Milestone or Maelstrom? European Defence and the 2015 Council Summit

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European Geostrategy

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Programme

14:30-14:50  Registration & Welcome coffee

14:50-15:00  Introduction

   Daniel Fiott, FWO Fellow, Institute for European Studies-VUB

15:00-15:15  Keynote speech

   Pierre Vimont, Senior Associate Fellow, Carnegie Europe

15:15-16:15  Roundtable I: “Institutional Views”

   Chair: Sven Biscop, Director Europe in the World Programme, Egmont Institute
   James Copping, Policy Officer DG Growth, European Commission
   Caimin Keogh, Action Officer Concepts Branch, EEAS/EU Military Staff
   Arnaud Migoux, Counsellor, French Permanent Representation to the EU
   Graham Muir, Head Strategy and Planning Unit, European Defence Agency

16:15-16:30  Coffee Break

16:30-17:45  Roundtable II: “Think Tank Views”

   Chair: Daniel Fiott, FWO Fellow, Institute for European Studies-VUB
   Jo Coelmont, Senior Associate Fellow, Egmont Institute
   Alexander Mattelaer, Acting Academic Director, Institute for European Studies-VUB
   Vivien Pertusot, Head of Office, IFRI Bruxelles
   Dick Zande, Senior Research Fellow, Clingendael Institute

17:45-18:00  Concluding remarks: “Outlook”

   Jorge Domecq, Chief Executive, European Defence Agency
Event Report

Given the Ukraine crisis, Russia's resurgence and the burning crises in the South there has never been a more urgent time to discuss European defence. Yet in the face of such challenges, how do we assess the recent European Council summit on defence? Does the Council meeting represent another milestone on the path to closer defence cooperation between EU member states, or did the meeting reflect the difficulties involved in forging a truly common defence policy? Drawing on a collection of thirty-four thought-provoking essays that were published in May by the Egmont - Royal Institute for International Relations, European Geostrategy and the Institute for European Studies, a roundtable was held on Wednesday 15 July 2015 (15:00–18:00) to discuss the summit conclusions and to critically analyse the way forward. The event was organised by the Institute for European Studies, Egmont Institute and European Geostrategy and the European Defence Agency kindly hosted the roundtable.

Opening Remarks

Threats and challenges in the East and in the Mediterranean, the United States' pivot to the Asia-Pacific and structural problems such as low-levels of defence spending and the Eurozone crisis is the overall geostrategic context in which Europe finds itself, Mr. Daniel Fiott (Institute for European Studies-VUB) stated when opening the roundtable. We now have Federica Mogherini’s Strategic Review and we can perhaps agree that her assessment of the world being more 'connected, contested and complex' is fair, remarked Mr. Fiott. He continued by saying that the fact that the 26 June 2015 European Council put into motion a revision of the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) – due in June 2016 –, and that it in principal decided that EU funds should be mobilised to help strengthen Europe's defence industry, are milestones in European defence cooperation.

Is Europe still 'so prosperous, so secure and so free'? 

Image credit: Institute for European Studies-VUB
Europe needs clearly defined strategic objectives

Yet the maelstrom is still raging. Mr. Fiott recalled how the 2003 ESS claimed that Europe has never been 'so prosperous, so secure and so free', but he invited the audience to ask whether this is the case anymore and whether Europeans can be as optimistic as they were at the beginning of the 2000s? Europe has a year until it delivers a new strategy document but, argued Mr. Fiott, in the meantime the strategic landscape may change drastically with 'Russia's resurgence', the ongoing Eurozone crisis, the Mediterranean, a possible British referendum on its EU membership, tensions in the Asia-Pacific and the 2016 US Presidential elections.

Prof. Sven Biscop (Egmont Institute) remarked that the June Council, while thin on conclusions, a fact that should have been expected given all the other pressing issues facing the Heads of State and Government, did nonetheless set in motion a revision of the ESS. This revision, Prof. Biscop explained, will surely mean European defence will be put in the spotlight and will ensure that we have a mature debate about the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). It is often said, remarked Prof. Biscop, that revising the European Security Strategy would be a time-consuming and politically sensitive process. Yet, he continued, Europe needs clearly defined strategic objectives to give the EU's foreign, security and defence policies direction.

