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# **Strategic Autonomy and the Defence of Europe**

**On the Road to a European Army?**



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# Strategic Autonomy and the Defence of Europe – On the Road to a European Army?

Hans-Peter Bartels · Anna Maria Kellner · Uwe Optenhögel

## Foreword

When the idea for this book emerged in early 2016 Europe's security policy environment was already fraught by the conflict in Ukraine and tensions with Russia, the refugee crisis and the bloody civil war in Syria. In these circumstances the European Council tasked the High Representative and Vice President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini with drafting a new European security strategy.

Although it was foreseeable that the issue of defence capabilities would feature more strongly on the European agenda after the years of the euro crisis, virtually no one could have predicted the level of political significance that the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) would acquire in the course of 2016. This development is linked to two historic surprises: the victory of the pro-Brexit camp in the advisory referendum on whether the United Kingdom should remain in the EU on 23 June 2016 and Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential election on 8 November 2016.

Germany's Social Democrats (SPD) have favoured further Europeanisation of security and defence policy for many years. They included the aim of a European army in their 2007 party programme and in the coalition agreement of 2013. That makes this aim the official policy of the federal government of Chancellor Angela Merkel and Vice-Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has also made widely reported statements calling for the creation

of a European army on various occasions. Nevertheless, in many European countries this goal has been rejected or at least not taken seriously, on the one hand because of fears that dual structures could weaken NATO and on the other because renouncing national armies appears prejudicial to the core of state sovereignty and many EU member states balk at the kind of integration this would require. But despite the scepticism the idea has not gone away.

Where, then, do the EU and the member states stand on the question of how strong and potent the CSDP should be? Is the distant aim of a European army an “*idée fixe*” of the perennially pro-integration Germans or the insatiable Brussels institutions? Or are there points of reference in policy, expert and public discussions in the member states that might favour decisive future measures towards a European Defence Union?

From consideration of these questions the idea emerged of establishing the discussion, which all too often errs on the ideological side, on a robust footing and coming up with a reference work on the current state of affairs in all (at present) 28 member states of the EU. Nothing of the kind has been done before, although to some extent it continues the work of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), which in early 2015 presented the report of its task force (headed by Javier Solana) on the future of the CSDP.<sup>1</sup>

We therefore selected national experts for each EU member state and asked them to answer a number of questions:

- How is the CSDP discussed in their country in politics and expert circles and among the public? What are the attitudes to the long-term goal of a European army?
- What factors determine national security and defence policy? What influences the debates and decision-making processes?
- How has defence spending developed in recent years and what trends can be discerned for the future?
- How do things stand with regard to their national armed forces, for example, in terms of personnel and materiel? What reforms have been implemented in recent years or are planned for the future?
- What experience has there been with multilateral cooperation and what kind of significance does it have in the national security architecture?

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1 CEPS / FES (2015): Report of the CEPS Task Force – More Union in European Defence, Brussels, February 2015. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bruessel/12160.pdf>. German translation: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/ipa/12454.pdf>.



## Part A: The Strategic Environment

Anna Maria Kellner · Uwe Optenhögel

### Strategic Autonomy for the European Union as a Power for Peace

We should never forget that the basic reason for the European integration process – and the European Union – is peace. That was the overriding objective of our founding fathers: Jean Monnet said that building Europe meant building peace. You cannot be clearer than that. (Prodi 2004)

**I**n a world whose growing dangers affect Europe, too, that founding promise, cited here by former Commission President Romano Prodi, certainly has potential to become a touchstone once again.

At the moment, at any rate, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) appears to be one of the areas where most member states could agree on a European policy and win back the trust of their citizens.

