

**EUROPE, STRATEGY,
SECURITY
PROGRAMME**

A EUROPEAN ARMY WITH WHOM?

(4/5)

BY FRÉDÉRIC MAURO

LAWYER AT THE PARIS AND BRUSSELS BARS, ASSOCIATE RESEARCHER AT IRIS

& OLIVIER JEHIN

INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST, CONTRIBUTOR TO THE BRUXELLES 2 (B2) BLOG

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ANALYSIS #4



The constitution of an integrated European army capable of acting autonomously begs the question: “with whom”? Which European states would be its founder members?

To answer this question without reference to political circumstances that could change at any time, let us postulate that in any complex institutional construction, in other words one that is made up of unequal entities, from simple co-ownership to a federal state or the European Union, there is a triangle of incompatibility between the principles of unity, effectiveness and unanimity: you can only have any two of the three at the same time. If we accept this hypothesis, three types of architecture emerge as options. “Inclusive” architecture allows us to achieve unity whilst preserving unanimity, in other words the sovereign nature of the states that make up the entity in question. The price to be paid is that it will, to a greater or lesser extent, be ineffective.

The concept of the “avant-garde”, on the other hand, aims to achieve effectiveness whilst preserving unanimity in making decisions, but at the expense of the group’s unity: only a limited number of participants are allowed in or, at the very least, only those that are willing and able. This historically dated route has never produced anything tangible in the field of defence and now looks completely impracticable.

This is why we must now consider the only architecture that has never been attempted in the field of defence, one that has proven its worth in other areas, particularly monetary policy, and which preserves unity without sacrificing effectiveness. It is the architecture of a Defence Eurogroup, within which decisions will be made by qualified majority.

INCLUSIVENESS WILL NEVER GIVE US A EUROPEAN ARMY

The principle of inclusiveness is the foundation of the European treaties which, in reality, provide only exemptions to the general principle that all member states will participate in all activities. These exemptions take the form of provisions that are tailor-made for certain countries, opt-ins and opt-outs, enhanced cooperation in certain areas, programmes or undertakings between a limited number of countries, as in the Framework Programme for Research, for instance, or the option for a group of member states to carry out a military operation on behalf of the Union.

This principle is also the foundation stone of the common security and defence policy (CSDP): all member states but Denmark are part of this and almost all decisions are made unanimously within a framework that remains strictly intergovernmental.

Yet we cannot ignore the fact that so far, unanimity has paralysed the most important decisions involving the use of force and has led to agreements with little involvement of member states or ones that are based on the lowest common denominator. Yes, thirty-five external operations have been launched under the banner of the CSDP. But how many of them changed the course of events? How much energy has been deployed and for what return? With the exception of a handful of success stories, such as Operation Artemis, the history of the CSDP is a long catalogue of stalemate, inertia and disappointment.

The chances of this changing are vanishingly small. What are the odds of the European Union member states unanimously agreeing to send peacekeeping troops to Mali, Libya or even Syria? Yet it was for precisely this kind of crisis that the idea of the “most demanding missions” set out by the CSDP was devised.

Unless its governance changes, the CSDP will be condemned to keep stumbling along like it has been doing for the last fifteen years. As the same causes produce the same effects, any European army based on this model will inevitably suffer the same rejection.

This is particularly true given that certain states are openly hostile to the very idea of strategic autonomy and would do all in their power to block any progress towards a European army. The United Kingdom may leave the EU. But other states are already keen to step into its shoes, to the sole benefit of the United States and opponents of the EU.

THE CONCEPT OF AN AVANT-GARDE HAS BECOME IMPRACTICAL

The idea of an “avant-garde” made up of a small number of states is one that has been borrowed from the euro in the economic and monetary field and adapted for the military domain. It is itself underpinned by the still-valid assumption that not all countries want a European defence and that there is therefore no point in trying to convince them of its merits. Far better to arrange things between the “willing and able”, whilst remaining on an intergovernmental footing.

This idea was first made flesh in the legal construction of the “permanent structured cooperation” (PESCO) set out by article 46 TEU and Protocol no. 10 annexed to the

Treaties. The PESCO aimed to constitute the capability process that would allow the member states of the avant-garde to provide the EU with the “operational capacity drawing on civilian and military assets” set out in article 42.1 of that treaty.

To ensure that countries that were not willing to go down this route could not prevent others from doing so, the treaty did not set a minimum number of participants and provided for the PESCO to be established by qualified majority. In so doing, it created an exemption, a “flexibility” applied to the principle of inclusiveness and allowing it to be preserved, as each country could decide to join the group of forerunners at any time.

But the legal construction of the PESCO, the very nature of which made it complex to write and harder still to understand, fell victim to the early disappearance from the political stage of the players who had dreamt it up. Furthermore, from the start of the discussions on its implementation, the idea of an avant-garde was seen as creating a “two-speed Europe”, with a “second division” that would inevitably include member states that were incapable of meeting the capability criteria or unenthusiastic about making concrete commitments to participate in the development of European defence. The discussions ground to a halt.

Although it was supposed to be established at the same time as the Treaty of Lisbon and no later than in 2010, it was not until 2017 that the PESCO was finally up and running, under conditions that were a long way away from the spirit and the letter of the original text and which no longer have anything to do with the original idea of an avant-garde. It does not take a genius to understand that the PESCO is highly unlikely ever to produce the results expected of it, namely autonomous and integrated capacity for action in the military domain.