Ambassador Pierre Vimont (Carnegie Europe) began his keynote speech by saying that fans of the CSDP should not be too alarmed at the June Council meeting. Even though the conclusions were not very extensive, Ambassador Vimont stated that the European Council has come a long way on security and defence issues over the last four to five years. First, the European Council is keen to keep defence on the agenda, and that is why they are organising regular summits on security and defence at the highest political level. Second, the announced revision of the European Security Strategy is positive news. Finally, the support shown for the Preparatory Action on CSDP-related research is a bold and interesting step for Europe. This is not to say that there is not a lot of work to be done on European defence, explained Ambassador Vimont. For example, more work is needed on implementing Article 44 of the Lisbon Treaty and the EU Battlegroups and a greater focus on hybrid warfare and working with NATO is required.

The June Council should not be viewed too pessimistically, stated Ambassador Vimont, although we must recognise that without political will from the member states progress can be slow. Vimont believes that revising the ESS will allow Europe to ask a number of essential questions; questions which both think tanks and member states will have a role in thinking about. What kind of actor will the EU be in the future? Can we go on thinking that the EU is not a geopolitical actor? Another question is what one really means when they say the EU is a 'security provider'. What does this mean today? Does it mean being a security provider in our immediate neighbourhood?
To the east Europe might be called on to act in challenging ways, such as peacekeeping in Ukraine. In the south, Europe will need to think of new ideas for countries such as Tunisia, Iraq, Egypt and Lebanon. These countries are likely to ask for more help from the EU, but a key question is how Europe will respond. Concluding, Ambassador Vimont stated that one thing is clear; the new Strategy will – out of necessity – have to be a completely different text to the original ESS.

Roundtable I: “Institutional Views”

Mr. James Copping (European Commission) began the debate by highlighting the European Commission’s interest in defence and how DG Growth works on defence industrial policy and supports defence research. The European Commission’s long-term objective is to develop a genuine internal market for defence, an EU-wide regime on security of supply, and encourage greater investment in defence research. Therefore, in terms of research, it is positive that the European Council showed its commitment for appropriate funding of defence research.

One has to acknowledge that there are key issues that still have to be addressed in relation to the Preparatory Action, stated Mr. Copping. Defence research is not like civil research and practical issues such as intellectual property rights over funded programmes need further examination. There is still a way to go before the Preparatory Action is adopted in 2017, and the Commission is cooperating with the European Defence Agency on the remaining challenges. The Preparatory Action is about testing a new idea on defence research and not about replacing national research funding. Once the EU has collectively decided on its military priorities for
defence co-operation the Commission will be able to target its support into these areas.

Lt. Col. Caimin Keogh (EU Military Staff) continued the debate by stating that, while for some in the EUMS there was an impression that an opportunity may have been missed with the Council conclusions, mainly because the CSDP was not as prominent as had been expected, the conclusions were nevertheless very positive. He remarked that it was difficult to clarify why the expectation levels were so high but posited that it was likely to have been related to the previously ground breaking output from the December 2013 Council summit and the recent considered debates on defence and security issues in the months leading up to the June Summit (i.e. Article 44 TEU; “Train and Equip”; Capacity Building, etc.). However, on reflection, the Council Conclusions delivered on all the known key EEAS “deliverables” (i.e. process of strategic reflection; internal-external security nexus; support for future defence research and technology programme; mention of defence budgets; partnership intensification; capacity building, etc.). The commitment to continue with the implementation programme for the 2013 Council conclusions was also encouraging because it has been instrumental in guiding EUMS outputs for military Concepts and Policy Developments (e.g. EU Rapid Reaction Concept [land, air, sea]; Protection of Civilians Concept; and also EUMC Military Advices to PSC (e.g. Capacity Building; MSS; etc.). Lt. Col. Keogh remarked that most significantly, the Conclusions did prepare the way for a revised European Security Strategy or “global strategy” and the Heads of State and Government acknowledged the need for a strong European defence industrial base.

