

WHAT FUTURE FOR EUROPEAN DEFENCE: ONE SIZE FITS ALL?

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A reflection on the European Commission's plans and a proposal for an alternative approach



In June 2017 the European Commission (EC) launched its 'Reflection Paper on the Future of European Defence'. It sketches a European security context characterized by military, economic and energy related threats to our east, next to vulnerable and ungoverned spaces of conflict to our south. This article is an initial response to the findings of the reflection paper and the wider federalist plans we see often these days. The European Union (EU) currently has a principle in place which is called: subsidiarity¹. All measures, agreements and working plans should be seen from this perspective. In this light Defence matters fall under the ultimate political authority of the sovereign state(s). Only states can have a standing army, so the issue of all European Defence matters immediately touch the very nature of EU member states and the EU itself.



"A common de-nationalised army would, and could, no longer owe obedience to a national authority, either as a whole nor in respect of the units of which it is composed. It would have sworn loyalty to the Community. The Community alone would have power over it. If any of its units were to follow the orders of a national Government, they would be regarded as deserters or rebels. If, therefore, such an army is set up, the only valid orders will have to come from an authority recognised by all the participating States". Robert Schuman (1951²)

REFLECTION PAPER ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN DEFENCE

The EC identifies two important security prob-

lems the EU states have to deal with (2017). First of all, the European states have according to the EC neglected their defence budgets. On the contrary, the EC sees that competing powers have increased their military spending's. Secondly, many of the threats faced by Europe do not respect national borders, as greater connectivity is blurring the boundaries between internal and external security. To further explain the claim that European military spending is neglected, the EC writes that European capabilities lag behind others, while there are differences in member states' contributions in European defence. According to the EC there is also the problem that because defence markets are highly fragmented there is a lack of interoperability between European military systems and the money is spend inefficient. In a connected world European member states are too small to deliver hard power on their own (EC, 2017). Where continental-sized powers, like the US, Russia or China, are better equipped than medium sized states. In contrast to this, the EC also identifies certain strengths. The EU uses an approach with a blend of soft and hard power. It uses security and defence instruments alongside diplomacy, sanctions, development cooperation and trade aimed at preventing conflict (2017). Where soft power alone may not be enough, the EU's integrated approach lies at the heart of sustainable security. To counter

the problems European states face, concerning their security, the EC describes three different ‘European Defence Scenario’s’: the Security and Defence Cooperation scenario, the Shared Security and Defence scenario and the Common Defence and Security scenario.

The Security and Defence Cooperation scenario is the least integrated scenario, where the Common Defence and security scenario is the most integrated scenario of the three. If we take into account, the used arguments in the paper it is clear that the EC has a preference for the Common Defence and Security scenario. The Security and Defence Cooperation scenario has according to the reflection some advantages in comparison to the present-day situation, but mainly disadvantages. The Shared Security and Defence scenario is a mix of both positive and negative arguments according to the reflection paper, where the Common Defence and Security scenario is presented as a solution for all shortcomings of present European defence policies. It is therefore that we will mainly focus on the policies proposed in the more ambitious Common Security and Defence scenario:

“This most ambitious scenario foresees the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy, leading to common defence based on Article 42 of the EU Treaty which allows a group of like-minded Member States to take European defence to the next level. Under this scenario, EU countries would undertake greater commitments to each other’s security, making Europe’s protection a shared responsibility of the EU and NATO. The EU would be able to run high-end security and defence operations, underpinned by a certain level of integration of Member States’ defence forces. The EU would support joint defence programmes with the European Defence Fund, as well as set up a dedicated European Defence Research Agency. This would also foster the creation of a genuine European defence market,

able to protect its key strategic activities from external takeovers.”

EU SINGLE DEFENCE MARKET

One of the most comprehensive policies proposed by the paper is the creation of a single EU defence market. The EC claims without adequate substantiation³ that at least 30 billion euros are spent inefficiently because there is a lack of interoperability. The EC believes that this is caused due to the fragmentation of the EU defence market.

