

EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium

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

The Fourteenth European Union

Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference,

10-11 November 2025

Brief Conference Report

By

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The fourteenth edition of the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Annual Conference took place in Brussels on 10–11 November 2025. The conference was organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) on behalf of the [EU Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks](#). It brought together experts on non-proliferation, disarmament, arms control, and conventional weapons from public institutions, governments, international organisations, independent think tanks, and civil society. In total, 240 experts from 55 countries – including EU Member States, associated countries, and third countries – participated in person.

The EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference is one of the flagship events of the European Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks. The Network was established in July 2010 by the Council of the European Union to support the implementation of the [EU Strategy Against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction](#). The Network, which also contributes to the implementation of the [EU Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms & Light Weapons & Their Ammunition](#), brings together 120 research institutions and is coordinated by a Consortium of six institutes: the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique (FRS), the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF), the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), and the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP).

Since 2012, the Annual Conference has established itself as one of the leading global forums on non-proliferation and disarmament. It has contributed to advancing strategic debate on measures to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems, while also addressing challenges related to conventional weapons, including their illicit trafficking and the excessive accumulation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their ammunition. The 2025

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edition addressed a wide range of issues of direct relevance to the European Union, particularly to the [European External Action Service \(EEAS\)](#), as well as several pressing challenges in arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament.

As in previous editions, the 2025 Annual Conference featured a broad and interdisciplinary agenda, structured around five plenary sessions, six parallel sessions, and two keynote addresses. Collectively, these sessions provided a comprehensive assessment of the current state of global arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament, while also exploring future avenues for European and international engagement.

Welcome Address

Ettore Greco, *Executive Vice-President, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*.

Ludovica Castelli, *Project Manager at the EUNPDC, and Research Fellow in the Multilateralism and Global Governance Programme, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*.

Executive Vice President Greco opened his remarks by observing that the global arms control framework is under unprecedented strain. While some treaties and mechanisms have shown resilience, the pace of geopolitical change and technological advancement has exposed critical vulnerabilities. Persistent gaps in verification, transparency, and crisis management now risk creating cascading instability. He noted that nuclear dangers are growing more complex. With little prospect for rapid disarmament, there is an urgent need for practical confidence-building measures – tools that can provide clarity, predictability, and trust among states facing heightened tensions. “Effective arms control measures are not optional – they are essential,” he emphasised. “No peace arrangements – stable or temporary – for the major ongoing conflicts can succeed without them. Without robust mechanisms to verify commitments and manage risks, even ceasefires or negotiated settlements remain fragile.” Mr Greco further warned that the erosion of the nuclear order has weakened the broader non-proliferation regime, leaving it vulnerable to both proliferation pressures and strategic miscalculations. In response, he called on scholars, policymakers, and technical experts to launch a fresh strategic debate aimed at both strengthening existing agreements and creating new pathways for dialogue, including addressing emerging technologies, regional flashpoints, and unconventional threats, in order to stabilise an increasingly uncertain global security landscape.

Dr Castelli presented an overview of the 2025 EUNPD Annual Conference, highlighting its structure, key sessions, and logistical arrangements. She emphasised that the conference’s defining features go beyond the high quality of its panels: it is the spirit of dialogue, exchange, and collaboration among participants that truly sets it apart, fostering meaningful conversations and the sharing of ideas across the field.

Opening Address

Benedikta von Seherr-Thoss, *Managing Director for Peace, Security and Defence at the European External Action Service (EEAS)*.

In her opening address, Benedikta von Seherr-Thoss, stressed that non-proliferation, arms control, and risk-reduction remain essential tools in an increasingly unstable global security environment. She warned against the erosion of long-standing norms at a time when conflicts are multiplying and geopolitical tensions are intensifying. She highlighted that most major contemporary security crises

have a clear non-proliferation dimension. These include Russia's violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention in Ukraine, the serious nuclear safety and security risks linked to the occupation of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, and the deployment of destabilising weapons systems. She also pointed to China's nuclear build-up and lack of engagement in arms control, as well as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's advancing nuclear and missile programmes. Ms Von Seherr-Thoss further emphasised the growing interconnections between regional crises, which increase the risk of proliferation and new arms races, including through military and technological cooperation among actors involved in ongoing conflicts. She also warned of rising proliferation risks in new domains, notably outer space, and underscored the impact of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence on warfare. In this context, she stressed the need to ensure meaningful human control and accountability, particularly in relation to the use of force and nuclear weapons.

