly hollow out norms in practice. These include multilateral arms control and confidence-building measures, inclusive diplomatic frameworks within the OSCE context, civilian mediation and dialogue formats, legally binding disarmament and arms control treaties, and long-term investments in peace education and reconciliation. Such approaches have repeatedly demonstrated that security can be enhanced

not through military superiority, but through cooperation, transparency, accountability, and the gradual institutionalization of trust. The response to uncertainty and fear must not be reduced to armament and deterrence.

At the same time, education systems across Europe fail to prepare the next generation for the challenges of peacebuilding, conflict transformation, social-emotional learning, critical digital literacy, early action in conflict and global interdependence. The lack of systematic peace education, critical digital literacy, and civic empowerment leaves young people ill-equipped to shape a future based on cooperation rather than militarization and confrontation. This educational gap threatens to reproduce cycles of violence instead of breaking them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also shown the limits of crisis responses while highlighting the importance of solidarity, care, and social resilience. It showed that security is built through cooperation and functioning public systems, not through militarization. A common foreign policy must therefore focus on strengthening human security and preventing violence, rather than deepening alliance rivalries.

Europe's security landscape is shaped by diverse historical experiences and security traditions. Many European countries, particularly in Eastern Europe, perceive collective defense arrangements such as NATO as essential responses to past experiences of aggression and insecurity. Other European actors, including nuclear-armed states such as France and countries outside the EU such as the United Kingdom (UK), shape the continent's security environment through deterrence-based doctrines and global military commitments. In war affected regions such as the Western Balkans, security policies are closely intertwined with reconciliation processes, institutional reform, unresolved conflict dynamics and long-term peacebuilding needs, while renewed pressures toward militarization and rearmament continue to shape political debate. Neutral states have historically contributed to peace by strengthening international law and institutions, promoting confidence-building measures, advancing disarmament initiatives, and sustaining civilian and diplomatic engagement in conflict transformation.

A European Peace Strategy must therefore engage with this diversity rather than prescribe a single security model. It emphasizes that all European states – whether nuclear-armed, allied, neutral or non-aligned – share responsibility for upholding international law, preventing escalation, reducing armament risks, and strengthening civilian approaches to peace.

Finally, this strategy builds on a rich landscape of civil society–driven peace concepts developed across Europe and beyond, including initiatives such as from Germany (“Sicherheit neu denken”), the Netherlands (“Veiligheid Opnieuw Doordenken”), Great Britain (“rethinking security”), France (“Security France”, “Repenser le concept de sécurité”), Austria (“Frieden ist möglich – Aber sicher!”) or “Rethinking African Security“ offer constructive proposals for an active peace policy. These perspectives demonstrate that alternatives to militarized security are not utopian, but already practiced, researched, and demanded by societies.

These 42 proposals are not an all-or-nothing package. Progress in one area – civilian capacity, disarmament and restraint, democratic oversight, or justice-oriented policies – can make progress in the others more politically feasible.

This strategy is addressed to all European states, not only EU member states, as well as to EU institutions, parliaments, municipalities, and multilateral bodies active in the field of peace and security. It also speaks to civil society, academia, media actors, and local communities as essential actors in shaping and sustaining peaceful security policy.

Guiding Principles and Goals

- **Human Security:** Protecting people, primarily by peaceful means – focusing on personal, social, democratic, environmental, economic, and political conditions that enable them to live in dignity and security in times of war, conflict, and peace.

- **Active nonviolence:** Active nonviolence is the deliberate use of moral, political, and social means to overcome injustice and unjust structures. In doing so, the opponent is not dehumanized or harmed, but consistent pressure for change is exerted.

- **Refusal of violence:** Individual and collective forms of refusal of violence (e.g. refraining from the threat or use of force in accordance with the UN Charter or the right to conscientious objection) are recognized and actively supported.

- **Peaceful Conflict Management:** In situations of ongoing conflict, peaceful means should be exhausted before any consideration of military force, including mediation, humanitarian diplomacy, civilian protection missions, nonviolent resistance, targeted sanctions under international law, and inclusive dialogue processes. Military measures may only be considered as ultima ratio in strict accordance with the UN Charter.

- **Multilateralism and International Law:** Strengthening inclusive diplomacy, honoring disarmament treaties, and supporting a robust and equal international legal order to protect people. Accountability for war crimes and grave human rights violations – including through the International Criminal Court, universal jurisdiction, and systematic documentation – is essential to sustainable peace.