#### Europe's hard landing in reality

When the European Union first adopted a security strategy in 2003, this occurred against the background of two countervailing trends in European politics. Firstly, the Balkan wars, 9/11 and the ensuing “war on terror”, and the Iraq War were already

indicating that the expected peace dividend after the Cold War was not going to last. Relations with the central ally, the United States, were fraught, the future role of NATO unclear and the European states divided. At the same time, the Union stood at the threshold of a European reunification, its largest ever enlargement round. The EU was seen not only as an example of peaceful conflict-resolution in a continent riven by centuries of war – in dimensions unparalleled in world history – but also a uniquely successful model of regional integration and a global actor in foreign and economic policy. This (self-)confidence was also reflected in the introductory words of the first security strategy, presented in December 2003 by High Representative Javier Solana. Under the title “A Secure Europe in a Better World”, it asserts: “*Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure or so free. The violence of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has given way to a period of peace and stability unprecedented in European history*” (ESS 2003).

For the first time in its history, the European Union now possessed a foreign policy and security strategy to which all its member states could subscribe, creating a new shared political basis after the quarrels over the Iraq War.

The strategy created the necessary instruments and placed external relations on a footing of shared values. It structured the foreign policy and security aspects of the debate over a European Constitution and was reflected in the outcome of the Treaty of Lisbon (2009). The strategy outlines a Europe that begins by creating a “ring of friends” (Prodi 2003) in its own neighbourhood on the basis of democratic and humanist values, and moves on, in the scope of a comprehensive approach and “effective multilateralism”, via crisis prevention and civilian conflict resolution – in other words soft power – to contribute to security and development and thus to global peace and a just economic order. The Solana strategy was largely responsible for establishing the European Union as a soft power in the global arena.

A good decade later, the Union’s stance of 2003 now appears utterly overoptimistic. The Union’s revised security doctrine, “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe”, which High Representative Federica Mogherini presented to the Council in June 2016, begins with the words:

“We need a stronger Europe. This is what our citizens deserve, this is what the wider world expects. We live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union. Our Union is under threat. Our European project, which has brought unprecedented peace, prosperity and democracy, is being questioned.” (EU Global Strategy 2016).

The difference to the introduction to the 2003 Strategy could hardly be greater. A series of unexpectedly rapidly escalating crises and international conflicts, and a

Union paralysed by internal differences and periods monopolised by the euro crisis have undermined Europe's role as a geopolitical actor.

This development played out in three central policy areas.

**Firstly: Security.** Instead of being surrounded by a ring of friends, the EU today finds itself facing an arc of instability stretching from the Sahel through the Horn of Africa and the Middle East to the Caucasus and the new fault lines in Eastern Europe. The broad failure of the so-called Arab Spring as the most recent self-democratising of non-western societies, protracted wars in Syria and Iraq, refugee streams heading for Europe, escalating terrorism in the core states of the Union, and the increasing destabilisation of Turkey all underline the dramatic nature of the situation.

Russia's annexation of Crimea, the destabilisation of Eastern Ukraine and military provocation towards several EU member states call into question the European security system established under the Charter of Paris in 1990, following the end of the Cold War. And they have reawakened awareness that conflict involving conventional weapons and occupation of territory are once again conceivable in Europe.

Beyond this, the emergence of a multipolar security environment has led to a diversification of threat scenarios, spanning political, social and economic spheres and increasingly closely interlinked. These security risks are not purely military in nature, but range from the dissemination of weapons of mass destruction and cyberattacks to piracy and threats against energy and environmental security. Accelerated through globalisation, these dangers transcend state borders and are as such no longer constrained to individual geographical regions. The borders between internal and external security become blurred. No other "global player" currently faces comparable chaos in its own strategic backyard.

**Secondly: EU-internal.** Starting with the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy and the resulting crisis of a deregulated financial sector, the EU found itself forced to use public funds on a gigantic scale to repair damage caused by private mismanagement. This led to economic recession and subsequently a massive state debt crisis. The cuts resulting from this state of affairs have also significantly impaired the military capabilities and resources of the Union and its members. Lacking an external military threat, confronted with the rising costs of modern weapons systems and facing public scepticism towards military interventions, governments have had a hard time justifying high-level defence spending and explaining their participation in foreign military missions. Most EU member states have therefore slashed their defence budgets in an uncoordinated and unplanned manner.

