



Military Capabilities: From Pooling & Sharing to a Permanent and Structured Approach

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In 2013 the European Council for the first time since long will deal with European defence. An excellent opportunity: to move key Pooling & Sharing projects to the implementation stage in the short term, and to launch a permanent and structured approach to the development of European military capabilities for the long term.

In this time of crisis the European Council has emerged as the place in the European construction where one can hope to get things done, through direct talks at the highest political level. For the first time since long the Heads of State and Government will now also address European defence, at the end of 2013:

“The European Council should also look at defence, in particular the development of European military capabilities. A changing strategic environment, constraints on defence budgets and the Lisbon Treaty's explicit call for advances in the Common Security and Defence Policy, all point to the need for a longer-term and more systematic cooperation in this area. An in-depth discussion could take place in the second half of 2013. It should take into account links to industrial policy, research & innovation and the internal market.”

This is good news. The problems of Europe's military are known, the solutions are known. More meetings of officials and experts will not bring much progress. The only way to now get *results* is to make the process more political and top-down. An opportunity not to be wasted therefore: now is the time to design a roadmap leading up to December 2013.

MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

First of all the December 2013 deadline should be put to use to maintain the momentum in Pooling & Sharing.

In December 2011, the process led to the identification by the Council of 11 “specific concrete” projects, including on air-to-air refuelling, smart munitions, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance including space situational awareness, and military satellite communications. These would go a long way to address some of the key shortfalls qua strategic enablers – if they are implemented. While there has been some progress since, notably on air-to-air refuelling, the fundamental challenge remains to recruit a critical mass of Member States for each of these projects to really take off and generate *significant* additional capability. December 2013 should be announced as the key deadline.

France and the UK, the leading military actors in Europe, have a direct interest in convincing the other Member States to invest in collective enablers. Paris and London have the weight to initiate projects to create strategic enablers, the lack of which they have just felt again in Libya. But to make projects economically and financially viable, they need contributions from the other capitals. Vice versa, if the other capitals want to remain militarily relevant and retain the capacity to deploy their forces, they need these enablers as much as Paris and London. Of course, when Member States are cutting national defence budgets, asking them to simultaneously invest in a multinational capability is not an easy sell. The role of the European Defence Agency (EDA) can be to point out, from its European perspective, where Member States can safely disinvest nationally in favour of these multinational projects.

One avenue that deserves more exploration is cooperation with the Commission. Many enabling capabilities are of a dual-use nature. Pooling and sharing not just between Member States but with the Commission as well might greatly enhance the financial feasibility of some of the projects.

CHANGING THE MIND-SET

In order to keep Pooling & Sharing going, short-term progress on the 11 projects is essential. Member States will only be convinced though if they subscribe to a long-term framework for European defence, of which the current projects are but one (important) step. For these projects do not address all of the gaps qua strategic enablers. And there is more to European defence than strategic enablers. The challenge also remains to create more deployable manoeuvre units (and thus to get real value for money from the defence budget), and to update or replace platforms (without increasing the defence budget). The December 2013 European Council should also be used therefore to lay the groundwork for a

systematic long-term approach to Pooling & Sharing.

The aim is strategic-level coordination, of national defence planning as a whole, to complement the existing tactical-level, project-by-project coordination. That can only happen in a top-down manner. Not in the sense that Brussels dictates the Member States what to do, but in the sense that Heads of State and Government collectively decide on a political process. A process of which they maintain ownership and supervision, which is essential for the sustained involvement of the Heads of State and Government and for swift implementation by each national defence establishment. A process also which is not only to safeguard sovereignty but even to restore it where at the individual national level it has been lost. Those who have the authority to kick off such a process (with an agreement on principles and short but clear overall guidelines) are the Heads of State and Government.

A permanent and structured dialogue on national defence planning as such, under the aegis of the European Council, will create transparency, trust and confidence. And when Member States are certain of each other's intentions, they can confidently decide:

- To focus their national defence effort on a reduced range of fully employable capabilities;
- To scrap redundant capabilities;
- To use the full potential for Pooling & Sharing that will rapidly emerge from their dialogue;
- In order to create budgetary space to invest in the major new collective projects to acquire strategic enablers.

