

## EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium

Promoting the European network of independent non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks

E-newsletter of the European Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks

### THE CD'S CURRENT GOALS: PRESERVING THE DISARMAMENT ARCHITECTURE WHILE ADAPTING TO EMERGING CHALLENGES - AN INTERVIEW WITH AMBASSADOR LEONARDO BENCINI



Ambassador Leonardo Bencini serves as the Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva. He will chair the 2025 session of the Conference on Disarmament until mid-February. He was the President of the ninth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), held in Geneva from November 28 to December 16, 2022.

### SLIM CHANCES FOR A NEW INF TREATY

Since the collapse of the 1987 INF Treaty in 2019, the idea of reinstating it in some form has never left the European security agenda. The loss of the INF, which banned US and Soviet (later Russian) ground-launched missiles with the range between 500 and 5,500 km, was regarded as a serious blow to the security of Europe in spite of the strong conviction in the West that Russia had violated it (an accusation Russia has denied). Moscow, too, appeared to favor a new treaty: it announced a moratorium on development and deployment of previously banned missiles and eventually proposed to negotiate a verification regime for it. A window of opportunity opened in the end of 2021. A series of demands sent by Russia separately to the United States, NATO, and the OSCE contained a proposal on a relevant treaty complete with verification measures including on-site inspections and remote monitoring. Initial US-Russian contacts appeared reasonably promising. Compared to other international security issues, an INF 2.0 seemed achievable. Everything changed a few months later when Russia attacked Ukraine and all arms control contacts between the US and Russia countries ceased. For the next two years the situation remained stable, however, especially given the absence of reports about Russian use of INF-banned missiles against Ukraine. In the spring of 2024 events took a decidedly negative turn, however.

In May, 2024 Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that Russia would accelerate research and development on new INF missiles and in June announced a plan to begin their production (but not yet deployment). As a reason, he referenced temporary deployment of American ground-launched INF missiles in the Philippines and Denmark during exercises, which Moscow viewed as precursor for permanent presence. In July 2024, US and Germany adopted a joint statement about plans to begin 'episodic' deployment of SM-6 multipurpose missiles, Tomahawk ground-launched cruise missiles, and the Dark Eagle hypersonic glide vehicles in Germany beginning in 2026. In response, Putin threatened to end the moratorium on deployment of INF-range missiles and Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov added that these missiles may carry nuclear warheads. Finally, in November 2024 Russia launched a new ground-based INF missile Oreshnik against a target in Ukraine. This was termed a "combat test" indicating that the system was still in development (and thus not officially deployed), even though it was used for a real mission; Russia also announced that the system was already in production. Its deployment appears only a matter of time – not only in Europe, but also in Asia. Oreshnik appears more capable than the 9M729 missile, which caused the collapsed of the INF Treaty, and represents a new, unforeseen element of the European security landscape. Nonetheless, an INF 2.0 remains feasible, although much more difficult than in the end of 2021:

- Time is limited. The Russian Oreshnik is still in the testing phase, but deployment may start next year; similarly, deployment of US missiles in Germany is scheduled to begin next year, too. This means that the treaty must be negotiated quickly, preferably this year.

- The political climate is not conducive for a deal that foresees elimination of missiles ready for deployment, unlike in the late 1980s.

- An INF-style agreement banning only ground-launched missiles would leave sea- and air-launched missiles unrestricted – an element in which the Soviet Union lagged far behind the United States in the late 1980s, but has actively developed since.

- A bilateral treaty is no longer possible considering large INF-range stockpiles in China, Iran, and other countries.

- Finally, an agreement banning only nuclear-armed ground-launched INF missiles would require highly intrusive verification of warhead stockpiles – something that has not yet been tried in more than five decades of arms control. Moreover, such an agreement would not affect the most usable, conventional missiles.

An INF 2.0 would require a political decision, a strong commitment from the two key parties, the United States and Russia, and equally strong support from European countries. In arms control, nothing is impossible as long as there is a political decision, but obtaining it will be a non-trivial task.

Dr. Nikolai Sokov, Senior Fellow at the Vienna Centre for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP)

### What are, in your opinion, the main priorities and challenges for the Conference on Disarmament (CD)?

The CD continues to address crucial issues, starting with nuclear disarmament, although it does not at the moment fulfil its original mandate which is to negotiate new treaties. However, Geneva is also the place where we discuss the implementation of all the multilateral disarmament treaties, such as the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), the Ottawa Convention on Anti-Personnel Landmines (APMBC), the Oslo Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Space security is also a very important topic in our work, as are military applications of emerging technologies. Indeed, we have a large portfolio; progress is very limited, but it covers all these issues. However, currently the main goal is to preserve the great disarmament architecture built over decades, which is clearly under attack.