- **Democracy and Transparency:** All peace and security decisions must be subject to democratic oversight, transparency, and public scrutiny.

- **Civil Society Agency and Participation:** Recognizing the essential role of civil society actors in mediation, research, monitoring, early warning, peace education, democratic renewal, the protection of civil

liberties, and public debate on peaceful political alternatives. Civil society should not merely be consulted symbolically, but be structurally involved in agenda-setting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, while democratic accountability remains with public institutions.

- **Inclusive, Feminist and Accessible Peace:** In line with the UN Women, Peace and Security agenda (UNSCR 1325) and broader intersectional peace approaches, security must center care, justice, participation and accessibility – recognizing gendered power dynamics, valuing unpaid care work, and ensuring full inclusion of women, persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ persons, and marginalized groups across all peace and security processes.

- **Post- and Decolonial Perspective:** Acknowledging structural power imbalances in global and European institutions and revisiting security through an anti-racist, decolonial lens, including how European security policies, trade, border regimes, and arms exports reproduce unequal vulnerability and undermine universalism in practice.

- **Climate-Peace Nexus:** Understanding the ecological crisis as a driver of conflict and insecurity as well as the effects of armed conflict on the environment, integrating environmental justice into peace policy.

Thematic Pillars for the European Peace Strategy

I. Civil Peace Infrastructure and Nonviolent Conflict Transformation

National security strategies often marginalize peaceful alternatives – despite existing commitments to the UN Charter, OSCE principles, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Municipalities and civil society actors such as NGOs, churches, trade unions, universities and think-tanks, or social movements are frequently excluded from formal security dialogues. Civilian conflict prevention, mediation, reconciliation, and post-conflict recovery are often treated as supplementary or symbolic activities rather than as core elements of security policy.

Conflict transformation and peace processes require credible mediators. Not only political and economic strength is needed, but also a willingness to make a long-term commitment, even when public interest wanes. Short-term crisis management and rotating mandates often undermine trust-building processes and weaken the sustainability of peace efforts. Civilian components of peace operations remain structurally under-resourced and politically overshadowed by military elements and interests. Civilian personnel constitute only a minority of deployed staff, gender parity remains insufficient, and predictable funding for non-governmental actors is lacking. Peace education is not systematically anchored. Cities serve as integration hubs but lack formal recognition.

Civil society actors have an important role to play in addressing the consequences of violence, supporting long-term recovery, and rebuilding social trust. Psychosocial support for survivors, trauma care, rehabilitation programs for veterans and returnees, as well as community-based reconciliation and restorative justice mechanisms remain underfunded and sometimes non-existent. In peacebuilding processes, respected personalities, civil society actors and experts from the academic field have to play an important role, regardless of whether the concrete program is

run by an international organization, a state or an NGO. Narrowing the debate and focusing on military aspects limits the range of available policy responses.

Addressing the legacies of violent pasts is central to prevention and nonviolent conflict transformation. Selective or one-sided narratives of past and ongoing wars can prepare the ground for renewed violence, while inclusive memory work, dialogue across former lines of enmity, and shared approaches to historical responsibility can help build sustainable peace.

In addition to practiced concepts of a culture of peace, peace infrastructure also encompasses civil mechanisms and instruments as well as inclusive international organizations that aim to prevent violence, balance interests diplomatically, and build trust. To this end, measures must be put in place that not only warn of violent conflicts but also contribute to their resolution at an early stage using civil methods.

Action Points:

1. **Establish** a European civilian pool of experts in mediation, conflict transformation, reconciliation, and post-conflict rehabilitation for international and regional missions under multilateral frameworks aiming at gender-balance.

2. **Strengthen** the mandate and role of local and international civilian peacebuilding experts with a focus on early warning, preventive civilian action, mediation where appropriate, conflict transformation, post-war rehabilitation, disarmament support, and inclusive dialogue projects in strong coordination with local needs assessment and local partners.

3. **Establish** and fund Civil Peace Services (CPS) through cooperation between states and civil society organizations, working closely with local partners in crisis regions. Recognize the role of independent civilian peacebuilding experts and grant them protection while they are carrying out their duties.

4. **Integrate** peace education, social-emotional learning, critical digital literacy and nonviolent communication into all levels of formal schooling. Establish and fund public peace education centers and conflict transformation institutes, linked to national frameworks.

5. **Strengthen** the role of local civil society actors and peace infrastructure in areas of conflict in a sense of local ownership and support accountable municipal actors, trusted community leaders, and local civil society organizations in peace efforts.