Another problem here is the increasingly blurred lines between internal and external security, caused above all by an escalation of the terrorist threat to the core states of the EU and steadily increasing pressure of migration, which escalated in 2015 into a massive influx of refugees into the European Union.

These threats demand – in the first place – primarily civilian responses and police deployments. External threats potentially requiring strong military forces were perceived by only few member states until Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. In tandem with drastic pressure to economise, this naturally had considerable repercussions on the CSDP. Although it initially followed a steep learning curve, its development has almost ceased since the outbreak of the financial crisis. Today the CSDP still remains far from the significance it should possess in view of the continent's changing threat situation – and which it was originally assigned in the 2003 security strategy and later in the Treaty of Lisbon.

**Thirdly: Geopolitical.** The rise of the Asian emerging economies and long-term demographic trends have shifted the world's economic centre of gravity away from Europe. Global defence spending patterns have changed accordingly. The United States remains the world's only military superpower, with spending still about five times the level of second-placed China. The United States also retains leadership in hardware and software development, fighting experience and readiness to intervene globally. Even if the countries of the European Union still belong to the leading group in relation to defence spending and military manpower, there are signs of a shift in the balance of forces. The emerging economies are catching up and are in the process of elbowing the industrialised nations aside. Their new confidence in asserting and protecting their regional and global interests will lead to increasing tensions, and as a consequence sow insecurity.

In view of these now undeniable geopolitical shifts (and in the context of containment of the euro crisis) the EU turned again more strongly from autumn 2013 towards security and defence policy and the future of the CSDP. In December 2013, for the first time since the Treaty of Lisbon came into force in 2009, the heads of state and government again discussed intensifying cooperation in this field.

Indirectly, they thus acknowledged the deficits and inefficiencies of the existing CSDP. Differences between the member states over security interests and risk assessments had to date prevented the emergence of a shared strategic culture and hampered the formation of common European military instruments, structures and procedures.

A lack of political leadership, the complexity of European institutions, inadequate coordination at the planning and operational level and the hesitation of the mem-

ber states to supply troops and equipment currently preclude any operations exceeding the scope, size and duration of the current overwhelmingly small European missions.

Despite more than ten years of “learning by doing” in the scope of the CSDP, the EU is currently neither in a position to guarantee the security of its own citizens nor to contribute effectively to fighting threats to and violations of peace and security in its strategic neighbourhood and the rest of the world. Without a strong security and defence arm, it is in no position to fulfil its own ambition of acting as a power for peace with a comprehensive approach and to contribute decisively to conflict prevention and crisis management.<sup>1</sup> Creating the preconditions for greater strategic autonomy for the EU and restoring its ability to operate as a guarantor of international security will require greater cooperation between the member states on security and defence policy and the development of a robust integrated defence industry. Improved and intensified defence cooperation within the EU would also represent a positive contribution to NATO. And whereas a decade ago the United States rejected the creation of separate defence structures in the European Union, this is now demanded by leading American politicians from both parties – most vehemently in the recent presidential campaign of Donald Trump.

## Initiatives and institutional adjustments in advance of a new strategy

On the basis of the Council decisions of December 2013, and even more so since the 2014 European elections, Brussels institutions have resolutely set to work to rectify accumulated deficits in foreign, security and defence policy. With its summit decisions the Council initiated a multitude of initiatives at different levels. The European Council called on the member states to seek more systematic and longer-term cooperation on development, maintenance and deployment of military capacities. The emphasis on intensified cooperation with NATO was central to this and other initiatives. In order to preserve and expand the capabilities of EU members, the heads of state and government also supported efforts to strengthen the internal defence market and to promote a more integrated, more sustainable and more competitive European defence industry.

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the state of the CSDP and recommendations for moving towards a European Defence Union, see the report of the CEPS Task Force chaired by Javier Solana, “More Union in European Defence”: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bruessel/12160.pdf>.

