



Promoting and building an autonomous European defence

Europe and Defence - G2S Dossier No. 24

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Published on 08/08/2019

Relations internationales

General (2S) Jacques FAVIN LÉVÊQUE evokes the possible avenues and actions, in the short and longer term.

President MACRON and Chancellor MERKEL, as well as President JUNKER earlier, recently referred to a future common defence, to be carried out by a "European army". Defence professionals have not been fooled by the terminology used. Quite often the media discourse does not reflect the operational reality of things. It is clearly not a question of creating an integrated army in which nations would lose their identity and sovereignty.

Everyone knows how much the current situation in the European Union, shaken by a resurgence of nationalism and by the diversity of strategic approaches, does not make it possible to give an operational reality to an any dream of merging the armed forces of the Member States and integrating them into a single army.

The idea of a European army, moreover, underpins the idea of a Europe as a political power with all the attributes of a federal state, which the European Union is not, and probably will not be, at least not in the foreseeable future.

However, to speak of a "European army" is to provide a simple and colourful response to the wishes regularly expressed by the citizens of the European Union in Eurobarometer surveys. It is also a way of making a complex international issue affordable and of popularising the measures that the EU must take in order to assume full responsibility for the defence of its strategic interests and in particular its territory and its people.

It is in this respect that such a stance on the part of the two leading countries in the field of defence, in a European Union without the United Kingdom, is likely to advance the European defence tool and perhaps the willingness of the Member States of the Union to commit themselves.

In practice, the policy adopted by the Member States, through the European Council, is based on the current concept of a European defence, the scope of which is limited to external operations. It lays the foundations for an autonomous European defence, the first stage of which would result from the decisions taken since the summer of 2017.

These include Permanent Structured Cooperation (PSC or PESCO¹⁰), a somewhat obscure term with technocratic overtones, which now opens up significant possibilities for EU member states to cooperate in the field of defence capabilities and to a lesser extent - albeit for the time being - in the operational field.

The PSC stems from the Lisbon Treaty. Implemented since 13 December 2017, it brings together 25¹¹ EU states that have decided to honour binding commitments to carry out joint projects. These projects do not systematically involve all 25 States, except in special cases, but voluntary nations according to the interests of each one .

The PSC has already led to the launch of 34 projects. By way of example - and over and above the flagship projects such as the European MALE¹² UAV, cyber defence or Franco-German fighter aircraft and armoured vehicle projects - we can mention one project that is emblematic of the community of interest, which brings together almost all the states participating in the PSC, is that of military mobility.

Often referred to as the "military Schengen", this "mobility" project, in which NATO has also expressed an interest, will make it possible, from the outset, to develop a "military Schengen". As soon as its modalities have been decided, including in particular its implications in terms of infrastructure, the free movement of EU military units throughout the territory of the Union will be possible.

In fact, free military movement is nothing new. This was the case for the Allied armies on West German soil for several decades during the Cold War. The French, British, Belgian, Dutch, American and Canadian regiments that were part of NATO's operational deployment against the Warsaw Pact were then free to move on German roads and highways. But their field of action was limited to the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany, which was the potential battlefield at the time.

Since then, Germany has been reunified and its territory has expanded. The European Union was formed and the defence of Europe now extends from Gibraltar to the Baltic and from Brittany to the Polish border. Whether we are talking about the NATO system in Europe or the growing importance of European defence, the free mobility of units throughout the territory of the Union has become an imperative.

The Union is in fact facing difficulties of several kinds. First of all in terms of principles, because the 28¹³ Member States of the European Union are sovereign States, which demand respect for their sovereignty and only accept the arrival of foreign military forces on their soil on condition that they have their own regulations. For example, an infantry company of the Spanish army that has to reach a manoeuvring area, or an operational deployment in Poland, will have to comply with a whole series of different administrative procedures and controls specific to each of the countries it crosses.

Secondly, the difficulties to be overcome concern both road and rail infrastructure. With regard to the road network, especially motorways, a great deal of work needs to be done to define and upgrade major traffic routes that could be used by military convoys. Particular attention will have to be paid to the class of bridges, which will have to be able to accept the passage of the heaviest vehicles. In West Germany in the 1960s to 1990s, all

bridges had a sign on which the class of the bridge was shown in black on a yellow background. These signs have almost disappeared from the German landscape, they are still visible today. will have to be relocated there and implemented across the whole of Europe.

In the rail sector, military mobility is dependent on the homogeneity of the European rail network. Some countries, notably the Baltic States, are not aligned with the 1.435-metre track gauge of most European countries.

