

The Europeanization of the French Defence Policy

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From the beginning of the Fifth republic to the 1990's, sovereignty and independence were considered the best way to maintain the French status in international politics. This did not mean isolation. As a member of both NATO and the WEU, France agreed upon clauses of mutual assistance (art.V of the North Atlantic treaty and art.V of the modified Brussels treaty), and as a member of the United Nations, France participated in peacekeeping operations. But Charles De Gaulle, as the first president of the fifth republic, took two major decisions that reduced the French dependence towards the United States. He decided that France would retire from the NATO military bodies as soon as 1966, and he launched an

ambitious nuclear military program meant at providing France with its own capacity of deterrence.

This French specificity, to which we will refer as the Gaullist tradition, has not completely disappeared in the post Cold War era. But France has realized that it would both be useless and counterproductive to act alone in the field of security, and that the “new” security tasks –conflict prevention, peacekeeping or crisis management- would be better implemented in a collective framework. In the first years of the 1990’s, it was decided to transform the defence policy and to adapt it to the new international context resulting from the collapse of the USSR. From that time, the European Union has become a core element of a renewed French defence policy which has entered into a process of “europeanization” including: a reorientation of goals and means, an adaptation of institution and policy-making, the creation and development of a strategic culture promoting the idea of Europe as a military power. These trends in French politics have contributed to a better mutual understanding among the EU member states and to the building of a European security and defence policy (ESDP).

Since the failure of the European Defence Community in the 1950’s, it has been very unlikely that the security and defence policies of the member states could be europeanized. Surprisingly, the creation of the CFSP, in 1992-3, and the launching of the ESDP, in 1999, showed that no field was out of the scope of the European unification process. For France, the ESDP has become a priority goal. France, already a strong support for the CFSP, has advocated the prospect of a European defence policy which could lead to a common defence. The development of both the CFSP and the ESDP has been encouraged as a way of making the EU more autonomous in international affairs and as a means to strengthen the French influence worldwide through a political leadership in Europe.

Despite these important changes, the French defence policy remains a policy driven by national interest considerations. The europeanization process is limited to crisis management and does not include territorial defence. France does not want to depend on others when it comes to deterrence and protection of vital interests. And we also have to keep in mind that the ESDP, as an institutional mechanism, remains strictly intergovernmental, in accordance with the French concern on sovereignty and independence.

In this paper, it will be argued that the French position on European security and defence matters remains ambiguous. The “new” position of the French president Nicolas Sarkozy will be taken into consideration although it does not change fundamentally the terms of the debate and the premises of the analysis. To some extent, the French defence policy is deeply europeanized although this profound evolution still suffers from serious limitations. Some of the remaining ambiguities should be removed provided that the member states reach a consensus on strengthening the ESDP. To say it differently, the more the EU emerges as a global power, the more France will be willing to include -or integrate- its defence policy in a European collective framework.

1. The ESDP as a core element of the French defence policy

The concept of europeanization, used to describe the French defence policy, conveys two different meanings at least. Firstly, it implies the adaptation of the French doctrine and military to the European framework, so as the French soldiers participate in EU-led crisis management operations. Secondly, europeanization means that France is very active in promoting the development of a European security and defence policy amongst the EU member states.

1.1 Adaptation to the ESDP

The French adaptation to the ESDP has followed the adoption of a security doctrine which was first set up by the authors of the *White paper on defence* in 1994 and which was given official status in 1996 when the President introduced the orientations of a sound reform of the army on the 27th of February. On July the 2nd, a law on military planning¹ is voted by the Parliament. It defines the strategic goals and plans the military means which are deemed necessary for the years 1997 to 2002. Another law on military planning is voted on the 27th of January 2003².

The new doctrine can be summarized as follows. The immediate geographical environment is not as dangerous as it used to be during the Cold War. This assumption is even truer now that the enlargement of both NATO and the EU has contributed to stabilize Europe. However, if a major threat has disappeared due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, “new” threats must be taken into account: regional crises, proliferation, weapons of mass destruction, drug trafficking and other forms of international criminality, terrorism... Therefore, a global approach of defence³, covering the whole spectrum of national activities and including military as well as civilian dimensions, is needed in order to face those threats.

Such a comprehensive understanding of the notion of defence is something relatively new in French politics. In 1959, the basic text organizing the French military under the Fifth Republic already gave a large definition of defence⁴. But until the 1990’s, the focus clearly was on territorial defence and nuclear deterrence, and the concept of defence was tackled in a very narrow way. The wide definition proposed in the 1994 White paper, a few months after

¹ Law n°96-589 on military planning for 1997-2002, *Official Journal of the French Republic*, 3 July 1996.

² Law n°2003-73 on military planning for the years 2003-2008, 27 January 2003, *Official Journal of the French Republic*, 29 January 2003.

³ *Livre blanc sur la défense*, 10/18, 1994, p.54. The broad definition of defence is also used in the different laws on military planning.

⁴ “The objective of defence is to ensure territorial security and integrity and to protect the population against every kind of aggression, in every circumstance, at any time”.

the entry into force of the Maastricht treaty, is in line with the objective deriving from this treaty: transforming the EU into a global power. Thanks to its economic, political and even military potential, the EU may contribute to international security in many ways, just as France is supposed to do through its renewed defence policy.

