
COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

The Double Challenge of the EU Security and Defence Policy

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The European Union (EU) recently decided on a new military operation in support of humanitarian assistance efforts in Libya. The European states played a leading role in the international community's intervention against Colonel Muammar Qaddafi's troops. Yet, the related rise of attention to military matters should not lead to the conclusion that security policy is of a particular concern in European politics.

On the contrary, security and defence policy – which for the past decade was a key issue for European policy-makers – has made way to more pressing issues of the day, namely the financial and economic crisis and the post-crisis recovery. The attention of the world media and world politicians is chiefly focused on possible new Bretton Woods-like systems, the rise of new economic powers and the old giants' struggle with budget deficits. In Europe, the future of the euro is the issue of the day. Quite understandably, policy-makers have little time for other topics.

Moreover, the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty shifted the responsibility for the European Union's (EU) foreign and security policy towards the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The High Representative, together with the newly established European External Action Service (EEAS), has stripped the rotating presidencies of a large part of their agenda. It might be tempting for the Trio Presidency to focus on economic governance, the Single Market or justice and home affairs, where they run the show alone and don't need to communicate with the High Representative.

This would be a mistake. Foreign and security policy challenges have not lost their significance and they should remain on the top of the EU agenda. Common security and defence policy might be up and running, but too many issues remain unresolved and need to be tackled, such as the level and manner of defence spending or a comprehensive approach to crisis management. Similarly, the High Representative and the EEAS cannot go it alone. The Member States remain the key players in foreign and security matters and the rotating presidency must continue to be fully engaged, while respecting the High Representative's

responsibility. It should be welcomed that all three presidencies included the EU's role in the world in their priorities.

Considering it was established only little over 10 years ago, the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has been doing remarkably well. The EU has launched well over 20 operations. It has been able to deploy soldiers, police units, judges and civil servants not only in its closest neighbourhood, but as far away as Central Africa and Afghanistan. With the establishment of the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD) in 2010, it made great progress on a comprehensive approach. And with the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has become (even if just potentially) a common defence organisation. The Lisbon Treaty has also provided (again potentially so far) a mechanism of structured cooperation among states that want to move faster on defence.

However, the CSDP is still in the making and concerning security issues the European Union still punches below its weight. To turn the EU into a full-fledged power, a concentrated effort by the High Representative, the rotating presidencies and the Member States will be needed. With the High Representative presumably concentrating on other areas, such as general foreign policy and the creation of the EEAS, the rotating presidencies will need to pay more attention to security and defence cooperation.

Today, the CSDP faces a double challenge.¹ First, it needs to turn the European public's pre-occupation with the economy into an asset and adjust security cooperation to the post-crisis era. Second, it must make the best out of the establishment of the EEAS and further improve the EU's comprehensive approach to crisis management.

Post-crisis CSDP: Doing more with less

Capabilities have always been the fulcrum of European cooperation on defence. Since the very beginning, Europeans aimed at improving their armaments and equipment and at deploying more people more readily. In terms of manpower, the Helsinki Headline Goal set the military objective very high, but dragged behind in quick response. With the battlegroup concept, the Headline Goal 2010 raised the readiness level, but this never really delivered. The battlegroups are ready, but political concerns have prevented their deployment.

The European Defence Agency (EDA) was established in order to help Member States cooperate more closely and effectively in defence procurement and research. In the same

1. The improvement of EU-NATO cooperation would surely be of much help. But, unless the Cypriot problem is resolved, EU-NATO relations will never improve on a strategic level. Unfortunately, it would be naïve to expect any EU presidency to be able to significantly contribute to the matter, and this is especially true concerning the coming Trio Presidency, which will include Cyprus. Thus, the EU will have to continue to make the best out of an *ad hoc* cooperation on an operational and tactical level and to rely on the Member States' self-interest to keep their actions in the EU and NATO coherent

area, the permanent structured cooperation of the Lisbon Treaty should boost Member States' defence spending and streamline their procurements. None of this has helped so far. The EDA has not changed Member States' procurement habits. Nor was the Belgian Presidency able to launch the permanent structured cooperation, which was one of its key priorities.

