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The European Intervention Initiative (EII/EI2)

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What is the European Intervention Initiative?

The European Intervention Initiative (EII/ EI2) is a French-led initiative that was set out by President Macron in September 2017 as part of his [vision](#) for a “sovereign, united and democratic Europe”.

In order to achieve that ambition and enable European states to take on greater responsibility for their own security, he put forward proposals for a common European intervention force and a common doctrine for action, independent of the European Union. European States, he argued, should be able to “better integrate our armed forces at every stage”.

The proposal was viewed by many as a way of overcoming French frustration at the inability of the EU to respond rapidly to potential crises within the European sphere of influence.¹

As Christian Mölling and Claudia Major, writing for the Royal Institute for International Relations in June 2018, noted:

European defense has to deliver on operations, not on institutional aesthetics, and it needs to do so quickly. France does not want new structures, but rather a flexible and exclusive club that unites those states that are politically willing and militarily able to take action. EU membership is secondary. In this way, Paris can circumvent the slow and cumbersome EU processes and integrate capable non-EU states.²

Letter of Intent

Participation in the EII is by invitation only and a [Letter of Intent](#) launching the initiative was initially signed by nine European countries on 25 June 2018.³ The main elements of the EII are as follows:

- It will be a flexible and non-binding forum of European states that are able, and willing, to engage their military forces when and where necessary in order to protect European security interests across the spectrum of crises, and without prejudice to

10 European countries, including the UK, are part of the European Intervention Initiative.

Italy officially announced its willingness to join the initiative in September 2019.

¹ The EU battlegroups, for example, which were established in 2007 to provide a flexible rapid response capability have yet to be deployed by the EU.

² Mölling and Major, “Why joining France’s European Intervention Initiative is the right decision for Germany”, Egmont Institute, 15 June 2018

³ The LOI was signed by France, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Denmark, Portugal and Estonia. Italy was invited to participate at the outset but the newly elected Government stated that it wanted more time to consider the proposals.

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the framework through which action is taken (i.e. the UN, NATO, the EU or as an ad hoc coalition).

- The main objective will be to develop a shared strategic culture between participating states, reinforcing bilateral defence relationships as well as joint efforts carried out through key multilateral organisations such as NATO, the UN and the EU.
- It will focus on four main areas: strategic foresight and intelligence sharing; scenario development and planning; support to operations and lessons learned and doctrine.
- It will not create a standing European force, nor does it envisage the creation of a new rapid reaction force. It will rely on existing structures and a network of liaison officers in the various military structures of the participating states.
- Participation in any of its specific initiatives, or any military operations that result, will be subject to sovereign national decision-making.
- It intends to contribute towards ongoing efforts within NATO and the EU to deepen defence cooperation,⁴ including through initiatives such as the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)⁵ and NATO's Framework Nation Concept.⁶

Finland subsequently joined the initiative in November 2018, bringing the current number of participants to 10.

The Italian government also [announced](#) its willingness to join the EII following a meeting between President Macron and Prime Minister Conte in mid-September 2019. At the time of writing, the Italian government had still to sign the Letter of Intent.

What is its relationship with the EU and NATO?

The EII is European in focus but independent of the European Union and NATO in terms of their respective decision-making structures.

By remaining autonomous from the EU, the EII allows the full participation of Denmark which has an opt-out from the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). It also provides an avenue for post-Brexit participation by the UK in European security issues.

The EII is also not dissimilar to many of the groupings or ad hoc coalitions of states that have gone before it, such as [OCCAR](#),⁷ the [Visegrad group](#) or [Nordic Defence Cooperation](#), which have often been motivated by converging regional interests or in recognition of the need for European states "to do more" in security terms in the face of falling defence budgets. In operational terms, recent military interventions in Libya, Mali and Syria/Iraq have all been conducted by coalitions of the willing rather than under the auspices of the EU or NATO; while many European states are engaged in a network of bilateral and multilateral expeditionary forces beyond the scope of either institution.⁸

⁴ Efforts to deepen EU defence cooperation have made significant progress in the last five years. Further detail is available in Library Briefing Paper CBP8216, [European Defence: Where is it Heading?](#)

⁵ Further detail on PESCO is available in Library Briefing Paper CBP8140, [EU defence: the realisation of Permanent Structured Cooperation](#).

⁶ Adopted in 2014 the Framework Nation Concept seeks to encourage a decentralised approach to multilateral defence cooperation among different regional or functional groupings of Allies. The FNC is discussed in some detail in a [2016 research paper](#) by the NATO Defence College.

⁷ OCCAR was established by the UK, France, Germany and Italy in 1996 in a bid to provide more effective and efficient arrangements for the management of collaborative procurement programmes between the four nations. Similarly, the 1998 Letter of Intent between the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden sought to facilitate defence restructuring in Europe in order to retain competitiveness.

⁸ Such as the German/Dutch Corps, the Franco-British Combined Joint Expeditionary Force or the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force.