First Keynote Session

Securing Nuclear Facilities: Threats, Norms, and Governance

Rafael Grossi, *Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Vienna.*

The conference opened with a keynote intervention by IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi, who framed nuclear security as an increasingly expansive and urgent issue in what he described as "extraordinary circumstances." Ambassador Grossi argued that the Iranian nuclear file has entered a qualitatively new and unprecedented phase. This shift is driven, first, by the direct use of force against safeguarded nuclear facilities in Iran, including Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan. These attacks, he noted, caused extensive damage and forced the IAEA to withdraw inspectors for safety reasons, severely constraining the Agency's ability to perform its verification mandate. Second, Ambassador Grossi highlighted Iran's growing political resistance to the IAEA itself, including new legislation suspending cooperation and the introduction of a novel inspection notification system routed through the Supreme National Security Council. This system, which applies even to inspections of minor facilities, represents an unprecedented departure from standard safeguards practice and creates significant uncertainty about access. While cooperation has not ceased entirely, Ambassador Grossi emphasised that restrictions on facilities where uranium is present are incompatible with satisfactory safeguards. Inspections, he stressed, are a legal obligation, not a voluntary confidence-building measure. At the same time, he acknowledged the need to consider Iran's security concerns and argued that the only durable solution to the current impasse lies in diplomacy rather than technical adjustments. Ambassador Grossi also drew attention to the IAEA's expanded operational role in Ukraine, particularly at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, where the Agency has maintained a continuous presence since 2022 and has recently helped negotiate temporary ceasefires to allow repairs to critical power lines essential for nuclear safety.

Plenary Session

Rethinking Nuclear Arms Control in a Changing Security Environment

The panel Rethinking Nuclear Arms Control in a Changing Security Environment brought together Guillaume Ollagnier, Stephen Lillie, and Elena Sokova to assess prospects for arms control amid rising geopolitical tensions. Mr Ollagnier emphasised that today's context is marked by "a blatant lack of confidence," making traditional arms control negotiations extremely difficult. Yet France sees strategic stability as resting on "two legs": "credible solid nuclear deterrence" and continued work on

arms control. Paradoxically, he argued, “the less you have confidence... the more important it is to continue to work” on arms control, broadly defined to include transparency, risk reduction, and the preservation of existing agreements such as the NPT and CTBT. He also warned that certain new Russian systems are “substantially per se highly problematic,” particularly when their purpose is unclear and potentially destabilising. From the UK perspective, Mr Lillie described a world “more volatile” and marked by “radical uncertainty.” He was candid that “the challenges to arms control far exceed the opportunities,” especially in light of Russia’s war in Ukraine and China’s nuclear modernisation. While the UK is increasing defence spending and reinforcing deterrence, it remains committed to “advancing strategic stability across all pillars,” including risk reduction and dialogue. On the P5 process, he stressed the need “to keep the P5 process going” to preserve channels of communication, even if progress is limited. Ms Elena Sokova painted a sobering picture: the “word of the day... is deterrence,” not disarmament. With most bilateral agreements gone and New START nearing expiration, she warned of decreased transparency and a potential “spiral in the arms race.” Still, she identified opportunities in risk reduction, including proposals for a broader nuclear risk reduction network and renewed investment in expertise and next-generation thinking. Overall, the panel underscored that while formal arms control appears bleak, strategic stability, dialogue, and risk reduction remain essential – and urgent.

