

Intervention on
The role of neighbours and strategic partners in the future of European defence policy

at the side event at GLOBSEC Forum 2019

“Beyond PESCO: What is a Vision for a European Defence Union?”

Setting the scene

The EEAS Deputy Secretary General responsible for CSDP, Pedro De Serrano Haro, underlined in his recent paper that “[t]he EU is well aware that even while bringing together all the capabilities of its Member States, influencing world events also requires cooperation with other partners” (De Serrano Haro, 2019). By underlining this somewhat obvious fact, he addressed the concerns of many partners regarding the European strategic autonomy concept¹ put forward in the European Global Strategy 2016 (EEAS, 2016). The risk of perpetual European dependency on the US seems to be too high to take.

Both the complexity and the scope of current security threats require the EU to develop feasible and effective mechanisms for integrating key third parties in its future defense initiatives. Hence, it is safe to say that the European Union will continue to act with partners as much as possible as it is its ‘default option’ – multilateralism is an important part of the EU’s DNA, be it with neighbours, strategic partner countries or international organizations, such as the UN, NATO, the AU or OSCE. At the same time, due to the proliferation of security risks and the perceived uncertainty of US security guarantees, the EU needs to have the capacity to act on its own when required (mainly in its neighbourhood via crisis management operations, Coelmont, 2019).

European Defence Union as cooperation framework

It is too early to offer any specific details on the involvement of neighbours and strategic partners in the development of the European Defence Union (mainly CSDP operations, PESCO and EDF) since a new overarching framework for cooperation with partners in this area is currently under consideration by the EEAS and Member States which have diverging ideas on this topic. Brexit triggered the revision of the hitherto functioning Framework Participation Agreements (FPA) that regulate the third country participation in CSDP missions², but in fact

¹ The ambiguity of this concept led to a debate on how it should really be understood: Nicholas Burns and Douglas Lute have suggested that a preferable concept for the EU might be “strategic responsibility”. Federica Mogherini, at the 2019 Munich Security Conference, coined the expression “cooperative autonomy”. Sven Biscop distinguishes between “strengthening autonomy” (in domestic security), a “significant degree of autonomy” (Europe’s ‘connectivity’) and “full strategic autonomy” (in crisis response). Daniel Fiott differentiates between “autonomy as responsibility”, “autonomy as hedging” and “autonomy as emancipation”.

² The FPA includes provisions on participation in both civilian and military crisis missions/operations (e.g. regulating the personnel, chain of command, financial aspects and agreements regarding the status of personnel

it has been long overdue. The growing number of very different partners the EU has worked with on CSDP in the recent decade (45 countries such as US, Canada, Turkey, Norway, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Serbia, Switzerland, Australia etc. Tardy, 2014³) and the progressing integration of security and defence need to have clear rules on third country participation. The challenge is the heterogeneity of the third parties. Tardy puts forward a threefold typology of partnership relations differentiating with regard to a) the security interest that the third parties represent for the EU b) what the third parties can bring to the EU's security policy, as well as their willingness to work with the EU on a broad security agenda; and c) the extent to which the third parties share the EU's values and therefore can legitimately cooperate with the EU (Tardy, 2018).

The aim of the new framework is to provide greater clarity on the overall network of EU engagement with international partners on security and defence issues, and offer greater flexibility to tailor specific relationships to the characteristics and commitments of each partner. Extending political ownership of third countries and benefiting more from their experience and capacities are to be taken into account. As for PESCO and EFD, since these instruments have just recently been launched, new arrangements have to be found on how to involve neighbours and strategic partners.

The discussion of the role of neighbours and strategic partners in the future of European defence policy has two dimensions: the operational and the strategic dimension.

The *operational dimension* entails profiting from military and civilian capabilities of third countries that the European Union needs in order to launch CSDP operations. To illustrate it with some examples: Norway is a key player in conflict resolution and mediation; the UK is a strong policy actor and one of the largest contributors to CSDP military missions (mainly with critical military equipment such as vessels, Martill and Sus, 2018) with wide geographic reach and significant expertise on sanctions regimes; Turkey is a key partner in counterterrorism and a pivotal player in the Middle East; and the Balkan countries provide a growing presence in Africa. These countries can easily offer the significant 'added value' in terms of personnel, assets, expertise that a third country is expected to contribute when invited to participate in European defence projects.