We believe that a single market could only be effective if there will be a level playing field between producers. The problem here is that all states have shown to secure their national (often industrial and thus domestic political) interest before the ‘European’ interest. The strongest European states all have highly protected Military Industrial Complexes⁴ (MICs) and are not willing to buy ‘foreign’ platforms. Even states like France and Germany, who seem to be profound advocates of EU military integration⁵, are in practice protecting their own industrial-, foreign affairs- and security interests⁶.

ECONOMIES OF SCALE

To strengthen the strategy of creating a common European defence market the EC resorts to the argument for ‘economies of scale’. We agree with the EU that economies of scale could have a significant impact on the price of military systems. It would therefore be most economical if all European militaries would use the same systems. Only when Europe as a whole decides to use the same military hardware we could speak about ‘economies of scale’. What is important to realize is that this approach does not leave room for differences between European users. To keep in line with the ECs findings about interoperability, standardized platforms should be kept up-

to-date and on the same level throughout the EU. This is mainly because different variants' of the same product will lead to different support lines and logistics.

LOSS OF SOVEREIGNTY

A single European market and procurement would mean that each state will need to buy the same systems. Which means that each state should be aware that, besides acquisition, they also should commit to collective costly upgrades. This should in itself not be a problem – but we believe that this only can be performed if it will be forced to all member states by a new supranational authority⁸. This authority will then decide what platforms to equip the European forces with and how, and when to upgrade them. In our opinion this could be problematic for the EC plans, as states are normally reluctant to give away their key political decision powers. States will only decide to do this, when it will benefit their own MIC. The Common Defence and Security scenario as stated by the EC study could be viable only if states decide on acquiring the cheapest (acquisition plus operation) and also the best available technical solutions. This can only be done by means of a neutral evaluation of alternatives, within a real level playing field. We see both in the USA and EU member states that this isn't happening now, and it isn't very likely to happen in the (near) future. It's this lack of neutral evaluation and 'protectionism' of mainly the larger industrials which in our opinion leads to the 30 Billion spending inefficiencies as mentioned by the EC.

Besides the previous concerns we also assume that the plans of the EC's idea of a single European defence will have further consequences for national sovereignty, the operational level and smaller European producers. We are commencing with a more in-depth research to find

answers to these assumptions and report on it. The question we should ask ourselves which interests are more important: the interests of big MIC (and their shareholders) or the reason of existence of armed forces in the first place: defending the (sovereign countries on the) European continent and its people?⁹

OPERATIONAL RISKS

Besides the mentioned economic and sovereignty risks we see a more practical risk the EU member states should consider: operational risks. Where the EC sees diversity as a negative issue we see it as a principle which works in practice. Each hardware system normally has advantages and disadvantages. Non-is completely the same or equal. Creating a one-size-fits-all approach creates limitations in options and capabilities. An example of limiting the numbers in the "European Defence" toolbox is when aircraft are temporarily taken out of service because there are a number of consecutive crashes^{10 11}. A situation like this would leave Europe extremely vulnerable to irregularities, a luxury the proposed EU defence policy does not have.

SMALL TO MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES AND SMALL STATES

Maybe the biggest problem we see with the EC plans¹² are the consequences for smaller European producers. These often highly advanced and skilled 'Small to Medium Sized Enterprises' (SMEs) lack the marketing and global reach of big European companies but often deliver advanced and affordable products. These SMEs are also essential for the national security of smaller EU member states. The Single European Defence market will place SMEs in the military domain in a very uneven position, even more than they already are, because they will lose their home-market. We see two potential

outcomes for SMEs: they will be taken over by the big European players or they will cease to exist. For all clarity the EC and the leaders of EU nations are talking about SMEs in defence related industries too³³, but we sincerely believe this is on a whole different level. The EC is talking about SMEs as (parts) suppliers, not as system designers, - builders and -integrators.

BIGGER IS BETTER AND MORE AFFORDABLE?

