

EUROPE OF DEFENCE: A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

Jean-Yves Le Drian | *French Minister of Defence*

French Minister of Defence Jean-Yves Le Drian calls for a fresh boost to Europe of defence, just a few weeks after the publication of a new French White Paper. This Tribune is based on the speech he delivered on the occasion of the presentation in Brussels on 15 May of the TGAE IV Report [“Think Global - Act European. Thinking strategically about the EU’s external action”](#) directed by *Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute* and gathering the analyses and recommendations of 16 European think tanks.



Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you here today, although I am afraid it may be a very meagre return for Jacques Delors in view of all that he has invested in me throughout my political career.

Today I would like to talk to you about a topic that is of special interest to me both as defence minister and as a convinced pro-European: that topic is Europe of defence.

France has just produced a new White Paper, endorsed by the President of the Republic in the past days. Four points are especially worth focusing on. First of all, despite budget constraints, the President of the Republic has expressed a desire to maintain the level of the national effort and the scope and breadth of our defence tool. That is a strong decision. Second, we are maintaining the basic triptych that underpins our defence policy, namely the protection of our people, nuclear dissuasion, and intervention abroad. In addition, we are maintaining our sovereignty thanks to the existence of a French and European defence industry. And lastly, we have set ourselves the pragmatic goal of imparting a fresh boost to defence Europe.

I use the term Europe of defence rather than European defence because I am a realist. The latter concept, while more spell-binding, has never produced any tangible

results. I, for my part, consider the concept of Europe of defence to be far more pragmatic. It is a more humble rationale, but if we want it to take concrete shape we must set aside our ideological posturing and act in concrete fashion, as two, three, five, twenty-seven, or soon even twenty-eight countries, in response to the chances offered us and to the opportunities that we should seize.

I want to believe in this because, objectively speaking, we do not have any choice in the matter. This is why France intends to continue actively promoting the strengthening of Europe of defence. While such an aspiration may have been seen as rather utopian by some of our partners in the past, it is a goal that we are forced to aim for today, more than ever before, because it has become a historic necessity.

This necessity is driven, first and foremost, by the rebalancing of the United States’ strategic positioning. The Europeans need to shoulder their responsibility in the face of the United States’ relative pivot.

The second necessity is occasioned by the budget constraints in many countries which are impinging on their ability to develop their capabilities with - in some cases, and with only a handful of exceptions - high and very significant costs. We need to mutualise, to share, to find points of convergence. Otherwise Europe is going to go into strategic decline, and that would be a terrible cop-out.

Thirdly, the continued existence of threats and risks is very real, concerning as it does the southern belt, fragility to the east, globalisation with a generalisation of terrorist flows, and organised crime linked to the drug trade or to religious fundamentalism.

I am convinced that the member states will gradually take all of this on board. Otherwise, we are inevitably going to suffer a collective loss of sovereignty.

That is what we need to start with, before we resume theoretical or purely projective arguments that will not produce any concrete results. It is in this direction that we need to prepare the next European Council meeting in December 2013. France's position will be to renew this stance and to ensure that our meetings on these issues are held at regular annual intervals.

Despite security and defence issues are at the heart of all head of states and governments' mandate, at European level, defence is quite absent. The European Council has not actually addressed such issues since 2008. This is hard to understand.

Today the situation is favourable to imparting a fresh boost to the construction of Europe of defence. We intend to take full advantage of the meeting in December 2013 proposed by President Van Rompuy last year. It is a strong political signal and an opportunity that we must seize.

To start with, we must adopt a pragmatic approach to the operational sphere. It is urgent for the European Union to finally adopt and implement a genuinely global approach to crisis management. I would like to take this opportunity to say, with some conviction, however, that that will not be possible as long as the European institutions are incapable of adapting and of optimising their working method, of bringing down the walls which continue to separate the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) and which hinder the rapid, consistent and effective mobilisation of the EU's tools as a whole.

France tirelessly drew its partners' attention to the dangerousness of the security situation in Mali for over a year, and events proved us right, justifying our intervention on the national level. Today we have entered a phase

of stabilisation. The EUTM Mali has proven to be effective although it has taken some time to implement, when it is merely a military training mission. Besides, the EUTM mission is not the only response to the crisis in Mali. Europe has the advantage of proposing global solutions, as it is proving today, for instance, in the context of the Mali development conference.

In addition to this, we have also made progress in the sphere of our capability, doing so in conjunction with the British. But our plans can be open to two, three or more willing member states. With political will, and without calling countries' sovereignty into question, we can make progress in a number of concrete and simple areas such as logistical airborne transport. The European Air Transport Command (EATC) has worked well in Mali. These mechanisms can be opened up to other member states and they can be extended to cover other fields as well. I am thinking in particular of air to air refuelling or space-related activities.

And lastly, where industry is concerned, I am convinced of the need to sustain Europe's technological and industrial base in the defence industry. It is probably not appropriate, as things stand today, to fully open it up. The right way forward consists in bringing forward our future programs so that those member states likely to take part in them do so willingly; this, in order to avoid intra-European competition. I am thinking, for instance, of drones as an area for industrial cooperation in the medium term.

There we are, that is what I wished to share with you in connection with Europe of defence, a goal at the very heart of our defence policy and openly stated as such in the new White Paper.

Thank you for your attention.

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