

The Eastern Air Defence Corridor for a Safer Europe

10 SEPTEMBER 2026

Georgios Karantanis



Air Defense Equipment

The threat to Europe's skies

Since 2022, Russia has been steadily upgrading its drone capabilities for military use in Ukraine. Moscow has been using those very same capabilities to consistently violate the airspace of NATO member states. This campaign mainly aims to poke NATO in order to gauge the alliance's responsiveness. In addition, it seeks to manipulate the views of the European public regarding the conflict in Ukraine. One of the drones in question, the Geran-2, can fly up to 2,500 km, causing significant concern for European security.

Beyond drones, Russia's total air power remains considerable despite losses in Ukraine. It has managed to replenish and increase the fighter jets at its disposal, arming them with better anti-aircraft missiles. The number of Russian anti-aircraft missile systems on the ground is still big enough to function effectively against adversaries. Finally, several types of cruise

missiles have been tried and tested operationally in long-range strikes against Ukrainian targets. The capacity of the Russian Air Force combined with combat experience in Ukraine establish Russia as the greatest threat to Europe in the air domain.

The Financial Times reported that Iran has weighted strikes against targets in Europe, specifically in Bulgaria and Cyprus. Although analysts doubted that Tehran's threat was severe, it is still a reality: Iranian missiles can reach parts of Europe in the Southeast. Any flair-up in the current US-Iran war could prompt Iran to carry out strikes against European states. Thus, the range of Iranian missiles and the uncertainty of Tehran's intentions make Tehran an additional threat to Europe in terms of air defence.

Europe's air defence gap

As of today, there are two existing structures for Europe's air defence. The main structure is NATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defence. IAMD is organised around a holistic view of aerial threats, seeking to eliminate them operationally. In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, European states created a second structure for air defence called the European Sky Shield Initiative. This German-led framework intends to create a three-layer system focused on missile defence.

EU leadership has envisioned the Air Shield. It is an ambitious air defence system designed to protect Europe from a full range of aerial threats and work with NATO structures. Since the idea is yet to be materialised, Europe essentially lacks a fully-integrated air defence architecture. Instead, European states currently rely on their own national air defence systems and the two aforementioned structures. These are not sufficient enough to protect Europe from the Russia-Iran threat in event of aerial attacks.

Creating a new air defence architecture

This is why I propose the Eastern Air Defence Corridor (EADC). The EADC would be a new air defence architecture stretching from Poland to Greece. It would bring together Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. The EADC would combine their advantageous geostrategic position with a fully-integrated air defence system. This system would address the full spectrum of aerial threats. It would include anti-aircraft, anti-drone and anti-missile capabilities. Concentrating these capabilities along Europe's 'borderline' would create a more effective regional kill chain against Russia and Iran.

The EADC would connect national sensors, command structures and air defence systems into a single operational framework. Such integration would allow information to flow rapidly between participating states, reducing delays between detection, identification and engagement. The architecture could combine different capabilities according to their geographic and operational advantages, creating overlapping layers of pro-

tection. This would make Europe's eastern flank a concentrated defensive zone capable of responding to any kind of aerial attack. Consequently, the EADC could provide a more coherent response than Europe's fragmented current arrangements.

The EADC would also provide several strategic benefits beyond defence. First, it could maximise deterrence against Russia, Iran and other potential adversaries. A coordinated regional system would demonstrate Europe's ability to respond collectively to aerial attacks. Second, it could improve the allocation of resources and translate them into better defence. Resources could be concentrated where they would have the greatest defensive effect rather than spread across a broader, more vulnerable structure. Finally, the EADC could strengthen cohesion among its allies. Its integration could bypass diverging threat perceptions among participating states and enable a unified response to any aerial threat.