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# FACTS & FINDINGS

PROSPECTS FOR GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY

## European Island Solutions as a Basis for Strengthening European Defence Capabilities?

Maik Zarandi (ext.)

For the first time since 2003, a session of the European Council dedicated to European defence and security policy will take place. The fact that the heads of state and government will be addressing this subject matter will provide a significant opportunity to give new impetus to concepts – which up to now have in many ways been lacking – for the project of strengthening Europe's defence capabilities at the very highest political level. One approach that could potentially produce significant progress involves the concept of "island solutions", i.e. cooperation between individual states, which does not extend as far as full-blown, EU-wide solutions. This paper examines the question as to the opportunities and risks that this concept entails and presents concrete recommendations for action for German policy makers.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most serious problems of the Common Security and Defence Policy of the European Union (CSDP) is the fact that the political declarations of intent are not adequately underpinned by military capabilities. In view of the foreseeable cuts in European defence budgets over the next few years, the question of what form defence cooperation in Europe should take in the coming years is becoming ever more urgent. Europe must increase its capacity to act in the security sphere, not least in order to strengthen the European pillar within NATO. The cooperation efforts made to date under the CSDP, as well as within NATO, have only produced a limited impetus for the required enhancement of the European defence capabilities. This can be attributed mainly to the lack of political will and various reservations on the part of the European states, but also to structural obstacles to cooperation. It therefore seems appropriate to turn to more pragmatic courses of action in the area of defence cooperation for the near future. One obvious promising solution is regional cooperation between states and groups of states, which concentrates on specific areas of capability and is based on an approach that is more bottom-up in character. More "islands of cooperation" as modular elements could act as a basis for strengthening European defence capabilities and provide a way of moving step by step towards the long-term goal of comprehensive defence integration.

Experts on military economics believe that while defence cuts are already having a clear impact now,<sup>1</sup> their full impact on military capabilities will in fact manifest over the course of the next few years. Against this backdrop, the development of previously lacking capabilities seems a particularly great challenge.

The USA's strategic reorientation towards the Pacific region and its diminishing willingness to become involved in the resolution of military conflicts in the European environment are forcing the Europeans to accept greater responsibility for the stabilisation of their region with respect to security.<sup>2</sup> The case of Libya illustrated this vividly, and also showed how Europe continues to be reliant on military support from the USA in the area of crisis resolution. It is highly likely that the approach taken by the USA will change over time from the current "leading from behind" to the stage of "helping from behind" and ultimately to "pushing from behind".

The upheavals in the Middle East and in North Africa as well as the developments in the Sahel, in the Horn of Africa and in the Caucasus may give rise to serious security challenges to Europe and demand a greater capacity to provide a civilian as well as military crisis response. Another important as-

pect lies in the fact that the dissatisfaction of the USA with the way the "burden sharing" within NATO<sup>3</sup> has developed unequally to its own detriment has reached a point where the Europeans are in danger of the USA losing interest in their European NATO partners. If the EU states wish to avoid this, higher financial contributions to NATO missions will not be sufficient. The availability of deployment-ready military capabilities remains the most important factor in this context.

## II. PROBLEMS WITH THE EXISTING CONCEPTS FOR STRENGTHENING EUROPEAN DEFENCE CAPABILITIES

Against the backdrop of the developments described above, Germany and Sweden put forward a proposal in 2010, the Ghent Initiative, which set out how defence cooperation and the fighting strength of the EU could be enhanced in times of financial constraint. The idea was to realise conservation potential by combining and sharing as well as by diversifying capabilities, which would free up funds for the development of urgently required capabilities and for preventing deterioration in individual European capability categories. In line with these ideas, the EU states agreed to define at a national level which capabilities should remain first and foremost in national hands, which ones the states are prepared to combine at a European level, and where there is scope for states to relinquish specific capability categories in favour of having these provided by partners. The expression "Pooling and Sharing" was coined and has been used in official EU communications since 2010. Within NATO, the equivalent efforts are known by the term of "Smart Defence".

### 1. Scant results from Pooling and Sharing and Smart Defence

To date, the progress made in terms of Pooling and Sharing as well as Smart Defence has been disappointing.<sup>4</sup> Misgivings about surrendering national sovereignty have proved the greatest obstacle to closer military cooperation. Contrary to the numerous political declarations, which confirm that pooling and sharing are good ways of maintaining and developing military capabilities, necessary and ultimately unavoidable and should therefore be applied in as many areas as possible,<sup>5</sup> many states are showing a distinct reluctance where the proposal of initiatives or involvement in concrete projects are concerned. Further obstacles to cooperation include above all a lack of political trust, doubts about the actual availability of shared capabilities in concrete deployment scenarios and concerns about displacement processes detrimental to national defence industries. The lack of trust with respect to the availability of pooled or shared capabilities, which is at a high level within NATO and in the EU as



it is, has not been reduced by the way Germany conducted itself with respect to the intervention in Libya.<sup>6</sup>

## **2. The larger the projects, the stronger the reluctance**

The strongest reluctance is in evidence in the case of cooperation projects involving a larger number of cooperation partners, which are registered via the European Defence Agency (EDA) and via NATO, as well as in areas that involve industrial core competences and key technologies. What the states fear in this context is poor manageability and excessive bureaucracy, longer project implementation periods, cost escalation, efficiency losses, the turnover of national know-how and jobs and, most importantly, loss of control. Past experience indicates that these concerns may well be justified. The military transporter A400M, for instance, which was ultimately procured jointly by six European states and Turkey after individual cooperation partners had pulled out, went over budget by approximately one third, and there was a delay of several years in the delivery of the first machines compared to the original planning. There have also repeatedly been problems with multinational projects in the past involving mutual accusations relating to the theft of ideas and to the tactic of reducing initially high order volumes during the course of the project after the national manufacturing quotas depending on them had in fact already been allocated.

## **3. Lack of political will**

Representatives of EU bodies and national armed forces have repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that the instruments for greater defence cooperation, such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation in Defence (PSCD), are in fact in place at a European level, but that they are not being utilised by the Member States.<sup>7</sup> They cite the lack of political will on the part of the Member States as the main reason.

Since 2011, the EDA has collected a large number of potential proposals for Pooling and Sharing projects and presented these to the Member States, to date with little response. On the basis of the approximately 200 ideas on concrete projects, the EU Defence Ministers agreed on eleven projects in 2011, which have since been registered with the EDA and are currently in different stages of implementation. Seven further projects were added in November 2012. Germany is involved in a total of five EDA projects and is sharing the role of lead nation for the Air-to-Air Refueling project with the Netherlands and France. The realisation of agreed cooperation projects is also proving extremely difficult within NATO. Only a small proportion of the programmes approved at the last NATO summit have been initiated to date, and

the implementation report on the "Chicago Defence Package" has been shelved for the time being. There has been some criticism within NATO of Germany "putting the brakes" on several projects.

Since 2012, there has been some new dynamic specifically in the Pooling and Sharing process, but faster and, most importantly, more effective measures are required to make real progress. Where concepts of European defence cooperation are concerned, the German Ministry of Defence in particular stresses with increasing emphasis that it is more important to produce concrete results at a small scale than devising grandiose projects that are ultimately not feasible, as has tended to be the case with the CSDP in the past.

## **III. ISLANDS OF DEFENCE – GREATER RELIANCE ON BOTTOM-UP APPROACH**

One solution to produce faster results in defence cooperation along these lines could be to go the route of "European island solutions". Cooperation more strongly emphasising a bottom-up approach involving individual islands of cooperation specific in terms of geography and capability could give new impetus to the process of European defence cooperation. Structural obstacles to cooperation, which are currently still impeding collaboration between a greater number of partners, may be eliminated in the medium and long term through the successful implementation of projects in easily manageable forms of cooperation involving two or three states. The yielding of sovereignty could be reduced to a minimum. As illustrated, for instance, by the example of the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO), the yielding of sovereignty feared by politicians is reduced when the group of partners a country has to deal with in coordinating the capabilities to be procured and shared is limited to a manageable number. A qualitative improvement in cooperation would be achieved step by step: expansion of the projects to a larger number of participants, to capabilities of greater sensitivity in terms of security policy, to joint procurement, development and manufacture of defence equipment and ultimately to acting as joint buyers of weapons systems and the development of a European armaments industry. The following characteristics are associated with island projects: manageability, delimitation, trust and cohesion.

These elements can lend greater manageability and commitment to cooperation, particularly at the beginning of a process, which is where the European states objectively still are with respect to defence cooperation. Contrary to the Permanent Structured Cooperation in Defence (PSCD), which would involve the fulfilment of certain criteria prior to participation by individual states, island cooperation operating without predefined catalogues of criteria (which may impede



matters in the early phase of a project) can help to reduce obstacles to cooperation and thus speed up the cooperation process.

### **1. Political and military developments in sub-regional defence cooperation**

The island solution approach originates from the observation of recent trends within European defence cooperation. It is also based on the premise that the impact of obstacles to cooperation increases the more states are involved in a particular project, the more security, political and military cultures come into contact with one another and the more sensitive the affected areas of national armaments industries are.

Over the last two to three years, there has been a noticeable trend towards greater sub-regional forms of defense cooperation, for instance with the setting up of the EU Battlegroups but also in other areas of cooperation. The Nordic EU states<sup>8</sup> have intensified their cooperation within NORDEFECO;<sup>9</sup> the format of the Weimar Triangle comprises France, Germany and Poland, which put forward an ambitious initiative to strengthen the CSDP in December 2010.

One month earlier, the UK and France concluded a far-reaching bilateral defence cooperation agreement, and France, Spain, Italy and Portugal have been collaborating closely for years within the EUFOR group. In addition, there is increasing cooperation taking place between the states of the Visegrad Group<sup>10</sup> and those of the HELBROC group, which comprises Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Cyprus. From a geographic perspective, this means that cooperation within Europe has become concentrated in six sub-regional islands. The most advanced level of integration to date has been achieved within NORDEFECO.

The two declarations of intent with respect to binational military cooperation that Germany signed at the end of May 2013 with Poland<sup>11</sup> and with the Netherlands<sup>12</sup> can contribute to a strengthening of the island concept as a form of cooperation.

### **2. Benefits of the bottom-up approach**

There will be a continued need for military cooperation in various areas parallel to these islands of cooperation. The island concept is therefore not aimed at producing exclusive and self-contained spheres of cooperation. Instead, island cooperation should build on past experience, on tried and tested processes and on existing mutual trust, which has developed and consolidated over the years in these sub-re-

gions of defence through intensified cooperation in military matters. Based on experience gained with the creation of multinational force packages, such as the Battlegroups, military planners have recently become more vocal in drawing attention to the efficiency losses resulting from ever-changing constellations due to differences between national military standards in the certification of equipment and command structures as well as due to different deployment doctrines. Efficiency losses also arise from the expenditure involved in transporting military equipment and personnel across Europe for training exercises and manoeuvres and not least from the loss of institutional experience, which can only yield genuine synergy effects if forms of cooperation are conceived for sustained use within a consistent constellation.

In these areas, the island approach could produce clear benefits. It could also conceivably help to reduce obstacles to cooperation compared to pan-European cooperation in the areas of pooling and sharing of capabilities as well as joint procurement and the development of common industrial capacities.

The bottom-up approach also has the advantage that it takes greater account of the given realities than the top-down demands of the past ever did. When the Military Headline Goals of the EU were devised at the beginning of the CSDP process, a wish list of politically desirable ideas was compiled, but the planning did not take sufficient account of existing obstacles to cooperation, if not ignoring them altogether while focusing on the political agenda.<sup>13</sup> The top-down approach was further based on expectations that have unfortunately not yet been fulfilled to the envisaged degree. There has not been either an alignment in the threat conceptions of the different European societies or harmonisation with respect to the willingness to use military force. Nor has a consensus been reached on the weighting of civilian and military means or on defined rules of where and under what circumstances military means should be used. The level of consensus on security policy, which had been the basis on which the European Security Strategy was drawn up in 2003, has decreased rather than increased over the last decade – partly due to the enlargement of the EU and the different setting of priorities oriented towards the south and, respectively, towards the east.

When examining the situation objectively and acknowledging the fact that the prerequisites for a top-down approach have not improved significantly overall over the last decade, a realistic, pragmatic approach of sub-regional with a limited number of cooperation partners appears to be the best way forward for the next few years.



### 3. Risks and limits of the island concept

In spite of all the short and medium-term benefits of the island approach, the concept does have some weaknesses that need to be considered in the implementation of island cooperation:

- a) Without higher-level coordination of individual island cooperation projects, there is a risk of costly duplication. There is a further risk of individual European capabilities being lost altogether.
- b) How can the island approach lead on to progress regarding an alignment in terms of national threat conceptions in Europe and the willingness to use military force? How can these deficiencies be overcome when one of the core ideas of the island concept is that collaborating with states that have a similar security culture anyway makes for good cooperation?
- c) What can be done to prevent individual island cooperation projects from becoming detached from the CSDP process, thereby causing a weakening of the achieved level of common thinking on security matters in Europe?

### IV. OUTLOOK AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The island concept provides clear benefits for the strengthening of European defence capabilities and above all for the development of the required capabilities, the creation of greater synergy effects and closer cooperation between the armaments industries. But it also entails some weaknesses, which need to be taken into account in all the planning and measures involved in devising an island cooperation project. Unless there is a simultaneous strengthening of the European level, particularly regarding the higher-level coordination function and a more robust strategic security superstructure, the concept will quickly reach its limits. In an ideal scenario, the island concept would only represent the second best solution, while a fully integrated European defence policy would be the best solution. In view of the given realities, however, island cooperation in combination with coherent European coordination represents the most promising option.

During the period leading up to the European Council session in December 2013, Germany must draw up plans for future initiatives in the area of island cooperation that are as concrete as possible, yet far-reaching. Combining such island initiatives with a sustainable "road map" for the most coherent development of European defence capability possible at a pan-European level will represent the great challenge at the meeting of the heads of state and government

in December. After the formation of the incoming German administration, the government will need to act quickly in this area in view of the short time remaining prior to the European Council session.

There are several arguments for pursuing a dual strategy aiming at developing islands while simultaneously also strengthening the coordination of individual island cooperation projects at the European level.

#### Recommendations for action:

1. In the case of projects that involve more sensitive capability areas or nationally important industrial interests and therefore require high levels of trust and deployment reliability, the number of island projects should be as large as possible. Cooperation at the European level should be driven forward all the more forcefully in the remaining areas. Some defence capabilities could thus be retained as islands in the long term, while other cases of island cooperation would be subsumed within cooperation at the pan-European and transatlantic levels in the form of Pooling and Sharing as well as Smart Defence in the medium and long term.
2. To allow the island concept to succeed, the EU states must abandon their reluctance where the sharing of defence and planning data is concerned and make comprehensive information available to the EDA to enable it to exercise a genuine advisory and coordination role. Germany's current reserved stance towards the EDA should be revised in line with a more open relationship, and this should also apply to the registration of individual island projects.
3. In addition to these initiatives in the military sphere, Germany should also strengthen the European civilian capabilities involved in island cooperation, above all under the CSDP but where appropriate also within NATO. Germany has developed vast expertise in this area over the years, which needs to be developed further and enhanced in collaboration with Germany's partners. Consistent efforts should also be made to develop combined projects aimed at potential deployment involving civilian as well as military aspects. In this context, the EDA's role as a link between the civilian and the military arms of the CSDP, to which it is well suited on principle due to its close interrelationship with the EU Commission, should be strengthened further.
4. The concept of the Battlegroups must be retained. The Battlegroups remain an important instrument of European defence cooperation and need to be strengthened further in the course of island cooperation. In view of past problems with the Battlegroups, this will necessitate an open discussion about the future of this central component for



strengthening European defence capabilities. The establishment of permanent, so-called "Standing Battlegroups" should be on the agenda of the European Council. Standing groups could also be valuable for ensuring the most efficient utilisation of island capabilities.

