



France's Defence Policy and European Security

Rikhardinkatu Library, Helsinki
Monday, 23 February 2026, 13:00-17:00



International relations are heating up. In a context of strategic restructuring, public attention is fragmented and shifting every week. But one trend is emerging: the sidelining of international law and the multilateral system, and the return of raw power relations.

Faced with this global disorder, what role does France, a nuclear power and permanent member of the Security Council, intend to play? How does its vision fit in with the security imperatives of Finland and Europe? Renowned speakers offer their insights:

- *Welcome and few opening words, Tuomo Melasuo*
- French Security Policy and the Defence of Europe, half a century after the Helsinki Final Act, Nicolas Badalassi
- Finland and France - Partners in EU and in NATO, Matti Anttonen
- France's new national security review and strategy for the Arctic, Rémy Songeur
- *Social break*
- German-Franco Tandem and Europe's Zeitenwende, Kimmo Elo
- Future European defence: coalitions, organisations, leadership, Hanna Ojanen
- Closing panel discussion between the speakers and with the public

The seminar is organized by the Franco-Finnish Association for Scientific and Technical Research (SRTTS-AFFRST), in cooperation with the French Institute in Finland, the Department of Political History at the University of Turku, and the Tampere Peace Research Institute (TAPRI).

To go beyond headlines and immediate reactions, come and decipher the world to come!

The language of the event is English.

Admission is free upon [REGISTRATION](#).

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Nicolas Badalassi

He is professor of Contemporary History at Sciences Po Aix. His research focuses on the Cold War, European security and cooperation (CSCE/OSCE), and French foreign policy. He is also the director of *Master Geostrategy Defence and International Security*.

<https://www.sciencespo-aix.fr/en/teachers/nicolas-badalassi/>



Matti Anttonen

A Finnish diplomat, emeritus, and former Ambassador of Finland to France. He previously served in senior leadership roles at Finland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs, including being appointed Permanent Secretary from March 2018.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matti_Anttonen

Rémy Songeur

A French Army officer (Colonel) serving as Defence Attaché at the Embassy of France in Helsinki. His role focuses on defence cooperation and military-to-military relations.

https://x.com/FR_DA_Finland



Kimmo Elo

Kimmo Elo is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Eastern Finland (UEF), Department of History and Geography. His work focuses on Germany and Europe, European integration, and related political-historical developments.

<https://uefconnect.uef.fi/en/kimmo.elo/>

Hanna Ojanen

She is Research Director at Tampere University, working in international relations/world politics. Her research focuses on European security and defence, including EU-NATO relations. She is also project director for STRAX.

<https://www.tuni.fi/en/people/hanna-ojanen>



Tuomo Melasuo, Moderator

Tuomo Melasuo is Professor, emeritus, and former director of Tampere Peace Research Institute. His work focuses on North Africa and the Mediterranean, with a particular emphasis on Algeria. He is also President of SRTTS-AFFRST.

https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuomo_Melasuo



Argumentation for the Seminar

2025 marked the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, signed in Helsinki on 1 August 1975 at the conclusion of the CSCE process. The organisation of the resulting cooperation has significantly shaped the evolution of our continent's security policy.

For approximately the last few years, our continent's security and defence policy has undergone major upheavals, particularly following Russia's war against Ukraine, which escalated dramatically with the full-scale invasion launched on 24 February 2022. In the United States, Donald Trump's second presidency, which began in January 2025, has prompted a need for changes in European defence policy, especially because of his renewed push to acquire or control Greenland.

Among European countries, France, as the EU's sole nuclear-armed state, has reacted strongly to the constant evolution of these upheavals.

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing open war have disrupted European security and defence policy more than any other since the end of the Cold War. Germany has launched a major defence modernisation drive since 2022, aiming to rebuild capabilities and, as leaders have stated, to make the Bundeswehr Europe's strongest conventional force.

In France, the dynamics of change have focused on developing its own defence capabilities, deploying forces for reassurance and deterrence, and supporting the strategic autonomy of Europe as a whole, of the EU as well, and, consequently, strengthening the European pillar of NATO.

In concrete terms, this means doubling the country's defence budget by 2027 compared to 2017 and continuing its growth into the next decade. Furthermore, a debate, hitherto rather subtle, concerns the integration of a more European dimension to the "vital interests" that would justify France's use of nuclear weapons.

In the summer of 2025, the debate on French security policy intensified considerably, highlighting both the Russian threat to the entire continent and the importance of its own rearmament.

On 11 July 2025, in a rare press briefing, Thierry Burkhard, Chief of the Defence Staff, said that Russia had designated France as its "main adversary in Europe" (a claim he explicitly attributed to Vladimir Putin), and warned that Russia could pose a "real threat" to Europe before 2030. In his annual address to the armed forces on 13 July 2025, on the eve of Bastille Day, Emmanuel Macron stressed the need for strong, sovereign armed forces, reaffirmed the central role of France's nuclear deterrent (and its role in Europe's security), and mandated a strategic dialogue with European partners. This sequence coincided with the publication of the updated "National Strategic Review 2025," whose update Macron requested in January 2025 and which was published on 14 July 2025. On 23 July 2025, Macron appointed Fabien Mandon as the new Chief of the Defence Staff, effective 1 September 2025.

All these changes represent a major effort, perhaps the most significant since the establishment of the Fifth Republic, 1958, to reform and strengthen the country's defence forces. This is of paramount importance for the whole of Europe and the EU, as well as for Finland and for our continent's international relations, both transatlantic as well as in the Middle East and the Global South.

Our seminar aims to discuss all these reforms and changes, as well as their implications. We hope in this way to raise awareness among the informed Finnish public about French security and defence policy and its challenges.

Tuomo Melasuo, Moderator