Apart from giving a “new” approach of defence, the White paper defines three kinds of national interests: 1) vital interests (population and territory); 2) strategic interests (peacekeeping in Europe and in close areas); 3) other interests linked with French world-wide ambitions (international security and peace) and French international role as a member of the United Nations Security Council and as a nuclear state. To pursue these national interests, the French foreign policy is guided by four major principles : 1) the priority given to crisis prevention and arms control, especially through the development of legally binding instruments; 2) the importance of international law, the UN Security Council and intergovernmental cooperation; 3) solidarity with allies and partners (close links with Africa, military involvement within the Atlantic alliance, cooperation with America and Russia; 4) and finally the European dimension, ESDP being the “natural” framework of the French defence policy⁵.

The focus on Europe is a new trend. In 1972, the *White paper on national defence* did not even mention the possibility of creating a European defence. Two decades later, the building of a European defense policy is quoted in the 1994 White paper as one of the French priorities and the reference to the nation has been removed from the title of the text. For France, the objective is to “favour the progressive development of a European capacity in the field of defence” and to act “as much as possible in the framework of its alliances and of a European community of interest”⁶. The EU level seems particularly relevant to defend both “strategic” and “other” interests, while “vital” interests are dealt with at national level. In the

⁵ For a short presentation of the French strategy, see: http://www.defense.gouv.fr/def_natio/strategie6.html.

⁶ *Livre blanc sur la défense*, op. cit., p.52.

military planning law of 1996, the Parliament confirms the role attributed to the EU, and in the military planning law of 2003, it asserts in a rather explicit way that Europe has become “the main political and geographical frame of our action”⁷.

This evolution is related to another shift in the French defence policy, which is the importance given to crisis management operations. France, who privileged deterrence during the 1960’s and the 1970’s, gives more credit to military intervention in the 1980’s⁸ and even more in the 1990’s⁹. This doctrinal move can be explained by the change in the international context. In the post-Cold War era, the biggest security risks are caused by regional crises and require a capacity of rapid reaction as well as key resources like C3I or strategic airlift... Even though the ambition is to maintain its capacity to act alone, France cannot cope with all the dangers of the post Cold War era and must act as often as possible within collective frameworks¹⁰, preferably within the CFSP/ESDP. The UN organization is crucial to legitimate peacekeeping and other crisis management operations. NATO can also be a useful framework for crisis management whenever the Europeans and the Americans want to achieve a common goal and because the ESDP lacks some crucial military tools which are available in NATO. But the EU must be autonomous, i.e. must have the capacity to decide and act alone each time it is considered necessary. If the Europeans rely too much upon the US military assets available in NATO, they will not be able to take their own decisions. EU-US arrangements in NATO may give to the Europeans the military control over operations that are led by the EU. But whatever institutional and operational arrangements can be, it will not make the EU autonomous if the success of a crisis management operation highly depends upon the military support given by the United States. Officially, Paris says that the EU should avoid

⁷ Law n°2003-73 on military planning for the years 2003-2008, op. cit.

⁸ The focus on military external operations in the 1990’s had been somehow announced by the creation of the Rapid Action Force as soon as 1984.

⁹ On this issue, see: Pierre Pascallon, Pierre-Henri Fourgous, « Vers un rééquilibrage entre dissuasion et action? », in Pierre Pascallon (dir.), *Les interventions militaires extérieures de l’armée française*, Bruxelles, Bruylant, 1997, p.279.

¹⁰ *Livre blanc sur la défense*, op.cit., p.52.

unnecessary duplications of NATO assets. But no doubt this is mostly rhetoric. For France, the Europeans should make an effort in terms of military capabilities in order to enhance ESDP and make it more effective and credible¹¹. This should imply some duplication.

The military planning law of 2003, voted during the euro-american crisis over Iraq, maintains the new doctrinal position. According to this legislation, the US supremacy in the military and technological fields proves in a more vivid way the necessity for Europe to build its own defence component. After September 11, the fight against terrorism requires some adaptations but not a major doctrinal change. Intergovernmental cooperation and international law must remain the basis of the international order in the post-Cold War era.

In July 2007, a Commission is created to write a new White paper on defence¹². It shows a willingness to adapt to the new context following 9-11 and the crisis over Iraq. During the electoral campaign of 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy kept on repeating his willingness to get closer to the United States. This could quite soon materialize within the framework of the Atlantic Alliance. In his speech at the US Congress, on November 2007 the 17th, the French president wished that “France –a founding member of our alliance and already one of its first contributors- would take part in the renewal of its instruments and its means of action and, in such a context, would transform its relationship with the Alliance”¹³. In accordance with these declarations, the presence of French soldiers in Afghanistan has been reinforced in autumn

¹¹ « Pour l'ensemble des Européens, préserver la liberté d'appréciation et de choix et maintenir une capacité d'action lorsqu'ils choisissent de s'engager aux côtés de leur partenaire américain passe aussi par un effort de défense renouvelé. Sans s'engager dans une compétition technologique qui ne correspond pas nécessairement à leurs besoins, il leur faut améliorer la crédibilité de leur outil militaire s'ils souhaitent peser sur la conduite des opérations de gestion de crise, participer à la restauration et à la préservation de la paix et soutenir les processus multilatéraux internationaux auxquels ils sont attachés», cited from: Law n°2003-73 on military planning for the years 2003-2008, op. cit.

