

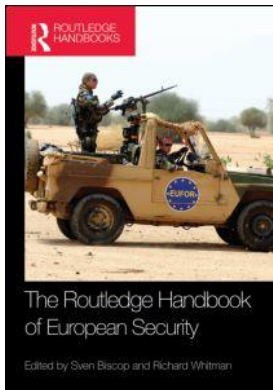
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7

MILITARY CSDP

The quest for capability

Sven Biscop and Jo Coelmont

In absolute terms and when taken as a bloc, the EU is the world's second largest military actor, preceded only by the USA. In 2009 the 26 EU Member States that collectively participate in the European Defence Agency (EDA) spent €194 billion on defence, having some 1.67 million men and women in uniform (EDA, 2010). However, of that impressive overall number, only a small share is employable for expeditionary operations: a meagre 10 per cent or some 170,000 troops (Horvath, 2011: 57). Because of the need for rotation, the EU can sustain about one third of those in the field, so a rate of deployment of 60,000 to 70,000 troops is the maximum effort which in the current state of its capabilities and under normal circumstances the EU can sustain. This more or less equals the level of ambition of the Headline Goal (HG) adopted by the European Council in Helsinki in 1999. The aim is to be able to deploy up to an army corps (50,000 to 60,000 troops), together with air and maritime forces, plus the required command and control, strategic transport and other support services, within 60 days, and to sustain that effort for at least one year.

In 1999, the number of 50,000 to 60,000 was arrived at by referring back to the launch of KFOR earlier that year: it was about the number of troops needed to stabilize Kosovo or, earlier, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Today, the EU and its Member States are actively engaged in many more theatres, a trend which is likely to continue as Europe strengthens its foreign policy, and as the USA is looking for burden-sharing with its European allies. As a result, EU Member States now usually deploy troop numbers equivalent to the HG or even higher, if all ongoing CSDP, NATO, UN and national operations in which they participate are counted, up to 83,000 in 2006 (EDA, 2010a). This much-increased rate of deployment has two major implications. On the one hand, operations last ever longer – usually much more than one year. On the other hand, in the event of a crisis occurring in addition to ongoing operations, EU Member States could not, or could only with great difficulty, deploy significant additional troops, except by improvising (as in the event of an emergency threat to vital interests they would, accepting the increased risks for the forces deployed which this would entail) or by withdrawing forces from ongoing operations.

In order to stay in tune with this higher level of activity, the HG should be interpreted broadly. First, the ambition in terms of sustainability ought to be increased. Second, the HG should be understood as a deployment which EU Member States must be able to undertake at any one time *over and above* ongoing operations. Having a second corps available, the

EU would be able to deal with every eventuality. Clearly, therefore, the transformation of Europe's armed forces must be stepped up.

The need for transformation

Transformation means reorienting the armed forces from territorial defence to expeditionary operations. The majority of Europe's armed forces used to consist of heavy formations with limited mobility geared to the defence of the national territory. This made perfect sense during the Cold War, as armies were stationed at striking distance on both sides of the Iron Curtain in preparation for a massive conventional onslaught. This legacy meant that once the Cold War ended, most of Europe had to start transformation with a severe handicap as compared to the USA.

Today's worldwide crisis management operations demand much more agile forces, able to deploy rapidly over long distances. This requires a different mix of capabilities: strategic air and maritime transport, the key 'strategic enablers' along with deployable force headquarters (FHQs) and strategic intelligence and communications, but also equipment suitable for operations in various theatres. Doctrine and training, an integral part of any capability, must be adapted accordingly. Member States are aware of this challenge; all have initiated reform. Budgets are limited, however, and have considerably decreased since the end of the Cold War. At the same time, capabilities and operations have become increasingly expensive, hence transformation cannot be achieved in one big bang but proceeds mostly at a very slow pace. Often, the situation is aggravated by governments regarding the defence budget as easy pickings when additional savings are needed to balance the national budget. As a result, plans for transformation and restructuring of the armed forces often have to be abandoned midway through, when it turns out that the promised budgets are not accorded after all. A succession of unfinished reform plans has left many armed forces in disarray. The problems faced by the Member States of Central and Eastern Europe are particularly difficult, as they are burdened by even larger quantities of usually older legacy equipment, and have much more limited budgetary means.

The fundamental issue at the heart of both the problem, i.e. low deployability, and the slow pace of the solution, i.e. transformation, remains the fragmentation of Europe's defence effort. If the collective defence budget of the EU27 represents a very considerable sum of money, in reality it is of course not spent in a collective way. Rather it is fragmented across 27 separate armed forces. Most Member States remain reluctant to align national defence planning with that of other Member States and take into account the shortfall areas, as well as the areas in which there is overcapacity, that have been identified at the European level. Instead, they insist on remaining active in a relatively wide range of capability areas chosen in terms of national considerations, in spite of the decreasing defence budgets and size of their armed forces. Consequently, a plethora of ever smaller-scale capabilities are scattered across the EU's smaller Member States especially, which are neither cost-effective nor, usually, very deployable. At the same time, many Member States maintain large capabilities in spite of their having become redundant.