In the current state of the EU defence market we already see that the most expensive products are delivered by the biggest military producers. That bigger corporations don't always deliver better results – in terms of, quality, lower acquisition and operation costs – is a matter of fact. This is mainly because these companies have to share production and assembly facilities across different locations (states) and institutional environments which in itself is inefficient. We believe that small to medium sized companies can deliver equal or even better systems with lower costs in acquisition and operation. To illustrate our case we will compare some equally sized naval platforms.

COMPARING (EU) FRIGATE / DESTROYER PLATFORMS

There isn't a clear qualification to name a ship a Frigate or a Destroyer³⁴. We created a select list of current frigate/destroyer sized ships with comparable qualifications. All ships will have Anti-Air Warfare for a naval taskforce as main task. Other roles are: Anti-Surface Warfare, Anti-Submarine Warfare and Naval Fire Support. The ships are all equipped with main and secondary guns, a Vertical Launch Weapon System (VLS) with Air Defence missiles, anti-ship missiles, torpedo's and (a) helicopter(s).

If we look at the European build ships, we see that ships build by smaller (national) shipyards are significant cheaper to buy and operate while



Iver Huitfeldt class frigate
defencyclopedia.com /Christopher P. Cavas

they do have equal and sometimes better qualifications. The most expensive vessels are those of Australia, UK and USA. The cheapest of them all; the Iver Huitfeldt class³⁵ (Denmark), in many ways outperforms the costly FREMM frigates build by Italy and France. The Danish ships have a weapon suite which outperforms the FREMM frigates. Where the FREMM frigates only have 16 missile silos in its VLS, the Iver Huitfeldt class has 32 VLS silos which can be used for both SM2 long range missiles or a larger amount of Evolved Sea Sparrow Missiles (ESSM). These ESSM missiles can also be launched from (modular) Mk 56 launchers with up to 24 RIM-162 ESSM. This ship can be equipped with 8 to 16 Harpoon (Anti Ship / but also Land Attack) cruise missiles while the Italians (3,3 times more expensive) and French (4,1 times more expensive) can launch only 8 shorter ranged (national) missiles. The Spanish designed and (partially) build Australian Air Warfare Destroyer tops the list with a price tag 9,8 times more expensive than the Danish vessel.

WORDS AND DEEDS?

Will the new EC "authority" which chooses the weapon systems or platforms to acquire, have a real neutral evaluation of alternatives to come with the best and most affordable solutions? We expect this scenario to be very unlikely. European states, especially Germany, France, Italy and Spain already could have chosen to buy the best

'bang for their buck' but preferred to use needlessly expensive vessels with sometimes less capable 'national' weapon systems.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as an answer to the security threats around the EU, the EC recommends further military integration in Europe and the creation of a single European defence market. This article questions the perceived advantages of the common European Defence and Security scenario. With several examples we expose that the EC's idea of cost-cutting will not be successful as a single European defence market will lead to the closing of highly efficient and innovative smaller military hardware producers. We believe that 'economies of scale' are more complex than painted by the EC and benefits will only occur under 'ideal' circumstances. As we value the small – we believe that small to medium sized companies can deliver equal or even the best systems and deserve European support. In a future publication we will look deeper into these claims made by the EC and will deliver an alternative scenario with practical solutions for a better EU defence cooperation based on our principle: Strong Nations, Strong Union. As we mentioned in the introduction, the European Union has a subsidiarity principle in place: All Defence related measures, agreements and (co-operation) working plans should be seen from this perspective. However in almost all papers, articles including this "reflection paper" from the EC (and many distinguished think-tanks), we see only the use of (questionable) "practical" or "economical" arguments without any show of "real-world" objective or neutral description off all the pro's and con's.

Endnotes

1 Subsidiarity: defence and security policy is one of the key elements of the sovereign democratic state to decide upon because in the end it's a matter of life and death. Therefore cooperation in this matter can not be mistakenly substituted with the loss of state/national sovereignty, unless all countries would democratically decide to do this, which needs changes to national constitutions by means of democratic referendum / voting.

2 Founding father Robert Schuman on the forming of a European integrated army: "With regard to the Defence Community, it might perhaps be possible to set up and administer a joint army which was not a mere coalition of national armies without calling constitutional principles into question. Opinions on this may vary from country to country. But the use of such an army implies unity of purpose and determination in a sphere of fundamental importance, since it is a matter of peace or war, of involving the lives of men and the fate of nations.

