

BREAKING: EU leaders adopt 5bn euros fund to train and equip security forces and militaries worldwide that risk fueling armed conflict

Today, EU leaders adopted the European Peace Facility (EPF), a new fund that will allow the EU to train militaries around the world and equip them with lethal weapons. This is despite experts - including civil society - raising their concerns that the fund could worsen conflicts and contribute to human rights abuses in unstable regions.

This EU fund will replace several European foreign and defence policy funds such as the African Peace Facility which finances security assistance and other military operations in African countries including Somalia and the Sahel region. The EPF differs, however, from its predecessors. Firstly, it is global in its mandate. Secondly – and crucially – it opens the door for the EU to fund 'lethal equipment' such as machine guns, pistols and ammunition. The EU is not allowed to spend its budget on weapons, so EU member states have circumvented the EU treaties prohibiting this by creating an off-budget fund. This marks a troubling change in EU foreign policy.

As European countries are starting to plan how to distribute these funds, civil society experts, analysts and MEPs in Europe and Africa react:

Note that each organisation should only be attributed to their own quote.

Quotes in English

"We are very worried about the recent adoption of the EPF - despite civil society's warnings, the necessary safeguards to ensure the activities are conducted in accordance with the EU and Member State's human rights obligations were not included in the final text. The possibility for EU Member States to transfer lethal weapons to armed forces in the Sahel without adequate control is particularly alarming, given these forces' implication in many human rights violations in the region."

Drissa Traoré, Coordinator of the Joint Office of FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights) and AMDH (Association Malienne des Droits de l'Homme) in Mali

"Providing weapons and ammunition to fragile countries is not the expertise or added value of the European Union. This, like most train and equip endeavours will cost human lives and fail to address the root causes of insecurity."

Sonya Reines-Djivanides, Executive Director, European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) (Brussels)

"For us in Mali, stabilization means stabilization of the military status quo, and this needs to change."

Assitan Diallo, President, Association des Femmes Africaines pour la Recherche et le Développement (AFARD).
Mali

"This fund allows European countries to sell weapons to conflict-torn countries without robust controls. This flies in the face of the EU's aim to preserve peace. In many of these countries, the black market for weapons is thriving and this move by the EU could make it easier for local militia and armed groups to get their hands on weapons, causing only more instability and suffering."

"Instead of fueling conflict, the EU needs to listen to people on the ground. In the Sahel, our local partners demand good governance, policies that work for all communities and a strong civil society."

Julien Vaissier, Oxfam EU Conflict and Humanitarian Advisor (Brussels)

“Today marks a concerning moment for the EU. There are serious risks involved with training and equipping security forces in conflict areas. As an organisation working with people affected by conflict around the world, we see how these activities often escalate conflict, and can also lead to attacks on civilians. The EU and its member states must urgently put in place measures to reduce these risks, and must be responsive and accountable in the case of abuses.”

Anna Timmerman, Director, PAX (Netherlands)

“The decision to include weapons in the European Peace Facility stands in stark contradiction with the EU’s commitments to peace. In a context of growing authoritarianism around the world, boosting the combat capability of repressive partners will have unintended consequences and fuel conflict and instability. EU leaders should refrain from training and equipping security forces in countries where assistance may end up in the wrong hands or be used for repression or abuses. Going forward, the EU should work closely with civil society in conflict-affected countries to ensure that EPF-funded assistance contributes to human security and accountability of security institutions.”

Tuuli Rätty, EU Policy and Advocacy Officer, Saferworld (Brussels)

“The EPF features a risky innovation: it enables the EU, for the first time, to deliver military training and lethal equipment to third states, ad-hoc military coalitions or peace support operations”.

“Despite the EU’s endeavours to mitigate risks, such equipment can be misused to further violence, as governments of fragile states often have poor governance and management systems to handle it”.