Since December 2013 the member states have not only adopted an EU Maritime Security Strategy (2014), but also established an EU Cyber Defence Policy Framework (2014) and a Policy Framework for Systematic and Long-Term Defence Cooperation (2014) that serve the member states as guidelines for expanding their defence capabilities – in complete coherence with existing NATO planning processes.

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has spoken out repeatedly and since early 2015 very publicly for the creation of a European army, earning him mockery and support in equal parts, depending on national perspectives. Although the debate clearly demonstrated that this can only be a very long-term objective, Juncker's intervention did succeed in succinctly presenting the issue – which had hitherto been restricted to European expert circles – to a broader audience. Parallel to this, the Juncker Commission has also made concrete institutional changes in order to integrate the CSDP better into the European institutions.

Institutionally, the Juncker Commission created thematic clusters of directorates-general in order to overcome the Brussels “silo mentality” and introduce a horizontal level of communication and decision-making.<sup>2</sup> This means that the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, coordinates the directorates-general relevant to external relations: neighbourhood, development, trade and migration. At the same time, she is also Vice-President of the Commission. The challenge of better integrating the European External Action Service (EEAS), which remained a foreign body within the EU institutions under Mogherini's predecessor Catherine Ashton, into the institutional framework lies in this dual function. Symbolically, Mogherini therefore moved to the seat of the Commission upon taking office. In doing so, she made it clear that she was interested not only in good coordination with the member states in the Council, but also with the Commission. Aside from that symbolic move, Mogherini also staffed half her cabinet with experienced Commission officials. She is coordinating more closely with the other Commissioners in the foreign policy cluster and has developed good working relations with both Commission President Juncker and Council President Donald Tusk. Such coordination is especially important in relation to the “soft power” components of EU external relations because the Commission – above all the Directorate-General for Development and International Cooperation – represents a well-funded and influential actor in this area.

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2 Within the Brussels machinery communication is traditionally vertical within each directorate-general. Communication between directorates-general is less highly developed, leading to a lack of coherence in policy output. This is what the creation of clusters is designed to overcome.

Mogherini has announced a “special partnership” with the European Parliament. This is documented by her regular participation in meetings of the foreign affairs committee, her coordination with Parliament President Martin Schulz and her announcement of the reinstatement of the special committee for discussing confidential matters.

Despite widespread initial scepticism over her lack of political experience, Mogherini’s half-time balance is positive. She has proven herself to be competent, cooperative and assertive both in the EU institutional framework and vis-à-vis the member states. In comparison to her predecessor she enjoys a much better media presence and is more committed to improving the EEAS’s integration in the EU institutions. In her early forties, she is a member of the “globalisation generation”; her thinking is multipolar.

These qualities are also reflected in the preparation process for the EU Global Strategy (EUGS), which the European Council asked her to prepare in 2015. Under the title “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe” (EU Global Strategy 2016), the document was ready as planned in June 2016. It supplies a programmatic framework for the diverse individual initiatives of various European institutions, addresses the multiple challenges of the EU’s new internal and geopolitical situation and as such provides the necessary fundamental revision of the Solana strategy from 2003.

## **A new balance of values and interests: The global strategy**

After a year of preparation and a public consultation process, Federica Mogherini presented the new EU Global Strategy to the European Council at the end of June 2016. She could not have picked a worse moment for broad public attention and a fundamental debate among the heads of state and government, as the meeting took place immediately after the unexpected “leave” vote in the British referendum on EU membership. Federica Mogherini decided to stick to her timetable, justifying this as follows: “In challenging times, a strong Union is one that thinks strategically, shares a vision and acts together. This is even more true after the British referendum.”

