

“Security for Whom?” Civil society organisations from across the spectrum urge EU decision-makers to reject the military budget surge and invest in human security instead

Open Letter initiated by TNI, ENAAT, Stop ReArm Europe

17 June 2026

Dear Heads of States and Governments,

In the run-up to the next European Council taking place this week, at which you will discuss the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2028–2034), with a view to reaching a final agreement by the end of the year, **civil society representatives from across the spectrum are calling on you to oppose the EU’s military budget surge and ensure taxpayers’ money is invested in what truly protects people: health, housing, education, human rights, peacebuilding, the environment, and social welfare. In short, the next EU budget should prioritise human security, not increased military spending or unchecked support for business.**

On 14 June, over 12,000 people demonstrated in Brussels, calling for “Welfare not Warfare”. The following day, more than 70 representatives of grassroots movements, national and European CSOs and NGOs, trade unions, and experts on peace, climate, health, social justice and human rights met to discuss the impact of rising military budgets on public policy and people’s lives. They raised alarm about budget shifts at both national and EU level, discussed alternative budget allocations, and are calling on you to halt the drastic increase in EU military spending. Instead, they urge you to preserve and earmark civilian funds for the urgent challenges facing people in Europe and beyond: environmental polycrisis¹ (e.g. climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution), rising poverty, discrimination and inequality, including in access to public services ranging from education to healthcare and housing.

The proposed Competitiveness Fund under the 2028–2034 MFF would allocate €131 billion to armament and space, around five times more than in the previous budget cycle², while dedicated health and environmental spending is being removed, and the European Social Fund³, the Cohesion policy and the Common agricultural policy are facing cuts. Additionally, EU civilian and regional funds are increasingly being diverted for military purposes under the current MFF⁴, a trend that will intensify under the next MFF with easier access for the arms industry to other civil funding pots⁵. This comes on top of the sharp rise in military spending at national level, which in many EU countries goes hand in hand with austerity measures, cuts to public services and the welfare state, and efforts to attract private investment into essential services.⁶

Moreover, under the banner of “simplification”, the EU is stripping away oversight and restrictions on the development, production and sale of weapons and military technology, to the benefit of an industry whose products are already being used in wars, genocide and human rights abuses around the world.⁷

1 https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/environmental-outlook-on-the-triple-planetary-crisis_257ffb6-en/full-report.html

2 <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/military-and-related-spending-in-the-mff-2028-34-proposal>

3 https://easpd.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/Policy_Papers/JointStatement_Building_on_What_Works.pdf

4 <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/eu-military-spending-until-2027>

5 <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/military-and-related-spending-in-the-mff-2028-34-proposal>

6 For example <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/finland-spend-32-gdp-defence-by-2030-despite-austerity-2026-04-23/>; <https://www.reuters.com/business/new-dutch-government-plans-freedom-tax-fund-defence-spending-2026-01-30/>; <https://www.reuters.com/world/french-pm-stakes-political-survival-budget-squeeze-2025-07-15/>

7 See for example <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/11/sudan-french-manufactured-weapons-system-identified-in-conflict-new-investigation/>; Report of Delàs Center, ECP and IDHC: Arms trade, conflicts and human rights. Analysis of European arms exports to countries in armed conflict and human rights violations (2020);

We call on Members of the European Parliament and EU governments to:

- 1. Reject the proposed €131 billion defence, security and space envelope in the 2028–2034 MFF and halt the militarisation of the EU budget.**
- 2. Redirect EU resources towards human security, e.g. public health, housing, education, care, environmental and climate action, anti-poverty measures, anti-racism, equality, active citizenship, peacebuilding and international cooperation.**
- 3. Protect civilian EU funds from military capture, including cohesion, home affairs, regional development, research, international cooperation, environmental and social funds. EU money intended for social, environmental or regional goals must not be diverted to arms companies.**
- 4. Create a binding human rights, environmental and due diligence exclusion framework for EU funding, preventing public money from going to companies involved in war crimes, occupation, repression, genocide, environmental destruction or serious human rights abuses.**
- 5. Increase EU funding for diplomacy, mediation, peacebuilding and support for civil society, rather than prioritising military procurement and arms production.**

To illustrate our demands and be concrete, the proposed €131 billion defence, security and space envelope under the 2028–2034 MFF could instead finance...

- ...around 1,5 year of the EU's annual energy-sector climate investment deficit⁸ (87bn/year), or more than one year of the EU's building-related climate investment deficit (€120bn/year)⁹
- ...nearly 30 times the EU4Health programme's current 2021–27 budget¹⁰
- ...more than two years of the EU's social and affordable housing investment gap¹¹
- ...almost 12 years of the additional investment needed to meet the EU's 2030 childcare targets.¹² (11bn/year)
- ...more than 13 times the combined budget allocated in 2021–2027 under the international cooperation thematic lines for peace, human rights, civil society & global issues as well as for the EU Rapid Response Actions¹³
- ...more than five times the minimum €25 billion humanitarian aid budget that civil society is calling to secure for 2028–2034¹⁴

These are not abstract trade-offs. They affect the childcare places, hospital waiting times, housing costs and energy bills your constituents face every day. Every euro locked into this seven-year envelope is a euro not invested in the services your constituents are asking you to protect.