Another important aspect of the operational dimension is the integration of third countries in the European defence market and -industry. The Member States are divided on the issue of granting companies from countries outside the EU (mainly the United States, Norway and UK) the possibility to participate in the EDF. Norway is a highly relevant partner in this respect – it is an integral part of the European defence equipment market with a high-tech and

and information sharing etc.). As for now, 18 countries have signed FPA, others cooperate with the EU outside of the FPA.

³ There is also existing cooperation between third countries and the European Defence Agency: EDA signed Administrative Arrangements with Norway (2006), Switzerland (2012), the Republic of Serbia (2013) and Ukraine (2015) and regulated their participation in EDA's projects and programs. Turkey does not enjoy any official links with EDA.

internationally competitive defense industry that can make a significant contribution to research on defence capabilities. EU countries whose (defence) industry is closely linked to the US or the British one are in favor of such an integration since cutting the partners out will have a negative impact on the transatlantic cooperation and bilateral relationship with post-Brexit UK (Chazan & Peel, 2019). The US ambassador to NATO, Kay Bailey Hutchison, said recently with reference to PESCO and the EDF “We do not want this to be a protectionist vehicle for the EU. We want the Europeans to have capabilities and strength, but not to fence off American products, of course. Or Norwegian products. Or potentially U.K. products” (Herszenhorn, 2019). At the same time, the Member States are concerned that third parties participation at EFD would mean that EU taxpayers’ money should be channeled to countries outside of the EU and thus there is no agreement on this so far.

In turn, the *strategic dimension* relates to the ambition of the European Union to be an “unparalleled platform for cooperation on security and defence” (De Serrano Haro, 2019). By joining the EU in its CSDP operations and in other initiatives it undertakes within defence policy such as PESCO, third states quite explicitly recognize the EU as a viable partner in crisis management and as an relevant global player. As Tardy argues “the visibility and effectiveness of the EU in crisis management partly relies on its capacity to attract non-EU countries and institutionalize relationships with them” (Tardy, 2014).

Such an involvement also strengthens the primacy of multilateral cooperation underlined in the EUGS. In the multi-order world, with liberal values under threat, being able to integrate like-minded partners and to act jointly is essential for the Union. Moreover, the ability of the EU to attract partners from and outside of the European continent constitutes an important aspect of Union’s soft power (power of attraction, (Zielonka, 2011) and positions the EU among other players such as NATO, UN or US and China.

Assessment

Taking into account the importance of engaging third parties into the development of European Defence Union, the existing ambiguity regarding third country participation i.e. in CSDP operations as well as in PESCO and EFD, has a negative impact on partners and causes speculation (Chazan & Peel, 2019). Also, the recent Council recommendation assessing participating Member States’ progress on fulfilling commitments undertaken in PESCO offer no clarification. One contentious issue is the decision-making autonomy of the EU. Whereas Brexit has shown that the EU is very clear on not granting any third country the possibility to participate in decision-making (Barnier, 2017), it might be necessary to re-think this rule in the context of CSDP and European Defence Union. Currently, third states that are about to participate in a CSDP mission are invited in the process at a very late stage. They are only given access to EU-issued documents once their participation has been accepted by the PSC. Despite the informal contacts between the EEAS officials and the officials from the third country, the partner country is not involved in the drafting of the concept of operations. However, consultation mechanisms that the Union now offers third countries willing to participate in CSDP instruments might not be enough to satisfy the closest partners, such as Norway or Switzerland and soon maybe the UK.

The level of integration within the European defence policy is changing and the involvement of partners and neighbours will have to be adjusted accordingly. There is a need for a strategic re-think on how to involve various third parties not only on the CSDP-related policies but also on hybrid threats, terrorism, migration in the spirit of the EUGS and the broad approach to security that this document puts forward.

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