



By: TA | AP Brief

# Eighteen EU countries apply for billions from a new defense fund



Eighteen European Union countries have applied for billions of euros from a new defense fund aimed at helping Europe provide for its own **security**, the bloc's executive branch said Wednesday, with Poland seeking more than a third of the money.

The Security Action for Europe (SAFE) fund is a 150-billion-euro (\$173 billion) program of cheap loans that member countries, Ukraine and outsiders with an EU security agreement, like Britain, can use to buy military equipment together.

The fund was launched after the Trump administration **signaled** that Europe is no longer a U.S. security priority. It's for buying key equipment like air and missile defense systems, artillery, ammunition, drones and "strategic enablers" like air-to-air refueling.

The European Commission said that Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain had applied for money so far.

They have requested at least 127 billion euros (\$147 billion) in total, it said.

Polish Defense Minister Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz said on Tuesday that his government has identified defense projects worth around 45 billion euros (\$52 billion), but that the amount it receives will depend on how the commission allocates funds.

## Ambitious target

Countries using the fund are urged to buy much of their military equipment in Europe, working mostly with European suppliers — in some cases with EU help to cut prices and speed up orders.

Earlier this month, 15 EU countries were also permitted to use a "national escape clause" to allow them to spend more on defense without breaking the bloc's debt rules.

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U.S. allies in Europe are **convinced** that President Vladimir Putin could target one of them if Russia wins its war on Ukraine.

The SAFE fund and budget leniency are aimed at **preparing** Europe to defend itself from attack by the end of the decade, but even EU governments concede that this is an ambitious target.