

# WHY WE SHOULD BELIEVE IN EUROPEAN DEFENCE

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For the past five years, the city of Lille and its “Mission Lille Eurométropole Défense et Sécurité” have organised an annual conference on European defence. The fifth edition of the “Ateliers de la Citadelle” was held in Lille on 9 October 2014, in partnership with Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute and Toute l’Europe. Chaired by Nicole Gnesotto, this conference opened with a speech by its guest speaker, Élisabeth Guigou, president of the Foreign affairs committee of the French National Assembly. This Tribune is based on her lecture and was also published in French in the *Revue Défense nationale*.

There are times when security and defence issues are more pressing and more serious than others. We are living through one of those moments today. Ukraine, Mali, the CAR, Iraq, Syria, Libya: **violent clashes are multiplying on Europe’s doorstep**, right up to and in its most immediate neighbourhood both to the east and to the south. This ring of threats gripping the EU sheds new light on European defence policy, and even on **Europe’s defence** itself. When people are fighting on our borders (Ukraine) while others (the AQIM, the ISIL, Boko Haram) are calling for our destruction, defence once again takes a front seat, both for our political leaders and for the man in the street.

My first contention is the result of a two-fold observation. We French cannot guarantee our own defence against global threats single-handed. And we Europeans cannot wait for others to take care of our defence in our stead. Anyone rejecting this two-fold observation is labouring under a dangerous illusion. Thus European defence has become a crucial topic and progress needs to be made in this area if our security is to be guaranteed.

Waxing optimistic about Europe is frowned upon these days. My having played an active role in campaigns on European issues for years now puts me in a position to testify to the fact that it was already frowned upon even before the Europhobic vote in May of this year. Denigrating Europe has been a favourite sport for a long time. Yet **we would be wrong to resign ourselves**. That would just be so much more ground won by the Europhobes of various extraction. As a convinced pro-European, I obviously reject that approach. In fact I believe, on the contrary, that in order to counter the social anxiety and the Euroscepticism (or even

the Europhobia) that we saw in May, we need more than ever to demonstrate that Europe is indispensable - including in the defence sphere, which cannot be viewed separately from the economy, employment or social issues. In this connection, Jean-Yves Le Drian has rightly stressed the contribution that the defence industry makes to Europe.

Is Europe defenceless? That question may sound like a provocation, but it needs to be asked because the increasing number of crises in a context of shrinking or stagnating defence budgets is making huge demands on our defence systems, and occasionally it even reveals shortcomings in certain European countries that were hitherto unknown to the general public, and even to numerous politicians. Europe is obviously not defenceless. Indeed, I would like to pay **tribute here to the French servicemen** - I met them in the theatres of operations in Mali and in the CAR - who perform their task with courage, with a sense of duty and with a degree of skill and humanity that make us truly proud of them. The main difficulty is that **the burden is not sufficiently shared out at the European level**. But do we French really want to share decision-making? Have we really conducted an in-depth debate not only on the goals to be attained but, above all, on the methods required to build a European defence?

As the first topic to be broached in these workshops suggests, I think it is possible that the various crises we are currently facing open up new prospects for European defence policy. They can allow us to overcome the reluctance and the lukewarm attitude evinced by some of our European partners. Of course, we still have to display political initiative and patience in order to get them to move in the direction we want,

namely towards greater awareness and greater operational and industrial integration. Jean Monnet taught us that “Europe will be forged through crises and that it would be the sum of the solutions to those crises”. That is true in every sphere. Turning so many crises into as many opportunities is the way we are going to push European defence forward.



## 1. European defence: over fifty years on the roller coaster

It is hardly surprising. For centuries European history has been a history of war. **The notion of a common defence system has come up against numerous obstacles in recent history.** And it is towards NATO that most European countries have been turning for over fifty years now to provide their security.