In a coalition each State retains the right, *de jure* and even *de facto*, to withdraw the national troops which remain under its sovereign authority. In doing this it may perhaps break the promises it has made. But it remains master of its own decisions.

A common de-nationalised army would, and could, no longer owe obedience to a national authority, either as a whole nor in respect of the units of which it is composed. It would have sworn loyalty to the Community. The Community alone would have power over it. If any of its units were to follow the orders of a national Government, they would be regarded as deserters or rebels. If, therefore, such an army is set up, the only valid orders will have to come from an authority recognised by all the participating States.

What form will this supranational authority take?

The Commander-in-Chief? He has the military responsibilities and the powers he needs to meet them. But he is subject to the orders of the political authority of which he is the executive agent. If the two powers, political and military, were united in one person, the result would be a dictatorship, absolute power.

Our democratic principles are bound to be applied to the organisation of Europe as much as to individual States. This excludes a monopoly of authority in the hands of one man.

https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2003/10/10/91573e99-1c69-40d5-867e-19e3d706d167/publishable_en.pdf

3 The EC, just like many European Federalists take the comparison between the money spent by the United States vs the total of EU budgets without any context as an argument to show the weakness of the EU. However the way the money is spent should be the main point of comparison not the height.

Another argument which we see used over and over again, is the comparison between the large number of “military platform” types, which the different EU countries use, versus the lower number the USA are using. Also this argument isn’t completely valid since in this case a comparison should be held based on, quality and (acquisition and operational) costs. If we look at it from that perspective European producers normally are able to produce more affordable systems with lower operational costs, then their US counterparts.

4 In this sense we mean the combined effort of Industry – military – and politics- meaning: politicians who represent the interests of the industry instead of the people. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military%E2%80%93industrial_complex

5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRiXM-8RiCoc>

6 Macron nationalizes shipyard to prevent Italian acquisition; French president’s intervention to defend ‘strategic interests’ earns Rome rebuke. <https://www.ft.com/content/303f7ac2-72d9-11e7-ac6e-c6bd07dfa3c>

7 Eurofighter Typhoon as a good example of a platform operational deployed in different blocks, versions and standards requiring many different support systems and procedures. <http://www.sldinfo.com/the-european-air-group-and-typhoon-integration-shaping-a-way-ahead-for-more-effective-operational-impacts/>

8 “... If, therefore, such an army is set up, the only valid orders will have to come from an authority recognised by all the participating States”.

Robert Schuman (1951) https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2003/10/10/91573e99-1c69-40d5-867e-19e3d706d167/publishable_en.pdf

9 “The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists, and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our

liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defence with our peaceful methods and goals so that security and liberty may prosper together.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military%E2%80%93industrial_complex

10 <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/britain-germany-and-turkey-ground-a400-military-planes/articleshow/47225179.cms>

11 <https://www.copybook.com/news/global-helicopter-fleet-grounded>

12 But also actions like the recent Permanent Structured Cooperation on security and defence (PESCO) cooperation agreement and the European Defence Fund (EDF), which are currently being developed under the European Defence Industrial Development Programme. [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/34226/Permanent%20Structured%20Cooperation%20\(PESCO\)%20-%20Factsheet](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/34226/Permanent%20Structured%20Cooperation%20(PESCO)%20-%20Factsheet)

13 The objective is to deliver capabilities, ensure a competitive, innovative and balanced basis for Europe’s defence industry across the EU, including by cross border cooperation and participation of SMEs, and to contribute to greater European defence cooperation, by exploiting synergies and mobilising EU support in addition to Member States’ financing. European defence industrial development will also require EU support for SME and intermediate (mid-cap) investments in the area of security and defence. (Page 9 / 10) <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21620/19-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf>

14 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Destroyer#Operators>

15 <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/OMT-Dansh-Frigate-Programme-April-2014.pdf>

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Rima Tüzun, Head of Foreign Affairs, European Syriac Union

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