6. **Form** a core group of states and civil society actors with particular ambitions in mediation, peacebuilding, conflict transformation, disarmament, and the prohibition of violence under international law.

II. Comprehensive Disarmament and Demilitarization

Over the past years, global military spending has reached unprecedented levels, although reliable and comparable data remain uneven. In particular, the actual military expenditures of some states involved in ongoing wars or authoritarian governance structures are only partially known, as significant portions of military spending are concealed, shifted to off-budget accounts, or excluded from public scrutiny.

The ongoing war in Ukraine, the deepening confrontation in the Near and Middle East, the conflict near the African Great Lakes, and renewed hostilities in the Caucasus region highlight the failure of deterrence-based security policies to prevent or de-escalate conflict.

The humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza – and the wider pattern of selective accountability in situations of mass atrocity, including the ongoing proceedings against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) concerning allegations of genocide and the International Criminal Court's (ICC) arrest warrants in relation to alleged war crimes – has further exposed a systemic crisis: impunity, double standards, and the unequal valuation of human life in global politics. For many actors in the Global South and historically marginalized contexts, this has deepened long-standing critiques that parts of the international legal and political order remain shaped by colonial and racist legacies. A European Peace Strategy must engage this critique directly if it seeks legitimacy beyond Europe. The risk of nuclear escalation has re-entered public consciousness: nuclear-armed states modernize their arsenals, while NATO nuclear sharing continues, despite widespread public opposition. Russia's stationing of nuclear weapons in Belarus and China's increased buildup of its nuclear capacities further contributes to an insecurity environment. Tactical nuclear use is no longer unthinkable in military doctrine discussions. While some European states support the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), some NATO members and Belarus still host or support nuclear weapons under opaque arrangements. Furthermore, the Europeanization of the Franco-British nuclear deterrence remains a subject of active discussion. This coexistence of unfulfilled disarmament commitments and deterrence-

based doctrines weakens global non-proliferation norms and increases the risk of escalation, miscalculation, and the catastrophic humanitarian consequences.

Emerging military technologies further intensify these challenges. Investments in the research, development and potential deployment of autonomous weapons systems (AWS), artificial intelligence-driven warfare, and cyber capabilities are expanding rapidly, yet binding legal and ethical frameworks are still missing. Europe is not merely reacting to these trends; through procurement, Research and Development funding, export policies, and permissive regulation it can also accelerate them – or restrain them. Ongoing debates at the UN have yet to produce tangible restrictions. Their deployment would dismantle the last humanitarian constraints on armed conflict.

In addition, the militarization of outer space is gaining pace. While dual-use satellite systems – such as Earth observation satellites – can serve legitimate civilian and defensive purposes, the increasing development of space-based military capabilities and activities that undermine the principles of the Outer Space Treaty raise serious concerns and forums such as the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) remains underutilized as a forum for peaceful, civilian governance of outer space.

Cyberspace has been declared a military domain and offensive cyber capabilities, including AI-driven surveillance and attack tools, are being developed under the umbrella of national security, outside the scope of democratic or legal review.

What is needed is a fundamental shift away from threat-based and profit-driven militarization toward a disarmament agenda grounded in human security, international law and global responsibility. The unchecked expansion of military capabilities fuels cycles of violence, undermines international norms, and places civilians at increasing risk. Disarmament is not an utopian vision, but a practical necessity – to reduce escalation risks, uphold humanitarian norms, and free up public resources for social, ecological and human development. History shows that major arms control treaties have often been achieved during periods of high tension. If not now, when? European countries must stop fueling global arms races and instead take the lead in developing peaceful security architectures.

Action Points:

7. **Sign and ratify** the TPNW, or as a first step at least contribute to its positive obligations of victim assistance and environmental remediation. Strengthen and connect municipalities and existing city networks as visible actors and advocates for disarmament, nuclear risk reduction, and civilian security policy, recognizing that cities would bear the human consequences of war most directly.

8. **Ban** AWS at the national level and actively support a binding international treaty ensuring meaningful human control over the use of force.

9. **Enforce** strict arms export controls, including export bans to conflict zones and authoritarian regimes, based on human rights risk assessments and international humanitarian law and establish a real-time public registry of all arms exports with parliamentary oversight, complemented by an annual arms export report, developed in collaboration with civil society and independent experts in recipient countries.

