



## European Security and Defence Policy: is it possible to tune European violins?

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**The author wonders about the difficulties the European Union faces in speaking with a single voice on issues relating to its security and defence in the absence of a real common political vision.**

In 2007, the Treaty of Lisbon created the European External Action Service, headed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. At the crossroads between states and the European institutions, the service is headed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, as Vice-President of the Commission and President of the Foreign Affairs Council. The aim was to make Europe audible on the international stage. On<sup>1</sup> December 2014, Ms. Federica Mogherini succeeded Ms. Catherine Ashton in this key position, which was easy to hold in a peaceful context and without direct threats. However, as early as November 2013, the Ukrainian armed crisis reminded Europe that peace is not an eternal achievement. Add to this the rapid rise of Daesh in the Middle East, another strategic surprise, and the European Union's (EU) common foreign policy faces major challenges. However, and despite the emotion aroused by the Paris attacks, the European cacophony continues today in dealing with immigration and the fight against terrorism. Differences will always exist, as states retain full sovereignty in foreign and security policy. But only a real common European political vision, with concrete actions, will give meaning and energy to this Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) which, in order to be efficient, needs a conductor, but above all a score to play.

### The conductor

At the height of the Ukrainian crisis, more attention was paid to Angela Merkel than to

Ashton or Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council of Heads of State or Government. Yes, Europe reacted and adopted sanctions, including economic sanctions, against Russia. But in action, Berlin or Paris eclipsed Brussels. Yet the Common Security and Defence Policy is defined by the Council of the European Union, composed of the ministers of the governments of each Member State. However, since decisions have to be taken unanimously for every crisis encountered, national governments in fact exercise close and permanent control over the CSDP and its High Representative, who cannot rely on clear and ambitious objectives and pre-established rules to take initiatives. It is a conductor without a score. The High Representative is thus at the heart of European diplomacy and security, but she must play a balancing act. If there is to be a conductor, it must be her. For there to be a score to play, however, a political consensus must emerge between the Member States, with compatible objectives.

### **Expectations of a security and defence policy**

Born of political will in the aftermath of the Second World War, the European Union has proved to be an effective tool for building lasting peace on a continent "historically ravaged by wars", in the words of former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. Even if the Lisbon Treaty has broadened the spectrum of CSDP actions, including military advice and assistance missions, European defence policy remains first and foremost a crisis management policy, the heir to the Petersberg tasks, where Europe often acts in reaction and at a low level. Within the EU, there is sometimes a divergence of will within the EU. During the third Gulf war [1] in 2003, France and Germany adopted a position very far removed from that of the member states signatory to the Letter of Eight, some of which took part in the conflict. But displaying its divisions in this way prevents the EU as a political entity from influencing events. Today, the question of the EU's position vis-à-vis NATO is central. Some EU members would like to rely more, if not solely, on this military organisation to ensure their collective defence in order to avoid unnecessary duplication. But the territorial dispute between NATO member Turkey and EU member Cyprus, as well as the detestable relations between Turkey and Greece, poison EU-NATO relations, which are sometimes instrumentalized, and create political blockages that complicate any rapprochement. Overcoming sterile opposition between NATO and the EU is the key to an effective partnership that involves the search for complementarities. This is the spirit of the "Berlin plus" process which, according to the 1996 NATO Berlin Summit Declaration, aims to "allow easy access to the EU's military capabilities and to the EU's political and security structures". of the European Union to the collective assets and capabilities of the Alliance for operations in which the Alliance as a whole is not militarily engaged as an Alliance". The European Union Force Althea stabilisation mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina works within this framework. However, it must be noted that in Ukraine, neither NATO nor the EU has committed itself militarily, despite the wishes of certain Eastern European states that would have liked a demonstration of force. All these internal debates within the EU remain inevitable, because the Member States retain their prerogatives regarding the definition and use of their defence tool. But these debates, which are necessary in a democracy, must not become deadlocked, hence the importance of agreeing in advance on what the Member States wish to achieve together. That is the very purpose of a common policy. In order to be effective, however, it must get rid of diplomatic ambiguities, which often serve to hide disagreements and are revealed in the crisis by restricting action.

### **Delicate cooperation**

The Common Foreign and Security Policy budget represents about 0.2% of the total EU budget, or just over €334 million for 2014. Paradoxically, with the crisis expected to spur cooperation, Europeans are finding it difficult to translate this into reality. The French Defence Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, thus declared at an informal meeting of EU Defence Ministers in Riga on 19 February 2015 that "we must act with greater solidarity at all times". He was referring to the difficulties encountered in setting up the EU Military Advisory Mission in the Central African Republic, composed of some 60 military personnel. Moreover, there is a very wide disparity in the financial resources devoted to military capabilities among the different Member States. Those most involved in the defence effort would like to see the burden better shared. At his six-monthly press conference at the Élysée Palace on 18 September 2014, François Hollande recalled: "A step must be taken to ensure that efforts are coordinated, the burden shared". An instrument was indeed already created in 2004 to finance the common costs necessary for the implementation of EU operations: the Athena mechanism. But it is limited by its complexity of implementation and funding possibilities, as it is the result of a compromise between its supporters and detractors when it was set up in 2004.