“The EU should not provide lethal equipment in fragile states, and instead prioritise other assistance measures. It should also shape its interventions within political strategies whose priorities are governance reforms, community reconciliation and the restoration of the social fabric”.

Giuseppe Famà, Head of EU Affairs, International Crisis Group (Brussels)

Building the capacity of local security and defense forces can provide opportunities for enhancing the protection of civilians, but force assistance can also lead to substantial risks for civilians in conflict as partners may have different capabilities and protection frameworks.

*As the European Union develops more robust approaches to security force assistance through the creation of the EPF, CIVIC recommends civilian harm mitigation be integrated at all levels of partnership through the implementation of **strong and consistent safeguards**. Local and international **civil society and grassroots communities** should be closely consulted and coordinated with at all stages of EPF-funded measures.”*

Beatrice Godefroy, CIVIC Europe Director

“In a high level conference on the security crisis in the Sahel, held in Bamako in February 2021, researchers, experts, Western and African diplomats, senior officials of African governments, as well as officers of security and defence forces all recognised the insolence and limits of the current military approach to fight against the insecurity in this area. So if all the experts concerned agree, what justifies the enthusiasm of European official to provide additional weapons to the Sahel ?”

Olivier Guiryanan, Executive Director of BUCOFORE, Chad

"The EPF will most likely contribute to arms proliferation in unstable regions. Recipients identified as "friends" and "partners" today might transform into "enemies" tomorrow. The EU should not look at "security" through "military" lenses but rather focus on "human security", addressing the needs of each individual and population affected by violent conflict. It should fight the root causes, not the symptoms. The EU can provide economic perspectives and stability via development cooperation, mediation and support for local peacebuilders. "Train & equip" programs for the military might harm the EU's potential as a "bridge builder" in international relations."

Dr. Martina Fischer Policy Advisor, Bread for the World (Protestant Development Agency), Berlin, Germany

"Delivering weapons to build peace: This is a risky bet, and it has been lost many times when we look at the incidents where exported arms ended up with warlords or armed forces and used to attack civilians. To prevent such outcomes, the EPF requires highest levels of transparency and control, including parliamentary scrutiny. However, the European Parliament has so far been left out in the process. At present, member states demand joint European action but are not willing to give up their national sovereignty rights. But ultimately, control and monitoring at the European level is the logical solution. Only in this way can we move forward to strengthen pan-European cooperation to ensure peace and security globally."

Hannah Neumann, MEP, Group of the Greens / European Free Alliance

Quotes in French

"Nous sommes très préoccupés par l'adoption de la Facilité européenne pour la paix : malgré les mises en garde de la société civile, les garanties nécessaires pour s'assurer que les activités soient conduites dans le respect des obligations de l'UE et des États Membres en matière de droits humains n'ont pas été intégrées le texte. La possibilité pour les États Membres de l'UE de transférer, sans contrôle suffisant, des armes létales aux forces armées du Sahel nous inquiète particulièrement, ces forces étant à l'origine d'une grande partie des violations commises dans la région."

Drissa Traoré, Coordinator of the Joint Office of FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights) and AMDH (Association Malienne des Droits de l'Homme), Mali

"Pour nous la stabilisation signifie la stabilisation du statut quo militaire et cela doit changer."

Assitan Diallo, President, Association des Femmes Africaines pour la Recherche et le Développement (AFARD), Mali

« J'ai participé à une conférence de Haut Niveau sur la gestion de la crise sécuritaire au Sahel à Bamako en février 2021. Des chercheurs, experts, diplomates occidentaux et africains, hauts responsables des gouvernements africains, officiers des forces de sécurité et de défense ont tous reconnu l'impertinence et les limites de l'approche actuelle ayant la lutte armée comme socle, pour lutter contre l'insécurité dans cette zone. Alors, qu'est-ce qui justifie l'engouement des responsables européens à fournir des armes supplémentaires au Sahel? »

Olivier Guiryanan, Directeur Exécutif de BUCOFORE, Chad