¹² Decree n°2007-1144 creating a Commission endowed to write a White book on defence and national security, 30 July 2007, *Official Journal of the French Republic*, 31 July 2007.

¹³ Speech of M. Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic, at the Congress of the United States of America, 7 Novembre 2007, <http://www.house.gov/daily/Sarkozyfrench.htm>.

2007 and should be soon reinforced as it was announced in April 2008. Nicolas Sarkozy has also announced the full participation of France in NATO military bodies.

Do these achievements mean a new doctrinal shift? Is it the end of the Gaullist tradition? The letter of mission addressed to the president of the Commission endowed to write the new White paper, Jean-Claude Mallet, recalls the priority given to the European defence policy but does not name the Atlantic Alliance¹⁴. The presidential statement of 7 November 2007, dedicated to the French American friendship, links a pro-NATO attitude with the strengthening of the European defence policy: “the more the European Defence policy will develop, the more France will participate in NATO”¹⁵.

The new White paper should bring some answers to the following questions: should the process of europeanization be continued? Should France get nearer to NATO? How conciliate atlanticism and the building of a strong ESDP leading to a common defence? While a doctrinal adjustment seems possible, it should not turn down the principles on which the French defence policy has been developing since the beginning of the 1990's.

The doctrinal adaptation paved the way to a structural reform of the military designed to better insert the French defence policy into the European framework. Since 1997, the organization of the French army and the definition of its missions have been modified in a way which is coherent with the CFSP/ESDP developing process¹⁶.

An efficient crisis management capacity requires the use of appropriate civilian and military means. It implies a greater mobility of the armed forces as well as some progress in key fields: communication, intelligence, reconnaissance and observation satellites, strategic

¹⁴ http://www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Lettre_mission_JCMallet.pdf.

¹⁵ The crisis over Iraq is not mentioned, at least not directly. « With friends », says M. Sarkozy, « we may disagree, but when we are facing problems, we stay side by side with our friends., we help each other”, es amis on peut avoir des divergences, on peut avoir des désaccords, on peut avoir des disputes. Mais dans la difficulté, dans l'épreuve, on est avec ses amis, on est à leurs côtés, on les soutient, on les aide », see : Speech of M. Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic, at the Congress of the United States of America, 7 November 2007.

¹⁶ The creation of the French “force d'action rapide” at the end of the 1980's somehow anticipated this evolution.

air transport. The French army is not able to manage a major crisis alone. It lacks some crucial tools that could really make the difference in many situations.

Some adaptations have been completed. The creation of the Rapid Action Force in 1984 somehow anticipated the adaptation of the French military to the requirements of the post-Cold War period. But it was insufficient as an improvement. In 1990-91, the difficulties of the Daguet operation during the Gulf War enlightened the persistent shortcomings of the French armed forces in external action¹⁷. The French authorities have tried to fill these gaps through different projects and programmes: “plan Armées 2000”, the White paper of 1994, the military planning laws for 1995-2000, 1997-2002, 2003-2008, 2008-2013.

The wide-range reform which has been currently undertaken lies on a strategy of action aimed at creating a professional army capable of sending forces abroad, within a multinational framework. The law adopted in October 1997 and dealing with the reform of the national military service¹⁸ suspended the conscription in December 2002. The military planning law for 1997-2002 was supposed to create a less plethoric army, better equipped and better adapted to the actions abroad, which corresponds to what is called the “2015 model”. This goal had to be achieved through the modernization of the nuclear as well as the conventional equipments. Now that the army is professional, the financial priority should clearly be given to the equipment of the forces: such is the challenge of the 2003-2008 planning law that reforms the “2015 model”. Three objectives aiming at the adaptation of forces are resumed in this law: 1) “the development of the capacities necessary to play the role of a lead-nation framework, especially the multinational dimension of our planning and command structures, in order to conduct European operations and implement the Petersberg tasks (including high intensity missions of combat forces)”; 2) “to support already existing bilateral or multilateral cooperation aiming at the optimization of forces and at mutual support between the member

¹⁷ Shortfalls in capacity of projection, intelligence, satellites and observation resources.

¹⁸ Law n°97-1019 on the reform of the military service, 28 October 1997, *Official Journal of the French Republic*, 8 November 1997.

states”, and to “ support the development of new cooperation with those member states ready to make appropriate financial efforts and to set new programs”; 3) “to reinforce interoperability of our armed forces with our neighbours or allies, improving information control in order to guarantee superiority on the theatre”¹⁹.

From now on, a substantial part of national forces can be used to fulfil the Petersberg missions within the ESDP. France is already the main contributor to the catalogue of forces which was approved by the European Council in Nice, December 2000, the French contribution representing 20% of the forces available. At the same time, the French industry of armament is re-structured around an electronic and aeronautic pole of defence. This evolution is conceived as a further step toward the development of a European industry of armament.

1.2. The French contribution to the creation and development of the ESDP

France wants the European Union to be a political and military actor capable of influencing world affairs. The EU, which is already a civilian actor, must transform into a military one in order to be a global actor with a strong external policy in economic as well as political and military fields. Whereas the EU is a real actor in the World Trade Organization or other diplomatic forums, it is less successful when it comes to military issues and crisis management. This situation is not satisfying for the French leaders.