Conventional Arms Control: Pathways to Enhanced Cooperation

The panel on Conventional Arms Control, chaired by Dr Alexander Bollfrass, highlighted how the challenges facing conventional arms control mirror those in the nuclear domain. Rapid technological change, from weapons design to tracking and deployment, is outpacing verification capabilities, while the erosion of core treaties and political instruments has further complicated efforts. These dynamics unfold against a global political landscape where states increasingly prioritise armament for national security over cooperative disarmament, raising pressing questions about Europe’s role in upholding and advancing conventional arms control. Mr Manuel Martinez Miralles noted that conventional arms control faces deeply rooted challenges connected to conflict governance and development. Conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan have sent shockwaves across the geopolitical landscape, undermining key humanitarian norms such as the Mine Ban Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Weak state institutions in regions like the Sahel and Haiti further exacerbate arms proliferation, while rising violence in Latin America and the Caribbean is fuelled by illicit economies and the flow of arms and ammunition. Despite these challenges, Mr Miralles highlighted reasons for cautious optimism, pointing to recent advances such as the adoption of the global framework for through-life conventional ammunition management in 2023 and progress under the Program of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, where implementation-focused mechanisms and international cooperation have strengthened accountability and practical impact. Dr. Nicholas Marsh then explored the prospects for conventional arms control in Europe, particularly the potential for future agreements with Russia in the event of a major political shift. While current relations make such negotiations unlikely, he emphasised that conventional arms control could play a crucial role in peace agreements, including regional limitations on military deployments in the Black Sea and Baltic, no-fly or non-deployment zones, humanitarian disarmament, and regulation of emerging technologies like AI in weaponry. Dr Marsh stressed the importance of monitoring production capacity and specific weapons types, noting that missiles and loitering munitions pose definitional and verification challenges, while tactical air power appears less central based on recent conflicts in Ukraine. Ms Juliana Buzi provided a regional perspective from Southeast Europe, focusing on the Western Balkans. She described

persistent challenges from the legacy of past conflicts, organised crime, domestic violence, and weak implementation of small arms control, which have contributed to high rates of illegal gun possession and misuse. Ms Buzi highlighted the success of the Western Balkans Roadmap on Small Arms and Light Weapons, established in 2018 with EU support, which sets comprehensive targets across legal frameworks, policy strategies, prevention, voluntary surrender, and stockpile management. The roadmap has strengthened regional coordination, standardised legal and policy approaches, enhanced national ownership, and improved transparency, with reporting on key performance indicators mirrored in the EU Firearms Action Plan. Its success has inspired similar initiatives in the Caribbean, Central America, and Southeast Asia. Finally, Ms Carina Solmirano reflected on the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), noting that while the international system is under strain, the treaty remains groundbreaking as the first instrument to set global standards for responsible arms transfers, including small arms and light weapons. The ATT establishes explicit prohibitions on transfers that could facilitate war crimes, genocide, or violations of arms embargoes, and requires risk assessments prior to authorisation. While the treaty's implementation is uneven, particularly in the Global South where states must build regulatory systems from scratch, Ms Solmirano emphasised the humanitarian purpose of the ATT and its contribution to establishing norms and promoting responsible arms transfers worldwide.

European Security and the War in Ukraine: Towards a New Strategic Posture?

The panel on European Security and the War in Ukraine, chaired by Dr Michal Onderco, explored the future of European security in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, highlighting the interconnected roles of Ukraine, NATO, and the European Union. Dr Mariana Budjeryn opened the discussion by highlighting a growing disconnect between Ukraine and the EU. She noted that Ukrainians already see themselves as part of the European community – even as providers of security – yet it remains unclear how Europeans view Ukraine within their collective identity. “The EU must clarify its stance toward Ukraine,” she argued, “as this will be pivotal in shaping the outcome of the war and eventually the future of the EU security architecture.” Turning to Russia, Dr Arkady Moshes described a country without a coherent long-term strategy. “Putin is not following a long-term plan; rather, he is seeking opportunities to win, exploiting the mistakes and weaknesses of his adversaries. This is not the logic of a chess player, but of a tactician driven by short-term gains rather than strategic vision.” Mr Maciej Stadejek added that Russia's enduring threat cannot be underestimated, warning that “weakness invites aggression - a lesson that must be learned from the failures of past deterrence.” The discussion then shifted to NATO and Europe's collective responsibility. Ms Carmen Romero highlighted the Alliance's efforts to strengthen deterrence while recalibrating its internal dynamics. “NATO continues to strengthen its deterrence and defence posture while promoting a groundbreaking internal rebalancing: one that seeks to recalibrate the US historical role and weight and the greater strategic responsibility that the EU must rightfully assume within the Alliance.” Throughout the panel, speakers emphasised that Europe faces a pivotal moment. Safeguarding security in the face of Russian aggression requires clarity on Ukraine's role, robust deterrence, and a renewed balance of responsibilities within NATO. The discussion underscored that shaping a new strategic posture will be central not only to the outcome of the war but also to the future architecture of European security.

