

EUROPEAN COMMON DEFENCE A NEW CHALLENGE FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract

The efforts for peace at the end of the Second World War were based on the belief that only through "European unification" was there hope for an end to a chapter in Europe's recent history of war, bloodshed and destruction. The supreme objectives of safeguarding peace, but also of economic unification, contained in the Constitutive Treaties of the European Communities were impregnated with the fundamental intention of ensuring peace. The Treaties that gave birth to the European Communities and the Union confirm that the goal of peace has succeeded, and that a violent confrontation between Member States is currently unlikely. On the other hand, the conflicts that have affected the former Yugoslavia have shown that peace and democracy in Europe are not as obvious as they seemed. The Yugoslav crisis has also shown that it is vital to act in support of peace beyond the borders of the conflict-free zone within the European Union. The paper aims to analyze the evolution of the concept of common European defence, in order to identify features and trends of the European security environment that can provide an image of the future options of the European Union in the field of defence.

Keywords: *European Union; common defence; structured cooperation; coordinated defence analysis; crisis management.*

INTRODUCTION

At the end of World War II, Europe became the confrontation scene of the two superpowers, the United States of America (hereinafter the abbreviation US) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the abbreviation USSR will be used below). Beyond any doubt, the moment 1945 not only represented the end of an era that until then had been dominated in international relations by Europe, but it reflected a point in time when the European identity was about to collapse under the weight of the ideological and the military clash of the two power blocs.

Later, the solution of economic integration provided the European Union with the opportunity to gradually develop a foreign policy which contributed to the maintenance of peace and helped guarantee the security of member states.

Nowadays, European Union is a powerful regional actor with a strong will to become a relevant global actor. Committed to the goal of becoming a global security provider, European Union and its Member States have the second largest defence budget in the world, but still need to improve their common approach on defence matters.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

In the years which followed the second World War, Europe struggled for its own survival. The establishment of the European Organization for Economic Co-operation on the 16th of April 1948 (Barbezat, 1997) (hereinafter the abbreviation EOEC will be used) managed to bypass the "entry" of Western Europe into the sphere of US economic influence, but the danger posed by the expansionary policy of the Soviet Union was maintained. The USSR continued its "aggression" in various ways, and, under the force of the Soviet soldier's boot, communist governments were installed in many of

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the states of Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, the civil war in Greece, which took place between 1946 and 1949, and which was funded by communist countries in the Balkans and orchestrated in Moscow, risked threatening European democracy and the origins of its civilization, as fascism had done in its days.

From a military perspective, between 1945-1950, Western Europe was clearly under threat from the danger of a resurgence of German militarism or a Soviet invasion, situations in which, in the event of aggression, it did not have the necessary means of defence. Immediately after the end of World War II, France and Great Britain considered Germany "the greatest danger", an argument that led to the signing, on March 4th 1947, of a "Treaty of Alliance and Mutual Assistance", also known as The Treaty of Dunkirk. Shortly afterwards, however, British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin announced a spectacular readjustment of the island state's foreign policy, recommending the expansion of the recently concluded Franco-British alliance to the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, leading thus at the signing on the 19th of May 1948 in Brussels of the "Treaty on Economic, Social and Cultural Cooperation and the Legitimate and Collective Defence"².

The shortcomings of the post-war years, the destruction and fears of social upheavals generated the idea that the next defensive alliance could no longer be limited to military issues, as had happened in past centuries, economic and social welfare being identified as the essential component of national defence, in an era that foreshadowed to be dominated by global ideologies and conceptions of society. These were the reasons why a military pact, such as the Brussels Treaty, contained the express commitment of its signatories to cooperate loyally and to coordinate their efforts for economic reconstruction (NATO, 2009), even if, in essence, this was done through the EOEC.

Although some experts question how the signing of the Brussels Treaty contributed to European integration, it is certain that this alliance, especially after 1954 when the Western European Union was formed (hereinafter the abbreviation WEU), became one of the "driving forces" of European unity, maintaining a formal bridge with Great Britain and "offering a helping hand to the defeated".

There is no doubt that, given the broad level of Soviet politics, especially after the violent Greek civil war, the Treaty of Brussels was not enough. This was one of the premises that led to the signing of the "North Atlantic Treaty" in Washington on April 4th, 1949, an event that put the Brussels Treaty in a long numbness, from which it will not recover until 1984³.