On the Strategic Review, Lt. Col. Keogh clarified that the EUMS was afforded the opportunity to comment during the drafting process, that the analysis therein was well received and that the document gives the EU a very good basis to move forward and address the challenge of drafting a revised global strategy. Lt. Col. Keogh observed that a revised European Security Strategy will not only address CSDP but all of the external action instruments available to the Union and therefore CSDP will only be as prominent as Member States require it to be. The “D” in CSDP will simply be determined by the level of Member State ambition. There can be no doubt that the development of the EU Global Strategy on foreign and security policy will be critically important in so far as it will allow the Member States and the EU Military Staff to define what future capabilities are required to meet the needs of the CSDP. Regarding the Preparatory Action on EU funding for CSDP-related research, Lt. Col. Keogh remarked that while the issue of financing European defence is a sensitive issue for some Member States, this is a positive step forward for CSDP.

Mr. Arnaud Migoux (French Permanent Representation to the EU) argued that from a French perspective the June Council conclusions fell short of expectations, were too modest, and granted a relatively superficial treatment to the various identified initiatives since December 2013. It was also disappointing that the European Council conclusions did not clearly endorse the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) conclusions of 18 May 2015 and that a clear clause for a rendez-vous meeting was not indicated. Mr. Migoux nevertheless welcomed four areas of work that fit French priorities that were mentioned in the conclusions. First, the development of a “European Security Strategy and foreign policy”, which will have to be synthetic and operational, and focused on security issues. Second, a call to increase defence budgets in the EU
which is absolutely fundamental to enable us to consolidate the strategic autonomy of the EU and to better share costs and defence responsibilities. Third, the improvement of EU capacity building for training forces in third-states (the "Train and Equip" initiative, renamed CBSD). Finally, the implementation of the Preparatory Action on research related to CSDP, which is maybe the most promising and innovative initiative in the mid-term to strengthen the EDTIB.

He explained that this less than satisfactory situation was due to the conjunction of several factors. First, in June defence issues were in a way pushed out by subjects under heavy political and media pressure (especially migration and Greece). Second, the absence of new subjects related to the CSDP: the European Council was actually more a stocktaking event than a moment for innovative proposals from the Member States who argued for further effective implementation of mandates given by the European Council in December 2013. Third, the fact that, following the Russian–Ukrainian crisis, there was a renewal of interest in Europe for defence issues but which was at this stage reflected almost exclusively around collective defence matters under NATO, which does not really benefit CSDP. Finally, there is a clear perception that the CSDP is progressing at its own, somewhat slow, pace and therefore there is a kind of fatigue of EU Member States faced with institutional deadlines “imposed” that do not necessarily match the timing of ongoing work.

Mr. Migoux concluded by saying that the priority for now was to implement the orientations defined by the 18 May 2015 FAC, including the key initiatives that are “Train and Equip”, the Preparatory Action on research in the area of CSDP (which should not be seen as an excuse to decrease national spending on defence R&T), and the pursuit of work on common capability programmes. He emphasised again that what was mostly needed was higher spending on defence.

Mr. Graham Muir (European Defence Agency) stated that while we are living through a maelstrom on European defence the June Council was nonetheless a milestone. Mr. Muir made clear that while some member states may be frustrated with the conclusions, one should recognise that even though the Eurozone crisis and migration dominated the debate the Heads of State and Government actually spent more time discussing defence in June than they did in December 2013. Mr. Muir believes that whatever comes out of the process of revising the European Security Strategy it is clear that the EU cannot be a global player without military capabilities, and this cannot be achieved without a strong EDTIB. Europe’s strategic autonomy is important, stated Mr. Muir, and while this is not designed to create a “fortress Europe” on defence, it is clear that the EU Member States have to invest more in R&T and R&D. On defence each Member State needs to put their money where their mouth is, Europe must avoid national retrenchment on defence and they should see the European Defence Agency (EDA) as a tool for defence cooperation.
On defence each member state needs to put their money where their mouth is