Despite the establishment of the Western European Union (WEU) in 1948, which obliged its members to provide each other with military aid in the event of aggression, **there has been a traditional reluctance to envisage even a partial transfer of authority in the sphere of security and defence.** We recall the failure of the European Defence Community (EDC) in 1952, a French initiative which was not ratified by the French parliament, in particular because France was engaged in Indochina and because it feared German rearmament. It is true that the EDC treaty had unattainable institutional aspirations because it sought to transfer the supranational approach enshrined in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) into a sphere which clearly lies at the very heart of every country’s sovereignty. The debate at the time was such a cross-party business that it was even likened to the Dreyfus Affair. The failure of the EDC buried the very concept of European defence for forty years. And for decades, cooperation in the field of foreign policy got stuck in the embryonic stage.

It was only in 1985 that the **Single European Act**, as its name implies, grouped both economic and political cooperation, which had only been informal up until then, together in a single treaty. And we had to wait for the **Treaty of Maastricht** in 1992 to see a European document once again addressing European defence issues - naturally with numerous institutional caveats (intergovernmental pillar). It is true that increased European integration, the upheavals associated with the end of the Cold War and the crisis in the Balkans demanded that European foreign policies move closer together.

Thus the Treaty of Maastricht established for the first time a **Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)**, which was christened the “2<sup>nd</sup> pillar”. The aim is openly stated, even if it is hemmed about with countless precautions!: “to assert its identity on the international scene, in particular through the implementation of a common foreign and security policy including the eventual framing of a common defence policy, which might in time lead to a common defence”. For the French negotiators who managed to get it built into the Treaty, **the WEU was supposed to become the European Union’s military tool:** according to Article J4.2 in the Treaty of Maastricht, the WEU is now considered to be an integral part of the European Union’s development.

The EU’s framework for action was laid down, again in 1992, by the WEU:

- humanitarian and evacuation missions;
- conflict prevention and peacekeeping missions;
- combat missions for crisis management and peacemaking.

These missions, subsequently known as the Petersberg tasks, were built into the Treaty of Amsterdam (which also created the post of High Representative for the CFSP, a post filled at the time by Javier Solana), then into the Treaties of Nice and of Lisbon, when their scope was also extended (to missions of disarmament, military assistance and stabilisation operations).

**The Franco-British Summit of Saint-Malo**, in December 1998, marked an important stage in the construction of an autonomous and credible European defence, ironically enough thanks to a British initiative. Tony Blair wanted his country, which had opted not to join the euro, to continue to play an active role in the European process all the same. To achieve this, he set in motion strong bilateral cooperation between

France and the United Kingdom, and agreed that the EU should endow itself with the “capability for autonomous action”. Several European Council meetings thereafter reaffirmed a strong political will in the field of defence:

- in **Cologne** in 1999, when it created the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and allowed the EU to intervene militarily to prevent or to manage crises;
- in **Helsinki** in the same year, when it set some extremely ambitious objectives and beefed up Europe’s military capabilities by setting itself the goal of being able to deploy military forces some 50,000 to 60,000 men strong in the space of sixty days and for at least a year. I never mention these figures without feeling a little nostalgic. Political and military structures were also set up to make it possible to decide on and to conduct an operation;
- in **Nice** in 2000, when it built the WEU’s crisis management functions into the Union;
- in **Feira**, also in 2000, when it aired the possibility of civilian and crisis management missions;
- and in **Laeken** in 2001, when it declared the ESDP operational.

It was also during that period – and this is crucial – that the EADS was set up. Because we cannot separate the political goal of a European defence from cooperation in, or even the integration of, our defence industries.

**The Berlin Plus agreement between the EU and NATO** in 2002 made it possible to take a further step forward: from that moment on the EU could use NATO’s military means to conduct external operations in its own name. This agreement allowed the EU, for the very first time, to take over from NATO at the helm of a peacekeeping mission, in this case in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in January 2003.

