

# DEBATING EUROPEAN DEFENCE AND SECURITY

At December's EU Council meeting, EU leaders will decide on the course of the EU's security and defence policy for the coming years. The summit will provide an opportunity to give new impetus to a policy area that is in need of attention in the light of changes to Europe's strategic environment at a time of dwindling defence budgets. Nevertheless, progress is likely to be modest, given the ongoing dominance of national prerogatives.



*Operation EUTM Somalia: Somali soldiers graduate from EU-run training in Uganda. J. Akena / Reuters.*

At the EU Council meeting due to be held between 19 and 20 December 2013, the leaders of EU states will discuss defence and security issues for the first time since 2008. Whereas recent EU summits focused on the financial crisis, this marks a welcome return of European security and defence policy to the table. While reaching consensus among 28 states will not be easy, it is high time that the EU's activities in this area came under the spotlight again. Since 2008, the war in Georgia, the transitions in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, the crisis in Mali, and the ongoing civil war in Syria have all heightened instability in Europe's neighbourhood. All this comes at a time when the US is signalling that it expects more of its European allies in the area of crisis management, even though fiscal austerity in European countries is

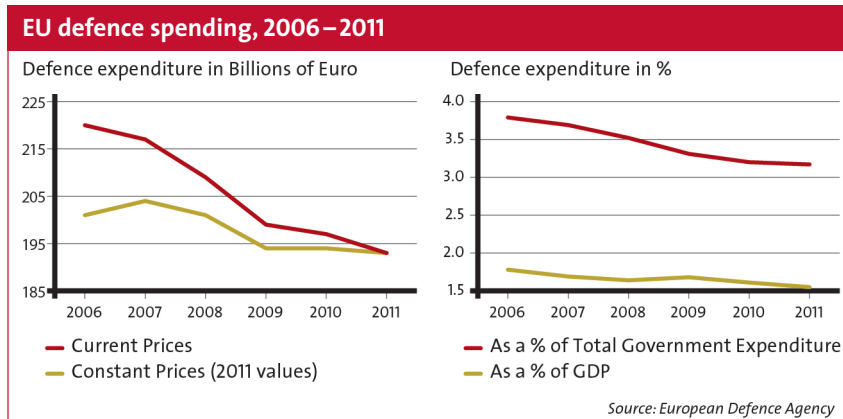
placing increased pressure on defence budgets.

The Council meeting offers an opportunity to impart new momentum to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP, formerly ESDP) at the highest level. At present, there is no long-term vision for the CSDP. Difficulties have been encountered in securing the commitments of member states for new missions and force generation for international engagements. The EU is also still struggling to develop the capabilities it needs, even though the UK, France, Germany, and Italy represent fairly large defence spenders globally. Increased instability on Europe's doorstep, the expected US preference to "lead from behind", and defence budgets cuts ought to create greater incentives for pooling re-

sources and improving the EU's capacity to act. The question will be whether those incentives are great enough to generate more convergence between the EU and the national interests of member states.

Discussions at December's Council meeting will be telling. Current circumstances suggest that the summit will not lead to grand declarations. Although France, Sweden, Spain, Italy, and Poland will attempt to infuse the CSDP with a fresh impetus, a number of other key states may be hamstrung. The UK is reluctant to discuss defence and security issues with the prospect of a referendum on EU membership in 2017 looming. Indeed, its potential exit from the EU could have serious implications for EU crisis management. Germany, too, may be in no position to make proposals, given that its new government may not even have been formed by the time of the Council meeting. Moreover, the Baltic and most Central and Eastern European member states tend to still focus attention on collective defence and NATO.

A number of states are likely to push for the development of a firmer strategic conceptual basis upon which the CSDP's role can be further defined. Communications issued by the High Representative (HR) for Foreign and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, and the European Commission indicate that EU heads of state and heads of government will also discuss how to increase the effectiveness of CSDP missions and develop the right capabilities to carry out a wide range of missions through



more systematic and long-term defence cooperation. Other agenda items will include ways of strengthening Europe’s defence industry through the development of a more integrated, sustainable, and competitive industrial and technological base; promoting synergies between civilian and military research; and improving the competitiveness of defence markets.

### Defining the CSDP’s role

The CSDP is often perceived as being hampered by the lack of a clear strategic vision that would help to define its role more concisely. The strategic framework for EU security and foreign policy is the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS), which was formulated against the backdrop of the 2003 War in Iraq and the presidency of George W. Bush. The ESS outlined threats (proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, regional conflicts, state failure, and organized crime) as well as geographic areas of strategic interest (the EU’s neighbourhood and South and East Asia). It did not elaborate in any detail how the CSDP is to meet these challenges posed by these threats. However, the 2003 EU Strategy against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction described effective multilateralism as the appropriate response to a particular threat.

A review of the 2008 “Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy – Providing Security in a Changing World” (ESS) updated the list of security threats to include additional challenges, such as cyber security, energy security, and climate change. It also indicated how the EU could better meet the challenges it faces, highlighting the need for greater coherence, better institutional coordination, and more strategic decisionmaking. The report also recognized, *inter alia*, the ongoing need to combine civilian and military expertise, from the conception of a

mission to planning and implementation. The need to increase interoperability of national contingents of civilian missions and to strengthen efforts to develop military capabilities was also highlighted.

Some member states argue that an EU Defence White Paper would provide an opportunity further to develop the strategic conceptual foundation for the CSDP. It could also form the basis with which to engage in longer-term planning for capabilities development. While further developing the EU strategy may be desirable, it may not be feasible. While France, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Sweden may favour further reflection on the EU’s strategic role, some key states such as the UK and Germany are reluctant to do so. The UK tends to balk at anything it views as political integration in the area of defence, and Germany is still fairly risk-averse and significantly constrained by parliament when it comes to military intervention. The Baltic countries and most Central and Eastern European member states may also take a more pragmatic approach to CSDP, given their continued emphasis on the importance of NATO and alliance with the US.

### Ensuring mission-effectiveness

While there is much debate about the strategic underpinning of the CSDP, it is at present largely conceived as a policy area enabling crisis management. The EU has carried out some 30 missions since 2003 in Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, Southeastern Europe, and South-east Asia. For the most part, these have been civilian missions, although military and civil-military operations have also been undertaken. This is no small achievement, considering that the CSDP was created in response to the EU’s incapacity to respond to the wars in the Bal-

kans in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, operational experience has revealed a number of weaknesses.

Decisionmaking and planning can be cumbersome due to the intergovernmental nature of the CSDP. Deciding which missions to undertake can involve time-consuming negotiations between member states. Once the decision has been made to carry out a mission, difficulties have also often been experienced in the planning phase. In order to overcome weaknesses related to planning and command coordination, some member states, such as France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Spain, have called for the creation of a permanent EU operational headquarters, and may propose this at the summit. The need to respond rapidly to crises, woefully lacking in the Libyan case, and the scarcity of military resources in Europe are seen as justifying the creation of a standing EU command and planning structure. However, this idea is opposed by some member states, notably the UK, which argue that the “Berlin Plus arrangements” that enable the use of NATO command structures, as well as the multilateralised national headquarters, such as those in Mont Valérien (France), Northwood (UK), Potsdam (Germany), Rome (Italy), and Larissa (Greece), make a permanent headquarters unnecessary. The activation of a temporary EU Operations Centre in Brussels in 2012 may add to the argument against a standing structure.

In addition, the EU has experienced difficulties in establishing the appropriate forces for a given mission. Force generation tends to take place late in the planning process, which means that missions may even be planned without knowing whether the necessary capabilities will be made available by member states. At present, contribution meetings are held as a means of enabling planning to go ahead. However, when the resources are ultimately not made available, missions may be compromised, which also has knock-on effects on the reputation of the

EU. This was the case, for instance, with EUFOR Chad/RCA, launched in 2008, in which France had to fill the capability gaps. In principle, the EU

Battlegroups that have been operational since 2007 should facilitate rapid reaction to crises. They have never been employed, though. This is largely due to inadequate cost-sharing between troop-contributing

**Most of the 30 EU missions have been civilian missions.**

states and lack of coordination between EU and national level decisionmaking, planning, and command structures. Undoubtedly, ways of improving their operational relevance and effectiveness will be discussed at the December summit.