10. **Fully implement** and defend existing disarmament treaties, like the Ottawa Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions, notwithstanding current withdrawals by certain states, ensuring not only the destruction of existing stockpiles but also sustained support for victim assistance, demining programs, and international cooperation.

11. **Promote** peaceful use of space via UNOOSA, fully implement the Outer Space Treaty and respect its prohibitions and elaborate further international legal instruments banning the deployment of weapons in space, to preserve space as a global commons for scientific and civilian purposes.

12. **Support** international negotiations on binding limits to offensive cyber capabilities, including a prohibition of cyberattacks on critical civilian infrastructure.

III. Migration and Rights-Based Asylum

The trend of increasing migration further continued in the past years. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), an UN related agency, estimated in its World Migration Report 2024 that nearly 300 million people worldwide were international migrants; in 2020 this number was at around 280 million. Additionally, about 50 million are refugees, asylum seekers, or in need of protection and a further 73,5 million are internally displaced persons. The predictions for the coming years are pointing to a further rise of these numbers. Two main drivers can be determined for that. The increasing probability of violent solutions to conflicts and the impacts of climate change and their short and long term socio-economic consequences.

In the past years, the European approach to these challenges further militarized. In the EU, independent institutions increasingly criticize the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) for its used methods, including illegal push-backs. Furthermore, the EU's Anti-Fraud Agency (OLAF) investigates the agency. The reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in 2024 has the potential to undermine protections of fundamental rights for refugees, adopted in 2026, and to limit their access to justice. The UK's plan to outsource its asylum process to a third country, in this case Rwanda, posed risks for the safety and due process for refugees. Though stopped under the new government in 2024, the risks of relinquishing responsibilities and a further erosion of international norms, if reinstated or copied by other states, still remains. In some cases violent non-state actors take over outsourced tasks, generating another revenue source, but also facilitating their human or drug trafficking operations. These developments are worrisome for political entities that center around the adherence to fundamental rights and international law. Overall, it is an approach to react to developments that will intensify over the next years and decades.

Though the negative aspects of migration have the main focus at the moment, the positive contributions should not be overseen. Especially in an aging society, migration can mitigate the impact of retirements in the course of some years, especially in the growing sector of care jobs. Further public discourse centers around migration at the stages of arrival, integration, and deportation of migrants and refugees and rarely lays the focus on causes forcing these people to leave their homes. If there is a

willingness to reduce migration, a discussion would be needed on the why and to present feasible solutions to minimize the contributing factors, like conflicts, genocides, exploitative economic systems, or climate change.

Action Points:

13. **Comply** fully with the Refugee Convention and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) non-refoulement obligations, end the detention of children and other vulnerable persons, and guarantee fair asylum procedures with access to legal assistance and protection of all fundamental rights.
14. **Support** and deliver aid to tackle causes forcing people to leave their home, like the fulfillment of climate agreements, provide diplomatic and civil society assistance for conflict resolution and reconciliation, reduce inequality in economic cooperation to minimize economic pull factors.
15. **Commit** to equitable refugee resettlement quotas and develop fair and rights-based frameworks for relocation, reception and responsibility-sharing as well as compensate for loss and damage linked to displacement, while emphasizing the positive contributions of migration. Extend and open safe and legal pathways for migration by establishing humanitarian visas, guaranteeing family reunification, and creating secure travel routes.
16. **Dismantle** military and para-military migration operations and return to full compliance with international legal standards at external borders.
17. **Guarantee** access to basic human rights – especially healthcare, education, housing, and work – regardless of legal status, and formally recognize climate-displaced persons by integrating climate mobility into protection frameworks and adaptation planning.
18. **Empower** and strengthen municipalities and local communities in their integration efforts through for example targeted funding for anti-racism training, inclusive public services, trauma-informed care, and long-term participation pathways. Facilitate access to secure residence status and fair, non-discriminatory pathways to citizenship within a reasonable timeframe as part of sustainable integration.

IV. Climate Justice and Environmental Peacebuilding

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) current forecast for temperature rise due to man-made climate change is up to 4 degrees Celsius by 2100. Staying on this track, extreme weather events, in their regional distinctiveness, such as heat, droughts, floods, and storms will increase massively in frequency and intensity. Long term changes in the climate conditions of a region have a high potential to shift the socio-economic structure or act as a conflict accelerator. A narrow framework of security policy instruments have their limits to counter consequences or causes. A further discrepancy exists, in that the main contributors to an increased CO_2 concentration in the atmosphere will feel its harshest consequences later.

