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# NB8 and Ukraine security cooperation

## A steppingstone to a strengthened European security architecture

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Europe's security order is undergoing a structural transformation. The assumptions that underpinned the post-Cold War architecture – stable deterrence, US primacy and predictable threat environments – have been eroded under pressure from Russia's protracted war against Ukraine and its broader campaign of sub-threshold operations across the continent. In this emerging landscape, Ukraine is no longer merely a recipient of security assistance. It is a central contributor to Europe's defence capacity and a driver of its adaptation. Ukraine is also frequently mentioned when European leaders envision the future of the European security architecture – as a member of the proposed European Security Council and the European Defence Union. NB8 countries have entered into strategic partnership agreements with Ukraine and are embarking on operationalising these.

### The evolving NB8-Ukraine relationship

The Nordic-Baltic countries (NB8) are among Ukraine's strongest partners and the NB8 has become an arena for enhanced security cooperation with immediate operational results. Nordic cooperation was significantly boosted by Finland's and Sweden's NATO accessions. The strength of Nordic support has been clear for some years, but the fall in US funding since 2025 means that the Nordic bloc is now among the top financial contributors to Ukraine. According to the Kiel Institute Ukraine Support Tracker, six of the eight NB8 countries rank as leading bilateral donors to Ukraine when government support is measured as a proportion of GDP (both including and excluding their imputed share of EU aid).

The Nordic-Baltic countries combined have high levels of political trust in Ukraine, a shared assessment of the Russian threat, advanced defence industries and growing military integration through the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). The question for the NB8, is not if, but how Ukraine could be more closely integrated with its European partners. The Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8)-Ukraine security nexus has the potential to become the operational core of a wider European response to Russia's long-standing security threat. All eight NB8 states concluded 10-year bilateral security cooperation agreements with Ukraine in 2024, most recently complemented by Norway and Ukraine's strategic partnership declaration in August 2026 and Drone Deal agreements with Norway, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Turning these agreements into operational partnerships has proved slow. A solid rocket fuel plant planned to be set up in Denmark by Ukrainian missile manufacturer Fire Point, for instance, has been delayed until 2027. Nonetheless, there has also been progress in some areas. Denmark is already financing Ukrainian-produced capabilities that correspond to Danish defence requirements; Norway has opened the way for Ukrainian drone production in Norway; Sweden has established a framework for joint production; and Latvia is developing technology transfer and manufacturing projects with Ukrainian industry. Camp Jomsborg in eastern Poland was set up at impressive speed to provide training for Ukrainian troops, as part of Operation Legio, an operation by the NB8 and Poland to support Ukraine with training and learn from Ukrainian experiences. In October 2026, Finland and Ukraine agreed to cooperate in the area of satellite capabilities, amongst other things.

The Freyja partnership, set to provide Ukraine and Europe with a desperately needed lower-cost alternative to the Patriot anti-ballistic missile system, has started initial testing having achieved technical integration. The 10-country Freyja partnership includes Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The project tries to compress a capability project that normally takes seven to ten years into a single year, while facing a weapons industry that seeks to maintain technological and contractual lock-ins for their existing products. It will require a cultural change in the industry and in host states to accelerate innovation and move to an open architecture where there is real competition to maintain a place on the Freyja platform.

## Coalitions vs institutions in the evolution of the European security architecture

During her State of the Union Address on 17 September 2026, European Union (EU) Commission President Ursula von der Leyen proposed to create a European Security Council, including Canada, Norway, United Kingdom and Ukraine. The proposal was met with surprise and scepticism by EU member states who had not been consulted. Nevertheless, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has given a strong motivation for closer security cooperation in Europe, and since February 2022 Europe has slowly come to realise that Ukraine is not only a recipient, but an essential provider of security.

Europe is under a triple pressure of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the burden-shift in NATO from the US to Europe, and an increasing number of hybrid attacks. Russia is already waging a war against Europe, as documented by the *Everywhere War: Sub-Threshold Warfare Tracker*. The number and audacity of its attacks is increasing. Today's policies will shape the future of the continent, as elaborated in the *Ukraine 2032* and *Russia 2032 Scenarios*.

As institutional reform is slow and the path is uncertain, the path to strengthened cooperation should be pragmatic and concrete, moving from coalitions to institutions. Coalitions establish and strengthen operational and strategic practices and ties. As such, the NB8 is a natural steppingstone to strengthen

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European security cooperation. A longer-term ambition could be to formalise this cooperation through membership in a future European Defence Union and a European Security Council.

## Operationalising and accelerating partnerships

From large-scale drone warfare and AI-enabled targeting to countering electronic warfare and adapting to constant technological iteration, Ukraine has become a laboratory for the future of conflict. Its ability to scale low-cost, high-precision capabilities and integrate them into operational doctrine offers lessons for European armed forces that are only beginning to adjust to these realities.