The Preparatory Action is a game-changer, Mr. Muir remarked, but it must not lead to further reductions in R&I spending at the national level. Mr. Muir pointed out that the EDA is thinking creatively about how to incentivise closer defence cooperation. The Agency pushed for and was granted a VAT exemption on Agency-run projects, but making the case for financial incentives through the EU budget is more challenging. The EDA is even experimenting with the idea of setting up a defence fund – although not from the EU budget – that could be used to support European defence, stated Mr. Muir. The fact that the June conclusions call for ‘greater and more systematic European defence cooperation to deliver key capabilities, including through EU funds’ is highly significant, surmised Mr. Muir. On this last point, Mr. Muir concluded that the EU is entering unchartered waters even if more needs to be achieved on joint capability programmes.

Roundtable II: “Think Tank Views”

Responding to the claim that the CSDP is “in hibernation”, Brig. Gen. Jo Coelmont (Egmont Institute) stated that with China regaining its historical role, the delayed ramifications of the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the collapse of the Soviet Union European defence will have to meet the challenges of rising powers, disorder in the Middle East and threats in Eastern Europe. Brig. Gen. Coelmont acknowledged that there is some degree of “shared and pooled” frustration with the CSDP, hence also a strong appetite to re-engineer the Policy. This is why the June Council was important, he explained, as it set in motion a revision of the European Security Strategy that will demand a greater focus on the CSDP. Let us not forget, Brig. Gen. Coelmont remarked, that the United States is focusing on China, the Middle East and Russia – and in that order too! – and Washington has made it clear that it will not always be there for Europe. The revision of the ESS is therefore crucial and the top-down leadership of the Member States in defence policy is becoming clearer, Brig. Gen. Coelmont stated. A new strategy will give the EU fresh direction and only then can the EU think about the military capabilities it needs as part of a broader
comprehensive approach to security. The idea of a White Book on defence could complement the revised strategy, but only if the Member States have co-ownership of the process. First and foremost, argued Brig. Gen. Coelmont, Europe needs to think about the revision process and ask questions about bridging together the individual national strategic defence plans in each European country. He concluded by saying that the revised ESS should not be too generic when stating its ambitions and give clear incentives for closer defence cooperation in Europe, which in turn could very well lead Member States to forge a new kind of permanent structured cooperation, within the framework of the EDA and in cooperation with the Commission.

Five years ago, when he had once remarked that defence budgets in Europe would start to increase, people thought I was crazy said Prof. Alexander Mattelaer (Institute for European Studies-VUB). Yet that is indeed what is happening now in a number of European states, he continued. This is a result of the overwhelming security challenges Europe faces on its borders with a revanchist Russia in the East, the burgeoning demographic problems in the South – marked by the rise of “angry 18-year old males” – and questionable European cohesion in the face of the Eurozone crisis. All of these problems intersect and, when taken with the United States’ pivot to the Asia-Pacific, they should be enough of a warning to European politicians that greater political and financial investment in security and defence is needed, Prof. Mattelaer explained.

For Prof. Mattelaer there are a number ways of dealing with these security problems and of giving Europe a greater sense of strategic prioritisation. The most pressing task is to deal with the problem of cohesion in Europe and this means not just dealing with the Greek debt crisis but with Eurozone governance more generally. It we get European cohesion right, explained Prof. Mattelaer, it will be easier to manage the crises in the South and the East. Europe faces a problem of time and space – the more time Europe spends on the Eurozone crisis the more the threats in the South and East will encroach upon the continent. Prof. Mattelaer also called on Europe to aim for a full spectrum tool kit with more emphasis on heavy land capabilities, ISTAR assets and strike capabilities. To conclude, Prof. Mattelaer said that the “guns vs butter” dichotomy is a false one not just because Europeans can and do spend on defence but because without the sovereign state there can be no welfare state.

