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The future of EU-Defence – a strategic roadmap « Europe 2020 »

Joachim Bitterlich

Abstract:

The European Council of 19 & 20 December 2013, the first meeting of the European Heads of State and Government with a thematic debate on defence – a new starting point for EU-Defence or a missed opportunity?

Ten years of the European Defence Agency [1] – an anniversary to be proud of? A glass half full or still half empty? At least some real progress has been made or launched in the last years after times of stagnation and frustration.

“Defence matters” these were the opening words of the Conclusions of the Council meeting and “the European Council is making a strong commitment to the further development of a credible and effective CSDP.” At least a signal of hope accompanied by a series of concrete priorities and tasks for the European Commission, EDA, and the Member States for next years.

However this is clearly not yet sufficient when taking into account the realities of a world which has become not only insecure but dangerous. Our national defence budgets are under financial pressure and the temptation to rely the “peace dividend” of the last two decades has to be considered as neither sustainable nor efficient!

We should not dream and ask for the immediate realisation of the vision of an European Army, this would be politically logical and the very last step of a development to launch now and to accelerate if we have the political will to strengthen again not only our own defence and security, but that of NATO too - and to be able to defend, if necessary and as last resort, in the most efficient way our vital interests by military means.

But how to overcome the national reflexes and egoism that still prevails and governs this crucial area of European integration? It is an area in which we have not even reached the same state of consensus or political will that the majority of EU Member States did under

Franco-German leadership on the eve of Maastricht in 1991 or once again in 1999.

Beyond the Conclusions of December 2013 what should be the next essential steps in order to enable us to take this fundamental decision?

The EU should concentrate first on making real progress in order to reach a “division of labour” in essential areas of defence, in other words the key approach should be “pooling and sharing.” In particular, the example of the European Air Transport Command should be completed and extended to other sectors.

This means common procedures, the identification of priorities and needs, in the field of defence planning, should be coordinated by the EDA in close cooperation with the Member States.

This means we should accept, at least to a certain degree, the specialisation of European national forces. To support this EDA should be enabled to buy military goods and services upon request of Member States, which could be used at their disposition for concrete operations.

Such a goal would require in parallel a significant change with regard to procurement, armament, and the relationship with the defence industry. The basis would have to be the constitution of a real European defence market including a “European preference.”

1. This text was originally printed in the book ‘10 years of working together » released for the 10th anniversary of the European Defence Agency on December 2014

We should encourage - as we did in the past with Airbus - the creation of a European defence industry with less but more profitable European actors; these efforts should be supported by applied research.

All European actors need to be aware that doing this requires improved efficiency and a deep change in our thinking and actions regarding both procurement and industry!

Under the current financial circumstances, which will not change in a foreseeable future, a purely national defence industry has in most cases no future. As an example, it is no longer possible, and it is a waste of money, for France to still buy only national armoured vehicles and Germany to still buy only German! We have to radically change our approach and "buy European" even if this means a concentration of our industries, which would otherwise not be able to survive in the long run!

In this regard, I fully subscribe to the analysis of Wolfgang Ischinger who underlined [2] that "the existing fragmentation is irresponsible, with regard to the financial situation and budgets as well as to the capabilities and the interoperability of our systems."

In parallel we have to thoroughly reexamine our schemes and systems of maintenance in order to improve the operational readiness of our armed forces. The recent reports about the state of key military material of the German Bundeswehr are shocking, the overall state of the German armed forces seems to be more than alarming, if not irresponsible. That the key material of the German armed forces, diplomatically expressed, is to be only "partly ready for operational use" - if we accept that less than one third still means partly! I am sure, objective reports will not show other armies to be in much better shape!

This new common approach would have to include a procurement and accompanying control system which is much more efficient than our national systems have been to date. The national Courts of Auditors could be helpful in this area, but more importantly the presence

of private auditing companies should be a fact of life from the first day of procurement and throughout the product's life time!

Bearing these steps in mind, the EU Defence could create in parallel common specialised command structures and common operational units being able to act in their specific areas. This was more than two decades ago the idea of the European Corps. However, up till now these have not been used in their originally intended capacity.

We could begin - beyond this Corps or the German-Dutch Corps - to establish European Special Forces which would be able to intervene under specific missions or as the first units to prepare for a wider campaign.

The next steps of our common roadmap should consist first in better coordination, then in harmonising, as far as possible, our national systems and rules for armament exports. I am aware of the political sensitivities regarding harmonisation, but it would be an unavoidable step to accompany and control this new European defence industry.

At the same time we should proceed towards unifying military intelligence with a coordination cell at the level of the HR for Foreign and Security Policy with specialised units in the member states.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of this roadmap with its three major fields should take place till 2020.

A realistic proposal or just a dream? No, it is just the necessary first response to the decline of our national military budgets, not only in the past few years but since the nineties.

Today these budgets are below the level necessary to sustain armed forces able to be used in areas of conflict and/or in the interventions that we have been witnessing at the international level since the end of the cold war.

2. « The Ukraine - crisis and the security of Europe », *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 1, 2014, page 6

We have to realise, we have not got the peace dividend we expected, the world around us is not becoming more peaceful, in fact quite the opposite is happening!

Based on the progress we have made by 2020 within these three major fields, Heads of State and Government would then be able to decide whether to implement, by 2025, the last steps towards a European Army or to stick to the progress achieved so far.

Running in parallel, a similar process of integration should take place in the field of the Common Foreign and Security policy. The first phase of the establishment of the EEAS has made a certain number of difficulties abundantly clear, but at the same time the added value

of a permanent coordination of European diplomatic efforts.

The development of the last decade has been underlining the need to improve our civilian capabilities, this should include a review of our development policy to ensure that it is executed as a powerful arm of our common foreign policy [3].

Joachim Bitterlich,

Ambassador (ret),

Former European, Foreign and security policy advisor to
Chancellor Helmut Kohl, member of the Scientific Committee
of the Robert Schuman Foundation

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3. Especially for German eyes I have to add: This way forward is not at all incompatible in particular with the German internal constitutional rules of parliamentary approval before the use of German military forces and of their control. It is nevertheless clear that in particular the permanent information of the competent commissions of the Bundestag and the procedures will have to be considerably improved.