For all the justified criticism of strategy papers, whose substance and impact are only really seen in their implementation, observers agree that this is a document capable of substantially advancing the debate and its implementation. Contrary to some expectations, the Strategy does not open with an analysis of internal and external threats and opportunities. This was already accomplished beforehand in a

separate document: “The European Union in a Changing Global Environment” (EU Strategic Review). In comparison to the European Security Strategy (ESS) of 2003, the new EU Global Strategy appears more modest in its scope, more clearly aware of the limits to the Union’s abilities and more precise in relation to implementation. It sets regional priorities in the neighbourhood, without relinquishing the global perspective. It is more strongly rooted in *realpolitik* and more honest in its specification of interests than the 2003 approach, without in any way calling into question the value orientation of European foreign and security policy: “Our interests and values go hand in hand. We have an interest in promoting our values in the world. At the same time, our fundamental values are embedded in interests. Peace and security, prosperity, democracy and a rules-based global order are the vital interests underpinning our external action.”

The document takes account of the progressive dissolution of the boundaries between internal and external security. In light of the broad public perception of new threats, it does not shy from repeatedly stressing both the interests of the Union and the concerns of its citizens: social interests, security needs, etc. This was much less the case in the ESS of 2003 (see also Grevi 2016).

The EUGS has five levels of ambition:

1. The security of the Union itself;
2. The resilience of states and societies in the eastern and southern neighbourhood;
3. An integrated approach to conflicts and crises;
4. Cooperative and stable regional orders;
5. Appropriate global governance structures for the twenty-first century.

In response to real political changes, the document addresses the hitherto neglected aspects of security and defence (Part 1). The guiding principle in this section is that of “strategic autonomy”, while the method for achieving the objectives is described as “principled pragmatism”. Part 3 (“An Integrated Approach to Conflicts and Crises”) supplies a further development of the practice of “soft power” successfully begun in 2003, alongside a clearer differentiation of security and defence approaches and goals than found in the ESS. The current strategy focuses less on promoting democracy than on ensuring stability by strengthening the resilience of societies and states. Here it cites the largely failed US “regime change” efforts, and also the Union’s own experience in this area. These suggest a “tailor made approach” whose crisis management focuses not only on involving the conflict parties, but also the participation of the affected civil society, which is often the only or largest party with a serious interest in lasting peace structures (Berlin Report 2016).



In summary, the experts and observers largely agree that the EU Global Strategy fulfils its objectives and relocates the Union's external relations within the multiple challenges of the current geopolitical and internal situation. The Brussels institutions have rapidly initiated decisive action to implement the Strategy. In mid-December a package comprising three pillars was presented to the European Council for its approval:

1. The EEAS's "Implementation Plan on Security and Defence" which formulates new goals and ambitions for the EU, to permit it to take on more responsibility for its own security and defence;
2. The Commission's "European Defence Action Plan" which smoothes the way for new finance instruments to assist the member states and the defence industry in developing new defence capabilities; and
3. A series of concrete proposals for implementing the goals of the EU-NATO Joint Declaration adopted at the July 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw.

Taken together, the three elements form a comprehensive package for improving the security of the Union and its citizens.<sup>3</sup>

The European Parliament for its part supports the approach of the Commission and the Council. But it explicitly underlines the complementarity of the EU's hard and soft power: "(The European Parliament emphasises that) the EU must strengthen its security and defence capabilities, as it can only use its full potential as a global power if it combines its unrivalled soft power with hard power as part of the EU's comprehensive approach; (the European Parliament) recalls that stronger and common civilian and military capacities are key elements for the EU to fully respond to crises, build the resilience of partners and protect Europe." (European Parliament 2016).

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3 Specifically, the European Council requested Mogherini to "present proposals in the coming months as regards the development of civilian capabilities, the parameters of a member state-driven Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, the process of developing military capabilities taking into account Research and Technology (R&T) and industrial aspects, the establishment of a permanent operational planning and conduct capability at the strategic level, the strengthening of the relevance, usability and deployability of the EU's rapid response toolbox, elements and options for an inclusive Permanent Structured Cooperation based on a modular approach and outlining possible projects, and the covering of all requirements under the Capacity Building in Security and Development (CBSD)." See: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2016/12/20161215-eu-co-conclusions-final\\_pdf/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2016/12/20161215-eu-co-conclusions-final_pdf/)