

The EU Global Strategy: From Ambition to Implementation?

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The Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), published in 2016, sets out very ambitious goals, aptly summed up in one of its key statements: “While NATO exists to defend its members – most of which are European – from external attack, Europeans must be better equipped, trained and organized to contribute decisively to such collective efforts, as well as to act autonomously if and when necessary.”⁶

“Strategic autonomy” in this specific context should not be confused with strategic independence, nor does it mean that the EU wants to turn its back on the United States.⁷ But the EU desires a negotiating position at eye-level, and it wants a stronger footprint in international security – acting as a soft power wherever possible and as a military power wherever necessary to defend its’ citizens security and interests.

Past attempts to strengthen the EU’s security and defense policy have largely failed because the EU member states could not agree on their implementation. This time it is different, not least because of Brexit, terror attacks on European grounds, the refugee crisis, and a rather unpredictable President Trump. The member states have already drawn conclusions and adopted several decisions on the



path toward what is to become a European Defense Union in the end: The Coordinated Annual Review on Defense (CARD), the European Defense Fund, and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) are likely to usher in a new chapter in the CSDP.

But this progress, of course, harbors certain risks:

There is the risk of deception. The latest EUROBAROMETER survey on security and defense shows huge support for a strong CSDP (75 percent on average), with even 55 percent of persons surveyed voicing their support for a European Army.⁸ People would like to see fewer refugees, fewer terrorist attacks, and less bad news on the whole. Despite the rise of nationalism, citizens of the member states obviously trust the EU more than their respective home countries and they want the EU to take care of things. This is precious political capital that could be quickly lost in the event of failure to deliver.

⁶ *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* (Brussels: European Union, June 2016.) p.19.

⁷ On 16 October 2017, Pedro Serrano, deputy secretary of the EU External Action Service, called for a structural dialogue on the development and strengthening of the EU-U.S. partnership on security and defense. He added that “cooperation with the US is essential to meeting (global) challenges” such as North Korea or the Middle East. “The US is the main strategic partner for the EU and its member states – be it in terms of bilateral cooperation or in the framework of NATO.” *Europe Diplomacy & Defense*, No. 1026, October 17, 2017.

⁸ *Special Eurobarometer 461 - Designing Europe's future: Security and Defense* (Brussels: European Commission, April 2017).

This is also true at the military level: PESCO, for instance, is first of all a political project. Designed to facilitate political cooperation and to demonstrate the capacity to act, its integrative impetus must be geared to attend to the most pressing military needs in order to produce true added value in defense.

There is also another risk, namely that of ineffective structures:

The post-EU Global Strategy security architecture does not start from scratch. It builds on a rather complex institutional landscape and a multitude of existing instruments. Whether or not the potential of the new instruments can be fully leveraged or not, largely depends on the following aspects:

1. To properly identify capability gaps, member states must be obliged to participate in the annual defense review (CARD) – which has not been the case to date. The European Defense Agency (EDA), which acts as the secretariat for CARD, needs a strong mandate to monitor, enforce, and assess the member states' commitment.
2. PESCO should primarily address these identified capability gaps. This once again requires an enormous commitment by participating member states – and appropriate assessment mechanisms for the European Council.
3. The European Defense Fund should exclusively be used to fund these projects in order to make PESCO more attractive to smaller member states and help them catch up with regard to European capability benchmarks.

All these preconditions are incorporated into the new instruments. However, strong mandates, binding requirements, and effective monitoring mechanisms are obviously unwanted at present. Thus far the

member states have merely been underscoring “the need for PESCO, the European Defense Fund and CARD to be mutually reinforcing (...)”⁹ – which is not enough.

Another challenging aspect of ineffective structures is the growing number of bi- and mini-lateral initiatives in Europe: NORDEFECO or more recently the recent French proposal for a European Intervention Initiative would appear to be very pragmatic, defense-oriented steps forward that also keep the door open to important EU partners (including the UK). But as long as these initiatives are not supervised by NATO or CSDP structures, they risk making European defense even more complex, fragmented, and ineffective.

However: The new instruments of this “post-EU Global Strategy security and defense policy” of the EU offer huge potential both at the political and military levels. They will help better to coordinate European defense policies, thereby rendering them more effective. They will enhance the interoperability and operational readiness of European armed forces – whether this be for NATO, EU, UN, OSCE, or other multilateral missions.

Of course, concepts and ideas regarding the spirit and purpose of the CSDP still diverge considerably. But as Alice Billon-Galland and Martin Quencez put it in their recent GMF policy paper: “European partners urgently need to provide answers to short-term security challenges and cannot expect to reconcile all the differences in their strategic cultures before engaging a process toward a more coordinated and more ambitious European defense.”¹⁰

9 *European Council Meeting – Conclusions (Brussels: European Council, October 19, 2017)*, pp. 9-10.

10 *Billon-Galland, Alice and Quencez, Martin, “Can France and Germany Make PESCO Work as a Process Toward EU Defense?” German Marshall Fund, Policy Brief No. 033, October 2017.*