



## France and Moldova Sign New Defence Cooperation Agreement

Amanda Dziubińska, Jakub Pieńkowski

On 7 March, the French minister of the armed forces and Moldovan minister of defence, in the presence of presidents Emmanuel Macron and Maia Sandu in Paris, signed a defence cooperation agreement. It is part of France's intensified commitment to the security of the eastern part of Europe after the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. French support will help Moldova, an EU candidate country, to modernise its armed forces, which will increase its resilience to Russian attempts at destabilisation.

### What is provided for in the new agreement?

The French-initiated defence cooperation document updates an older one signed in 1998 that allowed Moldovan cadets and soldiers to be educated and trained in France. The new one provides for an extension of French assistance in building Moldova's modern defence system, including a detailed multi-year cooperation plan to be developed by a bilateral commission. The French army will support Moldova's by offering exchanges of experience, joint trainings and exercises, internships, consultations, conferences, courses, and specialisations. These will cover defence policy, military information and telecommunications technologies, military topography and medicine, airspace control and management, logistics, personnel, financial and budget management, and participation in international missions.

### What is the condition of Moldova's defences?

Moldova's defence potential is small—about 5,000 soldiers and 1,000 carabinieri (former Interior Ministry troops). The armed forces lack tanks, combat helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, modern artillery, and anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons. Moldova's defence budget has increased from 0.38% in 2022 to 0.65% of GDP in 2024, but it is still only around €100 million. Meanwhile, the 2020 "Army 2030" plan assumes that only by spending around €250 million over 10 years can the armed forces modernise; currently, around

90% of its equipment is post-Soviet. Moldova counts on donations and grants from the U.S. and EU partners, for example it received €87 million from the European Peace Facility (EPF) in 2021-2023 for the purchase of vehicles and equipment. At the end of 2023, through the EPF, France provided it with a mobile Ground Master 200 radar worth €14 million to be the nucleus of a modern air defence system; Moldova has been helpless in the face of repeated deliberated violations of its territory by Russian missiles.

### Why is France intensifying cooperation with Moldova?

France wants to limit the risk of Russia destabilising the EU's eastern neighbourhood. The agreement with Moldova is part of a broader tightening of cooperation with the countries of NATO's Eastern Flank and the EU, in particular with [Romania, where France has taken command of the Alliance's multinational battlegroup](#). Macron wants to avoid repeating the mistake of a lack of diplomatic initiative in the region. Before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, France showed little interest in developing partnerships in Eastern Europe and left the initiative in this respect to Germany. Macron admitted in June 2023 that these countries were right in diagnosing the security situation. The development of the war in Ukraine and the vision of limiting U.S. involvement prompted him to reorient his European policy. France wants to take greater responsibility for European security and seeks to strengthen its role in response to Russia's aggression by building partnerships with Eastern European countries. That is why France has become more

# PISM SPOTLIGHT

involved in protecting Moldova's sovereignty. The signing of the bilateral agreement is intended to be a continuation of the actions undertaken so far. At the initiative of France, Romania, and Germany, the international Moldova Support Platform was established in 2022 under which Western countries provide political and financial assistance to strengthen the Moldovan economy and accelerate reforms, bringing it closer to EU membership. By increasing its political involvement, France is also counting on investments by its companies in Moldova, including in the energy, natural resources management, and rail transport sectors.

## **How is France involved in cooperation with Moldova?**

Last September, for the first time in history, the French Armed Forces minister visited Chişinău. France also announced the establishment of a permanent military

attaché at the embassy. The visit is an example of activities aimed at promoting France as Moldova's main defence partner and playing a key role in the modernisation of its army. France hopes to implement new contracts financed by the EPF, including for Bastion armoured personnel carriers and Mistral anti-aircraft systems. It also wants to strengthen cooperation with Moldova in countering hybrid threats, complementing the activities of the [EU Partnership Mission](#). Macron confirmed French support for the peaceful reintegration of Moldova and the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria. After the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Macron changed his country's approach to EU enlargement and began to actively support Moldova's European aspirations. In particular, France offers assistance in integration with the European market and in further judicial reform and the fight against corruption.