Mr. Vivien Pertusot (IFRI Bruxelles) turned to the issue of regional or “minilateral” defence groupings in Europe, and he remarked how there is a noticeable and understandable rise in the number of smaller defence clusters – e.g. the Franco-British cooperation, German-Dutch cooperation, the Weimar Triangle, NORDEFCO, etc. Mr. Pertusot explained that minilateralformations are increasingly popular because a number of countries recognise that they cannot go it alone on defence anymore, but that to opt for an overall EU-level approach is not necessarily the way forward.
Indeed, Mr. Pertusot argued that perceptions really matter, and a number of EU initiatives on defence are often perceived as far too integrationist by some Member States. This, he continued, is the reason why a number of the larger Member States are still reluctant to feed projects through EU institutions such as the European Defence Agency.

Mr. Pertusot argued that defence cooperation is an extremely sensitive area of politics, and militaries tend to be conservative about what can be achieved – some do not necessarily see EU and/or NATO cooperation as being as effective as it could be. The other issue, he continued, is that we must recognise that some countries simply feel more comfortable operating in a NATO context rather than at the EU-level. Mr. Pertusot acknowledged that changing the mentality of Member States is key to unlocking more European defence cooperation – even at the minilateral level –, but the planned revision of the European Security Strategy will not overcome the hesitancy felt towards cooperation. To conclude, Mr. Pertusot argued that the EU and NATO could help with information sharing between minilateral defence arrangements, and he also remarked that while the Preparatory Action on defence R&D is interesting more will need to be done to find willing and capable industrial partners to make the initiative work, especially in countries whose defence industrial base is not robust.

Mr. Dick Zandee (Clingendael Institute) took the floor by saying that while a revised European Security Strategy will give the EU direction, it will find it hard to deal with the problem of diverging security interests between the Member States. Security perceptions in the Mediterranean and the Baltics/Poland are different, he explained, and this has an inevitable impact on military capability development. Mr. Zandee only partly agreed with the thesis that there is little difference between the military capabilities needed for threats in the East and the South. In both areas rapidly deployable capabilities – i.e. NATO’s Very High Readiness Joint Task Force and the EU Battlegroups – will be needed. But for the East, traditional hard capabilities might still be required, making use of prepositioned heavy weapons, while in the South more robustness will have to be based on expeditionary forces.

Mr. Zandee made clear that defence cooperation works best when close neighbours rather than distant friends work together. In other words, in reality trust, commonality in security interests and a shared defence culture serve as genuine drivers for deeper defence cooperation. Accordingly, Mr. Zandee stated that the EU and NATO are wasting valuable time on collective defence planning when in fact smaller groups that share similar security interests are more effective. This is not to say that these regional clusters should not be part of an overall NATO and EU effort, and the overall direction afforded by these organisations is crucial, remarked Mr. Zandee. Institutions such as the European Defence Agency can play a vital role, especially when it comes to stocktaking national priorities on defence but also for standardisation.
and interoperability of capabilities required by all Member States like command and control, intelligence, reconnaissance and medical.

Concluding Remarks

Mr. Jorge Domecq (Chief Executive, European Defence Agency) concluded the roundtable discussions with some thoughts on the future. Mr. Domecq stressed the importance of the new perspectives think tanks can bring to the debates on European defence. He went on to underline that, even though one could have wished for more from the Council, the conclusions contained positive elements. The fact that the European Council would continue to meet to discuss defence on a regular basis was positive, stated Mr. Domecq. Furthermore, by supporting the mobilisation of EU funds for defence cooperation and the Preparatory Action for CSDP-related research, the European Council was making a clear commitment to European defence. The Preparatory Action had the potential to be a game changer for Europe’s defence sector. Europe needed to invest more and better in defence R&D because what was at stake is Europe’s long-term strategic autonomy. In all the upcoming work supporting the generation of capabilities, be it regarding the four key priorities (RPAS, Governmental Satellite Communication, Cyber and Air-to-Air refueling) or potentially new avenues of cooperation, Member States would need to remain the driving force, added Mr. Domecq.

