



European Defence Embryo

from national defence to European defence... / Europe and Defence - G2S File No. 24

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Relations internationales

Let's go back to 2019 and examine with the GCA (2S) Jean-Paul PERRUCHE how our embryo of European defence has gradually been built up in a process that obviously must not be satisfied with the level currently achieved.

Even today, the idea of a "European defence" still gives rise to many fantasies and different perceptions of its interest and conception. At a time when the major global strategic balances seem to be threatened by new power relationships, it would seem useful to gain a better understanding of their origin, reality and prospects.

The turning point of the Second World War: from national to European defence

Until the Second World War, defence in Europe was conceived only at the national level. It was only after 1945 that it was envisaged at the European level by a combination of two factors.

The first was cyclical and related to the threat posed by the deployment of the Red Army on the German-German border and the occupation of eastern and central Europe by the USSR. In the face of this threat, no European country could resist individually. The union of the defence capabilities of the countries of Western Europe was therefore imperative. This need first became a reality with the Treaty of Dunkirk between France and the United Kingdom in 1947, followed by the Treaty of Brussels in 1948, which included the Benelux countries, then Italy, and finally the Treaty of Washington in 1949, which gave a transatlantic dimension to the defence of Europe with the NATO, the guarantee of American security in the form of the deployment of several hundred thousand American soldiers in the member countries of the Atlantic Alliance and the reintegration of the Federal Republic of Germany into the European defence system.

The second factor was the catastrophic toll of the effects of the two world wars of the 20th century on the European countries that had come out of the ruins, bloodstained and now dominated by external powers. The "Never Again!" justified the creation of strong interdependencies and lasting cooperation between European countries that would

prevent new conflicts of interest from generating new armed confrontations. The first step towards this goal was the creation in 1951 of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which could have been followed by a European Defence Community (EDC), but whose project, no doubt premature, was rejected by the French Parliament in 1954. This was followed by the European Economic Community (EEC) or Common Market (Treaty of Rome) and EURATOM created in 1957, then the election of the European Parliament in 1957, in direct universal suffrage in 1979, the creation of the European Union with the single market in 1993 and the creation of a common currency (the Euro) in 2002. Through this process of union and integration, European countries were developing more and more common interests that needed to be defended in common. That is why the objective of establishing a CFSP and an ESDP that could in due course lead to a common defence first appeared in the Maastricht Treaty (1993), but it was not until the Treaty of Nice (2001) that the European Union was able to set up a common defence policy. However, it was not until the Treaty of Nice (2001) that the organisation, structures and means of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), which had only just been transformed by the Lisbon Treaty (2009) into the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), were defined.

Thus since the 1950s, the defence of European countries has been organised at three levels: national, European in the EU and transatlantic in NATO.

The three levels of European defence: state of play

Defence, the primary sovereign function of nation states, remains a national responsibility even today. It is the States that create, finance and commit their armed forces, and that assume the human and financial consequences of their commitments.

However, the relative decline in the power of European states since the 1950s and the steady reduction in their defence efforts in the post-Cold War period have considerably reduced their capacity for military action. Most of them are no longer able to meet their defence needs alone and are unable to undertake operational commitments outside their territory. They rely on NATO, i.e. the United States, to defend their vital interests, particularly in the face of the nuclear threat. They rely on NATO, i.e. the United States, to defend their vital interests, particularly in the face of the nuclear threat, and contribute marginally to international operations conducted within the framework of NATO, the EU, the UN or coalitions of the willing. They cooperate within multinational force HQs (Eurocorps, German-Dutch Corps, etc.) and some countries share certain capabilities (air and naval in the Benelux) or have capability complementarity agreements (Netherlands with Germany). Only France and the United Kingdom escape this situation thanks to their nuclear deterrent and force projection capabilities, albeit on a limited scale.

In this context, almost all European states exercise their defence responsibilities within NATO by relying on the US security guarantee. By agreeing to be dependent on the United States, they are thus giving up a large part of their national freedom of action.