As many Member States through successive rounds of savings have had to cut the size of many capabilities, cost-effectiveness has decreased, because certain costs to a large extent remain fixed, regardless of the size of the capability. The cost of running an airbase, for example, does not decrease proportionately as the number of aircraft stationed there decreases. As a result, the unit cost increases, an ever larger share of the budget is spent on overhead and support structures and less money is available for investment in the needs of the

manoeuvre units and for actually deploying them on operations. Moreover, many Member States sought to maintain the extensive superstructures of the former large-scale Cold War armed forces, such as division structures, even though mostly the actual size of the forces no longer warrants it. With the abolishment of conscription in most Member States, the reserve forces are gradually disappearing, so mobilization cannot serve to fill up these large structures either. In the area of overhead and support structures, great redundancy thus exists, so the potential for increasing cost-effectiveness is very large.

The answer to fragmentation is integration. But fragmentation has proved difficult to overcome. Even States that are members of the EU or NATO or both often decide on national defence planning with little or no reference to either. Their guidelines are usually trumped by considerations of prestige, by historical legacies, by national industrial interests, by very local politics and simply by budgetary pressure. As a result, even when Member States invest in defence, they do not necessarily invest in the right capabilities, nor do they always procure capabilities in the most cost-effective manner. Meanwhile, the strategic enablers required for the transformation to expeditionary operations are being developed only very slowly, if at all. In 2001, and at repeated instances ever since, the strategic shortfalls have been identified and prioritized by the EU and yet progress in addressing them has remained very limited indeed. At the same time, in other areas massive redundancies are maintained in spite of their limited usefulness.

Every successive round of budget cuts threatens to aggravate this already bad situation. Most recently, in the wake of the financial crisis, most nations as of 2010 have started to announce additional cuts. The worst that could happen under such circumstances is business as usual: each government deciding unilaterally, without any coordination with fellow members of NATO and the EU, where the cuts will be made. The great risk is always that States will scale down or axe altogether ongoing and future programmes and projects meant to generate the indispensable strategic enablers (Maulny, 2010), while hanging on to existing capabilities that are cheaper to maintain but that are already redundant. In the end the sum total of European capabilities will be even less coherent, and even less employable.

Creating a CSDP mechanism

The awareness of this European capability conundrum lies at the origin of the creation of ESDP, now CSDP, in 1999, following an initiative by Prime Minister Tony Blair and President Jacques Chirac at the Franco-British summit in St-Malo the year before. An intricate Capabilities Development Mechanism (CDM) was created in order to try and accelerate transformation and render Europe's forces more deployable by coordinating and cooperating at the EU level.

As defined in the CDM, follow-up of the 1999 HG is ensured by a working group of experts, the Headline Goal Task Force (HTF), with the support of the EU Military Staff (EUMS). First the Helsinki Headline Goal Catalogue (HHC) was drawn up, listing the capabilities required to achieve the HG. A call for voluntary contributions was then made. Following the first Capabilities Commitment Conference (CCC; November 2000), the results of this call were listed in the Force Catalogue. These amounted to about 100,000 troops, 400 combat aircraft and 100 naval vessels. Both the HHC and the Force Catalogue are regularly updated, taking into account additional requirements and adding new contributions. At the May 2003 CCC, notably contributions from the ten new Member States and the then six non-EU European members of NATO were added (although the latter does not count towards the assessment of capability shortfalls); the contribution from Romania and Bulgaria was included in 2007.

The comparison of the requirements of the HHC with the available capabilities according to the Force Catalogue led to the identification of a number of substantial qualitative shortfalls, listed in the Capability Improvement Chart. Following the second CCC (styled Capabilities Improvement Conference), a European Capability Action Plan (ECAP) was therefore adopted, in order to introduce a degree of top-down coordination to guide the bottom-up contributions by the Member States. Under the ECAP, 19 panels of national experts were launched, with at least 1 lead nation each, to propose solutions to remedy the original list of 42 shortfalls. In December 2001 the Laeken European Council stated that ‘the Union is now capable of conducting some crisis management operations’ – a careful but truthful declaration of operability taking into account the remaining shortfalls. In May 2003 the Council confirmed and reinforced this statement, declaring that ‘the EU now has operational capability across the full range of Petersberg Tasks’.

