European defence: Challenges ahead

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We are at a crucial moment in the short history of European defence, which started in 1998 with the Saint-Malo declaration, was institutionalised by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 and somehow seems to have taken off since 2016 with the flourishing of a series of initiatives both within and outside the EU, in response to a series of external shocks, beginning with the invasion of Crimea by the so-called *little green men* in 2014.

Unfortunately, just as one swallow doesn't make a summer, those initiatives do not make up an authentic European defence, envisioned as a defence *of* Europe, *by* Europe and *for* Europe.

Walking in this direction, there is a solid block of challenges that Europeans will have to clear off the road. What are they?

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Inside the Union framework: Finish the Job

The permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) is one of the singular features of the European defence concept enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty. It should encompass a *capability process* to build the "operational capacity" of an avant-garde of willing and able Member States to conduct crisis management missions outside the Union, which is the essence of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSPD). If the PESCO initiative, launched by 25 Member States in December 2017, really meant to achieve this, then we should just be patient and wait fifteen years or so before making a judgement. The problem is that, for the time being, it is more a *framework for cooperation projects* than a proper *process* to *integrate* defence budgets, plans, capabilities and industries, and carry out interoperability exercises in order to form an autonomous capacity. Moreover, this framework is barely linked to the CSDP. In fact, PESCO's main programme, "military mobility" endorsed by 24 Member States, has little to do with crisis management, but everything to do with NATO. So PESCO, as it stands, is some sort of European Defence Agency (EDA) without EDA. Which raises the question: do we still need an EDA? and are Member States willing to tighten their approach to avoid "wasting the chance" of PESCO? The litmus test will come soon. If and when a Member State "no longer fulfils the criteria" or is "no longer able to meet the commitments," will the others have the will to "suspend" it, as they pledged in the Treaty? Part of the test will also be in the willingness of Member States to write off the projects that appear as no more than paperwork. Therefore, PESCO is facing steep challenges. In practice, the chance that Member States push the reset button and go back to the original concept is thin.

Despite the fact that it will likely bear fruit only at the end of the next decade, the **European Defence Fund (EDF)** is the most promising initiative in the realm of the European defence. This stems from many reasons, among which the fact that, for the first time ever, the Commission will put money on the table, whilst it has a capacity to take decisions which are not the lowest common denominator. But there are conditions for this fund to come to fruition. The first is that Europeans vote the budget according to the provisions made in the draft Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF): €13 billion is not a small sum in the present context. The second is that the Commission builds up the right structure to manage a fund of this magnitude. This might be the case, with the creation of a DG Industry-Defence and Space. Finally, the most important condition for the Fund to be a success is to link it to an efficient defence planning process. This is not the case yet. The main challenge here is to lay down solid foundations for DG Defence and establish a consistent working programme.

Defence planning is the knot that should tie all initiatives together and bring coherence in what would otherwise be a muddled patchwork. Unfortunately, in spite of all the energy and the goodwill brought in by all the units involved, be it in the European Union Military Staff (EUMS) or the EDA, the new European defence planning process, relaunched in 2017 in the wake of the EU global strategy (June 2016) and its implementation plan by the Council of the EU (November 2016), is everything but satisfying. Many reasons contribute to this situation, the main one being that Member States are not supportive of an efficient European defence planning (EU-DPP). Large States have their own processes and the others have the NATO Defence Planning process (NDPP). The latter concludes with the apportioning of capability target packages, a much more constraining framework that the EUMS's high impact capability goals and the EDA's capability development plan. The truth is that not a single Member State wants another "laundry list" that would compel it to commit to some sort of capability objective. For this reason, it seems unlikely that the much touted "Coordinated Annual Review on Defence" (CARD) will make a difference, since it is difficult to review objectives that have not been properly set. The best would be to rethink the whole EU-DPP to find ways to harmonize it and make it coherent with both the NDPP and the national processes. However, reviewing the whole process is a huge challenge.