The credibility of this guarantee is now in question. Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which establishes Allied solidarity in the face of threats, is not binding and leaves each country free to show solidarity as it sees fit. The East-West confrontation of the Cold War made Europe the centre of gravity of American security interests. This geo-strategic configuration no longer exists because the strategic interests of the United States have shifted to the Middle East and Asia. After his last two predecessors, but in more brutal terms, President Donald TRUMP made it clear to his European "Allies" that they should not take the US security guarantee for granted and that it would no longer be at the same

price! Moreover, even if President Vladimir Putin's Russia has proved its capacity to cause a nuisance in relation to NATO and the EU by destabilising European countries, it has not been able to do so.s neighbourhood where Russian or Russian-speaking minorities live and needs to be countered, the threat it represents is unrelated to that of the USSR. Moreover, its strategy is increasingly expressed outside the European theatre (Syria, Africa, Venezuela, etc.).

It was created as a complement to NATO and for cases where the United States does not wish to engage in situations affecting the interests of the United States. The CSDP developed within the EU framework is still in its infancy today, having been created as a complement to NATO and in cases where the United States does not wish to engage in situations affecting the security interests of Europeans (a lesson learned from the crises in the Balkans in the 1990s).

It suffers from several birth handicaps. Its level of ambition has been restricted to the management of crises outside EU territory, so as not to affect the priority given to NATO by most of the member states of both organisations. Organised on an intergovernmental basis (like NATO), its permanent multinational operational command structure has been limited to the upper (politico-strategic) part with reduced manpower: the EU Military Staff (EUMS) with only 200 personnel, while NATO's International Military Staff (IMS) has more than 400. In the absence of a permanent operational chain of command, unlike NATO with SHAPE6 and ACT7 at the strategic level, AFNORTH and AFSOUTH at the operational level are not part of NATO. (approximately 9 000 personnel in total), the EU must therefore create an ad hoc chain of command and in particular an operation headquarters (OHQ8) for each of the military operations it launches. Clearly, this constraint runs counter to the need for rapid reaction in the management of security crises. Finally, the maximum volume of operational commitments envisaged by the EU has also been capped at that of an army corps (the so-called Helsinki target of some 50 000 troops). In reality, as illustrated by the concept of 1 500 battlegroups that can be committed in 15 days for a maximum duration of four months, the EU envisages only rapid, low-capacity, low-risk engagements. However, it should be noted that none of these battlegroups, which have been on alert since 2004, have yet been committed.

In all, some forty CSDP operations have been launched, generally successfully since 2003, but they are mainly civilian operations (police, gendarmerie, justice, advice, ceasefire observation, etc.). The military operations (about ten), of varying durations, have never been high-intensity coercive operations.

To sum up, with insufficient defence capabilities at national level, growing uncertainty as to the American security guarantee in the NATO and capabilities still at an embryonic level in the EU, European countries need to revise their defence policies and adapt them to the new global security context. If they want to continue to hope to benefit from a US guarantee to be discovered on a case-by-case basis, they will have to show their allegiance by giving concrete support to a US guarantee. If they want to continue to hope for a US guarantee to be discovered on a case-by-case basis, they will have to show allegiance by giving concrete support to US foreign policy and significantly increasing their defence spending (in particular in favour of the US defence industry). Apart from this scenario, which largely compromises their independence and autonomy. In order to take action, they have no other choice but to better federate their capabilities and build together a defence capable of making a difference at the global level. This is the path to which the EU Heads of State and Government have committed themselves since 2013 by setting the objective of European strategic autonomy, an objective that has been strengthened since 2016 by statements by the President of the European Commission,

the French President and the German Chancellor in favour of a "European army".

But beyond these declarations, it is necessary to take stock of the concrete measures implemented and the road still to be travelled.

European defence: how to make the desirable future possible?

In the new security context, it would seem necessary to improve Europeans' defence capability at the three levels mentioned above: strengthening national capabilities, developing European autonomy and redefining transatlantic cooperation.

