



## The Summit of Our Ambition? European Defence between Brussels and Wales

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When they meet at NATO's Wales Summit in Newport on 4-5 September, the European Heads of State and Government should not see this as the first chapter of a new book, but as the next chapter of an existing one. The previous chapter was their meeting in Brussels last December for the European Council. The title of the book is European defence.

The European Council made important decisions on defence at its December 2013 meeting and will address defence again in June 2015. The deadline for many of the taskings it entrusted to the European Defence Agency (EDA) and the Commission falls at the end of 2014, hence the state of play ought to have advanced considerably by the time of the NATO Summit. For the European Heads of State and Government therefore, NATO's Wales Summit is not so much a story in its own right as another episode in the overall story of European defence. It will be a platform to address the implications of their December 2013 decisions for the Alliance as a whole. In other words, it will be an

opportunity to go beyond the organizational divide and to assess "the state of defence in Europe". Thus is just as the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, envisaged it (in his speech at the 2013 annual conference of the EDA). And just as he spoke at the previous summit, in Chicago, he should be the EU voice in Newport.

The recent priorities and achievements (or, in certain areas, the lack thereof) of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and NATO demonstrate in fact that only the combination of the CSDP and NATO can constitute a comprehensive European defence. Neither NATO nor the CSDP alone have been able to generate all the structures, functions and capabilities that a credible European full-spectrum force requires. Now, however, true complementarity is emerging. Increasingly therefore, the CSDP and the European pillar of the Alliance have to be regarded as a single capacity.

### EUROPEAN CAPABILITIES FOR EUROPE'S FORCES

More than two years after the EU launched Pooling & Sharing and NATO its Smart

Defence initiative, progress has finally been registered. The European Council was able to welcome multinational programmes that should produce additional European capability in key enabling areas: drones, air-to-air refuelling, satellite communication and cyber. In contrast, Smart Defence has resulted in various useful initiatives mostly aimed at improving the efficiency of existing capabilities and training, but not in any major new capability project.

That ought not to have come as a surprise, for NATO was always about common defence planning and never really about common capability development. The NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) predominantly sets targets for the individual nations, which traditionally were met (or at least planned for) through national efforts. Occasionally, common capability projects took off because they (also) filled a US need and therefore the US was willing to pay for much of the attached research and development bill. Then Washington could put pressure on the European Allies to contribute their share through procurement (the F16 programme was a good example) and sometimes even a pooled capability (the C17-equipped Strategic Airlift Capability, for example). Even so, the Europeans usually drag their feet, as the Missile Defence (MD) and Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) programmes show. The continued decline of defence budgets in most European countries has not helped, of course. Today the problem is clearly a European one: the lack of strategic enablers for expeditionary operations. Hence the US is not willing to pay for the solution, and nor should it.

The European Allies have to sit together, set priorities and act. Unfortunately, such a European caucus is exactly what the US has always sought to prevent in NATO. No wonder then that it has always proved more convenient (easier would be an overstatement) to find the beginning of a solution to a

European capability problem in a European context. In 1968 already, twelve European Allies created the Eurogroup for that purpose, followed in 1976 by the thirteen-member Independent European Programme Group (IEPG). After the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, both transferred their functions to the Western European Armaments Group (WEAG) under the aegis of the Western European Union (WEU). Today the CSDP is the only European forum able to address European strategic shortfalls.

But whether NATO or the EU is chosen as the institutional venue is not important, because these are the same European countries anyway. In view of the less than brilliant history of the Eurogroup, IEPG and WEAG, what counts is that today the actions of the Europeans, not just their words, demonstrate their conviction that only common capability development can solve Europe's shortfalls in the area of enablers.

Through the CSDP, European countries ought to go full-out now for the implementation of the four multinational programmes that have been announced (not forgetting that the December 2011 Foreign Affairs Council prioritized eight more areas). That means more countries have to contribute more fully. Capitals should be aware that it is entirely up to them whether Van Rompuy will be able to announce real progress in implementing the December decisions by the time of the Wales Summit. The EDA has a vital supporting role to play, as has the European Commission, which the December 2013 European Council consecrated as a key player in European defence. European countries would do well to make creative use of any contribution the Commission can bring, for it is a powerhouse without equal in the CSDP or NATO.

NATO, for its part, can quietly shelve Smart Defence, which was only created after the EU launched Pooling & Sharing anyway. This was

hopefully the last instance of the beauty contest that led each organization to begrudge the other its moment in the spotlight. The new priority that the Alliance already announced is actually not new at all, but it is exactly right: the Connected Forces Initiative (CFI). Interoperability between European forces and between them and the other Allied forces requires an intense schedule of exercises and manoeuvres. That only the NATO command structure can provide. When troops are not in operations they train, but if the Alliance for public diplomacy reasons want to give this a name and a logo – CFI – why not? More questionable perhaps is the future of Allied Command Transformation (ACT). If the Europeans now do as they say, what role remains for ACT that justifies maintaining such a large structure across the Atlantic?

Here the first dimension of the emerging complementarity can be discerned. Common capability development is a European necessity best addressed through the CSDP. Exercises and manoeuvres for both Article 5 and non-Article 5 purposes are a NATO-wide necessity best addressed through the Alliance. In Newport, the Heads of State and Government can welcome the EU initiative on the former and endorse the CFI on the latter.

### **EUROPEAN DEFENCE PLANNING WITHIN THE NDPP**

Accepting that European strategic enablers can only be acquired collectively, the European Council stated the need for “increased transparency and information sharing in defence planning, allowing national planners and decision-makers to consider greater convergence of capability needs and timelines”. Furthermore, European countries should not only contribute to the big European programmes on enablers, but are also encouraged to continue pooling and sharing of capabilities within the smaller regional clusters, in order to maintain significant deployable capability in all forces. This is likely to lead to

many more permanently coordinated, or even integrated, multinational capabilities, such as European Air Transport Command or Admiral Benelux.