¹⁹ Law n°2003-73 on military planning for the years 2003-2008, op. cit.

In the 1990's, France would have wanted the EU to intervene in the Balkans or in Africa. But at that time, CFSP did not allow the Europeans to do so and the political will was lacking²⁰. The Kosovo crisis in 1999 showed that the Europeans could reach a united decision and defend a common stance on a military issue²¹, but it was NATO which carried out the military operation. Because of the past failures and to avoid other failures, the member states have decided to make the CFSP operational through the creation of the ESDP²². This decision, although a collective one, was strongly influenced by France -with the support of a few countries including the United Kingdom. As we said in the introduction of this paper, europeanization also means influencing the negotiations on a European defence policy at a bilateral level (France-Germany, France-United Kingdom), at a multilateral level (summit with Belgium, Germany and Luxembourg in April 2003), or within the EU institutions (European Council, GAERC, meetings of the defence ministers, Political and Security Committee and other ESDP bodies). Participating in the building of the ESDP has become one of the main activities of the French government in the field of security and defence.

Until 1999, the EU had not succeeded in its attempt to develop a strong security and defence policy. The connection between the EU, in charge of the CFSP, and the WEU, as the military arm of the EU and the implementation body of the CFSP, had not worked properly. In reaction, France supported the idea of a clear hierarchy between the two organizations, the EU defining the policy while the WEU would be limited to implementation tasks (this idea was included in the Amsterdam treaty signed in 1997). Then, France promoted a European security and defence policy defined and implemented by the EU alone, opening the way to the

²⁰ Fabien Terpan, *La politique étrangère et de sécurité commune de l'Union européenne*, Bruylant, 2003.

²¹ Thierry Tardy, *La France, l'Europe et la guerre du Kosovo, Regards sur l'actualité*, n°257, 2000.

²² Fabien Terpan, *La politique européenne de sécurité et de défense, L'UE peut-elle gérer les crises*, Presses de l'IEP Toulouse, 2004.

integration of the WEU activities in the EU framework²³. The British had to be convinced, and so were they at the Saint Malo summit in December 1998. A few months later, during the Cologne summit of June 1999, the ESDP was launched by the EU 15 with a strong impetus given by France.

Thanks to the ESDP, the EU now has some capabilities in the field of crisis management. More than 15 ESDP operations have been launched. France chose a high profile contribution, sending a lot of soldiers to these countries where a European presence was requested. French officials have repeatedly said that these operations –though limited in their scope and intensity- are of great importance because they can be considered as a first step in the creation of a strong European defence policy. The replacement of the NATO force in Bosnia (Sfor) by a EU-led force (EUFOR Althea) as well as the EUFOR in Chad and RCA shows that the Europeans are more and more ambitious in dealing with regional crises. This evolution is very much supported by France.

From a French point of view, the development of ESDP should be accelerated in order to achieve the ultimate goal of making a great power out of the European Union. This could be done thanks to a more coherent approach of foreign policy which should bring together CFSP, ESDP and external relations (cross-pillarization) without using the so-called “Community method”. The strengthening of ESDP institutions may be necessary, but integration is not the proper method. For France, leadership should be provided by the most powerful member states on a consensual basis and qualified majority voting should not become the current way of taking decisions. The defence ministers should be better involved in the development of the ESDP thanks to an enlargement of a Defence Council. The High Representative should play a major role, under the control of the foreign ministers.

²³ With the exception of the mutual assistance clause and of the parliamentary assembly.

In addition to the strengthening of intergovernmental structures, the French priority is to facilitate the emergence of coalitions of the willing within ESDP framework, by developing the flexibility method. Positive abstention cannot have more than limited effects, but the EU would make considerable progress in applying “enhanced cooperation” or “permanent structured cooperation” in the framework of CFSP/ESDP. This would make ESDP more efficient, while respecting the political differences between the member states. This kind of cooperation should be used in several domains: multinational forces, including joint command; armament and other capacities; military staff and military doctrines; mutual assistance. No matter if the number of member states involved in the cooperation is limited, the action of a few countries should benefit the others.

Does it mean that a permanent group of states should deal with military issues whereas the others would stay apart? This was not the position supported by France inside the Convention on the future of Europe. But with the crisis over Iraq and after the accession of twelve new European members, the idea of a core group assuming more responsibilities than the others in military matters –at least in the middle term- has gained some credit. While participating in the April 29, 2003 summit together with Belgium, Germany and Luxembourg, France wanted to make clear that the future of the European defence depended on the political will of a few key Member states. But the idea lying behind this meeting was not to create a two-speed CFSP, with the French assuming the leadership of a small “ESDP group”. For France, a core group would not be of any help for the development of ESDP if the UK is not part of it. The framework of the “permanent structured cooperation”, which was finally included in the Lisbon treaty, will only, be successful if the UK gives an active contribution.

Clearly, France puts the emphasis on military capabilities more than on ESDP institutions. The priority is to build an effective and credible ESDP. Therefore, the French

authorities have worked hard to make ESDP operational and have provided for a lot of ideas - as the Framework Nation and the Battle group concepts- which aim at facilitating the deployment of troops for a European operation. The priority is to ensure that ESDP is capable of acting in crisis management, not to build sophisticated institutional mechanisms.