Nevertheless, Mr. Domecq stated that a number of key challenges confront the EU: first, there is a need to increase defence spending in Europe; second, the EU needs to do more to enhance its posture on hybrid warfare; and finally, the EU Member States need to enhance their research investments would be crucial to fostering industrial innovation and to ensuring a globally competitive industrial base.
and innovation efforts.

The EDA Chief Executive referred in this context to the importance for Europe to master certain key enabling technologies which serve both the civilian and the defence sectors. Intensifying strategic investments would be crucial to fostering industrial innovation and to ensuring a globally competitive industrial base. Drawing on the CSDP: National Perspectives essay collection, Mr. Domecq concluded by saying that it was important to keep the “lynchpins” of European defence interested in the CSDP, to encourage the “believers” to take leadership, including by making use of the EDA’s à la carte approach, to convince the “undecided” that the EDA is complementary to NATO and benefits a single set of forces and to make the “outsiders” feel a part of CSDP-related decisions.
The Common Security and Defence Policy: National Perspectives

Given the Ukraine crisis, Russia’s resurgence and the burning crises in the South there has never been a better time to discuss European defence, but how do the European Union’s member states view the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)?

In the spirit of constructively finding an answer to this question, from November 2014 to March 2015 European Geostrategy ran a series of essays on its website which saw key experts share their own (national) views on the state of the CSDP. Jointly produced by the Institute for European Studies, European Geostrategy and the Egmont – Royal Institute for International Relations, this booklet collates all of the essays hosted on European Geostrategy. With a view to the June 2015 European Council on defence, each of the thirty-four essays focuses on the continued relevance of the CSDP in a world in flux.

Each essay is broadly structured so as to answer a number of central questions. Why, if at all, is the CSDP still important to the member states? How does CSDP help member states meet their national interests? What more could the member states do to further strength civil/military capability development within the CSDP? What mechanisms (e.g. permanent structured cooperation) could work to enable closer cooperation through CSDP? What do the member states think should become of the CSDP? Should it be a military alliance on a par with NATO or should it focus exclusively on civilian missions? What do the member states see as the main drivers and obstacles behind a more effective CSDP?

After a foreword by the former Executive Secretary-General of the European External Action Service, Ambassador Pierre Vimont, the reader of this collection can enjoy essays by former military personnel, policy-makers, academics and, of course, think tankers. The booklet is structured in five parts. Indeed, after looking at the “Lynchpins” of, the “Believers” in, the “Undecided” on and the “Outsiders” of the Common Security and Defence Policy the booklet moves onto five essays that look at the “Future of the CSDP”. The collection of essays was edited by Daniel Fiott, Researcher at the Institute for European Studies, and the collection was kindly published by the Egmont – Royal Institute for International Relations.

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DF: What priorities have you set yourself for your time as the European Defence Agency’s Chief Executive? Have there been any early success stories?

JD: I have joined the Agency at a crucial time for European defence. Defence expenditure in the European Union (EU) continues to decrease. Since 2006, it has dropped by more than €20 billion. But, on the other hand, the security and defence environment is evolving at a worrying speed. Operational commitments are legion, and increasingly complex threats seem to be emerging. The potential for doing more through cooperation is enormous. But cooperation is unfortunately not second nature. It needs to be incentivised.

The first five months of my tenure have largely been influenced by preparations ahead of the European Council discussions on defence at end of June. Although the discussion was short, since Heads of State and Government were occupied with other pressing questions, they have made clear that we need to continue the work on the four capability programmes as well as the Preparatory Action on CSDP-related research. The Council Conclusions also recognise the need to foster defence cooperation, including through EU funds.
If you want, I see especially the latter indication as an early success story in my time as EDA Chief Executive. European funding at the service of defence cooperation, R&T activities and our industrial defence sector is certainly not just my personal success but a joint one with all interested partners in enhancing European defence. However, all involved actors should continue to support this course of action which has the potential to provide European capability development with the necessary resources and of course the European defence industry with a fresh boost.

DF: Since you took office you have made a number of trips to visit various European ministers of defence. What is the general feeling in the capitals? Is there an appetite for closer cooperation on defence?