The Future of Non-Proliferation and Disarmament: A Conversation between Generations

This intergenerational panel examined the evolving challenges and opportunities in global arms control, highlighting the need for dialogue across disciplines, regions, and generations. Ms Jennie Gromoll emphasised the importance of maintaining such connections, arguing that “there’s an urgent need for cross-disciplinary, cross-regional, cross-generational forums to further the advancement of the global non-proliferation and disarmament discourse and shape a more secure future.” Speakers stressed that adapting traditional frameworks to today’s realities is essential. Dr Wilfred Wan cautioned against drawing direct parallels with the Cold War, noting that “comparing today’s world to the Cold War’s bipolar order is misleading. We’re not starting from scratch, but we must adapt and strengthen non-proliferation and disarmament frameworks and infrastructures for today’s realities.” Ms Fer Avar highlighted the growing role of private defence and technology corporations in shaping modern conflict, urging the creation of international norms to regulate these actors. “Private defence and tech corporations are increasingly shaping the future of warfare,” Avar observed, “We urgently need international arms control norms to regulate private actors bottom-up and to reinforce transparency and accountability in this evolving defence landscape.” The panel also noted the renewed political momentum generated by recent crises. Ms Eleonora Neri pointed to the impact of the Ukraine war, explaining that “after the Ukraine War, we have witnessed renewed momentum and strong political commitment toward the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. States increasingly recognise the CTBT as a pivotal and credible instrument for monitoring and upholding international stability. In this sense, the attack on Ukraine has acted both as a catalyst for action and an alarm bell for the global security architecture.” Overall, the discussion highlighted the urgent need for multilateral engagement, innovative regulation, and intergenerational collaboration to ensure that non-proliferation and disarmament frameworks remain effective in an increasingly complex security environment.

Bridging Divides: Diplomatic Strategies Ahead of the 2026 NPT RevCon

The panel Bridging Divides: Diplomatic Strategies Ahead of the 2026 NPT RevCon, moderated by Mr Jacek Bylica, addressed diplomatic strategies ahead of the 2026 NPT Review Conference and highlighted deepening divisions within the regime. Speakers noted that divergent threat perceptions and security logics, exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, have sharpened polarisation between nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states. Dr Jana Baldus warned of “a steady polarisation within the NPT membership,” driven by diverging threat perceptions and normative priorities. While divisions predate the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), she argued it “did make divisions more visible.” For many non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS), disarmament remains “the benchmark” of whether the NPT delivers, whereas for many nuclear-weapon states (NWS), disarmament “has never been” the treaty’s main purpose. If left unaddressed, polarisation risks further “entrench[ing] mistrust and stall[ing] the regime.” Turning to US policy, Dr Francesca Giovannini described a deeper conceptual shift in Washington. Arms control, she argued, is increasingly viewed as having “backfired,” with “reciprocity... dead” and transparency replaced by “opacity and ambiguity.” She characterised the move from Cold War “stability through vulnerability” to “stability through dominance, through primacy.” At the 2026 Review Conference, she predicted “very strong language on proliferation” and “zero tolerance and maximum pressure,” but vaguer positions on China and testing. While the US may not table major new initiatives, she expects activism on nuclear energy and safeguards. Offering a Global South perspective, Dr Olamide Samuel outlined mounting frustration: no consensus outcome since 2010, “a lack of progress on disarmament,” and “no

accountability for past nuclear testing.” He warned that many states now see “the increasing salience of nuclear weapons” as proof that nuclear arms are “really, really good for security and sovereignty.” The risk, he suggested, is not only polarisation but gradual disengagement. Across interventions, the panel underscored that bridging divides before 2026 will require rebuilding trust, addressing disarmament grievances, and clarifying the strategic direction of major powers.