From a French viewpoint, the EU must be an autonomous actor, which implies a capacity to defend positions which can differ from the American ones and a capacity to act alone whenever a military intervention proves to be necessary. However, the purpose of the French foreign policy is not to build the European defence policy in opposition to that of the United States, but to be able to make its own choices. NATO must be preserved but it must evolve in a way that “allows the European security and defence identity to emerge”, which implies “an increased political cooperation among the Europeans inside NATO, and more and more responsibilities for the Europeans within the organization”²⁴. For France, being part of the alliance is important provided that the EU plays a major role in it, and can talk equal to equal with the United States.

The French foreign policy has been described as a policy aimed at creating a gap between Europe and America. Nicolas Sarkozy is trying to change this perception by adopting a very pro-US position. During the Chirac presidency, the role played by the US had already been acknowledged. For example, the former defence minister Alain Richard, in a statement made in February 2001, said that “the European defence that we want is not –and will not be– an alternative to the Atlantic alliance”²⁵. As it is stated in the military planning law for the period 2003-2008, “our engagement in European defence must be coherent with the transatlantic solidarity”²⁶.

France had been trying to convince the Americans and its EU partners that the preservation of the alliance was considered as a priority goal. On several occasions during the

²⁴ *Livre blanc sur la défense*, op. cit., p.66.

²⁵ Speech at the Wehrkunde, 3 February 2001.

²⁶ Law n°2003-73 on military planning for the years 2003-2008, op. cit.

1990's, France took position in favour of the transformation of NATO and its adaptation to the post-Cold War era (adoption of a new NATO concept, decision to create Combined Joint Task Forces...) France even announced, in December 1995, its decision to participate in the meetings of the military Committee and of the Atlantic Council. This was a historical momentum, because France had retired from the NATO military bodies in 1966. Of course, the decision to get closer to the alliance was pragmatic: as French soldiers were involved in NATO crisis management operations, it was necessary for France to be present in those bodies whose decisions could have an impact on the situation of French military forces. But the decision was also political: it was meant at making the European security and defence identity accepted inside NATO. In the 1990's, France accepted to get closer to NATO given that a new equilibrium between Europe and the United States was reached within the Atlantic organization (thanks to new agreements between the EU and NATO or thanks to a reform of SHAPE). The NATO Rapid Reaction Force was welcome, provided that "it develops in a way compatible with the agreements reached by some Members states within the European Union". "The basic elements of this force should be used by one organization or the other without right of first use"²⁷. And France would fully participate in the alliance if only "the European defense identity is permanent and visible"²⁸ and provided that NATO continues to be adapted in a way which allows the European Union to be autonomous in the management of crises. Logically, when the United States refused to give the South-Europe Command to a European officer, France decided to stop its integration into NATO.

Until 2007, the French authorities gave priority to European autonomy upon atlanticism. Is it going to change under the influence of a new French President? There should be a change in style more than in substance.

²⁷ NATO Summit, Press Briefing of M. Jacques Chirac, President of the French Republic, after the meeting of the Heads of State and Governments, 21 november 2002, *Documents d'actualité internationale*, n°2, 15 janvier 2003, pp.60-63.

²⁸ Statement of M. Jacques Chirac at the annual meeting of ambassadors, 29 August 1996, *Documents d'actualité internationale*, n°20, 15 october 1996.

The substance remains the same. CFSP/ESDP is still perceived by the French as a means to exert influence in international relations while taking the lead of a powerful Europe. France is no longer a big international power but could be powerful enough to be a leader inside ESDP. As it is stated in the 1994 White paper, « the ability for France to keep its position in world affairs is to a large extent linked with its capacity to influence the construction of Europe»²⁹. This explains why France has made such a big contribution in terms of institution building -the High Representative, for instance, derives from the French proposal of a “Mr or Mrs CFSP”- and why France is the biggest provider of military forces and the most active country as far as military operations are concerned.

The style of the new president might be different. In official statements, Nicolas Sarkozy never talks about competition with the United States and never uses “realist” wording as “balance of power”, “hegemony” or “superpower”. Jacques Chirac used to support the concept of a “multipolar” world and made it clear that the EU should be a “counterweight” to the United States. When he was asked in 2003, why he opposed the war in Iraq, his first answer was: “because we want to live in a multipolar world”. This statement created resentment in the US and also in Europe, especially in the UK, because the main justification of the French position seemed to be the will to counterweight the US and not the situation in Iraq or international security considerations. Nicolas Sarkozy, while pursuing the same policy objectives than his predecessor, doesn’t talk about counterbalancing the USA but puts the emphasis on alliance and friendship. This might be the best way to promote the European identity in security and defence matters and to exert influence³⁰.

²⁹ *Livre blanc sur la défense*, op. cit., p.52.

³⁰ As Charles Zorgbibe said, « the end of the French exception could be considered, surprisingly, as a condition of a renewed position for France in international politics». Charles Zorgbibe, « Des guerres de sécession yougoslaves au rapprochement de la France de l’OTAN », in Pierre Pascallon (dir.), op. cit., p.273.