This dialogue can be supported by a formal group within the EDA structures. The key is to involve high-level representatives (the actual decision-makers) from Member States, be it the Defence Policy Director, the National

Armaments Director, the General Procurement Officer or equivalent: those who effectively steer national capability decisions. Ideally the dialogue includes all Member States, but it can certainly start with a group of the able and willing – willing to change their mind-set.

LEADING THE WAY TO 2013

Who can launch this permanent and structured framework? As it is to be a dialogue between Member States, Member States have to initiate it. The initiative should not come from the Franco-British, Weimar, Nordic, Visegrad or Benelux group. The aim is not only to deepen Pooling & Sharing within established clusters like these, but also to generate an overview at the level above individual clusters, at which those projects can be launched that surpass their capacity. A group of Member States cutting across these clusters would be optimal therefore.

Such a group could announce its commitment to launch a permanent and structured dialogue between its members, which can be formalized by the European Council. At any one moment it should be open to any other Member State willing to subscribe to its principles.

Such a group could notably propose the following:

(1) Member States should systematically engage in a dialogue about national defence planning, in order to continuously update each other about plans and intentions so that all would have the complete picture (whereas now in reality not all information is being shared, in spite of commitments to that end, e.g. in the context of the Capability Development Plan). When at the national level a formal white book or similar is being drafted, fellow Member States and the EDA can be consulted all along the process.

(2) Furthermore, Member States should

systematically submit national defence planning and white books to the EDA for an informal assessment in the light of Pooling & Sharing opportunities and the focus on commonly identified shortfalls.

(3) They should convene at the earliest possible moment to consider capability intentions post-2025. The immediate challenge today is to coordinate *national* cuts in existing capabilities and in future capabilities that are already under contract. The budgetary margin of manoeuvre is very limited. But now is the time to start discussing the capabilities that *collectively* we want to have in 10 to 15 years and beyond, in order to generate those in a collective fashion from the very start.

(4) Member States could commit to spend a fix percentage of annual defence investment via the EDA, in function notably of these long-term capability intentions. The resulting funds could be jointly administered by the group.

(5) In view of the EU's comprehensive approach and the links between internal and external security, a systematic dialogue with the Commission is essential, notably about dual-use capabilities. The EDA and the High Representative, its Head, are well placed to ensure such coordination. Pooling & Sharing with the Commission should be part of the new mind-set.

(6) Ideally, Member States would ground their reflection on the long-term capability mix in a broader strategic reflection about Europe's level of ambition as a security provider. For which regions and types of crises will Europeans assume responsibility as a matter of priority? Which types and quantity of capabilities do we want to have to that end? At the very least, we should think through the concrete and immediate capability implications of the American

“pivot” to the Asia-Pacific. Which contingencies for which until now we counted on American support are we henceforth expected to deal with ourselves? In our increasingly volatile neighbourhood this may happen sooner than expected.

The EDA itself can greatly contribute to overall transparency by publishing a publicly available yearbook on European capabilities. Rather than a collection of figures submitted by Member States (which as the NATO experience shows capitals do not necessarily believe themselves), the yearbook would be written by the EDA, focusing on commonly identified shortfalls, on employable capabilities, on potential solutions and projects, and on good examples of Pooling & Sharing.

CONCLUSION

The planned European Council meeting on defence should serve both as a deadline to stimulate concrete progress on specific projects in the short term, which is necessary to keep the dynamic going, and as a moment to chart the strategic course for the future.

On the one hand, the European Council should take stock of implementation of the 11 projects prioritized in December 2011. On the other hand, it could formally launch a permanent and structured approach for European defence in the long term, prepared by and under the clear ownership of Member States. Launching the framework could go hand in hand with a tasking, e.g. to prioritize and translate into project proposals capability

intentions post-2025, especially with regard to strategic enablers.

Another tasking, to a group of Member States or to a panel of personalities, could be to draft strategic guidelines and priorities for Europe’s level of ambition. Capability development should not take place in a strategic void, but should be firmly anchored in a collective vision on what Europeans want to achieve as security providers. Pooling & Sharing also applies to strategy.

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