At national level, it is for each country to define its defence capabilities in the light of its interests and foreign policy ambitions. However, it is clear that almost all European countries cannot hope to meet their defence needs alone and must accept a certain dependence on European and transatlantic cooperation. Their capability planning must therefore result from their contribution to common defence in the EU and NATO frameworks and their specific national needs. However, the collectivisation of defence efforts favours a certain disempowerment of nations inclined to make savings on their defence budget (the best supported by citizens in a democracy). This is why the capability requirements associated with collective defence should be assessed more precisely and be the subject of more binding commitments by nations. At present, European states are deferring to the United States in NATO, allowing them to reduce their ambitions in the EU and escape this constraint.

The current average level of defence efforts by European countries is undignified. Yet there will be no strengthening of Europe's defence without an increase in the national efforts of Europeans. The difficulty lies in specifying and justifying the level of that increase. That is why national defence planning (forces and weapons systems) must be able to take place within a framework of European cooperation in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and damaging gaps.

At the level of the EU and its CSDP, defence efforts often find themselves in the declaratory stage (strategic autonomy, European army, etc.), but are difficult to put into practice.

The concrete measures recently decided by the European Council in favour of greater European strategic autonomy are promising, as they indicate that the strengthening of Europeans' strategic influence and power can only come from the pooling of their forces. But these measures are still insufficient to guarantee a credible European operational capability. The activation of permanent structured cooperation by 25 member countries around 34 European multinational cooperation projects and the financial involvement of the Commission in research and development of European systems for the defence and security of Europe's military and defence industries is a major step forward. 13 billion over seven years for European research and development projects) are the strongest elements but mainly concern the capability field. Their effects can only be measured in the medium/long term (10 to 20 years).

As for the concept of a "European army", it should not be taken as a substitute for national armies. In the current state of the treaties and political realities, it can only be understood as a "cooperative of the national capabilities of European countries" that needs to be rationalised. Since armies are merely a political tool, the first aim is to strengthen the definition of common security interests, justifying a common approach to their defence at European level, and then to study scenarios for joint operational action, in which the different national capabilities should be articulated between integration, cooperation and

juxtaposition. At a later stage, with the development of a common European security approach and culture, power gains could be achieved by accepting a (more or less limited) sharing of sovereignty.

As far as NATO is concerned, no one can dispute the value of transatlantic cooperation for the defence of Europe and the benefits it brings. 70 years of military cooperation in this organisation (unified doctrines and concepts, interoperability, culture of integrated multinational staffs, etc.). But a responsible attitude should lead European countries to accept the new strategic reality that has changed the terms of this cooperation. Some European security interests do not concern the United States (migration, instability around the Mediterranean or in Africa...) and some common threats such as Islamist terrorism do not justify common modes of action on both sides of the Atlantic. Moreover, the American President likes to repeat that the American guarantee will no longer be at the same price. With the shift in American strategic interests towards Asia, the idea of a global NATO including countries from other continents deaf in certain corridors of the American administration.

The bottom line is that the American partner wants stronger, more responsible and more capable Europeans to manage the bulk of their own security needs and contribute to its own security burden. However, as mentioned above, Europeans can only significantly increase their capabilities together by strengthening their union. The emergence of a capable Europe of defence is in the interests of both Europeans and the United States.

The conception of a defence at European level is a legacy of post-World War II history. For a long time limited to the collective defence of the territory of European states by the United States during the Cold War, it evolved in the context of the 1990s (Balkan crises) and European construction, towards an implicit complementarity between NATO and the EU (CSDP).

In the new global security context marked by power relations between emerging continental states, the American disengagement from Europe is being confirmed. This implies a greater responsibility to be assumed by Europeans for their defence and the strengthening of their capacity for joint action. Defence at European level is no longer an option, it is an obligation.

6 Supreme Headquarters Allied Power in Europe

7 Allied Command for Transformation

8 Operational Head Quarters

9 ALTHEA in Bosnia has been part of NATO since 2004, ARTEMIS and EUFOR in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2003 and 2006, SOPHIA anti-trafficking in migrants in the Mediterranean since 2014, training missions of local forces in Somalia, Mali and Central Africa since 2010, 2013 and 2016).

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