2. The limits of Europeanization

The limits of the Europeanization are partly due to France, whose policy remains driven by national interest considerations. Although the ESDP has become a French priority, the Gaullist tradition has not been deleted. To some extent, the French willingness to preserve national prerogatives contradicts the pro-European discourse. But the limits are also –and mainly- due to “external” reasons, ie. the position of a few member states, the position of the United States as well as the broader international context.

2.1. The French “self-limitation”.

The Europeanization of the French defence policy is limited to crisis management and does not apply to deterrence or territorial defence, these tasks being out of the scope of the European Union. As a country possessing nuclear capabilities, France does not rely on anybody to protect its territory. Of course, as the writers of the 1994 White paper stated, “the issue of a European nuclear doctrine might arise as the EU strengthens its identity in security and defence matters”³¹. This is certainly a very long term perspective. Indeed, the idea of a European consultation in case of a possible use of the French nuclear arms³² has never been successful. The European security concept, adopted by the WEU member states in 1995³³, is almost silent about nuclear deterrence. It only recalls the existence of the French and British nuclear forces and the contribution they bring to European security. This had already been done in 1974 in the Ottawa declaration.

³¹ *Livre blanc sur la défense*, op. cit., p.98.

³² The idea was first mentioned by F. Mitterrand in 1992, and by A. Juppé and J. Chirac in 1995.

³³ « European Security ; Common Concept for the 27 countries of WEU », *Agence Europe*, 15 November 1995.

Without an effective and strong ESDP, France, which used to be a great power and remains a nuclear state and a member of the UN Security Council, does not hesitate to act individually in world affairs. If the EU treaty states that the Europeans defend common positions in the UNSC, France and the United Kingdom, as permanent members, are more likely to defend their own positions. In 2003, Paris rejected a second resolution authorizing war in Iraq. As no European common position had been found, this was possible. But France could have withheld a positive vote in favor, without vetoing the intervention, if only its main priority had been to preserve the Alliance and take into account the position of the most Atlantist member countries.

Another subject which shows the French hesitations concerning European defence is the patriotic willingness to defend the country (« l'esprit de défense »)³⁴ and the relationship between the army and the citizens (« lien armée-nation »). The fear that Europeanization would wreck the “esprit de défense” shows the ambiguity of the French involvement in the ESDP. The transformation of the French army into a professional one, usually presented as a necessary adaptation to the requirements of external action, is also seen as creating a gap between the army and the nation, the latter being less inclined to participate in the protection of the country. Such a point of view is based on a “maximalist” vision of the “esprit de défense” based on the assumption that in the past the whole nation was ready and willing to fight. This is a myth more than a reality. Conscription did not guarantee the unanimous adhesion of the population to national defence. The obligation imposed on each citizen to serve his country was not necessarily the best way of obtaining a popular support. The United States has been demonstrating for a long time the opposite model of a country where the national feeling and the defence “esprit” are highly present even though conscription is not.

³⁴ Fabien Terpan, La construction européenne et l'esprit de défense, *Cahiers d'histoire immédiate*, n°25, Printemps 2004, pp.197-200.

The end of conscription does not imply necessarily the end of the “esprit de défense”. If there is a weakening of the “esprit de défense”, it comes from previous evolutions: the nuclear weapon during the Cold War and the absence of a clearly defined enemy during the post Cold War era. September 11 has made the terrorist menace more vivid, but it has modified perceptions in the US far more than in Europe. The Madrid and London terrorist attacks have not had the same impact on the European people as 9-11 had on the American people. For the moment, international terrorism is not the kind of threat which could create a European security identity amongst people.

Can Europe have an impact on the way citizens perceive the defence issue? It is hard to imagine that the idea of defence could expand among Europeans and therefore among the French, thanks to the ESDP. The building of a military Europe has not entailed an appreciable lessening of the defence “spirit”, neither has it generated a patriotic feeling similar to national feelings. The member states have set the foundations of a European security culture through the adoption of a European security strategy in December 2003. The goals and principles that this document conveyed could help creating a kind of European identity, although limited to the elite (and presumably a small part of this elite). This identity already exists at the level of French military officers who have been socialized to Europe and for whom the ESDP is a reality³⁵. May the citizens be touched by the same phenomenon? Opinion polls show a strong support for the idea of a European defence. The crisis over Iraq has demonstrated that people can agree on difficult subjects as war and the use of force, even if the governments disagree. On the long-run, a kind of “patriotic” feeling –a European “esprit de défense”- could arise among the Europeans. This feeling would be based on common values and detached from the national ideology. This will occur provided that the member states promote those common values. Using the EU framework for national purposes –as France does when it claims for the

³⁵ The activities of the European College on security and defence could give another incentive to this process.

leadership of a powerful Europe- is not enough and might even be detrimental to the European identity; what is needed is a real propensity to put national resources –economic, diplomatic, political and military- at the disposal of the European Union.

2.2. External limits.

The image of France is one of a country in search of power and independence, and willing to play an international role far beyond its effective capabilities. Most of the European member states reject a French leadership of CFSP and ESDP, just as they rejected the Gaullist ambition to exert political leadership in Europe (an ambition clearly outlined by the Fouchet plans in the 1960's). They often oppose French proposals, because they fear to defend what could be a French -and not a European- national interest. For example, Paris wanted the EU to contribute to peacekeeping in Africa. This was refused by its European partners until 2003 and operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of Congo. As France used to have colonies in Africa and continues to act as a power in this continent (with military forces permanently installed in Senegal, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Chad and Djibouti), its partners hesitate to be involved in any operation which could be used by France as a means to legitimate its political ambitions. Recently, this kind of hesitation has slowed down the deployment of the EUFOR Tchad operation.