The creation of NATO cannot be limited to the process of establishing European unity, this moment representing, rather, a result of the confrontation and division between the two blocs of power, NATO being the mechanism of the Western defence system, with the role of protector of the European freedom and democracy.

The existence of the North Atlantic Alliance did not, however, remove the European nostalgia for setting up its own defence system, which would embody the community's response to the dangers associated with the Cold War. This approach, however, was not considered possible, being conditioned by the economic and political circumstances of the time. For this reason, at the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe on the 11th of August 1950, W. Churchill proposed the establishment of a European army, including Germany. France expressed its dissatisfaction and distrust of this project, understanding that this approach is nothing more than a rearmament of Germany. However, with the passage of time and pressure from the Americans (Britannica, 2020), the French government reconsidered its refusal, and in 1951, Prime Minister René Pleven commissioned Jean Monnet to draw up a Plan (the Pleven Plan (CVCE, 2013) similar to the Schuman Plan, establishing a European Defence Community (hereinafter referred to as the abbreviation EDC). In this way, the Treaty establishing the European Defence Community was signed on the 27th of May 1952.

Through this initiative, France hoped to block the reappearance of an autonomous German army by integrating any German armed forces into the newly created European army. From an

² In 1954, the Treaty on Economic, Social and Cultural Cooperation and the Legitimate and Collective Defence became, by the accession of Germany and Italy, the Western European Union (WEU).

³ The "missile crisis" and the participation of a WEU fleet in monitoring the events related to the Iraq-Iran war, events that gave impetus to a first definition of a European security and defence identity, as stated in the October 1984 "Rome Declaration".

organizational point of view, the institutional structure of the EDC was similar to that of the European Coal and Steel Community (hereinafter the abbreviation ECSC will be used), being composed of a Council of Ministers, an Assembly, a Court of Justice and a Commissariat.

In contrast to the creation of the ECSC, the establishment of the EDC was marked by a lack of enthusiasm, with politicians of the time stating that "it is not as easy to integrate soldiers and officers as it was to integrate steel and coal." This lack of enthusiasm was attributed to the fact that the armies are in the service of the policy of defending territorial integrity and independence, representing a part of the hard core of sovereignty and, at the same time, the complement of the foreign policy of the respective nations. The unanswered question was, as Raymond Aron put it, "to what state or power and policy would the European army submit?" (Raymond, 2019)

This question has sparked a real controversy in France, none other than the author of the project to set up a European army, and at European level a solution has been sought to resolve the tensions in the Hexagon (Kosicki, 2018). Italian Prime Minister Alcide de Gasperi proposed, as a solution to the crisis, the establishment of a European Political Community (hereinafter the abbreviation EPC will be used), which would have competences in the field of economic policy coordination and which, within a foreseeable time horizon, would have gradually absorbed the ECSC and the EDC. Finally, the historic negative vote in the French Assembly on the 30th of August 1954 led to the abandonment of the draft constitution of the EPC. Consequently, although all the other states had ratified the constitution of the EDC (Britannica, 2018), due to the controversies and the situation in France, the constitution of the EPC did not materialize and, implicitly, neither did the constitution of the EDC⁴. Finally, subject to severe limitations and controls⁵, the WEU allowed the rearmament of Germany, which later made it possible for Germany and Italy to become part of the "Brussels Treaty"⁶.

AFTER 70 YEARS

The implementation of the European construct, first through the creation of the European Union (hereinafter referred to as the EU abbreviation), through the Maastricht Treaty, and later through its consolidation, through the Treaty of Lisbon, resulted on the one hand in the cessation of WEU⁷ by the withdrawal of Member States from the Brussels Treaty⁸, and on the other hand it paved the way for the development of the Common Security and Defence Policy (hereinafter the abbreviation CSDP will be used), with ramifications that outlines the institutional framework for cooperation in the field of defence and security at EU level.

Since the failure to establish the EDC almost 70 years ago (Britannica, 2018), Europeans have failed to advance defence projects, with most countries retaining in their own hands what they believe was strictly national sovereignty. The succession of crises since 2014, from the conflict in Ukraine to the waves of refugees and Brexit, as well as a more pronounced political appetite, derived from pecuniary reasons related to the protection of national economic interests, have caused a change of perspective on this issue in some of the European capitals.

In fact, the major crises that have affected Europe in recent years are the premise from which the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy was mandated by the European Council in June 2015 to develop a new Global Strategy for EU's Foreign and Security Policy (European Parliament, 2020).