The industrial and institutional dimensions of the current transformation are critical. Shaped by wartime necessity, Ukraine's defence ecosystem is evolving into a dynamic environment for innovation, rapid prototyping and cooperation with international partners. This raises questions about how European countries can integrate Ukraine into joint production, procurement and capability development, moving beyond traditional models of defence cooperation.

Whether through a reformed NATO, new regional defence frameworks or hybrid arrangements, the integration of Ukraine as a fully-fledged security actor is necessary to achieve European defence readiness by 2030. This is a matter not only of political inclusion, but also of operational necessity. Countries that share a common threat perception must develop interoperable capabilities, aligned doctrines and coordinated responses.

## Conclusions and recommendations

With a combination of increasing bilateral and minilateral agreements signed, and proposals for overarching changes to the institutional structure with the proposals of establishing a European Security Council and a European Defence Union, it is clear that the European security architecture will be changing over the next ten years, and that Ukraine will be an integrated part of a strengthened architecture. European policymakers should prioritise the following policies:

1. **Integrate Ukraine into Europe's evolving collective defence architecture.** Ukraine should have a standing place in a future European Security Council and European Defence Union or any equivalent collective-defence format involving the EU, the United Kingdom and Canada. Where NATO or EU membership cannot yet provide the institutional framework, coalitions could create increasingly explicit reciprocal security obligations.

2. **Turn the NB8–Ukraine relationship into an operational security framework.** The June 2026 NB8-Ukraine declaration already commits the parties to closer defence-industrial cooperation, joint production, technology transfer, joint exercises and information sharing. The next institutional step would be a permanent NB8-Ukraine defence format linking defence ministries, armed forces, procurement agencies and industry. Rather than creating another political forum or formal institutional structure, it could coordinate a limited number of common capability programmes, regional contingency planning and implementation of lessons from Ukraine across the NB8.

3. **Move from defence assistance to joint capability portfolios.** NB8-Ukraine cooperation could concentrate resources on several common operational problems rather than proliferate small bilateral projects: counter-UAS (unmanned aircraft systems) and electronic warfare; affordable air and missile defence; autonomous maritime and underwater systems; resilient command and control (C2) and battlefield AI; and all-weather intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR). This could be framed as an extension of the Brave1 model across the NB8. Building on the Norwegian and Lithuanian precedent, Ukraine and the remaining Nordic-Baltic countries could

establish more specialised bilateral programmes under the Brave International framework. Rather than duplication, each should exploit national comparative advantages.

4. **Build a standing European unmanned systems capability with Ukraine as a co-developer.** Europe should establish a common framework for doctrine, training, testing, procurement and interoperability across aerial, maritime and ground unmanned systems, backed by a rapidly deployable counter-UAS component. Existing initiatives such as LEAP and national programmes could feed into this structure, while Ukraine contributes combat-tested doctrine, instructors and operational lessons as a full partner. While a European army remains politically out of reach, one institutional option would be a multinational European Unmanned Systems Force under a future European Security Council, providing a practical test of deeper defence integration without requiring a unified European military.

5. **Create a distributed Ukrainian-European production base designed to survive a prolonged war.** Co-production could be organised across Ukraine and several European states, with shared technical standards, pre-agreed licensing, alternative production sites, common component stocks and the ability to shift output when one facility is disrupted. The strategic objective is distributed production resilience rather than parallel and competing national supply chains.

6. **Institutionalise the innovation-to-procurement pipeline.** Rather than finance innovation and acquisition separately, European cooperation with Ukraine should connect battlefield testing, operational validation, procurement and industrial scaling within a single cycle. Ukraine already provides a working model. DELTA records combat performance, ePoints translates verified results into demand, Brave1 supports testing and market access and DOT-Chain Defence allows units to select relevant systems while central structures contract and finance procurement. European and NB8 programmes should build comparable pathways in which successful technologies move rapidly from operational testing and codification to pre-qualified supplier pools, framework agreements and repeat procurement. This approach should be extended beyond drones to counter-UAS, electronic warfare (EW), autonomous maritime systems, battlefield software and affordable interceptors, while procurement volumes expand as operational evidence accumulates.

7. **Drawing on Ukraine's experiences to create a European operational response to Russian sub-threshold warfare.** Europe's problem is less detection than the absence of a predictable connection between attribution and consequences. The EU has already committed itself to preventing, deterring and responding to hybrid campaigns and has established Hybrid Rapid Response Teams for member states and partners. Ukraine's experience could be incorporated into exercises that test responses to combinations of sabotage, cyber penetration, drone incursions, infrastructure disruption and information operations. The purpose would be to establish in advance which combinations of diplomatic, intelligence, law-enforcement, economic, cyber and military measures become available as Russian activity escalates. Most importantly, European states need to respond to hybrid operations with countermeasures that fundamentally alter the perpetrator's cost-benefit calculus.

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