

Position Paper

Standardization as a Strategic Enabler for European Defence

February 2026

Executive Summary

Europe faces growing geopolitical pressures and a rapidly evolving defence landscape. To build a **resilient and competitive** European defence sector, standardization must be integrated early and systematically into defence policy, planning, procurement, and capability development.

The war in Ukraine has made defence a top priority for Europe. Numerous policies focus on increasing European defence capabilities through greater cooperation and coordination of national defence forces, developing measures for interoperability, joint procurement, reducing industrial fragmentation, and strengthening supply chains.

Our Position: CEN and CENELEC underline the possible key role of European standards in European defence policy to ensure interoperability, technological sovereignty, and a strong industrial base across the Single Market.

Strategic Need: Fragmentation, duplication, and scattered information on existing dual-use standards¹ prevent efficient cooperation, driving costs, increasing delays, and creating unnecessary risks. The conditions for the defence community to coordinate standardization needs and priorities is essential for strengthening European defence capabilities.

Value Proposition: The European Standardization System (ESS) provides a neutral, consensus-based platform that delivers industry-driven technical solutions through European standards. Standards accelerate the adoption of civil innovations for defence use while strengthening the Single Market.

¹ <https://edstar.eda.europa.eu>

Call to Action: EU institutions, Member States, EDA, NATO actors, and industry should embed standardization in defence initiatives from the beginning, allowing the ability to align funding and procurement procedures with standards, and therefore coordinate through the ESS to avoid ad-hoc, non-European solutions.

Background

This paper sets out CEN and CENELEC's strategic position on defence standardization.

It proposes four areas of focus: (1) improve policy coherence and strategic coordination; (2) establish the ESS as a strategic technical enabler; (3) deliver tangible value to and from industry, (4) Integrating CEN and CENELEC Members.

Addressing these focus areas will give access to new markets and defence procurement opportunities, increased national engagement, and uptake of standards in defence programmes. Effective defence requires coordinated action across EU institutions, national governments, agencies, and industry to ensure interoperability and reduce duplication.

Standardization opportunity: Dual-use, market-ready standards support increasing interoperability, security, safety, and performance—shorten time-to-deployment and reducing the need for bespoke military specifications.

The [2025 EU White Paper on Defence- Readiness 2030](#) calls for an integrated single market for defence procurement. Defence increasingly depends on new and emerging technologies, many originating in the civilian sector.

Dual-use standards allow civilian technologies to be modified for defence purposes, help SMEs access defence markets, and strengthen Europe's industrial base. Currently the EDSTAR is being used to define these dual-use standards by targeting European Norms (ENs), ISO and IEC Standards and STANAGs. This tool, while useful, could be used more strategically and should be allocated more resources to remain up to date and accessible.

1. Definition of Problem

The current lack of a dedicated, strategic framework for European defence standardization is an important opportunity to engage defence stakeholders and ensure standardization is focused on meeting their urgent and long-term needs.

Despite the proven value and interest of dual-use standards, stakeholder coordination of standards uses, and development remains uneven across Europe. Information on existing dual-use standards is scattered and difficult to access, inhibiting their referencing in procurement, contracts and manufacturing.

➔ *Impact: Fragmentation, duplication, and scattered information on existing dual-use standards prevent efficient cooperation and drive cost, delay, and risk.*

2. Strategic Importance

Standardization is essential to European defence. The ESS must be at the table with policymakers and programme managers from the outset of defence initiatives.

Doing so will:

- Reduce fragmentation by aligning requirements with established European standards and pathways.
- Protect strategic autonomy by prioritizing European standards and minimizing reliance on non-European frameworks where appropriate.
- Accelerate innovation uptake by providing verifiable, consensus-based technical solutions that adapt civil technologies for defence applications.
- Strengthen the Single Market by opening access, expanding supplier participation, and improving cross-border compatibility.

This approach aligns with broader strategic goals (e.g., strengthening the Single Market and achieving technological sovereignty).

The consequence of not acting is continued fragmentation, duplication, and reliance on costly, bespoke, non-European solutions.

3. CEN and CENELEC position

Our Position: CEN and CENELEC underline the possible key role of European standards in European defence policy. The ESS provides a neutral, consensus-based platform that delivers industry-driven technical solutions through European standards.

