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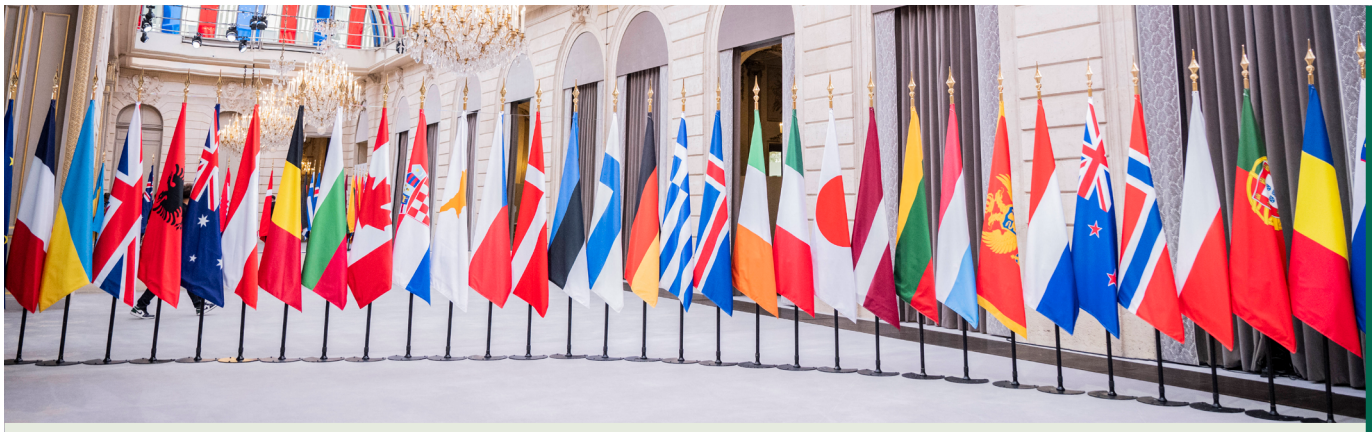

Multinational Force Ukraine Series

Belgium: Committed in Principle, Constrained in Practice

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Political will

Belgium has consistently shown commitment to support Ukraine since Russia started its full-scale invasion. The former government aligned with its Western partners in condemning Russia and funding Ukraine for humanitarian and military support, among which several F-16 fighter jets. However, the delivery of the fighter jets has been delayed until 2026, and much of this assistance has been financed through the interest revenues generated by Euroclear assets, resulting in minimal 'costs' to Belgium.

The current government led by Prime Minister Bart De Wever, which took office in February 2025, heightened the ambitions of the country's role as a reliable NATO ally. This applies to both Belgium's support to Ukraine as well as its wider contribution in Europe's rearmament.

Years of defence cuts left Belgium among NATO's lowest-contributors, with spending falling below 1% of GDP by the mid-2010s. For decades, it sought to offset this through active participation in international military missions. Since 2018, investments have been launched to reverse the trend, and under the current government – amid growing diplomatic pressure – spending is set to rise sharply, with a €4 billion increase in 2025 lifting it from 1.3% to 2% of GDP.

As to Belgium's support to Ukraine, the Defence Strategic Vision, approved in July 2025, adds that "*Our armed forces are preparing to support a European effort to ensure that a potential ceasefire is observed within an international framework yet to be defined.*" Defence Minister Theo Francken earlier made similar statements, hinting at a likely Belgian contribution to an international military mission to Ukraine, should a peace agreement be concluded. Such statements must be interpreted with caution, however, as any decision to deploy troops ultimately rests with the government and requires consensus among coalition partners.

Reaching political agreement on contributing to a multinational force for Ukraine will be challenging, given the government coalition's broad ideological range – encompassing Flemish nationalists (N-VA), Francophone liberals (MR), Christian-democrats (CD&V and Les Engagés) and Flemish socialists (Vooruit). While consultation with the House of Representatives is not constitutionally required, it is difficult to envisage that parliamentary support would not be sought, considering the political and military risks involved. Fears that consultation may cause delays should not deter the government, as parliament has convened on short notice before, notably before the 2011 Libya intervention.

Military capabilities

Expressing a willingness to join a multinational force for Ukraine is one thing; building the military capability to follow through is another. Decades of underinvestment in defence have significantly impacted Belgium's ability to contribute meaningfully to new substantial operations. As planned investments are yet to deliver, any potential

Belgian contribution will be limited, and come at the expense of existing engagements elsewhere. Political calls to deploy armed forces domestically to support law enforcement in combating drug-related crime further strain Belgium's room for manoeuvre.

While military planning is ongoing, there seems to be general consensus that a necessary prerequisite for any Belgian deployment – whether in the air, at sea, on land or a combination thereof, and likely in every scenario supported by cyber defence – would be, at a minimum, a credible ceasefire agreement between Ukraine and Russia and preferably a peace deal. The transitional state of Belgium's armed forces suggest that any contribution will be guided not only by political risk considerations but also by concerns over available troops, resources, and logistical support.

A *most likely scenario* is a deployment of a handful of F-16 fighter jets. Technically, these could contribute to an air protection zone over (parts of) Ukraine. This would be consistent with Belgium's history of making modest in scale but politically symbolic air force assets, as it did in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Libya and the operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Politically, though, debates over the rules of engagement and possible national constraints have yet to begin. The integration of European fighter jets with Ukrainian ground-based air defence systems also remains an important concern. Yet, Belgium's F-16 fighter jet fleet is currently being replaced by F-35's – the first arrived only in October 2025. This considerably limits Belgium's potential capacity to contribute, both in the number of fighter jets and in available flight hours. Lastly, such a contribution would come at the expense of Belgium's other engagements, such as its air policing contribution in the Baltics or Iceland.

A *less likely scenario*, but not unrealistic, is a naval contribution in the Black Sea area. Belgium currently already contributes indirectly to enhancing Black Sea security, by means of the planned transferring of 4 mine countermeasure vessels (together with 3 vessels from the Netherlands) to the Bulgarian navy. Earlier in June 2025, Belgium also transferred one of its mine countermeasure vessels to Ukraine. Any direct contribution to coalition efforts aimed at enhancing Black Sea security must be consistent with the provisions of the Montreux Convention and Türkiye's interpretation thereof. For Belgium, this may include the deployment of a countermeasure vessel to the region in rotation with other nations, or support to naval mine countermeasures operations from ashore. Deploying a frigate to the region is considered to be unlikely.

The *least likely scenario* is the deployment of ground forces to Ukrainian territory. Here too, Belgium's options are limited due to constrained infantry, logistical, and medical support capabilities, and will also depend on allies' contributions. In the unlikely event that political agreement is reached on such a deployment, it would presumably be restricted to company size. Moreover, this would come at the expense of other ongoing commitments, notably the current deployment of the approximately 300-strong armoured infantry company to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) Battle Group in Romania. A more realistic outcome, therefore, would be for Belgium to reinforce its existing posture there.

In conclusion, although Belgium aspires to position itself as a 'model alliance partner', years of defence underfunding and a delayed awakening substantially constrains its capacity to translate ambition into action

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In the *Multinational Force Ukraine series* of policy briefs leading experts from allied countries assess key factors for participation in the Multinational Force Ukraine. This includes the political willingness of allies to deploy troops—on the ground, in the air, or at sea—to establish a military presence in or around Ukraine. They also examine the conditions for such deployments to occur (before, during, or after peace negotiations), the roles these forces would be expected to perform (defensive or offensive), the red lines imposed by national governments, and the specific capabilities each country could realistically contribute.

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