

The RDII program

The RHID's 'Research, Development, Innovation and Industrialisation' (RDII) Department: your R&D partner on the roadmap to new, effective capabilities, based on Belgian expertise.

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For years, the 'Programme 7' part of the Defence budget has been allocated in its entirety to the RHID, where the 'Scientific and Technological Research for Defence' department used to be responsible for facilitating and coordinating Research & Technology (R&T). Prior to 2016, this budget – amounting to several million euros – went almost exclusively to the three military research institutes, namely the RMA (for the most part), the Defense Laboratories and the MHQA.

With the Strategic Vision for Defence in 2016, following participation in PESCO and in accordance with its provisions, it was decided to allocate up to 2% of the Defence budget to R&T. This immediately resulted in a substantial increase in the budget, meaning that it no longer made sense for the RHID to facilitate and coordinate this increased budget solely through the military research institutions. This marked the start of a new approach: the RHID would be responsible for funding R&T, including by non-military and industrial research institutions, on the condition that there would be a potential return for Defence.

This led to the development of the Defence, Industry & Research Strategy (DIRS), which was launched in 2022 and which, among other things, set out long-term objectives to develop, strengthen and maintain Belgium's Defence Technological & Industrial Base (DTIB).

Immediately new vectors were launched to address the funding of R&T by and for Defence in a structural manner. Initiatives were launched to strengthen the national knowledge base (the well-known DEFRA initiative being the most prominent example), participation in international research projects was realized, and the department also jumped on the 'innovation' bandwagon.

The 2025 Strategic Vision once again proved to be a game-changer for the department. It was decided to expand the scope of R&T support for Defence to include Research & Development (R&D), which led, among other things, to a name change for the department: Research, Development, Innovation & Industrialisation (RDII). Political commitment was also immediately extended to 3% of the Defence budget in order to expand to R&D.

Without a doubt a substantial budget, and a major challenge to ensure that every penny is spent wisely and delivers a tangible return for Defence.

At the end of 2024, the department's structure was adapted to the future challenges known at that time. This structure, which is still in use today despite the name change, will be reviewed once again this year in light of the constantly changing and evolving landscape. Among other things, the arrival of federated entities as new players in steering R&D for the benefit of Defence will lead to a new organization: the Organization for Defence Innovation and Defence Industrialisation (abbreviated to the acronym 'ODIN'). The functions of the current RDII department will be fully incorporated into this.

Thanks to these far-reaching changes, the optimal use of the Defence R&D budget will be guaranteed for the future. Research leading to finding solutions for the needs of tomorrow and future generations, including in the CIS domain, will increasingly be facilitated by ODIN. In this way, we contribute to the development of new and innovative capabilities for Defence, as well as to closer cooperation between Belgian industry and Defence, and in the long term also to the strengthening of Belgium's DTIB, preferably within a European framework.

The presentation during BEMILCIS will outline the approach to current challenges within the framework described, with a focus on R&T/R&D in the field of communication technology.