



BELGIUM

NATO member



since 1949

Defence share in GDP

2017



PESCO projects

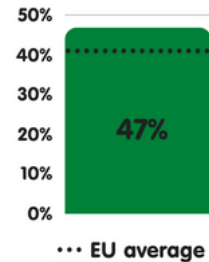
Leader



Participant



Trust in EU



What does the country fear?

Belgium sees terrorist attacks as the most significant threat to its national security. This is the result of Islamic State group operations in Belgium and France in recent years, especially the suicide bombings at Brussels Airport and Maalbeek metro station in March 2016. Belgium has also been the base of operations for several terrorist attacks in France, including those in Paris in November 2015. These events have significantly changed the mindset of Belgian political leaders, raising their awareness of intelligence agencies' important role in protecting society. Belgium also regards external meddling in domestic politics and cyber attacks as major threats, recognising the state's lack of resilience in these areas.

Who does the country fear?

Belgium perceives jihadists as the most threatening actor it confronts. Other significant perceived threats include China, Russia, and international criminal organisations. Interestingly, Belgium has also begun to see the United States as a kind of threat. US President Donald Trump's actions have widened a pre-existing Belgian political divide in which the right sees NATO as Belgium's main security provider and the left views the alliance with greater scepticism. However, despite Trump's efforts to undermine the international liberal order, Belgium still perceives the US as one of its closest allies.

Essential security partners

Belgium sees all four of its neighbours – the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, and Germany – as its most essential security partners. This has much to do with not only historical cooperation patterns, but also the transnational character of terrorist groups. (France and Germany also perceive such groups as the greatest threat they face.) The US plays a major role in Belgium's security, particularly through NATO and its nuclear guarantee. There is a US Air Force base in Chièvres and – despite the Belgian government's statements to the contrary – the US has stationed B-61 nuclear bombs at Kleine Brogel Air Base. Although Belgium wishes to be seen as a reliable transatlantic ally, its low defence spending remains a problem in achieving this.

The EU as a security actor

In Belgium, as in most other EU countries, the establishment largely views the European Union as a transatlantic geopolitical project that has NATO as its backbone. The government plans to steadily increase its military budget during the next 20 years to keep the US in Europe. Yet, in keeping with its long-term policy, Belgium supports European defence cooperation, including that through PESCO. Nonetheless, it sees the initiative as a mechanism for improving transatlantic cooperation rather than for creating an independent European defence capability. Belgian leaders are also interested in strengthening European defence industrial cooperation to boost the small and medium-sized enterprises that dominate the country's industrial sector.