The **European Peace Facility (**EPF) is a personal initiative of the former High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission (HR/VP), Federica Mogherini, launched in June 2018, to set up a new off-budget fund, outside of the Union's MFF, worth €10,5 billion. This Fund should enable the financing of operational actions under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) that have military or defence implications. It is to be constituted by drawing together existing off-budget security and defence-related mechanisms, namely the Athena mechanism and the African Peace Facility, overcoming their gaps and limitations. At present, discussions on the launch of the EPF seem to be stalled.

The simple reason is that some governments are not willing to consider the common funding of crisis management operations. This is precisely the rationale for the wording of article 41.2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), which forbids the Union to fund expenditure "arising from (CSDP) operations having military or defence implications". Since "who pays decides," some Member States prefer to pay rather than to surrender to the decisions to the Union. At the same time, they will be blaming others for not supporting the initiatives they are putting on the Union's table. This contradiction must be overcome. With a little goodwill, this should be feasible.

Beyond PESCO's meandering and in line with President Juncker's commitment to a fully-fledged European Defence Union by 2025, in November 2017 the Commission and the HR/VP launched an initiative called "**Military mobility**" to facilitate the movement of military troops and assets within and beyond the Union's territory. The dedicated "Action Plan," backed by a €6.5 billion budget request, identifies a series of operational measures to tackle physical, procedural and regulatory barriers which hamper military mobility. This Action Plan is based on three pillars: harmonising military requirements; developing an infrastructure policy and investments enabling more synergies between civilian and military needs; and finally, streamlining and simplifying customs formalities for military operations and aligning rules for transport in the military domain. Some progress has been made and the challenge seems manageable.

Outside the Union: between disillusions and new promises

In 2010 the signature of the so-called **Lancaster House treaties** between France and the U.K. was presented as a redux of the "failed romance of Saint-Malo". It was indeed once again all about creating a "capacity for autonomous action backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises.". The Lancaster treaties shared with CSDP and PESCO the flavour of an "avant-garde," even if reduced to two nations, presented at the time "the ones that pay and the ones that fight". It also shared with PESCO the fact that it addressed all pillars of cooperation at the same time: operational with the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF); industrial with a dozen projects, among them a MALE drone (the so called *Telemos*) and a Future Combat Air System (FCAS); and eventually a political window with the creation of a permanent "high level working group" and parliamentary meetings involving representatives of the four national chambers every six months. Unfortunately, lost in the Brexit chaos, Franco-British cooperation has so far led nowhere. All major industrial projects, with the exception of the nuclear window, are now Franco-German; the CJEF is certainly a good tool to drill the forces but it has about the same chance to be deployed as the battlegroups; and the political window seems to have become a mere ritual. The underlying truth is that British strategists do not envisage their troops going anywhere without the Americans … and so tend to do the French. Even if Franco-British cooperation worked, it would not be an authentic European defence.

At the present time, **Franco-German industrial cooperation initiatives** are among European defence's most promising seeds. Cooperation in the field of aeronautics

should give birth not only to an airplane, but to a combat system, marking significant progress over all previous cooperation attempts, such as the A400M. Similarly, cooperation in the field of ground systems should open the door not only to a mere main battle tank, but to new forms of cavalry and infantry fighting. Eventually, those industrial programmes should also lead to a lasting agreement on armament export controls between the two countries, which have been a matter of contention during the last years. In the domain of defence industrial cooperation, it is also worth noting the recent **Franco-Belgian "capacité motorisée"** (CaMo) agreement, which is a comprehensive armaments cooperation programme in the field of land mobility.

The **European Intervention Initiative** (E2I), launched by President Macron in 2017, is also a very promising seed for the European defence. It aims at fostering the convergence of the strategic cultures of the dozen or so participating European States starting from the shaping of a shared vision of security risks and threats, both geographic and thematic (e.g. cyber threats). Culture is one of the most powerful engines in strategy, and strategic cultures can evolve (think about Germany in the last two decades). However, this takes time. This initiative will therefore only bear fruit in the long run, if it does.