Progress towards solving the shortfalls was not as rapid as expected, however: out of a total of 62 identified shortfalls at that point, the next Capability Improvement Chart (May 2004) showed only 7 to have been solved and 4 where the situation had improved; 23 of the remaining unresolved shortfalls were considered ‘significant in the assessment of capability’. The process seemed to suffer from a lack of leadership and coordination. Already at the 2003 CCC, a second phase of ECAP was therefore launched. On the basis of the Progress Catalogue, an analysis of the updated 2003 HHC and Force Catalogue, the ECAP panels were transformed into 15 project groups,¹ each with a lead nation, which were to focus on the implementation of concrete projects, giving due attention to options such as leasing, multinational cooperation and specialization.

The June 2004 European Council endorsed a new Headline Goal 2010. This involved the continued updating of the HHC and Force Catalogue, on the basis of the five illustrative scenarios elaborated by the EUMS: separation of parties by force; stabilization, reconstruction and military advice to third countries; conflict prevention; evacuation operations; assistance to humanitarian operations. On this basis a more detailed Requirements Catalogue was produced in lieu of the HHC. No additional quantitative objectives were set: the HG 2010 focuses instead on qualitative issues, i.e. interoperability, deployability and sustainability. Another specific aspect of the HG 2010 was the creation of the Battlegroups (BGs): the EU permanently has two BGs of about 1,500 troops on standby for rapid-response operations. The core of a BG is a battalion, plus all support services; all capabilities, including command and control arrangements, are pre-identified. After a training period and certification process, each BG is on standby for six months and can be deployed within ten days of a Council decision to launch an operation; sustainability is four months. Often wrongly perceived as representative of CSDP as a whole, the BGs obviously do not replace the HG but constitute one specific additional capacity to that overall capability objective, created because of a shortage of rapid-response elements.

In delivering the HG 2010, an important part was to be played by the European Defence Agency (EDA), established by Council Joint Action of 12 July 2004. The EDA uniquely combines four functions in as many directorates: capability development, armaments cooperation, industry and market, and research and technology. The Agency is a European – as opposed to national – actor that was intended to strengthen top-down coordination by involving the ministers of defence of the 26 participating Member States (Denmark does not take part), who constitute the board of the EDA, which is chaired by the High Representative. The EDA is not a large administration, but a small body. Yet it was hoped that high-level political involvement would enable the EDA to play a strong role of stimulation and coordination: coordinating existing initiatives and mechanisms for cooperation

and stimulating Member States into action and new common initiatives by means of peer pressure. Decision-making power remains with the Member States, therefore it is up to the EDA to present as attractive a proposal as possible to convince Member States to harmonize requirements, to agree on specific solutions for specific commonly identified shortfalls and ideally to sign up to multinational programmes, which the Agency can then manage on their behalf. Alternatively, if the project phase is reached, management can also be taken care of by OCCAR, the Organisation Conjointe de Coopération en Matière d'Armement, a dedicated structure for running multinational projects created in 1996, which now has six Member States. Its combination of four functions allows the EDA to take a long-term perspective and initiate things far upstream, in the R&T phase, potentially generating maximal effectiveness.

Initially the EDA took over eight of the ECAP project groups. Following the informal European Council meeting at Hampton Court in October 2005, the EDA identified a much reduced set of priorities for the Capabilities Directorate (command, control and communication, strategic airlift and air-to-air refuelling) and for the Armaments Directorate (armoured fighting vehicles (AFVs)). The Agency's experience shows that generally it remains difficult to persuade Member States to commit to necessary but expensive measures. While the EDA has finished a number of studies, it has not yet been able to contract actual projects in many areas. In spite of the high expectations and the envisaged top-down steering, the EDA was not able to fundamentally alter Member States' behaviour. While it is true that in those cases where multinational programmes have been launched, experience has not been universally positive, the main reason being that they have not been multinational enough, as too many participating nations come up with too many specific national requirements. Such a 'gold-plating' strategy leads to the production of too many national versions of equipment and inevitably pushes up the price (Giegerich, 2010: 95). When money is short, 'the principle of nice to have should be replaced by need to have' (Zandee, 2011: 66). The basic fact remains that well-managed multinational programmes are more cost-effective than a plethora of national programmes duplicating one another. Furthermore, as national markets become smaller as a result of the diminishing size of defence budgets and armed forces, in many areas industry will require a multinational harmonization of the demand side in order to achieve the critical mass needed to launch a programme. Multinational programmes thus remain essential to a cost-effective European defence effort.