In 2003, thanks to an initiative by High Representative Javier Solana, the Union adopted a **European Security Strategy** in which it adopted a posture as a global player “for international security and the construction of a better world”. This European Security Strategy, updated in 2008, is the only reference document on the EU’s role in the world and on a common vision of threats (terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of

mass destruction, regional conflicts, the collapse of states and organised crime).

So this brief historical overview shows us quite clearly that we have had a common conceptual and operational defence system (institutions, legal tools, goals, the political will) since the early 2000s. Fifteen years ago there was a **fully-fledged dynamic for moving forward in the common security and defence field**.

Further tools have since come to complete the mechanism:

- **battle groups**, established in 2004, comprising 1,500 men deployable in fifteen days for a period of at least thirty days;
- **the post of High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy** (who is also the vice-president of the Commission in charge of external relations) with its own European External Action Service (EEAS), both of which were set up by the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007 to impart greater consistency to the EU’s external action;
- **permanent structured cooperation**, also set up by the Treaty of Lisbon. The procedure is considerably more flexible than other forms of enhanced cooperation because it does not require a minimum number of participants. This tool is particularly interesting to allow us to move forward with a hard core, capability being the sole condition for joining.

But ironically, all of these innovations have failed to result in a fresh boost being imparted to European defence because they have been little used by the member states, whose positions and interests have continued to be divergent. The absence of common, permanent tools for assessment, planning and command also constitutes a considerable obstacle. And the first High Representative did not display any interest in the subject.

This, however, has not prevented the EU from launching numerous civilian and military operations over the past twenty years, chiefly in Africa and in the Balkans, with the primary aim of securing Europe’s eastern and southern neighbourhoods. In fact, it would be interesting – and I urge our partners to do this – to assess the achievements of these operations, which have allowed

the EU to develop a global approach to crisis management and to be particularly effective in the struggle against piracy at sea. But it is also necessary to identify our shortcomings and the obstacles standing in the way of Europe's becoming a major strategic player and responding more rapidly to future crises (lessons from the operation in Mali).

How should we tackle emergencies? Well, a slow and patient job needs to be done upstream. Have we taken on board the strategic developments of recent years (the Arab revolutions, the collapse of states, the multiplication of cyber threats, the pivot towards Asia on the part of the United States, which is also going to achieve energy independence sooner than expected, and so forth) and our responsibility on the international stage? Should we not revise the European Security Strategy in order to reflect together on the threats that concern us all? Participants in the first round table will undoubtedly return to these issues because a deadline beckons at the European Council in June 2015.



## 2. European defence: why we should believe in it despite the crises

Despite the frustration and the opposition that European defence continues to arouse, I remain optimistic regarding the progress achieved by the EU over the past two years. First of all, the **European Council in December 2013 provided the signal that France was waiting for**. It was not a grand gala celebration of European defence, but it provided the catalyst for several initiatives which mark a quantum leap in their specific areas: external operations, the mutualisation of capabilities, and the autonomy of the European defence industry.

While the strategic debate to which I referred just now is crucial, to my mind, it must not turn into a pretext for dodging the concrete, "material" aspects involved in European defence. In this regard, the planned

alliance between Nexter and Germany's KMW - in which Jean-Yves Le Drian played a decisive role - is a harbinger of the future. And along with the European drone project, whatever light the participants in the second round table can shed on this "marriage" will be equally as welcome.

Another significant advance was the adoption by the member states on 24 June this year of a European Union Strategy for Security at Sea. And at the same time, several of our partners committed to the common purchase of air-to-air refuellers. This, in conjunction with France's own efforts, will make it possible in a few years' time to fill one of the most crippling gaps in European armies' autonomy. By the same token, I place great hope in cooperation with our German partners with regard to the development of the next generation of surveillance drones. In the course of the Security Conference in Munich in February 2014 and during my most recent trips to Berlin, I have been able to gauge just how intense the debate in Germany is today. Taboos there are falling, as we can see from the supply of arms to the Iraqi Kurds. We would be well advised to take advantage of this development in order to make progress in other fields. Also, the Community institutions are themselves moving forward. The European Commission has agreed to explore the possibility of using the European budget to fund dual-use projects. While still in the experimental phase, this decision hints at interesting developments for European defence's future.