### Do you think there are concrete prospects for a resumption of nuclear disarmament?

Nuclear States cannot agree on how to proceed with disarmament, after the treaties adopted in the past. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and Russia's repeated threats of using nuclear weapons, any possibility of progress in the field of nuclear disarmament appears even more remote. We do not know if the New START between the US and Russia – now suspended and expiring in February 2026 – will be replaced by a new agreement. There are also no strategic agreements between the United States, China, and Russia on nuclear disarmament.

A large portion of the "middle ground" countries has started a process for the abolition of nuclear weapons, concluding a separate treaty, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), because they are frustrated by this lack of progress. There are many fault lines on nuclear disarmament.

### What can the Conference on Disarmament do to promote the control and regulation of the use of Artificial Intelligence in the military domain?

For 10 years now, dedicated working groups have been discussing the use of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) in the conventional field.

Progress is being made under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) to restrict their use. However, even if this negotiation results in an additional protocol to the CCW, it will not cover all other potential military applications of Artificial Intelligence. Let's think, for instance, of the application of AI to Weapons of Mass Destruction: this remains an open issue, on which negotiations have yet to begin.

### At the same time, there is a growing risk of militarization of outer space, with fears that nuclear weapons may be deployed there. How is the diplomatic process proceeding on this topic?

Last year in New York, a Resolution was adopted by a large majority in the First Committee of the UN General Assembly, reaffirming the obligation of all States to comply with the Outer Space Treaty. The goal was also to put pressure on Russia, which the US suspects intend to deploy a nuclear weapon in space. A nuclear detonation, especially in Low Earth Orbit (LEO), would have devastating consequences for two-thirds of satellites, especially commercial ones, with an unimaginable impact on the economy of all countries. This makes this scenario extreme and very unlikely.

## Latest Publications

Subregional arms control and conflict prevention in the Western Balkans. Katarina Djokic. EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Papers no. 93. January 2025.

Artificial Intelligence, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament: A Compendium on the State of the Art. Thomas Reinhold, Elisabeth Hoffberger-Pippan, Alexander Blanchard, Marc-Michael Blum, Filippa Lentzos and Alice Saltini. EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Papers no. 92. January 2025.

Military nuclear programme of Iran: Its history, suspension, and prospects for the future. Marcin Andrzej Piotrowski. PISM. January 2025.

## Network Calls

The Institute of International Relations Prague – IIR is recruiting a Postdoctoral Researcher under the project INTERFER, which studies foreign interference by foreign powers in the context of current geopolitical and technological change.

More info: [Here](#)

The Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP) is recruiting an intern for fall 2025, under the Japan Chair for a World without Nuclear Weapons programme. Eligible applicants must be Japanese nationals.

More info: [Here](#)

The Science and Technology for Peace and Security (PEASEC) research group at the Technical University of Darmstadt is recruiting a candidate for a PhD in Information and Hybrid Warfare / Human-Computer Interaction.

More info: [Here](#)

## EU NEWS

### THE EU AT THE 2025 CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT IN GENEVA

The 2025 Conference on Disarmament began in Geneva on 21 January. In its opening statement, the EU recalled its priorities for the Conference on Disarmament (CD): upholding the rules-based international order; bringing the CD back to its purpose and urging all countries to immediately cease providing material support to Russia's war against Ukraine.

Read the full statement [here](#).

## NETWORK NEWS

### THE UNIVERSITY OF NAVARRA JOINS THE EUNPD NETWORK

The University of Navarra joins the EUNPD Network. The University of Navarra is a Spanish private university based in Pamplona (Navarra), which was founded in 1952. More particularly, the School of Law offers a Degree in Law and a Degree in International Relations with various specializations and diplomas. Double degrees and postgraduate programs are also offered. The School trains jurists and International Relations professionals with a solid academic background, capable of facing the new challenges posed by society.

More info: [Here](#)

### SIPRI AND EUNPDC CO-HOST AN INTENSIVE ONLINE COURSE ON WMD NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

SIPRI and the European Union Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium (EUNPDC) invite graduate and postgraduate students in technical or natural science disciplines to apply for an intensive online introductory course on the impact of novel technologies and recent geopolitical changes on WMD mechanisms to control their spread, and disarmament. The course will take place online, during four half-days, on 8–11 April 2025 from 14:00 to 18:00 Central European Summer Time (CEST). The deadline for applications is 3 March 2025.

More info: [Here](#)

### BASIC LAUNCHES THE NPT MONITOR PROJECT

The NPT Monitor project, led by Senior Policy Fellow Dr Manuel Herrera, aims to address a core concern that has been widely expressed by the NPT community, namely that without a comprehensive, impartial, and accessible framework to help monitor the implementation of commitments made by NPT States parties, it is difficult to effectively track progress on the three “pillars” of the Treaty – disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear technologies. The NPT Monitor will institutionalise a methodologically rigorous, standardised process to analyse the implementation of commitments across all three pillars of the Treaty. The aim is to offer all stakeholders free, timely access to high quality, actionable data on the implementation of past agreements.

More info: [Here](#)