5. Germany should lead the way with respect to cooperation in the form of island projects both within NATO and at the European Council session in December by putting forward concrete initiatives of its own.

- A first concrete initiative could be the **joint procurement of two Joint Support Ships with France and Poland**. This proposal has already been put forward in the recently approved declaration of intent between Germany and Poland. With the collaboration of Poland, Germany now needs to start negotiations with France to bring on board this important partner and then work rapidly towards implementation in collaboration with the two countries. This would make a significant contribution to improving the strategic sealift capability and the basis for joint armed forces deployments, significantly strengthening the crisis response capability of the European states during future operations. The formation of tri-national crew modules would produce a permanent capability that could be deployed as and when required without a lengthy lead time. Germany would thereby also indicate to the USA that European states are underpinning the maritime capabilities, which are becoming increasingly relevant to security, by military means – not least for deployment in the Mediterranean region – and thereby realising concrete initiatives to strengthen NATO's European pillar and the CSDP. The German Navy would experience a noticeable reduction in the demands placed on it in the areas of manpower and funding.
- A further obvious project is the **joint development and procurement of next generation fighter jets in collaboration with the UK and France**. All major fighter jet programmes will be coming to an end in terms of development sometime between 2018 and 2022. And the planning must begin now. Pooling efforts in this area would

also send a clear political signal that one should avoid inefficient developments and unnecessary duplication in the future, such as the parallel development of the Rafale fighter jet and the Eurofighter. This project would also provide a boost to the harmonisation of the European armaments industry and increase Germany's ability to keep up with the US armaments sector in terms of technology through cooperation with the UK in particular.

- Germany should act as **Lead Nation for a joint air force with the Netherlands and the Czech Republic**. This would allow the Netherlands and the Czech Republic to reduce their respective arsenals further and rely on German structures, particularly for training and logistics. With coherent planning, this would free up funds in both countries, which could be used to maintain other capability categories or permit involvement in new projects to develop capabilities that are currently lacking. The Czech Republic, for instance, could use released funds to enhance its already well-developed NBC defence capabilities further and make them available to the EU as and when required. The Netherlands could make the savings available to the EU involvement in NATO missile defence.
- In addition, German initiatives should also routinely aim at strengthening concrete European contributions to NATO. Linking the processes of Pooling and Sharing and Smart Defence must constitute the central axis of any defence cooperation in Europe. One option in this area would be **to endow the F-124 frigates with anti-ballistic defence capability by equipping them with SM-3 missiles in collaboration with the Netherlands and Denmark**. The three countries would undertake this very costly upgrading measure jointly. This would produce a significant contribution to NATO's anti-ballistic missile defence and help to advance one of the flagship projects of Smart Defence. The German Navy would be able to realise a project that already figures in the procurement lists as an aspiration, but that could not be funded nationally to date. Germany would thus send a clear signal to the USA that it is willing to assume greater transatlantic responsibility.





- 1] *Since 2009, European defence budgets have been reduced by an average of 12 per cent. Source "Die Fähigkeitslücke", by Wolfgang Ischinger/Thomas Enders in: Handelsblatt, 26.04.2013. Germany has experienced stability in terms of defence spending in recent years. With the exception of a slight reduction in 2010, the defence budget has increased slightly year on year since 2009 (31.2 billion euros), rising to 33.3 billion euros in 2013. The cuts that were originally planned will not take effect until 2014 (33.0 billion euros). Source: Federal Ministry of Defence: "Bundestag beschließt Verteidigungshaushalt 2013", 22.11.2012:  
[http://www.bmvg.de/portal/a/bmvg!/ut/p/c4/NYuxDsIwDET\\_yE7YypaqDKxICMqWtIFkVCEv655FjycZuJPecE-HL6xN\\_qDolXLYK-z5xnOk8fWDiI8I7F6krMCXaNQgVxkf7LAHmnII2akhKIVG8ZoE-ti67NFJFqgBYcjR16Y80\\_9tudnLvcO2uGa3\\_Djdn9AEe3yhcl/](http://www.bmvg.de/portal/a/bmvg!/ut/p/c4/NYuxDsIwDET_yE7YypaqDKxICMqWtIFkVCEv655FjycZuJPecE-HL6xN_qDolXLYK-z5xnOk8fWDiI8I7F6krMCXaNQgVxkf7LAHmnII2akhKIVG8ZoE-ti67NFJFqgBYcjR16Y80_9tudnLvcO2uGa3_Djdn9AEe3yhcl/)*
- 2] *Patrick Keller: "Zur Zukunft der GSVP", in: Zeitschrift für Innere Führung, 27.03.2013:  
[http://www.if-zeitschrift.de/portal/a/ifz!/ut/p/c4/JYrLCSiwEEX\\_aKaxVNCdbV1060bbjaTNWAFyKGE0IH68Cd4DZ3MuTpjx-s2rF-g5eW7zhuPBxTjAnQ3d-fECe5MhDIit4LX9DsARPUizkxhbPXqCVE2EIUW8orxlyADY6V6ltVq131n\\_oemu7cTfum7of2gptzpx8Bq-H4/](http://www.if-zeitschrift.de/portal/a/ifz!/ut/p/c4/JYrLCSiwEEX_aKaxVNCdbV1060bbjaTNWAFyKGE0IH68Cd4DZ3MuTpjx-s2rF-g5eW7zhuPBxTjAnQ3d-fECe5MhDIit4LX9DsARPUizkxhbPXqCVE2EIUW8orxlyADY6V6ltVq131n_oemu7cTfum7of2gptzpx8Bq-H4/)*
- 3] *According to calculations by NATO Secretary General Rasmussen, the US share in the NATO budget has increased from 63 to 72 per cent over the last decade. Source: "Fortschritt im Schnecken tempo", by Matthias Gebauer, et al. in: Der Spiegel, 25.02.2013.*
- 4] *This ties in with the assessment by the former head of the EDA, Alexander Weis, for instance: "Erst die eigenen Interessen", by Johannes Leithäuser, in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 18.10.2012.*
- 5] *In November 2012, A "Code of Conduct" proposed by the EDA was approved by the EU Defence Ministers. With this voluntary commitment, the states undertake to implement Pooling and Sharing as the principle determining structural matters in the national planning and decision-making processes.*
- 6] *According to a statement by the Members of the Bundestag Dr Andreas Schockenhoff and Roderich Kiesewetter in their paper "Europas sicherheitspolitische Handlungsfähigkeit stärken. Es ist höchste Zeit" of 30.05.2012, which drew a great deal of attention, p. 6, and an assessment by the Research Director of the NATO Defense College in Rome, Dr Karl-Heinz Kamp, in the NZZ of 23.11.2011, "Eine Allianz im Zugzwang".*
- 7] *A Pooling and Sharing project under the PSCD, for instance, has not yet been implemented.*
- 8] *Although it is not a member of the EU, Norway is included here as it is involved in the CSDP, for instance within the "Nordic Battlegroup", and has concluded several agreements with the European Defence Agency, which facilitate participation in EDA projects.*
- 9] *The "Nordic Defence Cooperation" comprises Iceland, Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. NORDEFECO was set up officially in 2009, but there had been some cooperation beforehand particularly in the case of this island cooperation.*
- 10] *Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.*
- 11] *Declaration of Intent between Germany and Poland on Enhanced Maritime Cooperation, from 27th May 2013:  
<http://augengeradeaus.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/DEU-POL-Marine-DoI.pdf>*
- 12] *Declaration of Intent between Germany and the Netherlands on the further Enhancement of Bilateral Relations in the field of Defence, from May 28th 2013:  
<http://www.bmvg.de/resource/resource/MzEzNTM4MmUzMz-MyMmUzMTM1MzMyZTM2MzEzMMDwMzAzMDMwMzAzMDY4Njg-2MTM2NmE3MDM4MzQyMDIwMjAyMDIw/20130528%20DoI%20DEU-NLD%20FINAL.pdf>*
- 13] *The most striking example of this was the Military Headline Goal of 1999, which envisaged a flexibly deployable European intervention force of 60,000 soldiers, an ambitious objective that never even came close to being achieved.*