By integrating the ESS at the outset of defence initiatives, our position ensures:

- Interoperability.
- Technological sovereignty.
- A strong industrial base across the Single Market.

The strategic advantage of this position is accelerating the adoption of civil innovations for defence use while strengthening the Single Market.

3.1 Strategic Objectives – 4 Strategic Focuses

The four strategic focus areas set out the organization's objectives.

Focus Area	Goal	Benefits
Focus 1: Policy Coherence & Strategic Coordination	Embed standardization as a core, early component of European defence policy and programmes.	Positions ESS as a trusted partner and embeds the "civil standards-first" approach.
Focus 2: ESS as Strategic Technical Enabler ⁵²	Maximise ESS use to deliver verifiable technical solutions for interoperability and technological sovereignty.	The ESS is the trusted platform to achieve compatibility and accelerate dual-use technology integration.
Focus 3: Tangible Value for Industry (incl. SMEs)	Position standards as essential tools that drive efficiency, market access, and competitiveness.	Harmonized standards lower entry barriers, streamline compliance, and reduce product development costs.
Focus 4: CEN and CENELEC Member Partnerships	Ensure CEN and CENELEC members are integrated to enable the defence strategy with measurable business and reputational benefits.	Members are essential partners for national defence stakeholders and catalysts for services.

4. Recommendations

Focus Area	Key Actions
Focus 2: ESS as Strategic Technical Enabler	<p>Create Fast-Track pathways for defence-critical domains.</p> <p>Catalogue dual-use standards (discoverable and maintained – EDSTAR database).</p> <p>Develop conformity assessment guidance tailored to defence applications.</p>
Focus 3: Tangible Value for Industry	<p>Publish SME-oriented implementation guides and cost-of-compliance toolkits.</p> <p>Offer standards-aligned procurement guidelines.</p> <p>Through the members offer training on standards for defence suppliers and procurement agencies.</p>
Focus 4: Member Integration	<i>For discussion and collaboration for strategic national coordination.</i>

Call to Action (s):

- EU Institutions: Include ESS input in policy development and participation in

defence programmes. Recognise role of standards for deployment of research outputs and innovation.

- Defence agencies: Embed coordination on standardization in plans.
- Industry & SMEs: Incorporate standards and contribution to standardization in strategic plans, deploy standards in operations and conformity assessment.
- ESS Community: Prioritize defence-relevant work items, fast-track where feasible, and provide clear, accessible guidance to users.

5. Expected Impact

Policy Effectiveness: Reduced fragmentation and duplication by integrating standards into defence planning and procurement. Reduced need for bespoke military specifications and reliance on non-European standards.

Competitiveness: Clear pathways for adapting civil technology to defence needs. Strengthened industrial base through dual-use standards that support innovation.

Resilience: Wider and stronger supplier base; increased SME participation in joint procurement. Customer specifications widely accepted and needs met efficiently in due time and reduced cost.

System Benefits: ESS fully engaged. Systematic uptake of standards in defence programmes.

6. Conclusion

Key Takeaways:

- Recognize standardization as a strategic instrument for the European defence Single Market, building sovereignty and resilience.
- Coordinate urgently on standardization across stakeholders to avoid bespoke solutions and to accelerate interoperability.
- Alignment of supply and demand through practical tools to deliver measurable value.

About CEN and CENELEC

CEN (European Committee for Standardization) and CENELEC (European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization) are recognized by the European Union (EU) and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) as European Standardization Organizations responsible for developing standards at European level, as per European Regulation 1025/2012. The members are the National Standards Bodies (CEN) and National Electrotechnical Committees (CENELEC) from 34 European countries. European Standards (ENs) and other standardization deliverables are adopted by CEN and CENELEC, are accepted and recognized in all of these countries. These standards contribute to enhancing safety, improving quality, facilitating cross-border trade and strengthening of the European Single Market. They are developed through a process of collaboration among experts nominated by business and industry, research institutions, consumer and environmental organizations, trade unions and other societal stakeholders. CEN and CENELEC work to promote the international alignment of standards in the framework of technical cooperation agreements with ISO (International Organization for Standardization) and the IEC (International Electrotechnical Commission).