In 2006 the EDA in cooperation with the EUMC produced the *Long-Term Vision*, a broad prospective report assessing the nature of the capabilities which the EU will need in the future. The *Long-Term Vision* emphasized four characteristics: synergy, i.e. operating in coordination with civilian actors; agility and speed of deployment; selectivity, on the basis of the availability of a wide range of capabilities; and sustainability. These inform the major capability areas: command, inform, engage, protect, deploy and sustain. The Member States endorsed the *Long-Term Vision* in October 2006; at the end of the year, they tasked the EDA to elaborate a Capability Development Plan (CDP), in order to provide more specific and thus more operational guidance. The CDP, endorsed by the Member States on 8 July 2008, comprises four strands: the HG 2010, i.e. existing capability objectives in the short to medium term; the development of the global strategic context, of the threats and of technology informing Member States which capabilities might be required and which might be possible in the longer term (2025); lessons learned from operations in various frameworks (CSDP, NATO, etc.); and a database of Member States' current longer-term plans and programmes, which notably allows the EDA to identify opportunities for cooperation. The CDP is not one supranational defence plan that seeks to replace national defence planning; rather it is to provide the framework for defence planning at the national level, to function

as a ‘plan for planning’. The aim is to facilitate and, based on information on other Member States’ intentions, inspire national choices on defence planning while stimulating cooperation and, in the longer term, convergence of Member States’ plans.

At the same time as endorsing the overall approach of the CDP, Member States also selected 12 topics for specific action: counter–man portable air defence systems (MANPADs); computer network operations; mine counter–measures in littoral sea areas; military implications of the comprehensive approach; human intelligence; intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR); medical support; CBRN defence; third-party logistic support; counter-improvised explosive device (IED); helicopters; network-enabled capability (NEC). These are to inform options for specific capability projects to be proposed by the EDA.

In a few years’ time an intricate mechanism for capability development was thus developed. At the strategic level, starting from the European Security Strategy and how the EU sees its role in the world, Member States in the Council and in the Political and Security Committee (PSC) decide what the EU wants to be able to do militarily and which military capabilities it requires overall. At the planning level, on the basis of the advice of Member States’ military representatives in the EUMC and of the work of the EUMS, it will then be established in a dynamic process which capabilities the EU already has (the Force Catalogue), what the detailed capability requirements are (the Requirements Catalogue) and what are the capability shortfalls to be addressed (the Progress Catalogue). At the level of implementation, the EDA, informed by the CDP, will assess the range of possible solutions for the shortfalls, and identify the most promising ones and the resources they require. Finally, it is up to each Member State to define its national defence planning and make specific capability choices, to be implemented through national or multinational projects.

Multinational cooperation alongside CSDP

Most contributions listed in the Force Catalogue are national capabilities, but nearly all Member States participate in multinational units. The depth of integration varies greatly from one multinational unit to the other. Whereas some can truly be considered a single multinational capability, others are more an expression of political intent than an operational reality. Three examples, from navy, army and air force, can serve to illustrate this.

An example of far-reaching multinational integration is Admiral Benelux (ABNL), the cooperation arrangement between the Belgian and Dutch navies, which became operational on 1 January 1996 (Parrein, 2010). Together the two navies operate 8 frigates, 16 mine hunters, 4 submarines, plus various support ships and a helicopter capacity. The operational staffs of both navies have been merged into a single Maritime Situation Centre in Den Helder (the Netherlands), which conducts national as well as combined operations, under the command of Admiral Benelux (always the commander of the Royal Dutch Navy) and Deputy-Admiral Benelux (always the commander of the Belgian Navy). A major degree of specialization has been achieved in terms of education, support and training: e.g. all mine hunters are maintained in Belgium and all frigates in the Netherlands; mine-warfare training is organized in Belgium as well as – true to type – training for catering, while training for deployment on frigates is organized in the Netherlands. At the beginning of 2011 the final step in education was taken by the creation of a bi-national technical school.

ABNL demonstrates how a combination of pooling and specialization can result in important savings and synergies, while at the same time maintaining great flexibility. Belgium and the Netherlands maintain the full sovereignty to engage in operations; the deployment of

Belgian ships does not entail the deployment of Dutch ships or vice versa; and for national operations a national operations commander is in charge. But both countries are committed to assist each other's operations through the combined command and control structure, which will serve the national operations commander, and through the specialized support and training capabilities. An important facilitating factor for integration is the use of the same or similar equipment, such as the commonly acquired and modernized Tripartite mine hunters (Belgium, the Netherlands, France). This factor was substantially strengthened when Belgium acquired the same type of multi-purpose frigates and lately also the same NH90 helicopter as the Netherlands. The obvious implication is that if both countries want to maintain the same degree of integration in the future, procurement decisions would ideally be harmonized.