Spending more on troops and armaments will not get any easier in times of austerity. Yet, Europeans need not spend more; they just need to spend better. They will not achieve this through yet another Headline Goal or a new voluntary code of conduct. Cooperation on the high end will always be difficult, the more so in defence. The EU needs to quit the big all-encompassing projects coordinated from Brussels and shift its attention to smaller initiatives by a few states on clearly defined issues.

Defence cooperation requires trust. The closer we get to the core of state security, to the matters of the life and death, the more trust we need. This trust does not emerge out of nothing. It does not even emerge from the simple fact that the partners are all members of the EU. Here is the reason none of the big projects with many participants truly succeeded.

The EU should move in a different direction. It should encourage low-end defence cooperation between several Member States, which does not require so much trust. It should leave the combat troops and jet fighters aside and focus on common training, common education, or possibly common air defence. It should provide a forum for best-practice exchange. It may support the cooperation administratively. Only with a few success stories might Member States be willing to move forward to high-end cooperation. Only with positive experience will trust arise.

The debate on defence spending should be refocused. European publics are not ready to give up their peace dividend. The Member States, led by the Presidency and the High Representative, should move step-by-step in the name of savings. The latest Council support for pooling and sharing is a step in the right direction, but it should start with smaller, less exposed projects. Small projects will save small money, but they will deliver sooner and pave the way for the bigger things.

Comprehensive approach revisited: The role of EEAS

A comprehensive approach to crisis management has been the European Union's trademark. The EU has been in a unique position among other international actors, with soldiers and police officers at its disposal, together with experts on rule of law, administration and development. Since the very beginning of the CSDP, the EU has focused on civil-military and civil-civil cooperation. Starting with security and defence structures dominated by the military, the EU has developed a strong civilian crisis-management branch. It has established a Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability. And it has ended up with many more civilian than military

operations. However, the military and the civilians have remained in two separate worlds, with too little in common.

The new CMPD has the potential to bridge the two worlds. It employs military, police and civilian personnel alike and will help the Political and Security Committee (COPS) make strategic decisions on EU engagement. Other initiatives may follow soon, such as a single intelligence-sharing and early-warning body for military, civilian and humanitarian crises. Such improvements are useful and should be encouraged.

There are limits to comprehensiveness, however. The military and civilians are not the same and they need to remain distinct. They are trained for different tasks and they should be used for what they learned to do. The two worlds should be bridged, but they must not be merged. The strategic level has to consider all options in a complex manner, but the planning and conduct of operations should run the military and the rest separately.

The separation of military and civilian operations requires strong coordination. The CMPD or the COPS in Brussels are too far apart and cannot harmonise actions on ground. There is no structural mechanism for the head of mission and the operation commander to cooperate. Too much remains informal, depending on whether the two like and need each other. Other EU actors, such as EU delegations or EU special representatives, not to mention the Member States, are often present in the area. All in all, the European Union sends mixed signals to the locals as well as to other international actors.

The EEAS offers an opportunity that should not be missed. Incorporating the crisis-management structures as well as EU delegations abroad and contributing to neighbourhood, enlargement and development policies, the EEAS will have all instruments necessary to maintain a unified EU presence in crisis areas. The EU's support to the African Union's mission in Sudan may provide a blueprint for the future. The EU special representative should be the key person representing the EU, reporting to COPS and the High Representative. The head of the civilian mission, the commander of military operations and the head of the EU delegation should support the special representative in their respective capacities and he or she should coordinate them. Thus the EU would achieve a unified presence on the ground while retaining the special character of its existing tools.

Conclusions and recommendations

Today, the EU security and defence policy faces two great challenges, but both of them may and should turn into opportunities. Economic austerity is yet another argument for more cooperation in defence spending, which should be achieved through incremental steps and small projects. The initiative should come from the bottom, not from the top, but it

should be encouraged at the European level and favourable conditions should be created. The new EEAS should be used to achieve more coordination between civilian and military crisis-management while retaining their special character.

The Trio Presidency should, in cooperation with the High Representative:

- initiate a debate on low-end cooperation projects in defence; create a forum for the exchange of best practices, using the existing platform of the European Defence Agency; and consider possible forms of European support to such projects.
- propose the elevation of the EU special representatives to coordinators of EU presence in crisis areas with the heads of civilian missions, commanders of military operations, and heads of EU delegations supporting them.