



The Hague Centre  
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# NATO Pre Event Defence Recap

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**Editors:**

HCSS

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# Takeaways and Messages

On March 12, representatives of defence industry, governments, and international organisations gathered in The Hague for the NATO Summit pre-event on Defence Industry. This crucial event focused on the various aspects of scaling up defence industries, and strengthening defence capabilities and resilience of NATO allies and EU member states. With growing geopolitical challenges, the discussions emphasised increasing military production, enhancing economic resilience, and accelerating cooperation between governments and industry.

## Takeaways & Main messages

- Keynote speaker Ingrid Thijssen – President of The Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers VNO-NCW – underlined the **urgency for European countries to organise their own security**, stressing that we have all the ingredients to make this a success. Europe should **diversify its supply chains and increase cooperation with other like-minded states**.
- The second Keynote speaker, Dutch Minister of Defence Ruben Brekelmans, stressed that today's world is changing rapidly and the **coming months are crucial for Europe**. In his own words, **'big words should be followed by big actions'** in the realm of defence.
- The afternoon Keynote by the Minister for Arms Procurement and Personnel Gijs Tuinman of the Ministry of Defence – pressed for **breaking old habits, reducing bureaucracy**, review our approach and deliver.
- In a video message of Keith Webster – President of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Defense and Aerospace Council – the **need for cooperation between transatlantic partners** on defence matters was reiterated.
- At the end of the day, the first closing remarks of Reinette Klever – Minister for Foreign Trade and Development – highlighted the need for the Netherlands and Europe to stand strong in times of increasing geopolitical tensions. Klever **noted the ability of the Dutch industry to support this effort**, especially **through the Triple Helix Model** of government-academia-industry cooperation.
- The day was finally closed by Ingrid Thijssen – President of The Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers VNO-NCW again – summarizing the action points for industry and government:
  1. Leverage the 'can-do spirit' and already existing collaboration
  2. Focus on demand aggregation
  3. Focus on pre-financing
  4. Prioritize long-term contracts
  5. Secure concrete defence contracts before the NATO summit in June.

# Morning panel: scaling up defence efforts

The EU defence industry is still fragmented, with national interests often prevailing over common interests. In the first plenary panel, moderated by Michel Rademaker – Deputy Executive Director at the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies – the panellists discussed the urgency of scaling up defence production in the light of a changing geopolitical landscape.

- Robert Weaver – Deputy Assistant Secretary General Defence Investments NATO – highlighted that **without industry, there is no defence and no security**. In order to scale up fast, we would **need to aggregate our demand within Europe**.
- Lieutenant-General Elanor Boekholt-O’Sullivan – deputy Director General for Policy at the Ministry of Defence – **underscored the necessity of building trust in Europe** and moving forward, **taking a ‘leap of faith’ together**: it’s time to come to concrete action and contracts.
- Arnout Damen – CEO of Damen Shipyards Group – provided insight into the reality of many defence production companies. Often **the speed in which industry can ramp up is dependent on longer-term pledges by government** to procure products, so that businesses can **make the required investments in capacity** both within their own company and with their suppliers.
- Robert de Groot – the Vice President of the European Investment Bank – **called for more cooperation between funding institutions**, and announced the EIB would **bring together national investment organisations** to discuss further coordination and cooperation.



# Afternoon panel: Industry & Innovation – EU perspectives

Currently, the European Union lacks an integrated defence industrial base to support the strategic autonomy of the continent. In the afternoon plenary panel, moderated by Marc ter Haar of the American Chamber of Commerce, the topic of EU defence procurement was tackled. The panellists discussed which actions should be taken after the landmark Draghi and Niinistö reports on European Industry and Defence. During the discussion, the following suggestions were made:

- Hendrik-Jan van Veen – Managing Director Defence and Security at TNO – proposed not waiting for all EU countries to join common initiatives, but to **set up a ‘coalition of the willing’** with like-minded countries to harmonise and scale up production.
- Michel Karel – Vice President of GKN Fokker – further emphasised the need for **‘coalitions of the willing’ at a national, European and multilateral level**. Currently we are **lacking a unified multilateral agenda** to build the defence systems of the future. This needs to change.
- Theo Henrar – President of FME – noted that the Dutch industry can’t be a jack-of-all-trades. The **Dutch industry needs to choose industries where it already is strong, such as drones, sensors and semiconductors**, and scale up these capacities.
- Maurits van Os – Head of Industrial Policy at the Ministry of Defence – reiterated the need to **prioritise areas where we have a competitive advantage**, and just **starting out small with real initiatives instead of waiting for procedural changes**.

# Specialised breakout sessions

In addition to the Keynotes and plenary panels, six breakout sessions were organised in the morning and in the afternoon. The breakout sessions allowed for discussion on the topics of procurement, finance and R&D and innovation.

## Procurement breakouts

EU defence procurement is plagued by fragmentation, slow decision-making, lack of standardization and other bureaucratic hurdles. The procurement breakout sessions discussed ways to break these barriers:

- The morning procurement breakout session emphasised the urgent **need for speed, trust, and long-term commitment** in scaling up Europe's defence industry, with a strong focus on aggregating demand, **securing long-term contracts**, and fostering **cooperation between governments, industry, and start-ups**.
- The afternoon breakout session on NATO Cooperation in procurement emphasised the need for NATO countries to streamline defence procurement by aggregating demand, **reducing bureaucracy and increasing standardization** while at the same time balancing national interests and industrial competitiveness. It was also suggested that **NATO should learn from the EU's standard-setting power** in enforcing common defence standards.

## Finance breakouts

Improved access to finance is essential for the growth and sustainment of the defence industry. In the finance breakouts, finance professionals, industry and government went into discussion about overcoming the hurdles to effective defence financing.

- The morning finance breakout session highlighted the need for long-term, **stable investment in the defence industry**, emphasising the importance of **de-risking private capital, fostering public-private partnerships**, and ensuring that **institutional investors have the mandate to invest in defence projects**.
- In the afternoon panel on financing the defence industry build-up the priorities discussed were **overcoming the fragmentation of the internal market in the EU**, de-risking private investments at a European level, **ensuring predictable demand for defence companies** and **adapting financial frameworks like ESG to better align with security needs**.

## R&D & Innovation breakouts

Research and Innovation play a key role in the defence industry, but barriers to the effective implementation of innovation in defence capabilities remain. The R&D & Innovation breakout sessions discussed the leveraging of innovation in the defence sector and the role innovation can play in supporting the Ukrainian war effort.

- The morning defence innovation and spillovers session stressed that **innovation ecosystems are crucial for both technology development and implementation**. To optimize innovation there is a **need for clearer government signals to guide investment**, and to find the **right balance between regulation and innovation agility**.

- The afternoon panel on supporting the Ukrainian war effort emphasised the need for **increasing collaboration between Ukrainian and Dutch industries, overcoming bureaucratic challenges and preparing for post-war cooperation.**

The Ministry of Defence, VNO-NCW and HCSS look back on a fruitful day of discussions, a meeting of minds and of different domains about an ever more urgent topic. We would like to thank all the participants and the organisers for their contribution to make this day such a success.

If you are interested in the position paper *Scaling Up the European Defence Industry* that HCSS wrote in the run up to the event please follow [this link](#).

