

# DEFENCELESS EUROPE

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The City of Lille and its “Mission Eurométropole Défense et Sécurité” have been organising “Les Ateliers de la Citadelle,” an annual conference traditionally devoted to the topic of European defence, for the past five years. This year and for the first time, the Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute (NE-JDI) partnered in the organisation of the conference’s 5<sup>th</sup> edition, which was developed and moderated by Nicole Gnesotto, vice-president of NE-JDI and titular professor of the European Union chair at the Conservatoire national des arts et métiers (CNAM). This Synthesis examines the key issues discussed during two roundtables, conducted under the Chatham House rule.

Organised under the aegis of the Ministry of Defence and hosted by the Rapid Reaction Corps France (CCR FR) in Lille’s Vauban citadel, this high-level conference brought together generals and senior officers, national and international experts, elected officials and a well-informed general public. It has come to be regarded as the annual rendezvous for European defence. This year the conference, entitled “**Defenceless Europe? Crises and Perspectives for the Common Security and Defence Policy,**” addressed the institutional, strategic, and industrial challenges facing European defence. After a decade of success (1998–2008), today the European Union’s attempts at promoting an autonomous defence project seem to be at a standstill. Should the project be buried indefinitely? Is it possible to impart a fresh boost to it? Can France encourage its European partners to move forward in that direction?



## 1. Promising times or stumbling blocks for the CSDP?

The debates, moderated by Nicole Gnesotto, were punctuated throughout the day by the participation of **special guest General Henri Bentégeat**, former head of the French General Staff and former president of the EU’s military committee. The first round table kicked off with remarks by General Éric Margail, commander of CCR France’s headquarters, and by an

opening speech made by keynote speaker Élisabeth Guigou, president of the French National Assembly’s Foreign affairs committee. The debates were complemented by the participation of General Vincent Desportes, former director of the *École de Guerre* and affiliated professor at Sciences Po Paris, and by Admiral Alain Coldefy, director of the *Revue Défense nationale*.

There was unanimous recognition of Europe’s paltry capacity to anticipate the crises which have multiplied at its doors and of Europeans’ failure to pursue the momentum of European defence, notably under Javier Solana from 2006 to 2009 (the revised European security strategy (ESS) in 2008, the launch of a new external operation each year, the implementation of joint civilian-military missions, and a global approach, etc.).

**But this initial dynamic stalled even as the common defence and security policy (CSDP) began to demonstrate its usefulness.** The promises of the Treaty of Lisbon have not born their fruit, and the succession of economic and financial crises has precipitated cuts in member states’ defence budgets, thereby reducing their military capabilities. The declining operability of their military hardware is such that the member states are no longer capable of undertaking missions abroad.

France’s engagement in several theatres of operation abroad has been welcomed by its partners but the burden is insufficiently shared out at the European level. **Today the EU is no longer perceived as an international player with any clout in the security sphere.** These indicators of disintegration are all the more worrying at a time when the inviolability of borders in the world is being severely threatened again.

The European Council meeting in December 2013 allowed the EU to make concrete progress (the planned alliance between Nexter and KMW, the member states' adoption of a strategy for security at sea, the joint purchase of air-to-air refuellers, etc.). But until the EU has adopted a fully-fledged European foreign policy instead of what is still today a mere externalisation of Community policies, it will be impossible to mobilise the member states in defence of their common interests on the global stage. The disappointment triggered by Europe's current lack of progress in the defence sphere did not, however, prompt participants to adopt a pessimistic stance with regard to its outcome.

In their view, part of the European project must translate into the aspiration to act outside Europe, and that necessarily demands a strengthening of European defence. A sanctions policy, such as that adopted towards Russia, is not a sufficient alternative.

It was agreed that whatever member states can develop along bilateral lines will benefit the strengthening of European defence. **Having said that, it is still necessary to further develop the added value represented by the EU**, particularly in terms of its global approach, which allows it to intervene in crisis management, as well as its ability to go where NATO would never go. Thus several participants agreed that **NATO is a factor in the strategic de-responsibilisation and deindustrialisation of a large number of EU member states**, which rely excessively on NATO's ability to guarantee their security. Such a posture was judged to be untenable for a Europe intent on becoming a political force with regional and extra-regional projection capabilities. NATO has no mandate to intervene in the EU's neighbourhood or in those regions in which the EU needs to defend its interests. While the United States' medium- and long-term interests are causing it to turn increasingly towards the Pacific, the Europeans need to shoulder their responsibilities in order to contribute to the stabilisation of their neighbourhood.

It was pointed out that the United Kingdom's reluctance to embrace the concept of a European defence continues to be a major obstacle. While the Saint-Malo Agreement between France and the United Kingdom played a key role in launching the CDSP and the Lancaster House Agreement marked further progress in that direction, the two countries appear to have drawn different conclusions from these moves. The United Kingdom remains strongly attached to the idea of strong bilateral military cooperation with

France, while France, for its part, is still interested in strengthening European defence.

Yet France also needs to demonstrate that it is prepared to share in the decision-making role of external operations. France must make its intentions clear in terms of the role that it wishes to play, because its return to NATO's Security Council has raised questions regarding its commitment to the European dynamic. Does it prefer to be second best to the United States, or the leader of European defence?

Its partners also need to show their determination to strengthen their defence capabilities and to become involved in external operations. In Germany there have recently been encouraging signals of change on the part of certain leaders, who now appear to be less reluctant to admit that the country needs to shoulder its responsibilities as a great power; but those changes are still insufficient to persuade an electorate that continues to be extremely hostile to the prospect of engaging in any kind of military operation abroad. One participant argued that **"there can be no common political will until there is a mutualisation of casualties"**.