As the NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg has observed:

I just see this new initiative as something that can complement and actually reinforce the work which is ongoing in NATO to strengthen and increase the readiness of our forces.⁹

Links to PESCO

There has, however, been some concern over the relationship between the EII and EU-led defence projects such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), given that the Letter of Intent makes a direct link between the EII and European defence integration. On the issue of PESCO the LOI states:

EI2 participating states will strive to ensure that EI2 serves the objectives and projects of PESCO to the maximum extent possible, while taking into consideration national legal constraints and the issue of third parties' access to PESCO.¹⁰

It also goes on to comment:

While PESCO will inevitably produce beneficial effects for EI2, we will seek to identify, as soon as possible, relevant areas of cooperation within the EI2 framework that can merge with existing PESCO projects or constitute new ones.¹¹

In an effort to clarify the relationship the French Ministry of Defense confirmed that while the intention is to develop a relationship between the EII and the EU that is mutually beneficial, they will remain entirely independent of each other and the EII will remain outside of the EU framework. It has reiterated "EI2 will not be merged with PESCO, if only to allow the unrestricted participation of militarily able and politically willing countries such as Denmark, or the United Kingdom, or maybe other countries in the future".¹²

Involvement of the UK

The UK first signalled its intent to get involved in the EII in January 2018 following a Franco-British summit on defence cooperation. As part of the summit agreement the UK committed to working:

...with France and other European partners to support the development of the proposed European Intervention Initiative (EII). The EII will be a defence cooperation framework that aims to improve operational planning and coordination of military deployments among European partners with meaningful capabilities. The EII will be separate from the EU, and will be complementary to existing NATO, EU and JEF [Joint Expeditionary Force] military structures and initiatives.¹³

Following the signing of the LOI, in July 2018 the Minister for the Armed Forces, Mark Lancaster set out the position of the British Government in answer to a Parliamentary Question:

The European Intervention Initiative does not affect the independence of UK Armed Forces in any way. It is a flexible, non-binding forum, that provides a framework for increased co-operation between participating European states. It is not a standing force.

It aims to improve information sharing, planning and co-ordination of deployments to save time and make sure work is not duplicated when tackling common threats and challenges. The decision on whether to participate in its specific activities rests with us at all times.¹⁴

⁹ As reported in "Nine EU states sign off on joint military intervention force", *The Guardian*, 25 June 2018

¹⁰ *Letter of Intent concerning the development of the European Intervention Initiative (EI2)*, June 2018, para.9

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² [French Ministry of Defense](#), 30 August 2018

¹³ Downing Street and Ministry of Defence Press Release, 18 January 2018.

¹⁴ PQ160129, *EU Defence Policy*, 10 July 2018

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Baroness Evans of Bowes Park also provided detail during an exchange in the House of Lords:

We support the European Intervention Initiative and we believe that it complements existing structures and NATO. We believe that it also supports our argument that Europe is able to co-operate in new ways on defence outside existing EU structures. We were very pleased to sign the letter of intent, with France, Germany, Spain and four other countries, around this.¹⁵

The Brexit effect

Given that the EII is a defence initiative outside of the governance of the European Union, UK participation in it will not be affected in any way by Brexit.

However, UK participation in an initiative that is so closely linked to EU defence projects, and PESCO in particular, has raised some concerns among pro-Brexit commentators who fear the initiative could involve Britain in an embryonic European Army 'by the back door'.¹⁶

The future of the EII

Once the initiative is mature enough, an invitation to participate could then be extended to other European countries that are politically willing and militarily capable.¹⁷ However, it is widely expected that it will still remain an exclusive initiative, limited in membership to no more than 14 or 15 participating States.

In the longer term, how the EII evolves will, like many European defence initiatives before it, rely on the continued political will of the participating States and whether it can exist alongside EU and NATO structures and complement their efforts, while at the same time avoiding duplication. Importantly, it will depend on how France as the lead nation behind this initiative can maintain its autonomy and exclusivity while rebuffing efforts by Germany to tie the EII into EU structures and EU-led projects such as PESCO, which Germany has clearly stated as an expectation.

And as Maxime Lebrun, a Research Fellow at the International Centre for Defence and Security has also observed "until it is first tested in action, the EII will remain a paper tiger".¹⁸

¹⁵ HL Deb 2 July 2018, c442

¹⁶ See for example, "Nine states to launch joint military force as Paris pushes for post-Brexit crisis defence group", *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 June 2018

¹⁷ Although there are no specific criteria for membership, participating States would be expected to have a common perception of European security concerns; a strong compatibility with NATO and the EU; the ability to deploy a network of liaison officers to French staffs; the ability to deploy effective capabilities in various scenarios contributing to an autonomous European capability in the field; a strong commitment to European security by active engagement in operations and a long term defence effort ([French Ministry of Defense](#), 30 August 2018)

¹⁸ Maxime Lebrun, "[Behind the European Intervention Initiative: an expeditionary coalition of the willing?](#)", 5 July 2018

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