Presented at the European Council meeting on the 28th of June 2016, the final document of the EU Global Strategy sets the framework for the Union's external action in the medium and long term, focusing on five major priorities: Union security, resilience of Eastern and Southern states and societies of the Union, the integrated approach to conflicts, regional orders based on cooperation and global governance for the 21st century (EEAS, 2020).

⁴ Italy had not done so, but there were no problems.

⁵ France's position prevented the political dimension of the European Communities from developing until 1992, even if we can see an unblocking of this situation with beginning of 1986, with the adoption of the Single European Act.

⁶ Which was renounced with the reunification of Germany on 3 October 1990.

⁷ Amended by the "Paris Protocol" of 24 October 1954, the "Treaty of Brussels" was renamed "Western European Union".

⁸ On June 30, 2011, the WEU officially ceased to exist.

The next step was taken in December 2016, when the European Council approved the Security and Defence Implementation Plan that provides strategic directions to the action course for developing EU security and defence policy on three important objectives:

- a. consolidation of Member States' capacities;
- b. conflict prevention and crisis management;
- c. the protection of the EU and its citizens (EEAS, 2018, p. 1).

The concrete actions through which it is intended to achieve these objectives are (EEAS, 2018, pp. 2-3):

- a. initiation of the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (hereinafter will be used the abbreviation CARD);
- b. the development of a Permanent Structured Cooperation (hereinafter referred to as PESCO);
- c. the establishment of a Military Planning and Conduct Capability (hereinafter the abbreviation MPCC will be used);
- d. creating a set of crisis rapid response tools, including battlegroups and civilian capabilities.

The Coordinated Annual Review on Defence

CARD provides an overview, at EU level, of defence spending, both in terms of national investment and research efforts. The aim of this initiative is to boost European cooperation in the defence sector, including by developing the industrial component and by strengthening financial support for this segment (EDA, 2020).

Through its solutions for the multinational defence cooperation format, CARD has the capacity to provide a real picture and overview of how EU capabilities are being developed. Benefits include:

- efficient identification of deficits;
- in-depth cooperation in the field of defence;
- a coherent approach to planning defence spending (European Council, 2020).

The first CARD report, examined on the 20th of November 2020 at the meeting of EU defence ministers, emphasized that "European defence is fragmented, there is insufficient operational commitment and many capabilities are unnecessarily doubled" (EDA, 2020).

In this regard, during the meeting, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, emphasized the need to "intensify the in-depth dialogue at EU level, with the report pointing to the Member States where there is great potential for European defence cooperation, by equipping Member States' forces with modern equipment and improving their interoperability" (EDA, 2020). According to the European official, the target areas to be pursued are: the main battle tank program, surface patrol ships, fighter-centered systems, Counter-UAS/Anti access systems, space defence and military mobility. At the end of defence ministers meeting, it was concluded that for European defence to function at the level of ambition desired by the Member States, more time and coordination are needed (EDA, 2020).

Permanent Structured Cooperation

The Treaty on the Functioning of the EU provides for the possibility for a group of Member States to strengthen their defence cooperation by establishing a permanent structured cooperation format, which allowed EU leaders⁹ to launch, on the 22nd of June 2017, the package of initiatives in this area.

Member States participating in the PESCO initiative have established an initial list of 17 projects in areas such as: staff training, capabilities or operational capacity building (EEAS, 2020).

This first set of projects, together with the stages of implementation of PESCO, was adopted by the EU Council on the 6th of March 2018. The initiative was further developed by the adoption by the Council on the 25th of June 2018 of the governance rules for the projects within PESCO. These measures encouraged the participation of Member States in the initiative, so that on the 19th of November 2018, the Council adopted a second set of 17 projects, covering areas addressed in the

⁹ All EU Member States participate in PESCO, except Denmark and Malta.

previous set as well as new ones such as the operational capacity of ground forces, naval forces, and cyber defence, respectively, bringing the total number of projects to 34.

One year later, on the 11th of November 2019, the EU Council adopted an additional 13 projects, currently reaching a total of 47. Of this last set, of proposals, five projects focus on training, while the remaining eight focus on the development of naval, air and space capabilities (EEAS, 2020).

It is important to note that on the 5th of November 2020, the EU Council set out the general conditions under which relations with non-EU countries interested in participating in the PESCO initiative are managed, thus advancing the opportunity for EU defence cooperation, more intense and ambitious, including Union partners (EEAS, 2020).

