
FRANCE, GERMANY TO TABLE DEFENCE PLAN AT BRATISLAVA MINISTERIAL MEETING

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EurActiv

At the informal defence ministerial in Bratislava starting today (27 September) France and Germany will make the case for the EUs most ambitious defence plan in almost two decades, aiming to persuade sceptical easterners and avoid a showdown with Britain over its military future outside the bloc.

EU defence ministers, including Britains Michael Fallon, will discuss Franco-German proposals in the hope of whittling down a host of ideas into a coherent strategy for their leaders to formally back at a summit in December.

GERMANY AND FRANCE SEEK STRONGER EU DEFENCE AFTER BREXIT

Germany and France have outlined plans to deepen European military cooperation, a document showed on Monday (12 September), as Britains exit from the European Union removes one of the biggest obstacles to stronger EU defence in tandem with NATO.

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Britain, which retains full voting rights until it leaves the European Union, is adamant the plans must not weaken NATO and it has some support from wary Poland and the Baltic nations.

The ideas to share national assets, deepen cooperation in EU missions and establish a joint EU military headquarters have emerged as the most tangible way for governments to pull together following Britains referendum to quit the bloc.

FRANCE LEADING THE CAMPAIGN FOR EU MILITARY HQ

France and Germany both support the idea of creating a European military headquarters, but Paris has the most to gain from the project. EurActiv France reports.

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Building on stop-start initiatives dating back to the late 1990s, the plans could strengthen the European Unions ability to act without the United States to respond to challenges on its borders, from failing states to a more aggressive Russia.

European military spending is a fraction of the United States and only a handful of countries, including Britain, Estonia and Greece, spend generously on defence.

The initiative is designed for a strong Europe, said Germanys Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen. This Europe also wants to have good relations with Britain in the future, especially in the area of defence, she told Reuters before the meeting.

Britain has blocked such plans for years, fearing a European army run from Brussels. France, which along with Britain is Europes main military power, now sees an opportunity to show leadership without London in the way.

Proposals include increasing European spending on military missions, jointly developing assets such as helicopters and drones, expanding peacekeeping abroad and building stronger defences against state-sponsored hackers in cyberspace.

In Bratislava, the European Commission will also make a pitch for common EU defence bonds to raise money for research.

But the political momentum could still stall.

Britain has vowed to defend its military interests for as long as it remains in the European Union, fearful that the ambitions of the remaining 27 governments could suck financial resources away from NATO.

IN MAIDEN UN SPEECH, MAY SAYS UK NOT TURNING AWAY FROM THE WORLD

British Prime Minister Theresa May told leaders yesterday (20 September) that her country will not turn away from the world after the shock vote to leave the European Union, seeking to allay fears over the future unity of the West.

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London could find support from eastern Europeans such as Poland that also worry about undermining NATO. Most EU countries including Germany and France are members of the US-led alliance and contribute to EU and NATO rapid reaction forces.

The diplomacy in Bratislava will be about showing London that stronger EU defences are in NATOs interest, according to Urmas Paet, a former Estonian foreign minister and now a liberal lawmaker in the European Parliament.

The EU also needs Britain, one of the few European nations able to lead large military missions, as a partner.

NATO wants adequate support and Britain sees some aspects of the EUs ambitions that are useful, say on terrorism and cyber security, Paet said. We just need to avoid duplication.

Kaynak/Source: