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PROSPECTS FOR GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY

December Summit – Last Chance?

IMPULSES FOR THE REVITALISATION OF THE
COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

Olaf Wientzek

The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the EU has so far rarely met the expectations. Lately, it has only played a marginal role in conflicts with European involvement. In the aftermath of the Libyan conflict, there was even some talk of the “demise” of the CSDP. Contrary to numerous predictions, so far the cuts in national defence spending caused by the economic and financial crisis have not produced the necessary political will for greater cooperation.

Since 2012, the EU and individual member states have been making efforts to revitalise the CSDP through various initiatives. One example is the decision to discuss security and defence issues at the highest political level in the course of this year’s December summit of the heads of state and government. Due to recent developments in the immediate and wider European neighbourhood, an effective CSDP is in the European and German interest. Germany should use its influence to ensure the summit will demonstrate a credible commitment to the CSDP as well as initiating concrete and visible projects for the coming years.

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SITUATION

Since the creation of the CSDP there has been no lack of ambition or instruments. This was illustrated as long ago as 1999 by the ambitious plans of the Helsinki Headline Goal. Amongst other things, this envisaged the formation of an intervention force that would be capable of fulfilling the so-called Petersburg Tasks for one year. In 2004, the so-called EU Battlegroups were set up as crisis response forces that could be deployed rapidly. The same year saw the creation of the European Defence Agency (EDA), aimed at improving the EU's defence capabilities.

At the European Council summit in December 2008 under the French Council Presidency, an ambitious agenda was approved. Its purpose was to enable the EU to simultaneously conduct several larger military and civilian missions. In addition, the intention was to develop capabilities in key sectors, set up a civil-military planning structure as well as creating centres of excellence in the defence industry. The Treaty of Lisbon contained further significant innovations in the area of defence policy, including the introduction of a solidarity clause between the member states. The probably most significant innovation was the Permanent Structured Cooperation in Defence (PSCD), which facilitates defence cooperation between member states with a certain capability level.

In addition to these political impulses, there was an expectation that the economic and financial crisis would result in further advances in the CSDP. Many observers therefore assumed the cuts in the national defence budgets would pave the way for a greater willingness to bundle defence resources.

However, to date, neither the institutional innovations of the Treaty of Lisbon nor the financial crisis have resulted in the desired rethinking; instead, there was initially noticeable backtracking from the CSDP and also a partial renationalisation of defence policy. During subsequent years, several attempts to strengthen defence cooperation have produced rather sobering results. In 2010, Germany and Sweden launched the Ghent Initiative for joint use ("pooling and sharing") of capabilities or equipment in the area of defence. However, only a small number of the planned projects have been realised to date. In the second half of 2011, the Polish Council Presidency proposed a number of measures to revitalise the CSDP. Key topics included: pooling and sharing, a revitalisation of the EU Battlegroups as well as sustained strengthening of the EU-NATO partnership. Germany, France, Poland, Italy and Spain declared their commitment to measures including the creation of permanent civil-military

planning structures under the so-called "Weimar plus" initiative. Ultimately, these initiatives failed – notably also due to a lack of will on the part of the member states. France, for instance – not least after its experiences in the course of the Libyan crisis – has a preference for bilateral agreements with the other security heavyweight, the UK. London, for its part, took the view that many ideas, such as the setting up of permanent headquarters, went considerably too far.

Added to this was the fact that no CSDP mission was launched for almost three years from 2009, which further diminished its visibility. In 2011, a highly debated humanitarian mission for Libya did not materialise, and the EU consequently found itself standing on the side-lines of the Libyan conflict while NATO played the main role.

Since 2012, further steps have been taken to revitalise the CSDP. As a result, since then five new CSDP missions have been launched, although these were all relatively small supporting deployments or training missions. At the end of 2012, a voluntary code of conduct for the EDA was approved to further cooperation between the member states in the areas of procurement, deployment and joint management of military capabilities. In July 2012, the EDA and OCCAR (Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation) further agreed to coordinate their activities more closely. In addition, the European Commission set up the so-called EU Defence Task Force in 2011 with the remit to identify steps to strengthen competitiveness and efficiency in the defence and security sector; its report was published on 24 July this year and is intended to inform the preparations of the European Council in December. In the period running up to the European Council summit, the European Commission now wants to draft concrete proposals.

Yet the core problems of the CSDP persist:

1. The military instruments of the CSDP remain largely unutilised: The EU Battlegroups have never been deployed in a combat scenario. While the mere fact of their availability appears to have had some positive effects on the interoperability of the armed forces of the countries involved in each case, they have yet to be deployed to fulfil their original purpose of acting as a rapid crisis response instrument. It is not as if there have not been opportunities. Both in the 2008 conflict in the Congo as well as in Mali, Battlegroups would have been ideally suited for deployment. However, in the first case the nations due to supply the troops refused, in the second case the option was not even considered.



2. Pooling and sharing initiatives are still too tentative, and it has not proved possible to date to close important capability gaps, in air transport for instance. Furthermore, member states have so far been reluctant to take on the role of "lead nation" in pooling and sharing initiatives. The extensive cuts in the national defence budgets would also make it opportune for member states to better coordinate their savings planning. But there has been no sign of that to date.

3. The speed of decision making and deployment in relation to CSDP missions leaves much to be desired. The EU is currently either not willing to or not capable of making fast decisions on CSDP missions. The lengthy preparation phase for the training mission in Mali is but one case in point.

4. Insufficient willingness on the part of member states to invest manpower and resources in the CSDP: Be they of a civilian or military nature, CSDP missions have problems in receiving the required manpower from the member states. The fundamental reluctance of the member states to become involved in CSDP missions is probably partly due to the funding method. Mission costs are mainly funded according to the "costs lie where they fall" principle, which means that any deployment has to be paid for to a large extent (90 per cent on average) by the involved member states. Only around 10 per cent are financed via the so-called ATHENA mechanism.

5. The CSDP is increasingly being overlooked as a viable option for taking action. Neither in the case of Libya or Mali was the possibility of a (military) CSDP deployment seriously discussed.

6. One of the greatest obstacles to cooperation is a lack of consensus on pan-European security instruments and strategies. There is still no common European strategic culture. The general preference is for bilateral cooperation between countries that have similar structures or for multi-national forms of cooperation outside the EU setting. One case in point is the agreement between the British and the French, concluded in 2010.

7. The CSDP also has difficulties defending its corner in Brussels. For quite some time, EU High Representative Catherine Ashton seemed rather reluctant to acknowledge defence as a cornerstone of the EU's foreign policy. It is significant, however, that the European Parliament has become the greatest advocate of a stronger CSDP over recent years.

ARGUMENTS

Opponents to strengthening the CSDP put forward the following arguments:

1. Doubts about the need for permanent planning structures: The creation of permanent civilian and military command structures would only result in an unnecessary duplication of NATO's command structures. Seeing that NATO does have the necessary instruments and therefore the required "hard power" to effectively defend European interests, the CSDP is of little importance for "hard security" and should concentrate on civilian (training) missions, i.e. instruments of "soft power".

2. Preference for bilateral cooperation outside the EU setting: The strategic cultures and the foreign policy preferences of the member states are too different to allow effective work within the EU setting. Bilateral forms of cooperation, particularly the French-British agreement, on the other hand have produced initial results.

3. A third argument questions the very existence of the CSDP. The EU already has a broad range of instruments comprising civilian and development measures. With the EU being a normative power, the more modern and promising way to exercise its power would lie in "soft power". Focusing on issues relating to "hard security" and to NATO is outdated and ultimately counterproductive.

This is countered by the following arguments in favour of strengthening the CSDP:

1. New geostrategic context: Events in the enlarged European arena have shown that the military option remains an important instrument. The instability in the Horn of Africa and in the Sahel region and the presence of terrorist networks in those areas as well as several "frozen" conflicts in the European neighbourhood (Nagorno-Karabakh, Lebanon) demonstrate clearly that the military option must be maintained. In the case of Mali, it would in fact have been welcomed by the affected country. The same example also illustrates the potential added value of rapid reaction troops.

Added to this is the strategic reorientation of the USA, the "pivot to Asia", which will concentrate its resources increasingly on the Pacific region. This does not mean a total withdrawal from Europe, but will require the Europeans to take greater responsibility for their own neighbourhood. If Europe wishes to be more than a mere spectator in connection with developments outside its front door, it needs to have effective military instruments available in addition to its "soft power" toolset.



2. Defence capability: Most EU member states already have difficulty in maintaining certain troop segments. In the medium term, it will only be possible to safeguard the defence capability of the member states by bundling their resources in a common European framework. Even the military heavyweights of the EU, France and the UK, reached their limits in the course of the Libyan conflict, in terms of both quantity and quality (air reconnaissance without German AWACS). Such bilateral cooperation therefore does have its limits; even for France and the UK, the involvement of other European partners adds significant value. Russia has surpassed the UK and France in terms of military spending for some years now, to say nothing of Germany. Other regions around the world are also increasing their military capabilities, while the EU member states apart from Poland are going in the opposite direction. Military spending in the EU dropped from 251 to 194 billion euros between 2001 and 2010. In the medium and long term, the European countries will only retain their military capabilities if they bundle their forces.

3. Unique feature of the CSDP: The prognosis that NATO will remain the main guarantor of European military security for the time being is realistic. Having said that, the CSDP is the appropriate answer to risks that cannot be dealt with by the transatlantic alliance. For one, a NATO deployment is inconceivable in some areas of the European vicinity for political reasons. But more importantly: not only does the EU have the entire spectrum of military and civilian instruments available, it also has instruments to deliver humanitarian and development aid. The CSDP mantra is the “comprehensive approach”, and crises in the European vicinity and corresponding neighbouring regions do require such an approach. The involvement of the EU in the Horn of Africa is a good example of how this comprehensive approach can provide added value.

4. Threatening loss of innovation capabilities and competitiveness of the defence sector: There is a danger that austerity measures may result in the neglect of research and development in the defence sector, and the innovation gap between the EU and the USA is growing.¹ A reduction in financial resources may lead to a loss of know-how in the industry and thereby to economic weakening, particularly as the technological spillover from military to civilian industry is not inconsiderable. The cuts made in recent years have affected the operational side considerably more than the administration and this will result in the EU falling behind in this area in the medium term if no steps are taken to bundle the dwindling resources.

5. The importance of the EU in the international arena is measured not least by its capability to deal with security risks in its own region, if necessary by military means. “Soft power” may sound good to European ears, but it is not in line with the foreign policy and security logic of other global heavyweights. Military cooperation can represent an important component of the relationships with strategic EU partners. However, the EU will only be seen as an interesting partner if it has appropriate capabilities and technological standards itself.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The impending European Council summit will provide an opportunity to push the CSDP to the top of the agenda and to endow it with a new dynamic. Initially, a clear political signal is required as well as a discussion on objectives and structures. But in addition, several concrete projects should be initiated for the coming years. In this context, it is up to Germany to show some initiative and not to wait for other actors. This is also a consequence of the controversial stance of the German federal government towards the Libya conflict – as CDU members of the Bundestag Andreas Schockenhoff and Roderich Kiesewetter wrote in a position paper on the CSDP, which attracted a great deal of attention: “We have to acknowledge that German security policy has a credibility problem.” That also has an impact on the credibility of the CSDP as a whole.

Political Signals

1. The CSDP has developed a credibility problem, and an unequivocal commitment to the CSDP would therefore be of crucial importance for its future. There must be no repetition of the mistake made by the Council summit in December 2008, which merely approved an overambitious wish list of capabilities without prescribing realistic deadlines. The summit should not be seen as the culmination but merely as the start to a new dynamic in this policy area.

2. There is a need for a fundamental rethinking of the CSDP. The information that needs to be communicated clearly includes what the aims of the CSDP should be, what should be done jointly at the European level and what exclusively by means of multilateral forms of cooperation. In addition, a discussion should be conducted on the way in which the solidarity clause might be implemented as and when required. It is unlikely that the December summit will provide an entirely comprehensive answer, but its aim must be to initiate a comprehensive consulting process that will subsequently produce a Defence White Paper. Such a white paper must define strategic priorities, but also set concrete objectives with fixed deadlines so that progress can be tracked and endless postponement (as happened in the



case of the Helsinki Headline Goal) can be avoided. During sub-sequent years, a progress review should be carried out at regular intervals.

Structures

1. Germany should make even greater efforts than in the past to promote the creation of permanent civilian and military planning structures in order to facilitate the rapid planning and realisation of military and civilian CSDP missions. Particularly in view of the increasing number of missions involving both civilian and military aspects, the EU needs planning structures of its own and should not have to fall back on NATO (via the Berlin Plus agreement) or member state structures – which only cover the military aspect in any case. Permanent civil-military structures would also have the advantage that the management would be handled by a single institution from the beginning to the end of a crisis. Should no general consensus emerge once again in this area, this will have to be achieved through a coalition of the willing under the Permanent Structured Cooperation.

2. Reform of the funding of CSDP missions: The proportion funded via the ATHENA mechanism is too small. This acts as a fundamental disincentive to countries that are principally willing to become involved. The costs covered by all member states must be expanded considerably, particularly in the area of equipment. A greater proportion of jointly funded expenditure would be to the benefit of all those member states that are in favour of deployment in a particular case, but cannot become involved themselves for political or other reasons.

3. Germany should be more proactive in using structures created through the Treaty of Lisbon, such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation. There is currently no alternative to a Europe à la carte in the area of defence.

4. Closer interrelationships in the area of defence planning: Restructuring programmes in the defence sector need closer coordination. A “European Semester” of defence planning as demanded by the European Parliament will probably not find universal acceptance. But national defence planning must at least be devised in consultation with other member states and in particular with the EDA. The existing coordination between the UK and France could serve as inspiration to Germany.

5. Financial upgrading of the European Defence Agency: The funding and the capacities of the EDA should be increased. Germany should promote partial EU funding for the EDA in the future.

Instruments and Capacities

1. Political support for key pooling and sharing initiatives: The December summit must send out a clear political signal with respect to pooling and sharing initiatives. This should include a concrete remit (with deadlines) to close the most urgent capability gaps in the area of strategic air transport or multinational helicopters. Germany could act as the initiator of such a project – and as the lead nation.

2. Concrete steps to create an internal market for defence equipment: Furthermore, Germany should promote the implementation of some proposals included in the Commission Communication of 24 July 2013 at the summit and elsewhere. The European Commission will have to rely on support from national authorities in fleshing out its ideas, which are in part highly ambitious. This support will be crucial, for instance, for the correct application of the procurement directive. Germany should make efforts to ensure that some central elements from the communication are worked out in detail ahead of the summit so the heads of state and government have concrete “beacon projects” to discuss. Germany should also support a few broader demands made in the communication, such as drafting a European strategy for the defence industry.

3. Breathing new life into the Battlegroup concept: Germany should continue to promote the revitalisation of the Battlegroup concept. The German proposal to use components of the Battlegroups to support training missions is an initial constructive contribution, albeit one that has sparked controversy in Brussels. But this can only be an interim stage; the biggest added value of the Battlegroups would be as a rapid reaction force. The Battlegroups have not seen any military action to date. And this has been a deliberate decision on the part of the political executive; the German parliamentary prerogative, for instance, would not preclude such a deployment in principle. Brussels politicians are correct in warning that a CSDP that considers itself nothing more than a superior training programme will not survive in the medium term. In order to improve the operational readiness of the Battlegroups, the governments of the member states should further improve interoperability between the respective involved nations.

1| According to the European Commission, the USA's budget for research and development in the area of defence is seven times the total of the amounts allocated by all 27 EU states. There has been a 14 per cent drop in the relevant budgets in the EU countries between 2005 and 2010.