JD: Ministers of Defence were very supportive of the Agency and of defence cooperation in general. My main aim during the visits was to encourage Member States to make better use of the Agency and to see it as an enabler. It has been said many times before: defence cooperation is not a goal per se, it is the road to more efficient spending, increased interoperability and finally better preparedness against new and existing threats. All in all, it is about ensuring that Europe remains a relevant security provider at a regional and global level.

DF: The European Council conclusions on the CSDP from 18 May 2015 spoke about the potential support the European Investment Bank could provide in closer coordination between the Member States. Do you think the time is ripe for this sort of 'out of the box' thinking on the use of existing EU mechanisms, such as the EIB, for defence policy?

JD: Certainly it is time to think out of the box. If you look at the overall reductions in defence budgets, especially in terms of research and technology and think of the long-term effects of low investment, everyone will agree that we need to find new ways of financing. As I said before, this was also confirmed by the Heads of State and Government in late June. President Tusk stated after the meeting that EU funds should be mobilised to help strengthen Europe’s defence industry, including research and technology. We have already initiated contacts with the European Investment Bank to investigate potential financial support to the defence industrial sector through cooperative programmes of a dual-use nature.

DF: Last year the United States announced that it would initiate a new ‘Defense Innovation Initiative’ (also known as the ‘third offset strategy’), with the Department of Defense seeking to invest in high-end technologies such as unmanned systems, 3D printing and robotics. How should Europe view this initiative? Should European countries be ready to invest more in defence R&T as a consequence?

JD: Independently of the latest US initiative you refer to, there is a genuine need for Europe to invest more and better in defence R&T in support of cutting-edge capabilities. What is at stake is Europe’s ability to ensure its strategic autonomy and freedom of action in the long term. This includes investment in potential break-through technologies which will at the same time ensure the competitiveness of our defence industry.

As regards the transatlantic link more specifically, I stay fully committed to what has been highlighted by successive European Councils and NATO summits: Europe needs to take its fair share of the burden and
we have to ensure complementarity between the EU and NATO to the fullest extent in view of our single set of forces. At the same time the US needs to recognise the importance of ensuring that its modernisation programmes do not reduce its ability to remain interoperable with its European allies and partners with whom they have common values and interests.

As regards the Defense Innovation Initiative, we have to carefully monitor possible implications for Europe. I would like to emphasise that the US initiative is by far not limited to R&I investment but includes much broader aspects such as training, review of operational concepts and business practices. As regards the last point, I believe Europe should be particularly interested in better understanding the extent to which the defence sector would benefit from innovative technology spin-in from the commercial sector in the future in areas such as robotics, big data or others.

DF: Following the June 2015 European Council on defence, and the solid political support shown for the Preparatory Action on Defence R&I, how do you see Europe’s defence industrial policy evolving over the next few years? What is the significance of the Preparatory Action?

JD: The Preparatory Action for CSDP-related research has the potential to be a game changer for the European defence sector. The European Commission and the EDA work very closely together with Member States to shape this initiative. But very importantly, we are on a good track to launch the Preparatory Action in 2017. What matters is that, if successful, defence-oriented research can be included in the next EU budget (2021-2027) giving it a longer-term perspective. This would allow Member States to conduct research projects together, in areas of a European added value, that they would not be able to stem alone. Similarly, we would expect industry to work closer together across borders which would foster EU-wide collaboration and consolidate the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base.

The success of the Preparatory Action and the future Framework Programme on Research and Innovation related to defence should help achieve industrial stability in Europe, countering industrial exodus and loss of technological leadership.

In terms of industrial defence policy, we need not only to repeat but really to internalise that in the long term, Europe’s strategic autonomy, its power to act and its competitiveness largely depend on what is decided now. Luckily, this sense of urgency has finally been recognised at the highest political levels. Now it is our responsibility – Member States, EDA, the European Commission and the industry – to make the best out of it.

DF: Thank you for your time in answering these questions.

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Recommended Reading


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