One of the better-known multinational formations is the Eurocorps. Created in 1992 as a bilateral French–German arrangement, the initiative was subsequently opened to all EU and later to all NATO Member States, and now counts five so-called framework nations, following the accession of Belgium (1993), Spain (1994) and Luxemburg (1996). Next to the five full members, seven other nations send representatives to the Eurocorps staff: Austria, Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania, Turkey and the USA. Initially, Eurocorps was envisaged as a heavy army corps, to which France, Germany and Spain each contributed an armoured division and Belgium a mechanized brigade, in which a Luxemburg element was integrated. In view of the requirements of current crisis management operations, however, from 1999 onwards it was reoriented towards a rapid reaction corps. The main focus became the creation of a deployable headquarters available to the EU, NATO, and the UN (Eurocorps, 2009). The 390-strong HQ is based in Strasbourg, along with its some 400-strong Headquarters Support Battalion, and has seen deployment for SFOR in Bosnia (1998), KFOR in Kosovo (2000) and ISAF in Afghanistan (2004–5), and has been certified in the context of the NATO Response Force (2006 and 2010).

The Eurocorps HQ thus constitutes a real and useful capability. Interestingly however, there appears to be almost no discussion about the deployment of manoeuvre battalions in a Eurocorps context. For crisis management operations (which are more likely to require deployment below the corps level), the framework nations mostly do not seem to consider Eurocorps a likely framework for the combined deployment of manoeuvre battalions. As no units are permanently assigned to Eurocorps, participation has not promoted any significant degree of pooling or specialization among the armies of the framework nations. Important progress has been achieved in terms of harmonizing military procedures within Eurocorps, as well as, over the years, in terms of procurement of identical or compatible equipment. If ever manoeuvre units were to deploy in the Eurocorps framework, that would be vital. Arguably, opportunities have been missed, though, as there certainly is potential for pooling and specialization between the divisions and brigades concerned, notably in the organization of the various support and combat support capabilities.

A newly established multinational formation that has great potential is European Air Transport Command (EATC). EATC is a command and control structure that will assume operational control over most of the air transport fleet of Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands, in all about 170 strategic and tactical aircraft. EATC was formally stood up at a base in Eindhoven in the Netherlands in September 2010, with a staff of some 160. Currently, the participating nations operate C130 or C160 transport aircraft, but except for the Netherlands, which still has to decide on replacement, all will acquire the future Airbus A400M transport aircraft (including one funded by Luxemburg integrated in the Belgian capacity).² The integrated command structure allows for the maximally effective use of all

available aircraft. Important savings are realized as only one 24/7 operations centre has to be maintained with far fewer staff required than in the four nations separately. Germany has for the moment gone the furthest by abolishing its national air transport command, which incidentally had more staff than EATC. Just as is the case in ABNL, operational flexibility can be safeguarded: the multinational command structure can conduct national and combined operations, without the deployment of aircraft of one nation automatically involving that of those of another nation, as long as all nations contribute to all operations through their contribution to the command structure. Aircraft will continue to be stationed on a number of national bases: a good spread of hubs helps to achieve maximum efficiency in flight operations. At the same time, though, the use of the same equipment will allow the participating Member States to create synergies in terms of logistics and maintenance; a degree of specialization in these tasks could also be possible. Meanwhile, in these functional areas EATC operates in a modular way, allowing each participating nation to tailor its degree of cooperation and integration according to its current needs and capabilities.

Capability development: an assessment

As the year 2010 passed without the HG 2010 being achieved, the question imposes itself: is the existing mechanism sufficient to generate the capabilities that the EU requires to live up to the ambitions of the ESS? The last Progress Catalogue still identifies more than 50 qualitative and quantitative shortfalls, mainly in the areas of survivability and force protection, deployability and transport and information superiority. The operational consequence is a high to very high risk of the objectives of an operation not being met, of delay in launching an operation and of incurring casualties and loss of equipment. True, capability development is a long-term process. But have the mechanisms that have been put in place the potential at least to generate the necessary quantum leap? The reasons why this appears doubtful can be found in the characteristics of the CSDP capability-development process.

To start with, the Force Catalogue is indeed no more than that: a catalogue. For each Member State it lists types and quantities of capabilities that can be made available to the EU, but it does not identify specific units. Hence there is no permanent link between the different national capabilities listed, such as combined training and manoeuvres. Obviously, this approach, while not hindering it, does not promote cooperation between Member States either. Only for actual operations, if a Member State decides to take part, are specific units identified. The availability of the capabilities listed in the Catalogue is thus not automatic but has to be decided on a case-by-case basis. The implications for preventive action and rapid deployment are obvious. Far from the 'Euro-army' that some fear, there exists only the assumption of the availability of national capabilities. The actual readiness of those national capabilities is judged only by each nation itself. As the process is based on self-certification, no EU body assesses just how ready the capabilities listed in the Catalogue really are.