Parallel sessions

East Asia’s Strategic Landscape: Power Dynamics and Regional Dialogue

The panel on East Asia’s Strategic Landscape, chaired by Dr Cameron Hunter, examined the destabilising effects of US-China competition on regional stability and the strategies that middle and smaller powers are adopting in response. Ms Melissa Conley Tyler highlighted the role of these states in shaping the behaviour of great powers, arguing that their task is “to try to bind those great powers with norms and rules and try to socialise them into something we find easy to live with.” From the Japanese perspective, Dr Michiru Nishida noted that the security environment has changed qualitatively over the past decade, driven by the evolving threats posed by North Korea, China, and Russia. These developments, he explained, reinforce a widespread perception of strategic vulnerability, compounded by growing questions about US reliability in the region, adding a new layer of uncertainty to regional security calculations. Hua Han offered a Chinese perspective, emphasising that “since Obama’s pivot to Asia, the security environment in Northeast Asia has changed, including the US military restructuring in the region,” which has contributed to shifting power dynamics and strategic calculations. The panel also discussed the rise of hedging strategies among smaller states and the growing relevance of minilateral frameworks such as AUKUS, which present both opportunities and challenges for regional security. Overall, the discussion underscored the complexity of East Asia’s strategic landscape, highlighting the interplay between great power competition, middle-power diplomacy, and evolving security architectures.

Strategic Competition Beyond Earth: The Politics of Outer Space Security

The panel Strategic Competition Beyond Earth: The Politics of Outer Space Security, moderated by Ms Sarah Dunn, examined how intensifying geopolitical rivalry, commercialisation, and emerging technologies are reshaping outer space governance. Opening the discussion, Dr Bleddyn Bowen challenged prevailing narratives about a “new commercial space age.” While acknowledging increased private activity, he argued that “we shouldn’t confuse private ownership with a private economy,” noting that space companies remain deeply dependent on public funding and state priorities. For Bowen, contemporary competition reflects “business as usual in terms of power politics and the space industry,” reinforcing rather than displacing traditional space powers. Ms Victoria Samson highlighted the destabilising risks of orbital debris and dual-use technologies. With roughly 54,000 tracked objects in orbit, debris from anti-satellite (ASAT) tests remains a persistent threat. She noted that “there kind of a norm emerging that’s considered bad form to liberally create debris in orbit,” referencing growing international commitments not to conduct destructive ASAT tests. However, active debris removal technologies present strategic ambiguity: a satellite capable of cleaning up debris may also demonstrate “a co-orbital capability” with military implications. From a governance perspective, Ms Marjolijn van Deelen outlined the EU’s emphasis on norms and responsible behavior. Because “space is very different” from traditional arms control domains, she

stressed focusing on “norms, rules and principles of responsible behavior” rather than weapons counting. Addressing legal gaps, Dr Yun Zhao observed that the foundational treaties of the 1960s and 1970s are “not sufficient to deal with the current situation,” particularly regarding commercialisation, space mining, dual-use systems, and ASAT testing. While hard law may be unrealistic in the near term, he argued that “a soft law approach might be more feasible.” Across the discussion, panelists agreed that dual-use commercial systems pose acute challenges. As Samson bluntly summarised, when asked whether current frameworks are sufficient: “in a word, no.”