Upgrading the Baltic network is therefore of particular strategic importance in view of the resurgence of a Russian threat, albeit one that is not commensurate with the Cold War period.

Finally, over and above the efforts to be made to facilitate the movement of units in the infrastructure sector, a procedure for using the network will have to be developed. This brings us back to the need, so long fought against by the United Kingdom, now at last in the making, for a European Union operational headquarters to plan and conduct operations, including moves ordered by the European Union.

Furthermore, NATO may also need to organise the movement of units on European territory. This is why the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, SHAPE¹⁴, is also very interested in this project, which was initially led by the European Union but on which NATO is probably tempted to launch an OPA .

It has to be said, however, that this PSC, despite the hopes it has raised and the expected success of the 34 projects thus launched, is not, at least for the time being, reflected in the area of operational engagement.

There is in fact a focus of this PSC on the capability area - which is good - but it is a certain departure from its initial objective and from the text of the Lisbon Treaty itself. That is why France wanted to counterbalance this drift. In June 2018, it launched a European Intervention Initiative (EII) with the aim of deepening, together with the 10 countries¹⁵ that are currently partners, the geopolitical and geostrategic conditions for a joint operational commitment. Taking into account the future BREXIT, this initiative, which is outside the EU structures, will make it possible to maintain a strong link with the British, whose capabilities and operational know-how are still indispensable to us.

To complete this picture of concrete progress over the last two years, mention should finally be made of the decision taken by the Commission to create a defence fund at Union level. It should cover a significant proportion of defence research and technology expenditure and help finance the development of joint armaments programmes.

It is on the basis of this promising step forward, which has not yet been translated into tangible achievements, that a European defence could be built. It would go beyond the current framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the Petersberg missions¹⁶ to take full responsibility for the defence of EU territory, currently assumed by NATO under the Washington Treaty.

It is true that the culture of dependence on the United States still strongly marks the mentality in many member states, particularly in Eastern Europe and the Baltic States. However, the evolution of the Euro-American relationship, already perceptible under President Obama and now exacerbated by President TRUMP, may weaken mutual trust.

It is therefore not out of the question to imagine an autonomous European defence in the

medium term, or even a sovereign European defence in the much longer term. Indeed, the search for strategic autonomy is now a stated objective of the European Union in the field of defence and security.

In order to achieve that objective in practice, why not take up the concept of a "coalition" and perpetuate it in a permanent structure. In other words, to paraphrase the now enlightened terms of the PSC, create a "permanent structured coalition" based on a European Defence Treaty and giving concrete form to a "European Alliance".

Such a coalition, the armed arm of the European Union, could be inspired by the structures of the Atlantic Alliance and have a kind of European NATO as its military tool. It would have, as in the Washington Treaty, its "Article 5", reflecting the solidarity of the signatory states in a common defence. In fact, Article 42-7 of the Treaty on European Union¹⁷ already expresses that solidarity. Only the second paragraph of the article should be amended in such a way as to restore the EU's full responsibility for the defence of its territory, while preserving the Atlantic Alliance.

The sovereign nations, members of the European Union, would thus decide to join forces on an institutional and permanent basis and would organise their common defence through a politico-military structure which, from the PSC¹⁸ to the EDA¹⁹, including a permanent headquarters and Eurocorps, would be directly derived from the current EU bodies.

However, this does not mean that the transatlantic link should be broken. A defence agreement should be concluded with the United States, the United Kingdom and the other stakeholders in the Atlantic Alliance.

The reader will readily understand that this would be a fundamental reshaping of the international security architecture, the occurrence of which is low, and that the evolution towards a European defence of its own can only be slow and gradual. The European Union's strategic autonomy, which the decisions referred to above should make it possible to achieve by 2025-2030, would be the first step, particularly in the creation of a significant defence tool. But it is not the whole point of having suitable and effective means at one's disposal in the long term, one must still have the will to use them, and that is the whole problem of political Europe...

¹⁰ Permanent Structured Cooperation

¹¹ Excluding the United Kingdom, Denmark and Malta.

¹² Medium Altitude Long Endurance

¹³ 27 post BREXIT

¹⁴ Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe

¹⁵ Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom.

16 Humanitarian and evacuation missions; peacekeeping missions; missions of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking operations.

17 This Article provides that "should a Member State be the object of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall give it aid and assistance by all the means in their power".

18 Political and Security Committee

19 European Defence Agency

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Release date 07/08/2019

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