



EU ARMY

The need for defence cooperation within Europe - G2S File No. 24

GCA (2S) Philippe PONTIÈS

Published on 09/08/2019

Relations internationales

As pointed out by LAG (2S) Philippe PONTIÈS, this cooperation remains fragile and limited, in particular due to the differences in our different national policies and their democratic deadlines.

In its practical implementation, the CSDP20, in particular as regards the setting up of operations and non-executive missions (so-called Petersberg missions), comes up against national electoral agendas that are in perpetual conflict. These are most often a brake on the zeal of leaders who are reluctant to commit themselves militarily outside the well-established NATO structures and are confronted with public opinion that is primarily concerned with socio-economic issues.

Indeed, it is rare that at least one Member State is not confronted, at a given time, with the preparation of a national election to renew heads of state, parliament, government or regional executives. This electoral volatility and its consequences are, admittedly, rather difficult to reconcile with the necessary political stability required to adhere to the dual principle of triggering European military action and contributing to the setting up of an ad hoc force within the simple Petersberg framework. It is easy to imagine what could happen with more robust commitments.

The Member States of the European Union constitute a singular kaleidoscope of political organisations and modes of government, each with its own logic of operation. While constitutional provisions give the French President a large degree of autonomy in defence decision-making, this is not always the case elsewhere, where the French Government has the power to take decisions on its own. The decision to participate in the military is ultimately dependent on coalitions that are often fluctuating and sometimes even deadlocked. This reality also applies in the longer term when it comes to finalising industrial or capability partnerships.

Moreover, these coalitions most often reflect very diverse political and cultural

sensitivities, which have already been mentioned in many articles in this dossier and which explain the different degrees to which national public opinion perceives the need for autonomy of decision and action at European level. The same is true when it comes to judging the desirability of arms exports, the recent Franco-German tension over the appropriateness of the "European Union" as a means of promoting European security and defence. of selling war material to countries involved in the conflict in Yemen is a reminder in this respect that deserves to be pondered.

Thus, half of the European countries are governed by minority coalitions that are often fragile. This is particularly the case in the United Kingdom, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden. Other states, such as Italy and Germany, rely on majorities based on inter-party government contracts. Indeed, the fragmentation of the political landscape lends itself rather poorly to the development of an autonomous security and defence ambition that goes beyond the Petersberg tasks. The natural reflex is, therefore, at best to stick to what already exists, without risking its political survival through initiatives that may be deemed untimely, or at worst to try to unravel what may be at stake. At worst, it is to try to unravel what can be unravelled in the name of NATO, which is perceived as the unassailable horizon of collective security or, conversely, in the name of a purely national reappropriation of security and defence issues. And the electoral confirmation of the rise in the strength of feelings The fact that the populist and/or nationalist parties during the last European elections complicates the resolution of an already very delicate equation.

These fragilities are also found in the cooperation projects of armament programmes. While successes have been achieved in a number of areas (A400M Atlas transport aircraft, Tiger helicopter, MUSIS21 space observation system, FREMM22 and HORIZON frigates, SCALP23 and METEOR24 missiles), most of the programmes under way have not met all the expected military characteristics, suffering moreover from calendar shifts than in purely national versions. These shifts are mainly due to the multiplication of equipment versions linked to insufficient harmonisation of the military requirements of the States party to the project. Industrial duplication, the "juste retour" principle and the sharing of industrial load plans, without necessarily taking account of existing centres of excellence, illustrate the limits of national particularism in the face of the collective European interest.

Until now, NATO has played a particularly structuring role. Firstly, because the organisation was the privileged framework for collective security, under the American nuclear, capability and financial umbrella. From then on, everyone was able to live with this dependence at a lower cost for the defence of their vital interests, the guarantee of security and the protection of the environment. Moreover, the guarantee of American security made it possible to compensate for each other's capability weaknesses, in particular by means of sharing or complementarity agreements.

Whether they like it or not, the government coalitions that have taken over the responsibilities have never questioned this state of affairs, which is, all in all, quite comfortable for countries that have, over time, considered that they have been able to take over the responsibility for the security of their own countries. The government coalitions that have succeeded one another have never, willingly or unwillingly, questioned this state of affairs, which is, after all, quite comfortable for countries that have, over the years, considerably reduced the scope of their defence efforts, preferring to alienate their freedom of action at the whim of their big American brother, who now bears the greater part of the budgetary burden.

Now, the combination of the increasingly unequivocal questioning of the automaticity of the American security guarantee, the persistence of old threats (nuclear proliferation, the

return of power states, the need to guarantee freedom of movement and to energy supplies), the emergence of new threats (emergence of terrorism on European territory, more or less well controlled migration flows, stability of the Mediterranean basin and Africa on Europe's doorstep, cybercrime) and sensitive technological challenges (artificial intelligence, big data, control of space) impose the choice of European strategic autonomy in a recast collective security system.

Thus placed in the front line, European countries will have to devote a much greater budgetary weight to their security than is currently granted within the NATO framework. Similarly, they are condemned to strengthen their defence industrial cooperation in order to acquire the means of this overhauled collective security at a lower cost. At stake here are European technological independence, the level of interoperability of their forces beyond the American reference system, the ability of their forces to operate in the field of defence, and the ability of their forces to be used in the most efficient way. It is a question of European technological independence, of the level of interoperability of their forces beyond the American benchmark, of control over development and ownership costs, but first and foremost of the European freedom to possess technology without depending on possible embargo measures. The recent American decision concerning the 5G technology developed by HUAWEI illustrates the fundamental incompatibility between excessive technological dependence and ambitious strategic autonomy. Conversely, the development since 2004 of the European satellite positioning system GALILEO demonstrates the salutary awareness of this fragility, but also of the collective capacity to remedy it.

The countries of northern, central and eastern Europe are, for the moment, equipping themselves with mainly American equipment. And everyone is aware of the extent to which the choice of a fighter aircraft can have a political, strategic, budgetary, military and technological impact over periods of up to several decades, corresponding to the average life span of such weapon systems.

Are the variable-geometry political coalitions that are succeeding one another in Europe ready to accept in the long term to pay the price of an autonomous and integrated military capability? Will the disjointed rhythm of electoral events in the Member States allow this to happen? How can we reconcile the emergence of such an autonomous capability with a plurality of very time-consuming national decision-making processes in the face of security situations that most often require urgent decisions and clear political and military objectives?

In the absence of a primus inter pares (State or hard core of States) the exercise seems delicate, but where there is a will, there is a way.

20 Common Security and Defence Policy

21 Multinational Space-based Imaging System for Surveillance, Reconnaissance and Observation. In French, " système multinational d'imagerie spatiale pour la surveillance, la reconnaissance et l'observation ".

22 Multi-mission frigate

23 Autonomous long-range conventional cruise system

24 Air-to-air missile

Title : GCA (2S) Philippe PONTIÈS

Author (s) : GCA (2S) Philippe PONTIÈS

Release date 12/02/2021

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

[DOWNLOAD DOCUMENT](#)