Two other fundamental trends justify my optimism because they are capable of deeply altering the perception that Europeans have of their own security.

I think that we have to assign the correct value to the paradigm shift enshrined in the sequence of crises in Mali, in the CAR and now in Iraq. We have never tired of repeating over the past few years that the growing destabilisation of the Sahel-Sahara area has a direct impact on the security of ALL of Europe's citizens. Operation Serval has triggered a new awareness among our European interlocutors, with whom we regularly discuss its results and its consequences. **A European awareness of just what is at stake in the security sphere is growing thanks precisely to these crises**. This is a positive development which we need to foster with intelligence; and above all, it is fertile terrain for European defence's future initiatives. This is particularly striking with reference to Africa: the European forces cooperating

with us in the CAR, for instance our Baltic partners (Estonia and Lithuania), do not necessarily share our own historical and human closeness to the continent. Yet that does not stop them from being fully aware of the fact that the security of Europe's territory must also be consolidated by operations performed to the south of the Mediterranean. By the same token, our eastern European allies know that France is by their side in defending security interests on their borders, given that today we are one of the leading contributors to the reinsurance measures being implemented within the framework of NATO. The same trend can be detected in Germany, as I saw when Laurent Fabius and Frank-Walter Steinmeier appeared before a joint hearing of the French National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee. The two ministers went out of their way to deny "the clichéd perception that France only looks to the south and Germany to the east" (Mr. Steinmeier). I agree with Laurent Fabius when he said that, thanks to his counterpart's prompting, "**at this juncture Germany concerns itself - not as a spectator but as a player - with the WHOLE of foreign policy**". Even though the German people appear to be plainly lagging behind their political class, I am in no doubt as to the current German leaders' will to conduct the debate in the heart of German grass-roots opinion in an attempt to persuade the population to overcome their reluctance with regard to operations outside their borders.

The second reason is that the Ukraine crisis has brought us back to fundamentals. Some of our partners had rather lost sight of the fact, but **the European Union's credibility rests also on its defence effort**. The effectiveness of sanctions policies, in particular towards Iran - even though that effectiveness has been questioned - has prompted some of our partners to feel that sanctions could become a suitable alternative to a common defence policy. Sanctions, however, are a weapon that cuts both ways, producing two victims, and they are very difficult to lift. Russia's stance in the Ukraine crisis reminds us of the strength of a credible defence system as a deterrent. Both Jean-Yves Le Drian, and a large majority of the members on the Foreign Affairs Committee with him, share that belief. Thus in a situation of shrinking national budgets, we have no other option than to pursue **an ambitious programme designed to extend the pooling of our defence capabilities**.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to share with you one last conviction: Europe can and must become an influential power on the global stage, but it is suffering from the lack of a major federative and concrete blueprint capable of firing the imagination of Europe's man in the street. The fact that the issues at stake in the construction of Europe, which were clear in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are less easily perceived today, led to the vote of anger cast in the European elections in May this year being even stronger. Since the adoption of the euro, the European project has not been enshrined in any major other concrete initiative capable of giving the European Union a prospect for the future. A century after the sequence of events that led the continent into the catastrophic Great War, I am convinced that a well-thought-out European defence policy focusing on specific, well-defined goals backed up by concrete achievements, can make a huge contribution to the European project. I believe that, through national navel-gazing and certainly through excessive prudence, Europe's political leaders are underestimating the degree of expectation in European public opinion in favour of a broad European project in the defence field. It is the future European institutions' task to forge that project. This is a fine subject, which merits more initiatives on the part of France and Germany (at head-of-state and government level), with Poland being closely associated in the drive, in order to shake the Europeans out of their inertia for good and to increasingly deepen the integration of our defence systems.



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