Most if not all Member States have assigned part of their national capabilities to multinational units, but most of these formations display a rather low degree of integration. Except for the area of command and control, pooling and specialization mostly remain very limited. Hence many multinational formations do not amount to more than a catalogue themselves. Being assigned to a multinational unit should mean more than getting a new shoulder patch ... This is linked to the fact that multinational units, especially for land forces, are not usually seen as a primary framework for deployment for actual operations. Unless they are, the drive to deepen integration in existing multinational units will probably remain limited. The 'enormous kaleidoscope of European multinational commands and units' was mapped by the

EUMS (Horvath, 2011: 59). The exercise revealed that ‘while none of them is disinterested in CSDP ... what they may need is orientation – or indeed, some incentives – to fulfil a more challenging mission, such as to become part of the pooling and sharing of military capabilities for the EU’ (Horvath, 2011: 59).

The only exception to the catalogue model are the Battlegroups. Each BG is composed of pre-identified units that train and exercise together during the stand-up phase, before starting their six-month standby period. Because of the small scale of a BG, this can be considered a useful and indeed successful experiment in military integration. The BGs have served to increase interoperability and in some Member States have helped to drive transformation. But unless the lessons learned from the BGs are brought into practice at a larger scale, they will remain an experiment. Furthermore, the effectiveness and credibility of the BGs will only be convincingly proved after their first deployment, which has yet to happen. Lindstrom (2011) outlines some of the possibilities to improve the usability of the BGs. One could have but a single BG on standby, but of larger, brigade-size (up to 5,000). The links between the BGs and the EU’s civilian capabilities, e.g. the Civilian Response teams, could be strengthened so as to benefit from the added value of the BGs in humanitarian crises as well. Finally, the introduction of common funding to cover the cost of a BG deployment would remove one of the most important impediments to their use.

The fundamental obstacle to more substantial cooperation and integration is the almost exclusively bottom-up nature of the process, contrary to intentions at the launch of the ECAP and the creation of the EDA. Naturally, the mechanism relies on voluntary contributions by the Member States. Although in the EDA there is a key actor at the EU level, the capitals are the drivers. The intention was there, however, including in Paris and London, to complement this indispensable bottom-up dynamic with top-down guidance and coordination. During the European Convention and afterwards when the EDA was created, the ministers of defence especially had subscribed to this. That is why the EDA, which was included in the draft Constitutional Treaty, was set up in 2004, without waiting for the Treaty’s ratification and entry into force. When the Constitutional Treaty and afterwards the Lisbon Treaty ran into difficulties, however, a number of Member States and political leaders that had until then been committed became more cautious and swallowed their ambitions, including in the field of CSDP. The EDA was among the main casualties, as Member States refused to provide it with more than the minimal budgetary and personnel means, rendering it very difficult for the tool that they had only just created to perform its ambitious tasks. Capability development thus suffered great collateral damage from the Union’s institutional crisis.

As a result, an almost completely bottom-up capability-development mechanism emerged, which offers tactical-, but not strategic-level coordination of national capability development. Within the predominant focus on national contributions and with the limited means at its disposal, the EDA has made a valiant effort. It has analysed the needs and elaborated multinational options to address the priority shortfalls and, in specific capability areas, has attempted to convince Member States to abandon or to merge national projects in favour of multinational projects that focus on those shortfalls. When Member States are willing to join their efforts, in varying clusters according to the project, this approach does yield important results. But by and large Member States have not been willing to answer the call. Basically, Member States are still not motivated to invest in a capability area simply because at the EU level it has been identified as a priority shortfall. Rather they each look to the other capitals to make the first move, fearing as they do to contribute too much of their limited defence budgets to a common programme as compared to the extent that they expect to have to draw on it. Meanwhile their focus remains national, and defence-planning decisions continue to

be taken in isolation, in terms of strictly national requirements, without much coordination, let alone alignment, with fellow Member States. Redundant capabilities are still being maintained while the strategic enablers are lacking, therefore.

The conclusion is that tactical-level coordination, i.e. on a project-by-project basis, is insufficient to alter the intrinsically national focus and bottom-up nature of CSDP. That requires top-down coordination at the strategic level, not just of specific projects or even individual capability areas, but of Member States' defence planning as such.

The future: Permanent Structured Cooperation or pooling and sharing?

CSDP needs a new stimulus therefore. The Lisbon Treaty (Art. 42.6) introduces a new mechanism that has great potential to re-dynamize capability development:

Those Member States whose military capabilities fulfil higher criteria and which have made more binding commitments to one another in this area with a view to the most demanding missions shall establish permanent structured cooperation within the Union framework.

Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) allows a group of Member States, on a voluntary basis, to work together more closely in the field of defence. By setting criteria for participation, for the first time participating Member States (pMS) would enter into binding commitments in the field of defence; furthermore they would allow the EDA to assess their performance. The Protocol on PESCO annexed to the Lisbon Treaty sets out two objectives (Art. 1), one of which, i.e. to supply or contribute to a Battlegroup, has already been achieved by most Member States. This leaves a single major objective: to proceed more intensively to develop defence capacities, which must of course be available and deployable, as Art. 2 (c) says. Thus by closer cooperation among themselves, PESCO should enable the pMS to achieve at a quicker pace than at present, as well as to increase, their national level of ambition in terms of deployability and sustainability. In other words pMS will be able to field more capabilities for the full range of operations in all frameworks in which they engage: CSDP, NATO, the UN and others. In doing so, they will contribute to the achievement of the overall objectives for the CFSP and CSDP to which they have agreed in the Lisbon Treaty.

Article 2 of the Protocol mentions five areas which have to be operationalized and translated into criteria for participation:

- to agree on objectives for the level of investment in defence equipment;
- to 'bring their defence apparatus into line with each other as far as possible', by harmonizing military needs, pooling and, 'where appropriate', specialization;
- to enhance their forces' availability, interoperability, flexibility and deployability, notably by setting 'common objectives regarding the commitment of forces';
- to address the shortfalls identified by the Capability Development Mechanism (CDM), including through multinational approaches;
- to take part, 'where appropriate', in equipment programmes in the context of the EDA.

There was an arduous debate in 2010 about whether, and if so how, to implement PESCO. In spite of the lack of common understanding of PESCO and the reluctance therefore to launch it, the ministers of defence of the EU Member States, urged on by the financial crisis, on 9 December 2010 agreed on potentially far-reaching conclusions: the so-called

Ghent Framework. Avoiding any explicit reference to PESCO, ministers focused on the immediate need for coordination in view of the budgetary cuts and proposed a concrete method. Member States were encouraged to ‘systematically analyze their national military capabilities’, aiming at ‘measures to increase interoperability for capabilities to be maintained on a national level; exploring which capabilities offer potential for pooling; intensifying cooperation regarding capabilities, support structures and tasks which could be addressed on the basis of role- and task-sharing’. This pragmatic approach created a positive atmosphere. Subsequently, ‘pooling and sharing’ became the new buzzword in CSDP-town.

Pooling and sharing is of course not new. Many Member States have already pooled important capabilities with others for decades, through various bilateral and multilateral arrangements, and some have even engaged in role- and task-sharing or specialization. But they have never surpassed the tactical level of project-by-project cooperation, and have not solved the strategic shortfalls. There certainly is scope therefore to create many more synergies and effects of scale, as well as an increasing necessity, in view of the budgetary pressure and the ever-reduced size of most Member States’ defence budgets and armed forces. Pooling and sharing also has limits, though. A critical mass of Member States must take ambitious initiatives, including in some significant capability areas, to set things in motion. More importantly, pooling and sharing what you have does not get you more. Pooling and sharing can allow existing capabilities to be made more cost-effective, and hopefully also more operationally effective. But it does not automatically lead to solutions for the capability shortfalls. The Ghent Framework not only has to be long term, it also has to create a platform to launch new capability initiatives.

For the Ghent Framework to yield results, it must be top-down. Not in the sense that Brussels dictates to the Member States, but in the sense that the ministers of defence, who are the capability providers, personally take the lead and steer their armed forces towards greater convergence in order to meet the common capability objectives. Useful inspiration can be found in the method used to launch CSDP operations: a Force Generation Conference. Once the capabilities required for a specific upcoming CSDP operation are identified and listed in the Statement of Requirements, a Force Generation Conference is organized among the potential Troop Contributing Nations. This process goes on until the entire list of requirements has been met by voluntary contributions by the Member States. Although such conferences can be difficult, in the end they have always yielded results.

In a similar vein, the Ghent Framework could be the first step towards a ‘capability generation conference’ of the ministers of defence of the willing Member States. The aim of such a conference would be to create a durable strategic-level framework for systematic exchange of information on national defence planning, as a basis for consultation and top-down coordination, on a voluntary basis. Today, Member States do their national defence planning in splendid isolation, without really taking into account either EU or NATO guidelines. In the future, a national defence White Book ought no longer to be the end of the process, but the starting point for an open dialogue among partners. As defence planning concerns the long term, such a dialogue will be permanent, hence a *Permanent Capability Conference*. Such a forum will create the certainty and confidence that capitals need in order to really align their national defence planning with fellow Member States and to focus it on the commonly identified shortfalls.

