

CCMI FACTSHEET:

PROGRAMME FOR AGILE AND RAPID DEFENCE INNOVATION – AGILE (CCMI/266)



The European Commission has proposed the Programme for Agile and Rapid Defence Innovation (AGILE) on 25 March 2026 as part of the EU Defence Industry Transformation Roadmap. Conceived as a fast, flexible pilot instrument running for 2027 only, AGILE complements the European Defence Fund (EDF) and EU Defence Innovation Scheme (EUDIS) by closing the gap between promising defence innovation and operational deployment, with a particular focus on SMEs, start-ups and scale-ups.

The EESC welcomes AGILE as a platform enabling SMEs, start-ups, civil-tech firms and entrepreneurs to deliver rapid solutions for EU defence readiness, underlining the growing role of new defence players in transforming the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). At the same time, the Committee insists that speed and agility must not come at the expense of transparency, democratic scrutiny, social conditionality and a level playing field for SMEs across all Member States.

KEY FACTS: THE URGENCY TO ACT



EUR 5 billion — record private investment into European deep-tech defence and security start-ups in 2024, a fivefold increase since 2019; yet these companies still capture only 10% of all European venture capital.



EUR 115 million — total AGILE budget for 2027, financed entirely through reallocations from the EDF, EDIP and the EU Space/Secure Connectivity Programmes, with no new money added to the EU budget.



4-8% — share of the European Defence Fund's annual budget currently dedicated to disruptive technologies, despite their growing battlefield importance



4 months — the Commission's target time-to-award under AGILE, against an 8-month baseline observed under the EDF.



230+ — defence tech start-ups founded in Europe since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.



Up to 100% — share of eligible costs the EU may fund under an AGILE grant, reflecting the limited access of defence SMEs to private co-financing.



RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EESC OPINION

Support AGILE's framework: Back the Commission's proposed speed, responsiveness and simplified procedures to boost EU competitiveness and strategic autonomy.

Champion new defence players: Strengthen cooperation across the ecosystem and recognise the role of SMEs, start-ups, scale-ups and civil-tech firms in transforming the EDTIB.

Safeguard democratic accountability: Preserve transparency, national parliaments' scrutiny and democratic governance of EU decision-making even as procedures accelerate.

Secure additional, larger funding: Keep AGILE funds additional to existing defence programmes and substantially increase the budget in the next MFF, building on lessons from the pilot's evaluation.

Ensure inclusiveness and visibility: Reach out proactively to SMEs and start-ups from all Member States and sectors to guarantee geographical balance and broad awareness of the programme.

Tighten eligibility and control rules: Enforce robust, verifiable compliance with exclusion criteria to prevent circumvention by non-associated third countries.

Anchor projects in real defence needs: AGILE projects should be driven by clearly identified capability requirements, with access to real-world testing such as military exercises and testing grounds.

Widen participation: Open AGILE to both individual companies and small-scale consortia, and explicitly include Research and Technology Organisations, incubation centres and university start-ups.

Support iterative improvement: Extend support beyond breakthrough technologies to the continuous development and upgrading of existing solutions.

Embed social and ethical conditionality: Require explicit respect of EU labour, social and environmental legislation, quality employment, and a human-centric approach to AI in defence applications.

Involve social partners: Integrate the perspectives of employers, workers and society as a whole into AGILE's implementation.

ALIGNMENT WITH EU COMMISSION PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION (2025-2029)

Political Guidelines 2024-2029 / EU Strategic Agenda

Place security and defence at the centre of EU priorities and commit to reducing strategic dependencies and building a European Defence Union; AGILE channels this into a targeted, fast innovation instrument.

EU Defence Industry Transformation Roadmap

Calls for a shift towards greater speed, agility and risk-taking across the EU defence ecosystem; AGILE is the Roadmap's own proposed pilot instrument to test this shift in practice.

White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030 / Preserving Peace Roadmap 2030

Stress the need to accelerate innovation, shorten time-to-market and ensure rapid uptake of disruptive technologies — directly reflected in AGILE's 4-month time-to-award target.

Competitiveness Compass / Draghi Report

Identify closing the EU's innovation gap and scaling dual-use, deep-tech solutions as an urgent structural priority; AGILE targets exactly this segment through dedicated SME and start-up support.

Simplification priority / Omnibus packages

Call for accessible, fast and proportionate funding instruments with reduced administrative burden for SMEs; AGILE's streamlined, self-declaration-based evaluation procedure responds directly to this.

European Preparedness Union Strategy

Calls for stronger civil-military cooperation; AGILE's focus on adapting civilian dual-use technologies for defence purposes operationalises this synergy.

Next MFF (2028-2034) / European Competitiveness Fund (ECF)

AGILE is explicitly designed as a testbed, generating operational lessons that will directly inform the design of defence innovation support and the ECF in the next financial period.