The European countries doubt the sincerity of French officials when they talk about ESDP. France is perceived as a country using European political unification in order to pursue its own ambition of power. France is often accused of being arrogant and selfish. This has been the case during the crisis over Iraq, the main critics coming from the ten Central

European states which signed a letter in Vilnius in support of the US policy towards Iraq. Jacques Chirac took the opportunity to express himself on the letter from the Vilnius 10 at a press conference following the EU summit in Brussels on February 17, 2003. He said that the Central Europeans had “missed a good opportunity to keep quiet” and that joining the EU required “a minimum of consideration for others, a minimum of policy coordination. If, when a difficult subject comes up, you start giving independent points of view that have not been coordinated with the group we want to join, that’s not a very responsible behaviour”³⁶. Actually, Jacques Chirac was not wrong when he criticized the lack of coordination among the Europeans. But he accused the Central European countries whereas all the Europeans were going separately on the issue of Iraq. French leaders themselves do not hesitate to defend their own positions whenever they find it necessary.

The French policymakers have to convince every member states, first that they are sincere when they talk about European defence, secondly that ESDP will profit everybody not only France, thirdly that NATO will not be affected by the building of a European security and defence identity. The priority is to find a common position with Germany and the United Kingdom, because of their political weight within the European Union.

In the beginning of the 1990’s, France and Germany were in line as far as political union was concerned. They played their role as a “motor” of European integration. France together with Germany took the initiative of proposing an intergovernmental conference on political union in order to create a common foreign and security policy which should include a defence policy³⁷. It was not the first time that such a proposal was made, but it was the first time that a decision was taken giving Europe a military dimension. Later, both countries presented a plan

³⁶ Press Briefing of M. Jacques Chirac, President of the French republic, after the informal meeting of the European Council, 17 February 2003.

³⁷ Letter from the President of the French Republic and of the German Chancellor to the Presidency of the European Union, 20 April 1990.

for peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Juppé/Kinkel), which gave ideas to find a settlement to the conflict. The Eurocorps was created by adding troops to the Franco-German brigade. And the Franco-German armament agency, created in January 1996, became in November 1996 the OCCAR, a body including Italy and the UK and providing the basis for a future European armament agency (which creation was decided in 2004).

In the mid-1990's, the Franco-German partnership disagreed on some issues, but despite these difficulties, they succeeded in making common proposals³⁸ on defence issues during the intergovernmental conference which led to the adoption of the Amsterdam treaty. In particular, they tried to improve communication between the EU and the WEU, making it clear that the EU must be the core organization. In Amsterdam, this proposal was enshrined in the revision treaty (see art.17 EU).

In more recent years, the relationship between France and Germany has been very close, the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Elysée treaty being a symbol of this friendship. During the crisis over Iraq, they cooperated to defend a common position against the war. This political choice was made on the assumption that they had the capacity to unite Europe on this specific issue. But it was perceived as a way to re-establish the French-German leadership of the EU and it only brought division and discord. Since the Blaesheim meeting in January 2001, the French and the Germans have taken the habit to meet several times a year at different level (ministry of foreign affairs, diplomats...)

The election of Nicolas Sarkozy seems to have opened a new phase of disagreements between France and Germany. Angela Merkel has not appreciated the initiatives taken by the new French president to restart the unification process after the negation referendums in France and the Netherland and to create a Euro-Mediterranean Union. The two leaders have

³⁸ They proposed the creation of a planning unit, the nomination of a High Representative and the subordination of WEU to the EU. See the Freiburg meetings in 1995, and the declaration made in Turin in March 1996.

found a common ground and the conciliation on the Mediterranean has shown that a disagreement between the two countries cannot be tolerated on the middle and long-term.

Generally speaking, the Franco-German partnership is necessary to European integration. But it is far from sufficient to ensure that the integration process is still valid³⁹. Both countries cannot take decisions for the rest of Europe and their initiatives might, to some extent, be counter-productive if they are seen as a means to establish a “directoire” of great powers and as an attempt to oppose the United States and NATO.

In fact, the success of Franco-German initiatives highly depends upon the position taken by the British government. Whenever Franco-German proposals are accepted by the United Kingdom, European political unification is making progress. After the adoption of the Amsterdam treaty, French policymakers kept thinking that the European security and defence identity had to be more clearly located at the EU. The United Kingdom had to be convinced of this necessity. This was done at the end of 1998 during the Saint-Malo Franco-British summit. The two countries, in a common statement, insisted on the necessity to deal with European defence issues inside the EU, and to strengthen European military capabilities without harming NATO. This statement paved the way for the ESDP in the same way the Franco-German initiative in 1990 facilitated the institution of CFSP. After Saint-Malo, the military requirements of a credible ESDP have been mostly defined by the British and by the French. The statement made by the two countries in Le Touquet (February 4, 2003) reminded us of the role played by the Franco-British relation in the building of a more credible ESDP. France and the UK also cooperated in order to set up Battle Groups of 1500 soldiers which could be sent in 15 days to cope with an urgent situation in a “failed state”. This concept has been included in the new Headline Goal (HG 2010).