At the same recent meeting of defence ministers in EU Member States on the 20th of November 2020, a stage analysis of the PESCO initiative was also carried out. At the end of it, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, said that there was a strong political will in most European capitals to develop PESCO¹⁰ and explained that, given the recent nature of the initiative, 26 projects producing results that can only be measured in 2025, it is premature to draw conclusions before projects reach a level of operational capacity maturity (EDA, 2020).

It is important to note that, in addition to a stage analysis of the CARD and PESCO initiatives, at the last meeting, the defence ministers of the EU Member States examined the “Strategic Compass”, a strategic document in the field of CSDP. As the document is classified, we can only guess its content, which most likely contains a mapping of risks and threats to the EU and provides guidance on security and defence needs, closely linked to the level of ambition of the Union on these levels (Koenig, 2020).

Optimization of crisis management structures

Following the set of measures adopted on the 8th of June 2017 by the Council, it was decided to set up a Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) (European Council, 2017) in the European Union General Staff (hereinafter referred to as the abbreviation EUGS), with the role of executing operational planning and of conducting of EU operations with a non-executive mandate¹¹.

The MPCC becomes the EU's first permanent operational command, and is intended to command and control operations with up to 2,500 troops¹². The headquarters are located in Brussels, and the General Director of the EUMS is also the Director of the MPCC. Since its inception to date, the MPCC has led three of the EU's operations, namely the EU training missions in Somalia (EUTM Somalia), Mali (EUTM Mali) and the Central African Republic (EUTM RCA) (EEAS, 2020).

The creation of MPCC follows the European Union line to become an international security actor. If EU's initial operations had an emphasis on the humanitarian concerns and they were aimed to support the implementation of peace agreements or democratic elections, throughout the last 15 years, EU operations like EUNAVFOR Atalanta, EUTM Mali and EUNAVFOR Med Sophia, were focused on utility-based concerns like fighting terrorism and border control. While the initial operations yielded rather mixed outcomes, the latter operations in Somalia and Mali are clearly rooted in a broader policy strategy and there is indeed proof of them giving positive stimulus to other forms of EU involvement. This evaluation indicates that the EU is increasingly capable of submerging its military instruments within its overall foreign policy set of tools.

The rapid crisis response tool set

The operational dimension of the EU's commitment to defence has also been strengthened by measures taken to optimize the engagement of EU Battle groups, including by adapting mechanisms for securing financial resources for their deployment.

EU battle groups are one of the tools at the Union's disposal to provide a rapid response to crises and conflicts. In this regard, in order to prevent political, technical or financial obstacles that

¹⁰ At that time, Poland and Hungary conditioned the development of PESCO on the settlement of the dispute with Brussels on certain sensitive issues related to the functioning of the rule of law in the two countries.

¹¹ The non-executive mandate refers to advisory missions and operations and assistance.

¹² This is the size of a battlegroup in terms of personnel.

prevented in the past¹³ deployment of battle groups, on the 22nd of June 2017, EU leaders agreed that a possible deployment of these military forces would be a common expense, with funding to be managed at Union level through the Athena mechanism (European Council, 2020).

European Defence Fund

The European Commission's multiannual budget proposal, approved by the European Council in the summer of 2020 and refined by the provisional political agreement on the 14th of December 2020 between the German Presidency of the EU Council and the European Parliament, provides for a separate budget for the field of defence in the multiannual financial framework for the period 2021-2027. The new European Defence Fund is designed as a co-financing scheme for defence research and capabilities development projects, and has a value of 7.95 billion euros. To this it is added a fund of 1.5 billion euros for the financing of military mobility projects, respectively a fund of 5 billion euros for the financing, through the Athena mechanism, of EU measures for conflict prevention and crisis management (European Commission, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, the European Union has faced a number of significant security challenges, with the need for a coherent and effective response becoming increasingly evident. Initiatives such as CARD, PESCO or MPCC can play a progressive role to the EU's role in the field of defence, as this package of initiatives represents the moment of the transition of European defence to a higher level.

The EU Treaty and the Treaty on EU functioning, together with subsequent agreements, offer a huge advantage to those who support the idea of a common European defence. At the moment, there is a legal framework for defence initiatives that seemed impossible 15 years ago, to which is added a strong political will that has led European governments to remove some of the reluctance to opt out for delegating one of the sovereign powers, that of defence, to the European Commission.