Conflict Management and Regional Diplomacy in the Middle East

The panel on Conflict Management and Regional Diplomacy in the Middle East, chaired by Dr Ludovica Castelli, explored the interplay between military confrontation, diplomatic initiatives, and regional security dynamics. Dr Raz Zimmt analysed Israel’s shifting strategy following the October 7th, 2023 attacks, arguing that the national trauma from Hamas’s temporary territorial gains and the broader security environment has led Israel to adopt a zero-tolerance approach toward threats, both near and far. He noted that while Israel previously pursued restraint through selective engagement, recent years have seen a pendulum swing toward proactive military action. Strikes against Iran, he argued, were motivated primarily by operational windows and intelligence assessments, rather than personal political considerations, highlighting a broader strategic recalibration. Dr Abdolrasool Divsallar focused on the WMD dimension, underscoring the unique and comprehensive threat landscape in the Middle East. He highlighted three major military trends: a re-evaluation of deterrence concepts, emerging regional power imbalances, particularly Israel’s growing military dominance, and the increasing salience of nuclear capabilities in asymmetric strategies. Dr Divsallar concluded that political and military trends diverge, with the military favouring a force-based approach and political actors pursuing diplomatic solutions, leaving the region in a state of strategic uncertainty. Mr Stephan Klement provided the European perspective, situating the discussion in the post-JCPOA environment. He highlighted the EU’s commitment to diplomacy as the only sustainable solution to the Iranian nuclear issue but acknowledged the challenges posed by lost knowledge, the fracturing of the 3+3 format, and a lack of regional unity. Nevertheless, he pointed to growing regional interest in coexistence and cooperation with Iran, drawing parallels to European post-war cooperative approaches to nuclear management, and emphasised the EU’s role in facilitating dialogue and verification in any potential future agreement. Ms Amnah Ibraheem detailed the Gulf perspective on crisis management and regional coordination. She explained the GCC’s emergency management framework, emphasising its support role for member states in transboundary incidents or those exceeding a single state’s capacity. She highlighted recent improvements in regional expertise, emergency planning, and public communication, but stressed that efforts to expand information sharing with non-GCC neighbours remain constrained by trust deficits, leaving some regional coordination incomplete. Overall, the panel underscored that addressing security challenges in the Middle East requires a careful balance: fostering trust, improving information sharing, and pursuing diplomatic avenues to establish a more resilient regional security architecture.

Biological Weapons Convention at 50: Achievements, Gaps, and the Road Ahead

Marking 50 years since its entry into force, the panel on the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC): Achievements, Gaps, and the Road Ahead reflected on institutional weaknesses, technological disruption, and geopolitical strain shaping the treaty’s future. The chair, Dr Sana Zakaria, opened by

noting that “the world today looks profoundly different to what it did 50 years ago,” with emerging technologies reshaping what constitutes biological threat. Dr Irma Makalinao emphasised the importance of embedding biosafety and biosecurity capacity into national systems, particularly in the Global South. Highlighting synergies between the BWC and the International Health Regulations, she argued that investments in laboratory training and “a risk-based approach” strengthened pandemic response and could equally mitigate deliberate biological threats. Article X cooperation, she stressed, is “really very important for the global south” to ensure technology transfer and equitable capacity building. Addressing investigation and attribution challenges, Dr Una Jakob underscored the “ambiguity” of outbreaks, which may be natural, accidental, or deliberate. Given the absence of a dedicated verification body, she called for strengthening the UN Secretary-General’s Mechanism, describing it as “basically the only thing we have at hand right now.” Independent investigations, she argued, can help “reduce geopolitical tension” by countering disinformation. From a diplomatic perspective, Ambassador Leonardo Bencini highlighted the BWC’s structural weakness as “the only instrument... without an implementing agency.” While progress has been made toward science and technology and Article X mechanisms, he warned that financial and political constraints remain acute: even modest budget increases require difficult negotiations. Finally, Ambassador Frederico S. Duque Estrada Meyer described consensus-building as navigating persistent political divides. Yet he expressed cautious optimism that, with goodwill, states could finalise outcomes before the next Review Conference. Across the discussion, panelists agreed that while technological risks are growing, political will and institutional investment remain the decisive variables for the BWC’s next 50 years.