Another question that is likely to be debated is how to improve the EU's ability to generate comprehensive approaches to missions. The initial range of missions set out in the so-called Petersberg Tasks in 1992 included military support for humanitarian interventions, peacekeeping, and peacemaking. Since then, this list has been expanded by the 2009 Lisbon Treaty to encompass joint disarmament, military advice and assistance tasks, conflict prevention, and post-conflict stabilization. The EU therefore needs to be able to respond across the whole range of missions, requiring coordination within and between EU institutions. While the comprehensive nature of EU engagement is often seen as an added value, coordination between EU bureaucracies is still lacking and barriers to inter-pillar cooperation have proved difficult to overcome. Ashton has also stressed the need to develop a holistic approach to rapid reaction.

**Developing the right capabilities**

In addition to institutional and procedural questions, the perennial issue of how to fill capability gaps will undoubtedly be up for discussion at the summit. While EU member states have come a long way with regard to developing common capabilities, in particular the creation of the EU Battle-groups, key common capability gaps exist in the areas of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, strategic airlift, air-to-air refuelling, and precision targeting. Within the context of declining defence budgets and uncoordinated spending cuts, the development of capabilities ought to imply greater pooling and sharing (P&S). P&S refers to projects and initiatives led by member states that aim at intensifying cooperation with respect to military capabilities. Pooling of capabilities involves the collective use of either national or collectively procured capabilities. Sharing occurs when several member states forgo some capabilities in the expectation, or on the basis of guarantees, that other countries will make them available when needed.

The EU's European Defence Agency (EDA) provides guidance to states that wish to

*In Chad, France had to fill the capability gaps.*

take forward P&S. Progress had been made in particular in the area of air-to-air refuelling. The EDA is also assisting EU member states in the development of an air tanker project. Ten EU member states have signalled their intention to work together to develop new tankers by 2020. Eighteen nations now take part in an EDA network to facilitate maritime surveillance through information exchanges. The agency is also helping governments harmonize their safety standards for munitions. However, member states have so far not committed themselves to Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) P&S within the EDA framework, even though it is a key capability gap.

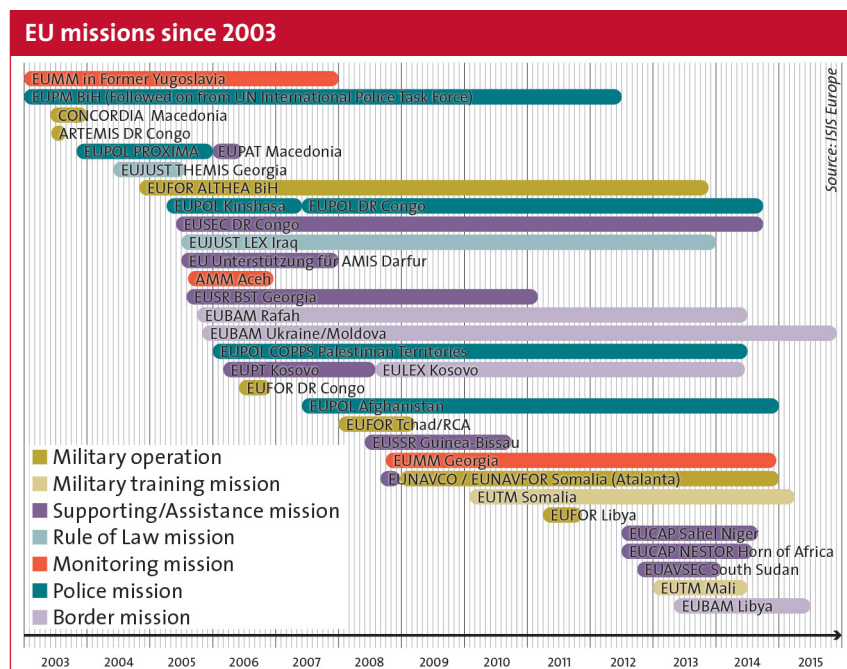
While P&S has do far taken place on an ad-hoc basis, an EDA Code of Conduct on P&S was endorsed in 2012 by defence ministers that aimed at facilitating more systematic consideration of cooperation opportunities in national defence planning and thereby mainstreaming P&S. It is to be implemented on a voluntary basis by individual defence ministries. It also reflects the need for more coherence between the various P&S initiatives. The first annual report on the implementation of the Code of Conduct will be released towards the end of 2013. This could provide a basis for assessing how national planning and capabilities correspond to CSDP needs. As a means of facilitating greater compatibility between national defence planning and EU capability needs, the HR's document "Preparing the December

