

FALLING WALLS SCIENCE SUMMIT



KEY RESULTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

“DEFENCE AS INNOVATION DRIVER: FROM LABORATORY TO LINE”

— *Make dual use the operating norm – link startups, investors and serial production to outpace fragmented national buys.*

Europe's defence innovation is stuck between urgency and inertia. With Ukraine proving that combat feedback loops can shrink innovation cycles to mere weeks, the challenge is clear: turn battlefield-tested technology into deployable capability at speed without losing accountability. The session asked how Germany and Europe can replace bureaucratic reform with executable processes, linking civil-military research, industry and government in one agile system that delivers capability, not paperwork.

Germany and Europe have the science and industrial base; the blocker is transfer. That means outcome-based certification, end-user trials with real soldiers, a European scale-up path for dual-use firms, and harmonised rules that enable joint procurement instead of national fragmentation. Investors belong in the room, as do universities and large-series manufacturers that can turn prototypes into serial production.

THE PANEL CALL TO ACTION:

1 — Certify processes, not just products.

Adopt risk-tiered, outcome-based certification of development and manufacturing processes so improved software and hardware can ship on parallel tracks; use dedicated sandbox units to validate releases against defined operational metrics and make stop-go decisions on fixed 30-, 60-, 90-day cadences.

2 — Put agile budgets at the point of use.

Give each service (army, navy, air, cyber) a ring-fenced €10–30 million annual “trial and adopt” budget to run soldier-in-the-loop experiments. Buy demonstrators, and feed results straight into requirements cutting approval loops and making quick iteration cycles the norm.

3 — Build a European dual-use scale-up pathway.

Link startups to serial production via “spin-in” programmes and investor participation. Reuse surplus automotive capacity and knowledge for mass manufacturing, and converge export-control and IP terms to enable joint European procurement (starting with common drone families rather than fragmented national platforms).

4 — Appoint a nationwide defence industrial coordinator with real authority.

Create one operating picture across federal and state levels, the armed forces, research organisations and industry. Integrate research institutions like Fraunhofer, innovation hubs and Bundeswehr universities into a single test-and-transfer network, under a sovereignty strategy that defines what to build nationally, with allies, or source globally.



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5 — Raise and refocus R&D towards translation.

Move towards European R&D share targets and protect budgets for mission-tied prototypes, serialisation and pre-production (including legal changes to allow limited build-ahead for critical lines). Launch targeted talent-return schemes to bring AI and software engineers back to Europe to work on defence and dual-use systems.

This event is supported by Fraunhofer Gesellschaft and assembled in the framework of the Falling Walls Science Summit 2025 in Berlin. The Falling Walls Science Summit is a leading international, interdisciplinary, and intersectoral forum for scientific breakthroughs. It commemorates the fall of the Berlin Wall and aims to promote dialogue between science and society.

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