

EUROPEANS AND THE USE OF FORCE

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The debate on European defence engaged by the European Council of December 2013 offers the opportunity to clarify the main challenges facing the European Union.

1. Assessing the new strategic context

Historically, the security of Europe's territory was mainly in the hands of NATO with the support of Europeans. However, the commitment of the United States (US) to NATO may diminish, with a cut of almost \$500 billion in the country's defence budget already announced over the next ten years, and this is bound to have an impact on the sums devoted to NATO (\$731 billion in 2011 accounting for approximately 75% of NATO's overall expenditure). And at the same time, the US' strategic reorientation towards the Pacific leaves the Europeans with little choice but to shoulder the novel responsibility of ensuring the stability of their neighbourhood and of neighbours of neighbours.

However the cuts that Europeans have been making in their national defence budgets have exposed them to capability gaps. Their defence budget has decreased by an overall of 15% between 2006 and 2012, and the defence budget's share of member states' GDP dropped, on average, to 1.7% in 2012, as against 4.4% in the US.

A good start to the debate would be to admit that [the absence of coordination in the reduction of public expenditure](#) defence is a lost opportunity to trigger a dynamic of "pooling and sharing" that would streamline and contribute to take advantage of existing military capabilities.

The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) certainly was not devised to plunge the European Union (EU) into the race for military might towards which the new economic powers are heading, with the BRIC countries' (Brazil, Russia, India and China) spending on defence shooting up from 8% to 13.5% of global military expenditure from 2001 to 2011, as against a drop from 30% to 18% for the European countries and with the US hovering stably around the 41% mark in 2011.

But the old dichotomy between territorial defence and external military operations no longer applies. Most of the new and widespread risks and threats need to be addressed outside the EU's borders. Instability in the periphery of the Union, especially in the South, requires greater strategic foresight and more rapid

reaction capability. Serious issues, ranging from the fight against terrorism to the securitisation of the sea-lanes through which some 90% of world trade currently travels, can justify external military operations. Also, with a growing overlap among the various local, regional and global issues, as for instance in the case of the clash in Syria, the Europeans cannot expect to have to cope only with crisis management operations in a minor key.

The December 2013 meeting must demonstrate that Europe is aware of the magnitude of the strategic downgrading risk to which the unabated erosion of its military capability is exposing it and that from awareness it can switch over to mobilisation which tomorrow will allow an autonomous action.

2. From safeguarding military capabilities to strategic engagement

The first thing to do is to send out a positive signal to the national players - general staff, industry and the political authorities - by announcing structural cooperation projects designed to bring Europe's military capability up to strength. These projects should figure among the European Council's conclusions and they should include important initiatives in the fields of: the construction of European drones; a "single sky" project establishing clear standards for incorporating those drones into the Twenty-Eight's airspace; cyber-defence; in-flight refuelling; communications satellites; and European Commission support for research into new (civilian and military) dual-use capabilities.

Only by cooperating in ventures involving a group of member states will the Europeans succeed in maintaining the technological expertise that they have built up and in making up the delay that they have accumulated in certain areas, despite the current tendency to pull back in order to save jobs in individual countries. Thus this means also more differentiation, given that not many member states have a real defence industry or budget (France and the United Kingdom account for two-thirds of Europe's defence expenditure, and

for fully 86% of that expenditure with only four other countries).

But a pragmatic approach also demands clarifying the Twenty-Eight's common strategic interests, as sixteen think tanks are committed to doing in the *Think Global - Act European* report. Rather than harping on about turning the EU into a global player in the field of defence - a concept too far removed both from the citizens' current economic concerns and from the EU's capabilities - the European Council meeting needs to focus on Europe's strategic autonomy.

The rapid and increasingly complex evolution of the global strategic context demands a revision of the 2003 European Security Strategy. Only by specifying the shared strategic interests that they agree to defend can the Europeans develop regional strategies, define the kind of external operations which they need to be prepared to face, and improve their crisis management capability. Thus the European Council could give the EU institutions, which are due to be renewed in 2014, a mandate tasking them with drafting a new European security strategy between now and 2015, on the basis of a public debate capable of mobilising the European citizens and to strengthen the sense of sharing a common destiny.

Moreover, the December 2013 meeting cannot accept the reluctance or disengagement of certain countries which, in continuing to rely on NATO, would leave the task of consolidating Europe's defence to the more willing among the member states. The mobilisation of those states "that can and that want to" must be accompanied by a Twenty-Eight-strong commitment to the "comprehensive approach" that allows Europe to use the full set of diplomatic, legal, financial and military tools that is more suited to resolving current crises than NATO's exclusively military capability.

Strengthening the "comprehensive approach", which continues to be the primary lever of the EU's strategic autonomy and credibility on the world stage, demands that those member states less committed on the military front do more on the other fronts included in the overall approach. Here again it is a question of putting European solidarity back in the centre of the debate, as much in the security sphere as in the fields of the economy, the environment, [energy](#) and even [migration](#).

3. Making our voice heard on the use of force

And finally, the more political issue which may not be addressed during this meeting would be to succeed in formulating a narrative on the use of force capable of being heard and understood by the citizens of Europe as a whole, because the whimsical manner in which they air their views on Europe's influence today is ridden with inconsistency.

71% of Europeans want the EU to enjoy greater leadership in the world (*Transatlantic Trends* 2013, GMF), and even more of them, on average, have been in favour of the CSDP for the past twenty years (Eurobarometer 70). Yet having had their fingers burnt by the wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan and by the difficulties involved in managing the aftermath of an external military operation, only 15% consider that Europe needs to further its military role in the world and 39% would like to see a cut in defence budgets (Gallup, 2010) - which are often very much overestimated as a proportion of national GDP. Moreover, the figures on the use of force and on capability for action independent of NATO show major differences according to the historical legacy of the respondent's native country. In other words, the Europeans want to handle their own security, yet without having to put up with the constraints that that entails.

The French interventions in Mali and the Central African Republic are tests of the Europeans' ability to unite around a military operation, including logistically and financially. Likewise, the success of the proposal to establish a European Fund for military operations will be indicative of whether Europeans are prepared to go beyond cost sharing as organised by the Athena mechanism.

In order to be in a position to take courageous decisions in a deeply pacifist Europe focused on shrinking budgets, the decision-makers must start by once again explaining the dissuasive and pro-active role played by defence in Europe's strategic autonomy - an autonomy which from now on relies on more collective sovereignty.

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