Only in the framework of a Permanent Capability Conference that provides them with a bird’s-eye view of all participants’ plans and intentions can Member State reliably assess the relevance of their national capabilities. It functions in effect as a peer-review mechanism of national defence planning. The advantages for national capability decisions are fourfold:

- 1 Member States can confidently choose to strengthen their relevance by *focusing* their defence effort on those capabilities required for crisis management operations that are in short supply and therefore critical at the EU level.
- 2 Member States can safely decide not to expand or even to disinvest in national capabilities of which at the EU level there is already overcapacity. Actually, Member States spent far more money on maintaining redundant capabilities than would be needed to solve the priority shortfalls. Doing away with those redundancies in a concerted way is the most effective cost-saver imaginable. Furthermore Member States can without risk decide to disinvest in a capability area either because existing national capabilities are obsolete and non-deployable or because, always on a voluntary basis, participating Member States have agreed on specialization among them.
- 3 In those capability areas in which they do remain active, Member States will be easily able to identify opportunities for increased pooling and sharing of capabilities, allowing them to organize them in a more cost-effective manner and increase operational effectiveness.
- 4 Pooling and sharing, specialization and doing away with redundancies will create budgetary margin, allowing Member States to find partners to launch multinational programmes to address the strategic shortfalls and generate *new* capabilities, including in those areas which go beyond the means of any individual nation and thus demand a combined initiative at the EU level.

The question can be asked: does this constitute PESCO? What is relevant here is not the label, but whether, for the Ghent Framework to be successful, a mechanism similar to PESCO is necessary. In all likelihood, not all Member States will be willing from the start to subscribe to a permanent and structured process along the lines of the Ghent Framework. It is crucial that those who are willing can do so *within* the EU and can make use of the EU institutions, notably the EDA. That will ensure that something like a Permanent Capability Conference remains fully in line with the overall development of CSDP, and will easily allow other Member States to join at a later stage, whenever they are able and willing. To allow that, the Protocol on PESCO annexed to the Lisbon Treaty could be activated, or Member States could agree to consider this as one of the subgroups established in the EDA, as long as the experience and expertise of the EDA can be put to use.

Conclusion

Europe's armed forces are simultaneously facing budgetary austerity and increasing deployment for crisis management operations. In spite of this, the political circumstances at first sight are not propitious to a new step in European defence cooperation. With Member States divided over the military dimension of Libyan crisis management in 2010, the enthusiasm for pooling and sharing of capabilities may have slackened. Yet operations in Libya have also highlighted once again the already well-known capability shortfalls. Precision-guided munitions (missiles), satellite observation, aircraft carriers, air-to-air refuelling: for lack of sufficient European capacity, 90 per cent of the strategic enablers that allow for a 'clean' air campaign were contributed by the USA.

Unfortunately, the political fallout of the Libyan crisis may negatively affect the Ghent Framework. There is a great risk that Member States will not be willing to engage in pooling and sharing with those seen as unlikely to join in when it comes to real operations. That impression can only be undone by those so accused, including by signalling their willingness to pool capabilities in substantive capability areas, to a substantive degree. That in turn will

create the political energy necessary to ensure that ‘Ghent’ becomes a long-term process, in order to arrive eventually at a forum for effective strategic-level dialogue between national defence planning. Only through CSDP can such military convergence be achieved as the only way to produce more deployable capabilities by *all* Member States, which will thus also benefit the two militarily most powerful Member States, France and the UK.

While the degree to which Member States will engage in substantive pooling of capabilities remains to be seen, nevertheless at the 1 December 2011 Foreign Affairs Council, Member States did indeed make important decisions concerning the strategic shortfalls. In the fields of air-to-air refuelling and satellite communications especially, the projects announced, if follow-up is assured, will be key in providing Europeans with some of the strategic enablers required for autonomous operations. The solution requires thinking outside the box, for which ‘Ghent’ was the starting point. Only by aligning their defence efforts and *collectively* focusing it on those shortfalls can Europeans remain militarily relevant.

Notes

- 1 Air-to-air refuelling; combat search and rescue; headquarters; nuclear, biological and chemical protection; special operations forces; theatre ballistic missile defence; unmanned aerial vehicles; strategic airlift; space-based assets; interoperability issues and working procedures for evacuation and humanitarian operations; intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance; strategic sealift; collective medical protection; attack helicopters; support helicopters.
- 2 The development of the A400M, which predates the creation of the EDA, can serve as an example of a potentially successful project: 6 Member States (Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Spain and the UK), plus 3 non-EU States (Malaysia, Turkey and South Africa) originally agreed to acquire a total of 192 aircraft. Cooperation thus allowed assembling the critical mass which industry required to launch such an expensive project. Unfortunately, the project was later derailed and suffered great delays; participants were forced to provide additional funding, but the budgetary crisis might at the same time lead to part of the order being cancelled.