More military spending will not solve our social, economic, environmental, and political problems.¹⁵ On the contrary, it deepens them: by diverting labour power and financial resources, entrenching authoritarian politics, and fuelling arms races which in turn lead to conflicts, human rights violations, and displacement.

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20171127IPR88940/yemen-meps-renew-their-call-for-an-eu-arms-embargo-against-saudi-arabia>

⁸ https://www.i4ce.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/The-State-of-Europes-Climate-Investment-2025-edition_V2.pdf

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ https://health.ec.europa.eu/funding/eu4health-programme-2021-2027-vision-healthier-european-union_en

¹¹ <https://pes.cor.europa.eu/article/affordable-housing-needs-europe-europe-needs-affordable-housing>

¹² <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/esde-2024/chapters/chapter-3-3-1.html>

¹³ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-technical-assistance/funding-instruments/global-europe-neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument_en

¹⁴ <https://eplo.org/eplo-publications/joint-call-ensuring-that-the-global-europe-regulation-strengthens-the-eus-ability-to-address-fragility>

¹⁵ <https://www.greenpeace.org/static/planet4-italy-stateless/2023/11/d4d111bc-arming-europe.pdf>

The world's militaries are already estimated to produce around 5.5% of total global greenhouse gas emissions¹⁶. Increased military spending will accelerate environmental destruction and will further lock Europe into a dangerous fossil fuel dependency, negatively impacting our energy security.

The next EU budget is an opportunity to choose a different path, one rooted in democracy, diplomacy, peacebuilding and conflict prevention, social justice, protection of human rights, environmental security and investment in human dignity. A 2018 UN-World Bank report showed that every €1 invested in peacebuilding can save €16 in costs due to conflict.¹⁷ A 2024 IMF study found that every \$1 spent on conflict prevention saves up to \$103 in potential costs for humanitarian and securitised interventions.¹⁸ Investing in social spending, fighting poverty, and reducing inequality is also the most effective way to counter the rise of the far-right.¹⁹

By working towards this, you will live up to the promise of a project that has long been presented as a peace initiative aimed, among others, at preventing a new arms race between rival military powers and at enabling everyone to live in dignity.

We urge you to use any opportunity to reshape the MFF before agreement is reached at the end of the year. We call on you to ensure that the next EU budget protects people and the planet, rather than locking Europe into a future of militarisation, austerity and insecurity.

Thank you for your attention. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely yours,

The Transnational Institute (TNI)
European Network Against the Arms Trade (ENAAT)
Stop ReArm Europe
Arci - Italy
Association of Greek Conscientious Objectors
Attac Austria
Centre Delàs d'Estudis per la Pau - Spain
Centro Pace ecologia e diritti umani - Rovereto, Italy
Counter Balance
Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO)
Debt for Climate
DiEM25 in Netherlands
European Bureau for Conscientious Objection to military service (EBCO-BEOC)
European Council on Refugee and Exiles (ECRE)
Equinox Initiative for Racial Justice
EuroMemo Group

¹⁶ <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/climate-collateral-2pagebriefing>

¹⁷ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/4c36fca6-c7e0-5927-b171-468b0b236b59>

¹⁸ www.imf.org/en/publications/wp/issues/2024/12/17/the-urgency-of-conflict-prevention-a-macroeconomic-perspective-559143
¹⁹ e.g.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348931106_Welfare_state_policies_and_far_right_party_support_moderating_insecurity_effects_among_different_social_groups_West_European_Politics_-_pre-proof_version; Klein M. - The Political Costs of Austerity.pdf

European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)
International Peace Bureau (IPB)
Inštitút ľudských práv Human Rights Institute - Hungary
Kerk en Vrede - Netherlands
Lex Innocentium 21st Century - Ireland
Lista Civica Italiana - Italy
Nonviolent Peaceforce
Observatoire des armements - France
Ohne Rüstung Leben - Germany
Palestine Solidarity Cluj-Napoca - PS.CJ - Romania
Peace Direct
Privacy International
Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA)
Rete Italiana Pace Disarmo - Italy
Salud por Derecho - Spain
Socialist Vision - Romania
SOLIDAR
Statewatch
Stop Rearm Europe - Italy
Stop Wapenhandel - Netherlands
Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society - Sweden
UAntwerp for Palestine - Belgium
Vrede vzw - Belgium
Vredesactie - Belgium
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Germany (WILPF Germany)
World BEYOND War