Put together, all those initiatives will be effective in 15 years at best and will not provide the Union with any autonomous capacity in the foreseeable future. There is a need to deepen European Defence by moving from mere cooperation towards integration – and not to waste time doing so.

STEPPING UP FROM COOPERATION TO INTEGRATION

Decide where we want to go

The main question: is what do the Europeans want to do together? Do they want to be able to deter the Russians from attacking the Baltic States? To fight the Jihadis that are trafficking in the Sahel-Saharan strip? To control the Mediterranean border? To fight in the cyberspace? In the outer Space? To make a decision, the Europeans need to have a serious conversation about what kind of military tool they want to build in the long run and, as part of this, what they want to be able to do alone, and what do they want to do within NATO, in other words, together with their American partners. That is the most important question, and the most difficult one, and this is the reason why it has never been really answered, and not even raised. Does Europe want a capacity and a strategy outside NATO, not competing with it, but allowing them to conduct crisis management missions on their own? Or do they want a European pillar of NATO? Or perhaps both?

Decide on the framework

The second crucial question is: should the European "autonomous capacity" be built inside the Union legal framework or outside? Basically, two models can be proposed, if one assumes that PESCO will lead to a dead end.

The first is an enhanced cooperation within the framework of the treaties. This is permitted by article 20 TEU. It requires nine Member States to agree, but it has to be launched by unanimity and decisions within it are still to be taken by unanimity. This is in line with the spirit of the Treaty, but it will be difficult to overcome the necessity of an initial unanimous vote. Nevertheless, enhanced cooperation might well work if it brings together some of the European countries with a defence industry, focussing for instance on aspects such as export controls, industrial cooperation, some sort of an armament common market.

The second option is to use the template of a Eurogroup outside the Union framework such as the European Intervention Initiative. Its value is that every aspect is open for negotiation and, in addition, that some kind of a "technical" body such

as the BCE can be put in place with decisions taken according to the qualified majority rule. If a Eurogroup on defence were to be put together, it should apply qualified majority voting (QMV). If Member States are not ready for this, then it would be better to remain within the present framework of the treaties.

Decide on the governance rules

This is the crucial question of QMV versus unanimity. If Europeans keep making decisions by unanimity, they will not be able to walk very far down the strategic path, operating an effective defence and security policy.

The difficulty is that almost no Member State is willing to leapfrog to QMV, neither the small States, nor the larger ones, which do not realise yet that they are small.

The solution might be to distinguish decisions that do not imply sending troops in operations, which are 90 % of the decisions taken in defence matters, and the decisions to launch operations, which would remain governed by the unanimity rule.

In this regard, the idea to put in place a European Security Council taking decisions at QMV, with a veto for decisions implying military operations, might well be the next big move towards an authentic European defence.

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A lot has been done since 2014, but a lot remains on the agenda of the new European Commission and Parliament. This promises further vital – and interesting – debates in the years to come.

The two main challenges boil down to two words. The first is coherence, which means connecting the dots between all the initiatives under way. This can be done only if the way forward encompasses a solid European defence planning, starting with a clear strategic concept, consistent both with national defence strategies and NATO's strategic concept. The second is patience. All the initiatives that have been launched will bear fruit only in the long run.

Still, they will not be sufficient. Call it a European Defence Union, Strategic Autonomy, Common Defence, or even European Army, the concept remains the same: Europe desperately needs an autonomous capacity at least to solve crises in its neighbourhood that impact it directly or indirectly (e.g. Syria) and, to all extent possible, to take an active part in its own defence, be it against old or new threats.

In order to build this capacity, the Europeans must come to agreement on what they want to do together and how they want to do it. As the old Seneca put it: there is no favourable wind for the sailor who does not know where to go.

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