The Sahel can be an illustration of what these changes mean for economically poor areas of the world. In addition to poverty, unequal distribution of resources, and marginalization of minority groups as breeding ground for violent actors, the Sahel zone is severely affected by extreme weather events due to climate change. Military aid in the past years has not adequately addressed or solved rising conflicts, on the contrary, they gave the impression of neocolonial missions to secure resources or arms trade deals. Furthermore, arms trade and militaries enormously contribute to the CO_2 output of humanity, how much exactly is not determinable due to incomplete data-sets.

A growing field of migration is movement for climate reasons. This appears in the form of land becoming hardly livable, small islands or coastal areas that will disappear in the sea or the loss of arable land due to yearlong droughts. A following shift in the predominant socio-economic conditions through high urbanization rates bears a destabilization risk for societies. Impoverished and marginalized people build a formidable recruitment ground for violent actors.

In multilateral efforts to tackle fundamental causes of climate change, there is an imbalance between the profiteers of pollution and the ones who want just climate policies. For example, at the UN Climate Change Conference COP30 in Belém 2025 the "delegation" of nearly 1600 fossil fuel lobbyists was just outnumbered by the host state Brazil (3805 overall,

899 in the state party); they often were part of state delegations, a privilege rarely received by civil society activists. A powerful negotiation position that is reflected in the outcomes of these conferences, as industry talking points can/are/will become state positions; flanked by lobbying efforts of the military-industrial complex to justify the contributions by their sector to climate change. One way to address the imbalance are Emission Trading Systems (ETS). However, though theoretically useful, their momentarily set up does not meet their ambitious goals and risk reinforcing existing inequalities rather than correcting them. The goal should be to address the root causes of the Climate Crisis and not to create new dependencies.

Environmental peacebuilding is not limited to climate mitigation. Cooperative governance of shared natural resources such as rivers, water basins, forests, ecosystems, and transboundary air pollution can reduce tensions, strengthen trust, and create lasting channels for dialogue even in politically difficult contexts. Such forms of practical cooperation show that ecological interdependence can become a foundation for peace-oriented regional governance and vice verca.

Action Points:

19. **Implement** the legal binding agreements on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and on limiting the global temperature rise, without applying double standards.
20. **Include** military emissions in national CO_2 inventories and National Determined Contributions (NDCs), conduct comprehensive audits of all military and armament environmental impacts, and establish mechanisms for accountability and reparations.
21. **Build up** and fund ecological peacebuilding, climate adaptation and transboundary environmental cooperation in conflict-prone areas, and ensure that climate finance directly reaches frontline communities most affected by crisis and displacement. Train peace workers in climate mediation and promote shared water governance, local conservation, resilience, ecosystem regeneration and cross-border environmental cooperation as effective tools for violence prevention and sustainable peace.

22. **Recognize** climate displacement in international protection frameworks, while creating and supporting reparative mechanisms for climate-related loss and damage.

23. **Prevent** the militarization of climate policy by limiting military actors from adaptation governance, and instead frame climate resilience through solidarity, cooperation, and human security.

24. **Enshrine** intergenerational environmental rights in national law, fund climate and peace initiatives, and include the perspectives of future generations in all strategic planning.

V. Digital Peace, AI Governance and Cyberjustice

Digital spaces are increasingly governed through national security logics, secrecy, and corporate concentration rather than through democratic oversight, the increasing power of private actors, and human rights frameworks. Public and private digital infrastructures that shape communication, information access, and political participation are becoming sites of surveillance, manipulation, and social control, with limited transparency and accountability.

Europe's dependence on a small number of dominant, often US-based platforms, cloud providers, and AI systems creates structural dependencies that weaken democratic control, public accountability, and digital resilience. Reducing these dependencies through interoperable public infrastructure, open-source solutions, and rights-based digital governance must be part of a peace-oriented digital policy.

Artificial intelligence accelerates these dynamics. It enables scalable surveillance, automated target identification, and increasingly sophisticated disinformation, including deepfakes and synthetic content that erode trust in information ecosystems. At the same time, AI-driven decision systems are expanding into sensitive public domains such as border management, policing, welfare, and risk scoring – often with limited transparency, unclear accountability, and documented risks of discrimination. Without binding safeguards, AI lowers thresholds for coercion and violence, undermines democratic debate, and shifts public power toward opaque systems controlled by states or a small number of corporate actors.