France and the United Kingdom lost no time in re-engaging with the Saint-Malo spirit, imbuing the concept of an avant-garde with a far more pragmatic application through the so-called Lancaster House agreements of November 2010. This avant-garde is, admittedly, limited to just two member states, but together, these two member states have half of all the EU’s military capability, including nuclear weaponry, and furthermore share a strategic culture. For what is the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force if not the “autonomous capacity for action” that was so highly spoken of in Saint-Malo in 1998 as a way of managing external crises without American assistance? And what are the industrial programmes, such as the “one MBDA” project, if not the greatest capacity

integration ever achieved in Europe to date and reaching up to and including the nuclear field?

But whatever the ultimate proponents of this agreement on either side of the English Channel have to say about it, it will be very difficult for this avant-garde to survive Brexit, if it happens. The evidence of this is that the planned Franco-British Future Combat Air System (FCAS) has already been scrapped, to say nothing of the interoperability of aircraft carriers. It even looks as though in its current format, one MBDA's days may be numbered if physical borders are re-established.

In the meantime, due to the absence of any real decision-making powers in the operational field, one might wonder whether, even in a format between just two partners whose strategic visions broadly converge, this Franco-British avant-garde would not have ended up succumbing to profound disagreements, such as the deployment of forces in Syria. Even two partners can fall out, which is a bit of a problem when you've got specialised forces.

As the avant-garde route is impracticable and the inclusivity option would condemn us to ineffectiveness, we will have to use a different method to determine who could be part of the European army.

ONLY THE DEFENCE EUROGROUP OPTION REMAINS UNTESTED

If you want the strength that comes from numbers plus an effective decision-making system, there is only one solution: qualified majority. In the absence of treaty change to move to qualified-majority decisions, the only option is to move out of the narrow framework of the Lisbon Treaty and reopen the scope of what is possible, by creating a Defence Eurogroup. The question is: with whom?

The idea of a European army consisting only of France and Germany has to be disregarded, for the same reasons that led the Franco-British cooperation to bear so little fruit. It would be tantamount to isolating these countries in a tête-à-tête that could easily turn sour. The reason for this is quite simple: despite their excellent cooperation and joint interests, the two countries do not share the same strategic culture and have very different political models. Current developments in German politics have not yet allowed the country to move away from a conception of international relations and Germany's role on the international stage that are rooted in the 1950s. It is only within the European

framework, with sufficient institutional safeguards, that there could be any question of relaxing the Bundestag's tight grip on the engagement of German troops. This is why other states would absolutely have to be involved as well, not just to make up the required critical mass, but also to facilitate discussions and allow decisions to be made.

In an ideal world, the list of state parties to the European army would correspond to the Eurozone, so that there could be a single European hub. This, moreover, was the vision of the drafters of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe (TECE). They mooted the idea of a European Union of Defence, referring to it as the "Defence Eurozone". Unfortunately, given the current state of intra-European relations, this objective seems unlikely to succeed at the first attempt, particularly due to misgivings expressed by Italy, a large founder country with one of Europe's most significant defence industries.

Middle ground could be explored and indeed has been, with the European Intervention Initiative, a project between ten countries, with Italy staying out but the UK going in. Alongside it were Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Estonia, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Finland.

This naturally begs the question of the UK's participation in the European army. As an army of this kind could operate only if it were designed and executed as a tool to integrate various national armies, it seems unlikely that the UK, given the current state of its relationship with the EU, could come on board, at least any time soon.

With these limitations in place, it is scarcely worth taking our intellectual speculation on possible participating states any further, as it will depend on the timing and the answers to the other questions, particularly concerning the purpose of the common army and the resources to be implemented to achieve it.

Yet it is important to avoid repeating the mistakes that were made when the euro was born and thus ending up with what our American cousins would describe as "half-baked" solutions. We consider that there are two mistakes in particular that should be avoided.

The first would be to establish criteria for states to join and/or remain in the army. This solution, which was designed for an inter-governmental-type institution, has shown its limitations, in both the currency field with the euro and the military field with the PESCO. Certainly, a great many of the member states are unable to observe their commitments. They are prepared to lie and cheat their way onto the train, rather than be left behind on the platform. The only way to make sure that everybody honours their own share of the burden is to proceed in the same way as for the European budget, in other words with

budgetary contributions calculated on the basis of a distribution key established in advance, which would be used to pay for common programmes: joint acquisition of capabilities, especially platforms that the states are no longer able to acquire individually, keeping equipment in operational condition, infrastructure networks.

The second mistake would be to dismiss moving to qualified majority out of hand on the grounds that it would be unrealistic and that no government in its right mind or any responsible parliament would agree to give away its ancestral right to make peace and agree to war. Yes, it would be a quantum leap. But let us be frank and not feed into the dogma of the Nation State whose application would condemn us to the obsolescence of the national armies and absolute submission to our American protector. All it would take to succeed would be the willingness of enough states to constitute a critical mass. The road will no doubt be a difficult one, but to borrow a well-known English proverb of unknown origin: where there's a will, there's a way. Before getting under way, we must answer the question of what the European army would consist of. ■

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Under the supervision of Olivier de France, research director at IRIS

defrance@iris-france.org

and Jean-Pierre Maulny, deputy director of IRIS

jpmaulny@iris-france.org

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INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AND STRATEGIC AFFAIRS

2 bis rue Mercoeur

75011 PARIS / France

T. + 33 (0) 1 53 27 60 60

contact@iris-france.org

@InstitutIRIS

www.iris-france.org