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DRAFT OPINION

of the Committee on Budgets

for the Committee on Foreign Affairs

on the European Defence Union
(2016/2052(INI))

Rapporteur: Esteban González Pons

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Budgets calls on the Committee on Foreign Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Notes that, with around EUR 200 billion of annual military spending, European countries are unable to avert the deterioration of their security environment and to weigh on global affairs because of fragmented defence policies that create inefficiencies and hinder their force projection; believes that a more integrated framework for defence could result in significant savings, additional capabilities and more sustained investment; recalls that, according to 'cost of non-Europe' estimates, annual efficiency gains in this area could range between EUR 26 billion in the less optimistic scenarios and EUR 130 billion;
2. Underlines that, at a time when public support for the EU is being called into question in some Member States, defence is an area where the individual and collective benefits of more Europe can be easily demonstrated, especially regarding the likely challenges to EU's standing as a strategic actor following Brexit;
3. Believes that common funding has a key role to play in incentivising the use of mechanisms whose potential remains largely untapped, such as permanent structured cooperation and EU Battlegroups; calls, therefore, for the Athena mechanism to be expanded and for consideration to be given to alternative funding for military expenditure in order to do away with the 'costs lie where they fall' principle; stresses that, in this context, the EU budget should be able to fund the administrative costs of establishing strategic structures, such as joint operational headquarters; calls also for more ambitious civilian missions that are better integrated in the policy cycle and in the range of available instruments;
4. Urges the Member States to engage more actively in cooperative projects, e.g. research programmes or pooling and sharing of assets; supports, in this framework, the proposed preparatory action on defence research which should pave the way for a dedicated programme;
5. Believes that the time is ripe for unfreezing the budget of the European Defence Agency, and is convinced that more should be done to close the investment gap in defence capabilities, including via EU innovative financing; endorses, finally, the proposal for a 'European Semester' on defence, whereby Member States would coordinate their defence spending plans in an open process involving the European Parliament and the national parliaments.