At the same time, there is a growing and dangerous discrepancy between what is technologically possible and what should be ethically and democratically permissible. While emerging technologies carry real risks for repression, disinformation, mass surveillance and social control, they also hold significant potential to promote peace, inclusion, and early conflict prevention – if governed ethically and wisely.

Digital governance remains dominated by a small number of powerful corporate actors, with limited transparency or democratic oversight. Public institutions struggle to keep pace with these developments, resulting in

fragmented regulatory approaches and limited coordination around disarmament, de-escalation, and the peaceful use of digital technologies. Disinformation campaigns – whether state-driven, commercially motivated or domestic – increasingly target minorities, peace movements, and civil society. Meanwhile, many rural and marginalized communities across Europe face digital exclusion, lacking access to safe and equitable digital spaces. These inequalities weaken social cohesion and limit meaningful participation in political and civic life.

Young people are particularly vulnerable to unregulated digital environments, including algorithmic manipulation, online hate, targeted misinformation, and surveillance – especially on social media platforms like TikTok, X, YouTube, or Instagram. Despite their critical role in shaping digital futures, youth perspectives are rarely represented in digital governance debates or cybersecurity strategies. Similarly, civil society organizations working on digital rights often lack stable funding and access to decision-making forums.

What is at stake is not only the protection of rights in the face of digital threats, but the transformative potential of technology to serve peace, justice, and inclusion. Without ethical and humanitarian safeguards, they risk enabling repression and deepening global inequalities. A peaceful digital future depends on global cooperation, democratic control, and the protection of digital rights for all. School and extracurricular educational programs have a special role to play in ensuring that everyone can participate in digital rights in a democratic manner.

Action Points:

25. **Initiate** and support global treaty negotiations on cyberpeace and binding limits on AI at the UN and other multilateral forums, and establish an independent international organization for AI governance mandated to define, monitor and uphold human rights-based and humanitarian limits on the development and use of AI, including clear red lines for areas where decisions must remain under meaningful, accountable human judgment. Advance high-standard regional frameworks in Europe that uphold digital human rights, democratic resilience, responsible state behaviour in cyberspace, and strong civil society participation.

26. **Ensure** that all cybersecurity agencies responsible for the protection of critical infrastructure and fundamental rights operate under independent civilian oversight with clear human rights mandates and that any military cyber capabilities are subject to democratic control. Promote European public-interest digital infrastructures, interoperable open standards, and reduced dependency on dominant private technology providers in areas critical to democratic governance, public services, and peace and security.

27. **Introduce** binding youth protection standards for digital platforms as well as safeguards against AI-generated manipulation (including deepfakes) and recommender-driven radicalization in close collaboration with child rights organizations and digital safety experts and integrate digital literacy and peace education into school curricula and extracurricular programs, ensuring that young people are equipped to recognize disinformation, resist online manipulation, and actively participate in democratic digital governance.

28. **Establish** and publicly fund PeaceTech innovation programs, including georeferenced conflict data, civic tech tools, VR-based training peaceworkers and inclusive digital dialogue platforms, while prioritizing early conflict detection through algorithms and geospatial analysis, and integrate such tools into civil peace infrastructure.

29. **Enable** stable, transparent and diversified funding for independent digital rights organizations, investigative media, and educational campaigns on disinformation, surveillance, and digital peace.

30. **Guarantee** affordable, safe, and universal internet access through sustained public infrastructure investment, especially in rural and underserved areas, recognizing digital access as a prerequisite for democratic participation and social inclusion.

VI. Economic Justice as a fundament of Post- and Decolonial Peace Partnerships

The current structures of trade agreements still enshrines injustices. Non-transparent conflict resolution mechanisms like Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) systems are to a greater extent criticized. ISDS's are more and more interpreted as being an attempt to prevent former colonies, mainly in the Global South, from appropriating or nationalizing industries after their formal independence and to constrain national efforts for social or environmental regulations.

ISDS's are exemplary for imbalanced relationships, as they regulate how states can be sued by foreign investors in disputes about foreign direct investment and most often take the form of international arbitration. As of June 2024, a total of nearly 113 billion USD has been paid by states to investors since 1998, commonly used in cases where climate or biodiversity protection laws make it impossible for companies to further increase their profits. A point of critique is that, unlike national courts, investors can shape the panels at their will with high risks for bias, conflicts of interest, misconduct or other abuses of power and amplified by behind closed doors hearings.