India–Pakistan: Prospects for Strategic Stability and Cooperation

The panel on India–Pakistan: Prospects for Strategic Stability and Cooperation examined the implications of the May 2025 crisis for regional and global nuclear stability. Dr Chiara Cervasio framed the discussion around a central question: why was this crisis significant, and “how far can India and Pakistan go in climbing this escalation ladder without really risking a nuclear war?” From a Pakistani perspective, Dr Rabia Akhtar argued that strategic stability in South Asia now “looks far less stable than the phrase suggests.” She contended that what emerged in May 2025 was not space for limited war, but “strategic ambiguity with thinner margins of error.” She identified three destabilising trends: “compressed decision time,” “entanglement” between conventional and nuclear systems, and an “escalation of expectations,” whereby one contained crisis may encourage risk-taking in the next. Stability, she argued, must now rest on “narrative stability” – a shared recognition of what is “too dangerous to try.” Dr Ruhee Neog, outlining the Indian perspective, described Operation Sindur as part of a broader “doctrinal evolution.” India’s objective, she suggested, was to test escalation thresholds and induce behavioural change “without provoking full-scale war and certainly without breaching nuclear thresholds.” Framing the crisis as an “experiment,” she noted that such experimentation inevitably carries risk. Dr Petr Topychkanov emphasised the transformative role of emerging technologies and external actors, highlighting the large-scale use of drones, satellites, AI-enabled command systems, and cross-border technology transfers. South Asia, he suggested, is increasingly shaped by global technological diffusion. Concluding, Dr Christopher Clary offered a sobering assessment: “South Asia has been learning to live dangerously.” While neither side seeks total war, crisis and arms-race instability are growing, leaving limited prospects for meaningful cooperation absent sustained political will.

Emerging Technologies and the Future of Arms Control

The panel on Emerging Technologies and the Future of Arms Control, moderated by Dr Ondrej Rosendorf, explored how AI, biotechnology, and advanced technological systems are reshaping strategic stability and governance. Opening the discussion, Dr Branka Marijan argued that the most pressing concern is not fully autonomous weapons, but AI's growing role in shaping military decision-making. "AI doesn't necessarily have to be the decision maker to have already influenced a decision-making process," she warned, highlighting how recommendation systems may reduce meaningful human agency. She stressed the challenge for arms control is "how do you capture that in governance?" Dr Elke Schwarz cautioned against technological determinism, emphasising that "nothing is inevitable." She warned that AI hype – particularly claims that wars can be won "swiftly and decisively if only we had more of this type of technology" – risks blending Silicon Valley business logics with military strategy. AI systems remain "brittle," she noted, and overreliance could normalise civilian harm and prioritise speed over political restraint. From a nuclear perspective, Dr Tong Zhao highlighted how emerging technologies enable "rapid response capabilities and rapid response doctrines," reviving Cold War concepts like launch-on-warning under more complex conditions. Threat perception gaps – for example over China's FOBS system or US missile defense – risk compounding instability. He called for building "shared risk awareness" as a foundation for engagement. Finally, Dr Cyril Martel warned that advances in synthetic biology, AI-enabled sequence design, and nanotechnology could increase the "usefulness of biological weapons" while lowering barriers to production. As dual-use risks broaden, export controls alone are insufficient. Across domains, panelists agreed that emerging technologies accelerate speed, compress decision time, and blur traditional categories – making renewed efforts at risk reduction and practical governance more urgent than ever.

Second Keynote Session

The Disarmament Agenda: 80 Years After Hiroshima

Izumi Nakamitsu, *UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs*

In her address to the Conference, UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, highlighted the urgent need for a recalibrated global approach to disarmament, grounded in both historical lessons and present realities. She began by reflecting on the 80th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, noting that "humanity had the means to annihilate itself. Yet eight decades later, we continue to roll the dice with these really cataclysmic weapons." She emphasised that today's security landscape – shaped by intensifying strategic competition, regional instability, the erosion of longstanding norms, and emerging technologies – heightens the risk of catastrophic outcomes. Against this backdrop, she praised the European Union's "steadfast commitment to multinationalism... not simply commendable but indeed indispensable." Nakamitsu outlined five key challenges for the disarmament agenda. First, she stressed the urgency of preventing miscalculations and escalation, noting that "a mistake in one domain can trigger escalation in another." She highlighted lessons from the Cold War, including notifications for launches, exercises, and strategic crisis communications, urging states to explore transparency and confidence-building measures across conventional and nuclear forces, including in the context of emerging technologies. Second, she warned against the erosion of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime, stating that "a third consecutive failure to achieve consensus [at the NPT review conference] would