2013 European Council on Security and Defence" puts forward the idea of a defence road map to encourage more systematic and long-term defence cooperation. It also suggests that protecting projects and initiatives from budget cuts could provide an incentive for defence cooperation.

**Defence industrial issues**

Defence industrial issues will also be on the agenda. There is a sense that if Europe is to retain the industrial capability with which to meet current and future military needs in support of the CSDP, concerted and coordinated action needs to be taken at the European level, given that developing and maintaining such a capability is beyond the capacities of individual member states. The Commission is attempting to push for more to be done to promote European cooperation. A key document that will most likely underpin discussions in December is the European Commission's document "Towards a more competitive and efficient European defence and security sector" of 24 July 2013. The Commission's communication sets out an Action Plan aimed at improving the efficiency and competitiveness of the European security and defence sector. It suggests measures that would strengthen the internal market for defence, make the defence industry more competitive, and encourage synergies between civil and military research.

The Commission has been seeking to reduce inefficiencies in European defence markets based on two directives: One is



Source: IJIS Europe

### Key documents

A Secure Europe in a Better World – European Security Strategy [↗](#)

EU Strategy against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction [↗](#)

Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy – Providing Security in a Changing World [↗](#)

Code of Conduct on Pooling and Sharing [↗](#)

Preparing the December 2013 European Council on Security and Defence Interim Report by the High Representative [↗](#)

A New Deal for European Defence - Towards a More Competitive and Efficient Defence and Security Sector [↗](#)

designed to relax export controls for military equipment and the other to make it easier for governments to use competitive tendering for their purchases of defence equipment. The idea that the Commission may have a greater role in the defence sector has, however, already generated resistance. The UK has said that it would oppose any efforts to enforce new rules on Europe's defence industries. Governments still tend to prefer to rely on purchases from national suppliers that are perceived as more stable providers. There is also nervousness about sharing sensitive details about their military technology. The failure due to political differences of France, Germany, and the UK to agree to the merger of the British multinational defence, security, and aerospace company BAE Systems and the Franco-German aerospace and defence corporation EADS in 2012 is also indicative of continued sensitivities surrounding the consolidation of the European defence industry due to subsequent job losses.

### Potential future avenues

Given that it seems unrealistic to expect the leaders of EU states to commit to a new strategic concept and elaboration of precise guidance to the CSDP, the Council meeting's success may be measured against the ability to agree on concrete measures to improve rapid deployment, comprehensive responses to crises, and the further development of key EU capabilities. In particular, there is still a dire need to improve the EU's ability to respond rapidly to crises. In the likely absence of an agreement on a permanent EU operation headquarters, commitments to better cost-sharing to support rapid reaction to crises as well as the creation of rapid reaction assessment teams would be welcome. An agreement on increasing the European External Action Service's

capacity to coordinate between CSDP and European Commission activities linked to crisis management tasks would constitute a significant step forward. In relation to capabilities, several measures aimed at generating a more coordinated approach to defence planning among member states, promoting the development of key capabilities, and reducing the impact of defence budget cuts may be decided on. In particular, a defence road map, greater commitment to mainstreaming of P&S, as well as financial protection for joint projects to develop key capabilities, such as

Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, could emerge from the December summit.

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