Three of the most relevant norm-setters, in regards to international trade and development, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are flawed and further contribute to structural inequalities. Their deficiencies in regard to their democratic governance and ownership, their inconsistent decision making processes, their non-accountability for harms caused, their bad record in protecting human rights and the environment, and their weak ability to learn from past mistakes, are main forces to perceive them as institutions that are widely perceived as institutions that primarily serve powerful and privileged actors.Over the past decades the WTO took steps to reduce injustices in its system and increases the participation of smaller states in a multilateral rules-based trading system, demonstrating that changes are possible.

Trade overall has beneficial effects, if its profits are distributed fairly. But economic relations are still heavily influenced by the colonial past and

present, up to now there are mechanisms that ensure the control and exploitation of resources by powerful entities over less powerful regions, many times against the democratic will of affected people. Structural and cultural violence and the use of overt force will grow when powerful actors increasingly declare trade policy issues to be security issues. Corruption, patriarchal structures, forms of caste systems, land grabbing and exploitation patterns of resources, and humans, get solidified by the strengthening of violent actors in fragile regions, leading to further repression of human rights and a loss of trust in their universality.

Action Points:

31. **Demilitarize** economies by redirecting public funds from arms to social and ecological sectors, and apply human security criteria across all public procurement processes.
32. **Evaluate** and restructure international trade, investment, and development finance regimes – including the governance and accountability structures of the WTO, IMF, and World Bank – according to their capacity to strengthen democratic participation, human rights, environmental justice, policy space, and equitable representation, especially for countries of the Global South.
33. **Enforce** full supply chain transparency for extractive and defense-related sectors, strengthen anti-corruption tools and financial flow monitoring, and promote divestment from arms, fossil through truth commissions and reparations, including debt relief, land return, and intellectual property justice.
34. **Address** colonial legacies through truth commissions and reparations, including debt relief, land return, and intellectual property justice. One focus is on examining global power imbalances as well as Western-dominated norms and knowledge systems.
35. **Reform** and/or negotiate migration and trade agreements to reflect sovereignty and equity. Remove ISDS clauses from trade frame-works, and safeguard public policy space for local democratic development.
36. **Fund** participatory budgeting and community-led economies, aligning development aid with feminist peace goals rather than migration control or securitization.

VII. Participation, Transparency, and Civil Oversight

Political debate around peace and security across Europe is increasingly constrained. Civilian conflict prevention, mediation, dialogue, and peacebuilding are often portrayed as naive or unrealistic, while arms exports are framed as economically or strategically necessary. Media narratives frequently conflate criticism with disloyalty, discouraging public discourse on alternatives to militarization and narrowing the range of politically acceptable policy options. In some European contexts, critical engagement with peace, security, or foreign policy is not only stigmatized, but criminalized, or met with politically decided sanctions, exposing journalists, activists, and political opponents to legal and political prosecution and, in some cases, imprisonment.

Civil society access is inconsistent and frequently limited to consultation processes that remain largely symbolic, with civil society inputs acknowledged but seldom reflected in concrete decisions or implementation. Grassroots organizations and civil society actors face unstable or insufficient funding, particularly when compared to military and defense Research and Development budgets.

Stable funding mechanisms for civil society should respect independence, pluralism, and critical oversight functions. Public funding must not undermine the autonomy of civil society actors, but should be transparent, diversified, and compatible with their watchdog role.

Transparency regarding arms exports, military spending, and strategic priorities varies widely. Lobbying in the defense sector remains opaque, and procurement decisions are often shielded from scrutiny. This lack of transparency increases the risk of corruption, conflicts of interest, and undue influence over security and defense policies, particularly where large financial volumes, secrecy provisions, and weak oversight mechanisms intersect. Civil society as advocacy actors influence policies with collective interest in their minds and involvement of the public, which differs from lobbying where the actors have primarily their own interests in mind. The debate on armament in particular is becoming increasingly narrow due to the increasing dominance of economic and industrial

interests. Public debate is characterized by harsh partisanship and simplification (“us” versus “them”). The art of diplomacy is being marginalized and credible approaches to conflict mediation are being discredited on the basis of vested interests.

A glaring gap exists in the inclusion of voices from the Global South, both in the European security debates and in international peace forums. Despite their disproportionate exposure to conflict and frontline experience with the consequences of arms exports, actors from the Global South are rarely involved in shaping the strategies that affect them most.