be a threat to the regime's very credibility... states parties need to be flexible, innovative and remember that a strong NPT is in all of our interest, everyone's interest." Third, she addressed the transformative impact of rapidly advancing technologies on international peace and security, from AI to quantum computing, noting that while there are benefits, these innovations "are fundamentally altering modern warfare" and raise risks of misperception, miscalculation, and inadvertent use of nuclear weapons. She emphasised that "all nuclear weapons states must agree that any decisions on nuclear weapons remain in human hands, not machines." Fourth, Nakamitsu confronted the global surge in military spending, observing that "in 2024, global military expenditure hit a record of 2.7 trillion dollars... nearly five times the level at the Cold War's end." She warned that prioritising military security alone "undermines the spirit and substance of disarmament and arms control agreements" and diverts resources from sustainable development, which in turn exacerbates inequality and instability. Fifth, she called for a reconceptualisation of arms control frameworks to keep pace with a changing world, asking how to address dual-use technologies, hybrid warfare, and the blurring of nuclear and non-nuclear strategic threats. She clarified that this was "not an argument for abandoning the existing architecture. It is a call for bolstering it with new tools, new norms, and new partnerships." Nakamitsu concluded by underscoring Europe's pivotal role, highlighting that the EU "has always been [a] paramount champion of the regime designed to eliminate WMD and apply strict controls to conventional weapons," combining normative power, technical expertise, and diplomatic reach. She affirmed that the UN would remain a "steadfast partner" in supporting Europe to lead global disarmament and non-proliferation efforts.

Closing Remarks

Peter Wagner, *Head of Service "Foreign Policy Instruments", European Commission, Brussels*

Mr Wagner's closing remarks emphasised the urgent and challenging context for non-proliferation and disarmament, while recognising the critical role of collaboration and sustained effort. He began by noting that the event remains "more necessary and timely than many of us might have thought," given the pressures on the rules-based international order, particularly from Russian aggression in Ukraine. He highlighted how these circumstances test the global non-proliferation framework, noting threats such as Russia's nuclear rhetoric, discussions about restarting nuclear testing following its withdrawal from the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and the upcoming expiration of the New START treaty. He also drew attention to ongoing threats to nuclear facilities in Ukraine and challenges in conventional arms control, including debates within Europe over the Ottawa Convention and landmines. Despite these difficulties, Wagner affirmed the European Union's continued commitment to non-proliferation and disarmament, noting that EU support remains vital for initiatives like this conference, field projects in Syria, and broader international efforts. He acknowledged challenges posed by budget constraints, but emphasised the importance of open discussions across continents to advance the agenda.

Sibylle Bauer, *Chair, EU Non-proliferation and Disarmament Consortium/Director of Studies, Armament and Disarmament, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)*

Dr Bauer's final remarks highlighted both gratitude for sustained EU support and the urgent need for continued vigilance and innovation in arms control and disarmament. She began by thanking the EU and its member states for over a decade of consistent backing for research, education, and engagement between policy and academia, emphasising that such support "certainly cannot be taken for granted"

in today's context. Marking Armistice Day in Belgium, she stressed the importance of remembering the lessons of history: "nothing is inevitable," and the horrors of war historically drove the creation of international humanitarian law and arms control norms. She reflected on the evolving discourse around security, noting terms like "peace" were less used than "war" or "deterrence," while new terms such as "AI hallucinating" and "rearmament" had emerged, signalling the need to rethink and clarify concepts. Dr Bauer also highlighted the value of intergenerational engagement and interdisciplinarity, stressing the need to involve natural scientists and engineers to understand technological risks, avoid hype, and anticipate implications. She concluded by invoking the 1955 Russell-Einstein Manifesto, emphasising a human-centred appeal: "We appeal as human beings to human beings. Remember your humanity and forget the rest," framing peace as a responsibility and urgent imperative for the current generation.

For more information and to watch the videos of the Conference, please visit the Consortium's website: www.nonproliferation.eu.