³⁹ Fabien Terpan, « L'Allemagne, la France et la PESC », in Daniel Colard et Jean-François Guilhaudis (dir.), *Aspects de la sécurité de l'Allemagne et de la coopération franco-allemande*, *Cahiers du CEDSI*, n°19, juin 1997, p.53.

No doubt the Franco-British relationship is a key factor for the European defence policy. Most of the progress made by the EU in military matters derived from the Saint-Malo declaration in 1998. This is why the crisis over Iraq, which apparently strengthened the link between the UK and the USA, could be considered as a challenge for ESDP. In 2003, some commentators did not hesitate to say that ESDP was a dead-born policy. However, France and the United Kingdom still have close military cooperation, in spite of their disagreement about the way to deal with the Iraqi regime. Even though the British give priority to their special relationship with the United States, this does not mean that they have decided to stop the development of the ESDP.

More than ever, the French leaders want to bring the UK closer to their own understanding of ESDP. The Franco-British military cooperation must transform into a more political one. The two countries share the same view of a mainly intergovernmental ESDP, but they do not adopt common positions on this issue when they meet together on a bilateral basis (see for instance the statement made after the Touquet summit in 2003). Moreover, France and the UK still have to clarify the consequences of ESDP on the transatlantic relationship. The UK and other European partners fear that the priority given to ESDP in the French doctrine is a rhetoric aimed at loosening the Atlantic alliance and creating a European counterweight to the United States. As it was written above, France has to give the assurance that ESDP is a real priority of its strategy and that ESDP is not favoured in order to get rid of or destabilize NATO. This only can build the foundations for a large consensus among all the EU member states. In this context, the pro-US position of president Sarkozy may paradoxically help to promote a strong ESDP amongst the EU member states.

France has the capacity to be an active contributor to CFSP/ESDP but it is doubtful whether it has the capacity to exert leadership. The French contribution to the catalogue of forces may be important, but it does not give enough capability to allow the European Union

to act alone –i.e. without the support of the United States- for most of the crisis management operations. The French security doctrine gives priority to military intervention, especially within a European framework, but the changes in terms of forces, armament, equipment and staffs, which have followed the adoption of this doctrine, have not been sufficient. The defence budget remains at a low level, compared to the British one, and is mostly spent on staff costs when the emphasis should be put on equipment, military research and technologies⁴⁰.

The situation can be described as a kind of “vicious circle”. France does not have the capacity to take the lead and make ESDP efficient and robust. Therefore, NATO continues to be seen as the only credible security organization by some of the member states. The lack of political will among the member states to strengthen the ESDP isolates the French position. Finally, France, confronted to the scepticism of its partners, is inclined to act individually instead of giving priority to the European Union.

The challenge is to transform this situation into a “virtuous circle” that could favour the development of the ESDP. France has a role to play in making clear that its main goal is not to build a European power in opposition to the US. If the relations between France and the United States do not improve, Washington will continue to seek support from individual European states and a balanced EU/US partnership will not emerge. France also needs to pursue its military adaptation in order to be more credible as an ESDP leader. France also needs to reach a consensus with its European partners, which implies a less arrogant foreign policy. France would be more inclined to evolve this way if its European partners consider the ESDP as a priority for the European Union and try to convince the US administration that the development of a credible ESDP is the best option for the future of transatlantic relations. Of

⁴⁰ The military planning law for the years 2003-2008 gives clear indications on the lacks and needs of the French army.

course, if the United States do not facilitate the development of a European crisis management capacity within NATO, it will be even more difficult for the EU Member states to reach a consensus on ESDP and its role inside and outside NATO. The position of the United States and the broader international context are crucial for the development of the ESDP. From 1998 to 2001, the international context seemed to be in favour of a rise of European power (thanks to the building of a credible ESDP) and a more balanced transatlantic relation. Since 2001, it seems to show a gap between the EU and the US. But now that the crisis over Iraq has lessened, the context should make another change in a way that could be favourable to the alliance. The problems that the Bush administration is facing in dealing with post-war Iraq may lead the United States to a more multilateral approach of foreign relations. Even a country as powerful as the United States cannot keep on taking decisions without having a minimum level of legitimacy and consent.

To conclude with, we may argue that France suffers both from an excess and a lack of power. Its attempt to be the leader of Europe through CFSP and ESDP creates resentment among the other EU member states. Most of its European partners continue to prefer the leadership of the United States to the less credible leadership of France. France is too much a power to be accepted as a leader. Its contribution may be better accepted if Paris agreed to go beyond the intergovernmental method and to accept a certain degree of communitarization of the second pillar. That would be a sign that the Europeanization of the French defence policy is sincere.

But France, which is far from having the capacity of the United States in terms of military containment and crisis management, is not powerful enough to really influence its partners. Its capacity of influence is even decreasing each time the EU is enlarged. Its ambition far outstrips its actual power. It may be powerful enough to act as a “motor” of

ESDP and CFSP and to be one of the main actors of the emergence of the EU as a military power, provided that its contribution is respectful of its European partners. France needs to continue its adaptation process in order to convince its partners that the ESDP can become a strong crisis management framework and that France is ready to merge into this framework.

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