
Europe's Security Starts at the Eastern Border



Non-paper of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU's eastern regions bordering Russia, Belarus and Ukraine: Strong regions for a safe Europe



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The Member States supporting this non-paper welcome the European Commission's decision to prepare and announce a dedicated Communication on the EU's Eastern border regions (EBRs). This initiative recognises a fundamental reality: Europe's security, resilience and long-term stability begin at its Eastern border. These regions are the Union's frontline, exposed to the most direct security, hybrid and geopolitical pressures, and therefore require sustained and targeted EU-level engagement.

The Communication rightly places specific focus on EU Eastern border Member States bordering aggressor countries – the Russian Federation and Belarus – acknowledging that the challenges they face are more acute, persistent, and multidimensional than elsewhere in the Union. Heightened security and hybrid threats, sustained pressure on national and regional economies, labour markets and social systems, declining investment attractiveness, social and psychological strain on border regions, and environmental vulnerabilities jointly undermine development prospects and hinder economic and social convergence. These pressures are persistent and structural in nature and cannot be addressed through standard policy tools alone.

EBRs are simultaneously expected to strengthen security and resilience while sustaining economic activity, social cohesion and the viability of rural and border areas. In response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the ongoing threat to EU security, Member States along the Eastern border have already made targeted decisions allocating substantial amounts from national budgets to strengthen the EU's external border, build-up border infrastructure and control the EU's export and import. In addition, through the Mid-term Review of Cohesion Policy, significant amounts of funds have been redirected in EBRs towards security, resilience, defence-related capacities, military mobility and civil protection. While undoubtedly necessary, this redirection inevitably constrains investments in long-term economic, social, and territorial development, thereby affecting the competitiveness and growth potential in these regions.

In light of the ongoing situation, the Communication constitutes an important first step forward. The proposed initiatives – including the Eastern Flank Watch, the European Drone Defence Initiative, and targeted hotspot investments as a matter of priority along the EU military mobility corridors of critical importance in the Eastern external borders and regions, focusing on strengthening cross-border collaboration with candidate countries – contribute to a more coherent European response to the challenges faced by the EBRs. The proposed EastInvest platform has the potential to stimulate economic activity, provided that it delivers added value through new solutions and effectively acts as a catalyst for additional investments.

However, the scale and persistence of the challenges faced by Eastern border regions exceed what Member States can address through national budgets, reprioritisation of current instruments, or proposed national allocations in the next MFF. Meaningful implementation of the Communication will therefore require **additional EU-level support and adequate budgetary backing**. In this context, the EU budget and a new financial perspective have a crucial role to play in counterbalancing the



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economic, social and security costs borne disproportionately by the Eastern border Member States and regions along the Eastern border, thus ensuring that all citizens have an effective right to stay in their region.

Looking ahead, the undersigned Member States underline the importance of translating the Communication into practical and timely action when it comes to the NUTS2 Eastern border regions. This should include, inter alia:

- rapid operationalisation of the EastInvest platform with tailored investment solutions reflecting the specific profile of EU Eastern border regions;
- dedicated calls and priority criteria for the EBR projects under directly managed EU programmes, including future instruments under the EU competitiveness, research, connectivity and security frameworks;
- a review of state aid regimes to address the specific challenges of the Eastern border regions and a boost of new investments;
- combined efforts to prevent and counter the escalation of the Russian hybrid warfare against terrestrial, aerial, maritime, space, and digital domains, including by using dedicated funding from the current and future EU-funded programmes;
- a comprehensive financial support to the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework, in particular a top-up under Heading I and targeted financial support under Heading II with the aim to enhance their defense, preparedness, resilience and security capabilities as well as address challenges in their economic, social and territorial convergence and development.

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Finally, the Member States stress that the situation along the EU's Eastern border remains dynamic and may further evolve and deteriorate. For this reason, we invite the European institutions to maintain continuous monitoring of developments in the Eastern border regions and to stand ready to adapt the EU response accordingly. Sustained political attention to these regions is not a regional concern – it is a strategic investment in the security and resilience of the European Union as a whole, and is necessary for continuing convergence.

Together for a Safer Europe