And indeed, the "pooling and sharing" principle only works when it entails no political risks for the member states involved. The European Defence Agency (EDA) must be allocated additional resources in order to foster the integration of the European defence industry, otherwise our manufacturers will continue to turn towards international and civilian markets. Finally, European security strategy needs to be updated; taking care to clarify Europe's common interests, and the establishment of a permanent European military staff - though not in competition with NATO's SHAPE - was also suggested.

The economic impact of external crises should encourage member states to mobilise in this direction. **The people of Europe cannot be content with simply being "payers", they must be able once again to become "players" by halting what one of the participants called the "lethal spiral of deterioration in our military capabilities"**.



## 2. The defence industry: the last chance for a revival of European defence?

The debates in the second round table developed around speeches by *Le Point* journalist Jean Guisnel, by François Heisbourg, the special advisor to the Foundation for Strategic Research, by General Ladeveze, defence adviser to Eurocopter, and by Bertrand de Cordoue, director of French Defence Public Affairs with Airbus.

**The European market is the appropriate scale for the defence industry, which would be overly constrained if it were restricted to national markets alone.** It was pointed out that member states' national defence budgets already underwent major cuts between 1995 and 2005 (with a drop of 20% to 30% following the end of the Cold War). While the United States, for its part, cut its defence budget by almost 40% between the early 1990s and the terrorist attacks in September 2001.

The Europeans have benefited from the legacy of the cooperation programmes inherited from the early days of the Cold War. European defence and security policy was christened by the lifting of British opposition to European defence integration by Tony Blair in 1997 and with the start of the war in Kosovo in 1999, and the member states' governments pledged to press Europe's defence industry chiefs to forge closer ties. Thus the creation of EADS would not have taken place if there had not been the assumption that we were heading towards a European defence. When the political context moves in the right direction, the industrial context also gets going.

Yet today that cooperation programme legacy is drying up. Franco-German cooperation over the Transall or the Tiger, two tactical missiles, or over space launchers, has not been pursued in the satellite sector (the French having developed observation satellites, while the Germans have been developing radar satellites). And the failure of European industrial integration is even more glaring in the sphere of land-based weapons systems.

Additionally, these budget cuts are compounded by a far trickier strategic environment (hotbeds on every front right on the EU's doorstep, a more expedient approach to NATO on the United States' part, a strong offensive on the part of US defence firms on

the international markets, and in particular on the European markets, etc.). **Officials talk about the need to boost cooperation among the member states, but in practice it is a matter of everyone for themselves** (the policy of coexistence between French and German exports is stumbling; there has been a little national restructuring, but there have been no new instances of intra-European cooperation). While there was the very positive signal of the 2010 Lancaster House Agreement on the mutualisation of study and research in the nuclear sphere in future decades, Angela Merkel's opposition to a proposed merger between EADS and BAE led to the failure of a project that was crucial for the integration of the defence industry in Europe.

Despite this, participants disagreed over the role played by the United Kingdom. In some people's opinion, the British role in the defence sphere is crucial but its membership of the EU is obstructing all progress towards European defence (thus the CSDP must move forward without Britain, because it is only if the 28 were to prove extremely ambitious on the project that the UK would become indispensable). However, others maintained that the UK's presence plays a key role in the dynamic of European defence integration. It still remains to be seen how to allow certain member states to move forward without causing a permanent break with the British. The UK's opposition to any increase in the EDA's budget is, in any event, an obstacle hampering the integration of Europe's defence industries, as is the constant reduction in defence budgets, which, it was argued, continues to encourage manufacturers to turn with increasing frequency towards civilian orders.

Participants also discussed a certain number of concrete measures to encourage the integration of Europe's defence industries, such as the adoption of a "Buy European Act" comparable to the principle in force in the United States, which would give priority to European defence manufacturers, or by signing a European agreement on export terms for jointly-manufactured weapons systems (by extending the scope of the 1971 Debré-Schmidt Agreement). In order to succeed in rationalising demand, it would also be beneficial to harmonise replacement requirements by adopting a common five- or ten-year replacement period among member states. In suggesting this, participants stressed that **the industrial dynamic depends first and foremost on the prevailing political dynamic.**

In conclusion, several factors might encourage the Europeans to mobilise in favour of European defence, starting with the shift in the United States' strategic interests towards the Pacific, the revival of nationalism in the BRIC countries - with Russia heading the list - and changes in European leadership (Donald Tusk, the new president of the European Council, has worked hard to bolster Poland's commitment to European defence). Yet at the same time, it is necessary to allow the EEAS to develop its full potential, starting by reviewing its crisis management procedures. The EEAS is still basically engaged in the management of civilian crises, in which the military does not intervene. But then, growing European grassroots dissatisfaction with external military operations

is due in part to those operations' disappointing results. It is necessary to learn the right lessons from previously adopted strategies in order to be able to garner the support of European citizens over the use of force. The lethargy demonstrated by the EU in its failure to engage in any new external operations in the past five years (the operation in the Central African Republic was launched by France) is not sustainable. The European response to crises is increasingly technological (drones, targeted missile strikes, etc.), but in refusing to deploy troops, the Europeans are refusing to look reality in the face. As Nicole Gnesotto put it, **Europe is no longer simply a domestic adventure. It must become a response to the world at large.**

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Élisabeth Guigou, *Tribune*, Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, October 2014

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Vincent Desportes, *Tribune*, Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, October 2014

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Giorgio Garbasso, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, September 2014

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