What is needed is a systemic rebalancing of power – from closed executive decision-making to transparent, democratic structures that include civil society and the voices of those most affected by violence. Peace and security cannot be effectively built if participation is symbolic, accountability is mostly absent, and the Global South remains excluded. A just peace architecture must be inclusive, transparent, and rooted in shared human responsibility. Safeguarding democracy, media freedom, and the rule of law is not secondary to peace policy but part of its institutional foundation.

Action Points:

37. **Legally establish** national peace and security councils as permanent statutory bodies with binding consultation rights, including representatives from civil society, academia, youth, persons with disabilities and marginalized groups. These councils must have formal influence on national strategies and the power to review security-related legislation and spending. In regions marked by past or ongoing hostility, such bodies should support sub-regional peace strategies that include the perspectives, needs, and security concerns of communities on all sides of former or present divides.

38. **Establish** or strengthen permanent parliamentary subcommittees on peace and disarmament, with public hearings, access to classified briefings under clear accountability rules, and power to propose legislative changes. Where relevant, these bodies should develop structured cooperation with corresponding bodies in neighboring countries and regions.

39. **Introduce** binding peace impact assessments for all foreign, defense, and migration legislation, that are made available to the public and must be co-authored by state and civil society experts.

40. **Establish** independent anti-corruption offices at the national level, mandated to monitor, investigate, and prevent corruption, conflicts of interest, and undue influence in peace, security, defense, and arms export policies. These offices should be institutionally independent, adequately resourced, empowered with investigative authority, and required to report publicly on their findings.

41. **Institutionalize** participatory democracy in peace and security policy through Citizens' Assemblies, community dialogues, and digital consultation platforms. These mechanisms must be inclusive, well-funded, and empowered to make recommendations that require formal parliamentary response.

42. **Guarantee** independent public broadcasting, establish independent public-interest media funding mechanisms, and protect journalists covering conflict, disarmament, and human rights through structural funding, anti-censorship safeguards, emergency protection mechanisms, and strong legal guarantees for press freedom.

From Action Points to Change: Reaction to Prevention, Militarism to Peace

This strategy is designed as a practical framework for active peace policy across Europe. Its 42 proposals aim to shift security policy from reaction to prevention, from militarized responses to civilian and cooperative approaches, and from fragmentation toward the gradual rebuilding of trust, restraint, and accountability. The strategy does not assume immediate consensus. It focuses on measures that can be initiated in parallel across different European contexts and security traditions, while strengthening cooperation through multilateral and civilian frameworks.

Pathways of Change

The strategy's impact rests on four mutually reinforcing pathways:

- **Build civilian capacities and institutions** that can prevent escalation and support nonviolent conflict transformation (e.g. civil peace services, dialogue facilitation, mediation, peace education, reconciliation and local peace infrastructures).

- **Reduce militarization risks** through disarmament, transparency, and arms control (e.g. export controls, registers, treaty implementation, meaningful human control over force, restraint in new domains such as cyberspace and outer space).

- **Strengthen democratic governance and integrity** in security policy (e.g. parliamentary oversight, transparency standards, anti-corruption mechanisms, civic participation, protection of critical debate and independent media).

- **Address structural drivers of insecurity** by advancing justice-oriented policies (in areas such as migration and asylum rights, climate justice, postcolonial economic partnerships, inclusive digital governance).

Progress in any one pathway increases the feasibility of the others. For example, transparency and anti-corruption measures strengthen public trust and make disarmament policies politically viable; peace education

and local resilience reduce susceptibility to fear-driven threat inflation; and equitable partnerships increase legitimacy and cooperation beyond Europe.

Across Europe, the knowledge, capacity, and moral responsibility exists to lead a peaceful transformation of security policy. This strategy envisions a future where dignity, cooperation, and ecological survival replace arms races and nationalist fear. Rather than offering a blueprint for a unified European security order, it provides the tools – and the political imagination – to shift direction: from reaction to prevention, from militarized responses to civilian and cooperative approaches, and from permanent confrontation toward the possibility of dialogue and restraint.

This strategy seeks to interrupt cycles in which violence generates further violent responses and militarization becomes self-reinforcing.

Let us act with courage, clarity, and compassion. **Let us choose peace.**

Acting with courage, clarity, and compassion in this context does not imply consensus or immediacy. It reflects a political choice to keep open the conditions for peace, even where cooperation appears distant. Choosing peace remains a decision – one that shapes whether division and militarization become permanent, or whether a different future remains possible.

Organisations and individuals interested in endorsing the strategy are welcome to get in touch at www.europeanpeacestrategy.eu.

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From Reaction to Prevention.

From Militarisation to Peace.