The Treaty of Lisbon has great ambitions in the field of security and defence, with the aim of developing a European defence. It also gives Member States the possibility of pooling their defence capabilities in the form of permanent structured cooperation if they so wish. Participating Member States commit themselves to certain objectives: budgetary, capability, operational or industrial. When voting on sensitive issues, such as security, decisions are taken unanimously. This means that a single country can veto and block everything. This end is rarely reached, but in debates, the threat of a red line that a state would not wish to cross favours the reign of soft consensus. Today we have the same way of working as we did yesterday with 28 members. In an area that requires responsiveness and adaptability, this is a handicap. Within the European Defence Agency, qualified majority voting applies in the decision-making process. Even if the issues at stake here are different, this is a line of thought that it seems difficult to ignore, as long as the national prerogatives of the Member States are not threatened. This could be the case when launching a new EU mission or when voting on the financing of an operation with the Athena mechanism. It would not be a question of forcing a country to intervene, but of possibly giving those who wish to do so the opportunity to do so, together and with the EU flag.

### **The European political vision**

The High Representative has the possibility to make proposals in the field of CSDP, but cannot take initiatives outside his mandate. The Union's strategic interests and the general guidelines of the Common Foreign and Security Policy are first identified by the European Council and then implemented by the EU Council Secretariat and the Commission. Acting under the control of national governments, the EU possesses a wide range of crisis management tools, both civilian and military, which makes it a potential global player on the international scene and gives it the capacity to develop a European foreign and security policy. However, the EU is regularly constrained by the political authorities of the Member States, who constantly put it forward: "Europe should...", without giving it the necessary framework with agreed concrete objectives and the means to achieve them. The migrant crisis that Europe is experiencing today is a perfect illustration of this contradiction. The political world is calling for more Europe', for better coordination, for

greater efficiency and for a global response, but, in the end, each State refuses to agree on a common immigration policy and does what it thinks is best for it. The States act separately, marginalising Europe, which does not have an agreed political vision, but 28 different visions. Cooperation and sovereignty were not incompatible; however, one of the reasons for the difficulties of the CSDP was that, in order for it to be fully effective, States would have to agree to lose some of their freedom of decision, under certain conditions and within an agreed framework. Only then could a real common political vision emerge. Only major issues manage to mobilise Europeans because, paradoxically, Europe moves forward when it is faced with failure, as was the case in the Balkans. Between the Islamist terrorism that has touched Europe at its heart with the attacks in Paris, and the flood of refugees knocking at its doors, Europe is facing major, perhaps vital challenges. One of the main obstacles to defining a common political vision lies in the different threat perceptions in western and eastern Europe. The perception of threats and vital interests remains very national, which explains states' fears about the loss of sovereignty resulting from a common defence policy. Daesh 's Islamist terrorism unambiguously constitutes a transnational threat to the whole of Europe. The EU's response will depend on what Europeans are prepared to give up in terms of national sovereignty in order to face it together, as well as on the trust they place in each other.

The concept of a common defence emerged at the St Malo Summit in 1998 with the birth of the CSDP. The first EU operation was launched only a dozen years ago: Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is not surprising that the EU, as a young political entity, sometimes struggles to make its voice heard in front of the Member States on sensitive security and defence issues. The ambitious idea of having a common defence respecting a purely intergovernmental logic seems difficult to achieve at the present time. A common political vision on security requires a clear identification of the threats that concern Europe and the interests that the European Union intends to defend. These collective security interests, such as the fight against terrorism or organised crime, must make it possible to go beyond the limits imposed by the sovereignty of States in a sovereign and politically sensitive area: security and defence. However, before responding to Jean-Claude Juncker's wish, expressed on 8 March last in the German newspaper Welt am Sonntag, to provide the EU with a set of instruments for its defence, in particular by "setting up a voluntary and permanent European defence force, with resources from the Member States that wish to participate", it would seem necessary to agree beforehand on the use of these instruments and thus define the score to be played under the direction of the conductor in the person of the High Representative. Let us not forget that it is cohesion, based on trust and solidarity, that enables a group of musicians to become an orchestra.

1) The first Gulf War pitted Iraq and Iran against each other from 1980 to 1988. The second war pitted Iraq against a coalition of 34 states supported by the United Nations between 1990 and 1991.

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