However, much of the reluctance will continue to persist since, in the context of many recent developments in European defence, it is still difficult to find a comprehensive answer to the question posed 70 years ago by Raymond Aron, "whose state or powers and whose policies would the European army submit to? "

Of course, in a simplistic approach one can answer that EU and CSDP will be the instruments to which the European army will be "subjected", but history has shown that not infrequently Member States have tried, through representatives of the EU institutions, to influence decisions and directions of action in accordance with the national interest.

Differences in perceptions about the origin of threats can be effectively exploited by those who oppose the idea of a common European defence. The possibility of Germany benefiting from a surplus of expertise and funding for the development of military capabilities, even in a European context, is causing chills among those who evoke the memory of the two world wars. As 70 years ago, France plays first fiddle in the development of a common European defence. "There is no question of turning our backs on NATO, but how can we be reliable allies if we always ask for help?" said French Defence Minister Florence Parly in 2019, arguing for the EU's strategic autonomy¹⁴ as a means for the Union to pursue its own interests on a large scale, internationally, in the absence of US military participation. However, the concept does not mention any security guarantees for the Member States situated at the eastern border of EU, which is probably seen as the main disadvantage of the European common defence concept. Without a pledge similar to NATO's article 5, the strategic autonomy and the common European defence represents just an impossible endeavour.

The materialization of the institutional dimension of strategic autonomy could have been realised in 2019, if France's proposal to establish the position of Commissioner for Defence had found support among EU Member States. Although a failure at that time, from a future political perspective,

¹³ Although created in 2005, these military forces were never deployed in support of an operation or to support crisis management.

¹⁴ The European Global Strategy uses the term "autonomy" seven times, referring to decision-making autonomy and autonomy of action, stating that "a Adequate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important for Europe's ability to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders."

it is possible that this initiative will be advanced again at the time of the formation of the next European Commission, given that this new post would widen the negotiating area for key positions at European level, such as the President of the European Commission, the President of the European Council, the President of the European Central Bank or the High Representative of the EU.

At the same time, the fact that Member States are open to political negotiations for the development of a common European defence is highlighted by the compromise made to France, by which it was decided to set up the Space and Defence Industry General Directorate, under the European Commissioner for the Internal Market, Thierry Breton from France, and responsible for the implementation and supervision of the European Defence Fund, as well as for the creation of a European market of defence equipment.

Following this direction, I believe that it is essential for the European Union to put more effort into cooperation between national defence industries, and this can only be achieved if Member States can rely on support from the European Defence Fund or incentives from a framework similar to it. This might be, in fact, the main advantage which the European common defence concept brings, which resides in the idea of strengthening the European defence industry and the cooperation between national defence industries. In other words, the type and the quality of the military capabilities will receive a greater importance than the amount of funding spent dedicated to defence budgets. In this respect, the performance of Europe's military-industrial complex could become crucial on developing the European common defence. On the other hand, the "protectionist" logic of the European Defence Fund will limit the access of American companies in consortia of projects that will be financed with European money, a fact that reflects the difference of vision between countries such as France and Germany, which give signals of industrial independence in the military field from the USA, and the Eastern European states, closer to a spirit of complementarity with the USA and NATO.

From a social point of view, the rise of nationalism in many European countries, amid crises caused by waves of migrants or the COVID-19 pandemic, has the potential to discredit EU efforts to develop defence initiatives. The phenomenon of nation-state re-legitimization combined with political narratives that refer to setting investment priorities in social fields much closer to people's perception, such as education, health or infrastructure, can create difficulties at European level in supporting budgets for funding research and development of military capabilities.

Also, nationalist narratives can amplify the confusion about the future profile of the European Defence Union, which is seen as a kind of European multinational military organization or, in other words, a parallel European military alliance and even competing with the North Atlantic Alliance. In order not to put the common defence in a shadow cone, as happened with the WEU 70 years ago, I believe that there is a need to find ways to make the European Union and NATO complementary in the field of defence. Thus, on the model of the "Berlin Plus" arrangements, ways can be developed in which NATO can benefit from the European Union's expertise in the fields of cyber and hybrid threats, simultaneously with the extension of the cooperation in the field of intelligence.

The results obtained so far indicate that there is potential to build an integrated, efficient and more capable Union that can do more for its own security and defence. In order for the achievement of the common European defence not to remain just a label of political discourse, efforts will have to be channeled towards amplifying the advantages obtained in this field so far, by developing strategic guidelines and by continuously strengthening the commitment to cooperation in the field of defence.

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