The latter example, the integration of the Belgian and Dutch navies, has gone so far that de facto these countries can no longer do national naval planning, for any decision has an impact on their cooperation, which neither can afford to end; in reality they can only plan together. In other words, the Framework Nation Concept proposed by Germany and now under discussion in NATO – in which a group of countries would de facto consider their combined capabilities in certain areas as one force and do common planning – is already happening. It is the logical outcome of ever closer cooperation. And it need not necessarily happen between one larger country with full spectrum forces and smaller countries which plug into those forces. It is equally possible between countries of similar size, as the Belgo-Dutch example proves. It is also, by the way, what Permanent Structured Cooperation as possible under the Lisbon Treaty would have led to had it been implemented.

Whatever constellation they choose, one thing is sure: European Allies will increasingly meet many of the targets set through the NDPP through cooperation among Europeans, including of course with non-NATO EU Member States. Such European cooperation is best coordinated in a European context.

Therefore the European Council’s tasking to the EDA, “to put forward an appropriate policy framework by the end of 2014, in full coherence with existing NATO planning processes”, is doubly important. On the one hand, systematic transparency about plans and intentions between individual and clusters of European nations must ensure that no opportunities for cooperation are missed, and that such cooperation addresses all capability

shortfalls without creating new redundancies. On the other hand, the collective plans and programmes that result from it can be taken into account by the NDPP, introducing a European level (including all EU Member States, whether they be NATO Allies or partners) between national defence planning and the ambition of the Alliance as a whole. The aim is not, obviously, to create an “EUDPP” parallel to the NDPP. Simply, all countries can systematically share all the data with the EDA that they compile for the NDPP anyway, plus their long-term plans and intentions, both national and in cooperation with other European countries.

While the EDA does not need to deliver on this tasking until the end of 2014, the Wales Summit could already endorse the principle of a “policy framework” elaborated through the CSDP and incorporated into the NDPP. Thus in planning as well complementarity could emerge, with NATO in charge of the Alliance and national levels of the NDPP, and the CSDP of the European level.

### **EUROPEAN STRATEGY FOR NATO AND THE CSDP**

Ideally, the introduction of a European level into the NDPP would result in an iterative process. The objective is not only for NATO to be able to integrate into the NDPP which part of the targets to be met collectively by Europeans, either through large-scale European programmes or through regional clusters, instead of by nations individually. In addition, Europeans should aim to shape the NDPP targets themselves, by identifying the level of ambition of the European pillar of NATO / the CSDP as a security provider.

This has become a necessity because as recent crises demonstrate, with the US focusing on Asia and the Pacific, military intervention in Europe’s broad neighbourhood (Libya, Mali), and even beyond (the Central African Republic), is increasingly likely to be initiated and the core of the force provided by Europeans. Rather than

the Alliance as a whole, more often European Allies and partners will act in such non-Article 5 contingencies. Therefore, Europeans have to decide what they want to be capable of without relying on the national assets of the non-European Allies. Europeans can initiate military action directly in a NATO or CSDP framework, but national action and ad hoc coalitions, with NATO and/or the CSDP possibly coming in at a later stage, are equally viable. Whichever option is chosen, the political and economic instruments which only the EU can provide will be indispensable to obtaining long-term peace and stability; the military instrument is but a catalyst. Therefore all European military interventions in whichever framework should coordinate as closely as possible with the EU. In many contingencies, such as the crisis in Ukraine, diplomacy rather than the military will be the instrument of choice. In such cases, the continued commitment to Article 5 provides Europeans with the confidence that any threat to their own territory is being deterred, thus creating freedom of action for their diplomatic and economic instruments – but NATO itself is not the channel for those.

Indeed, the level of ambition for Europe as a security provider must be set in function of which foreign policy objectives Europeans decide to pursue collectively through the external action of the EU (both via the European External Action Service and the Commission). The conclusion is obvious: it only makes sense to elaborate and adopt such a strategic framework at the EU level. This does not prejudice whether in a real-life crisis Europeans will act through NATO or the CSDP – or nationally – the circumstances and the politics of the crisis will determine which action is advisable and who is best placed to undertake it.

Actually, the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, already provided a large part of the strategic vision in her preparatory report for

the European Council. Europe needs strategic autonomy (read, the capacity to act without the US); which starts in its broad neighbourhood to the east and the south, including the Sahel and the Horn (to which one could add the Gulf); where it has to be capable of power projection; with partners if possible but alone if necessary; in order to protect its interests. The soon-to-be-adopted EU Maritime Security Strategy will contribute another part of the answer. The engagement in the Central African Republic could be seen as an indicator of a third tier of responsibility, after taking the lead in securing the neighbourhood and contributing to global maritime security: contributing to the collective security system of the UN, especially when the Responsibility to Protect is invoked.

Ashton's statement, which apparently elicited little or no negative comment from the Member States, would constitute the clearest political guidance yet on Europe's ambition as a security provider. On such a basis, European needs in the area of enablers could be quantified and an ideal capability mix could be elaborated. This would not only frame work on the currently identified priority projects, but could also be used to launch a reflection now about where Europeans collectively want to be in 20 to 30 years.

The NATO Summit could welcome an ambitious European statement in the sense of Ashton's report. That would be a strong political signal that Europe will assume responsibility, to the US, which can more confidently focus on Asia, but also to Europe's neighbourhood, which can trust European commitment to its future not to end where security problems begin. The complementarity is obvious: foreign policy strategy and a security strategy derived from it ought to be elaborated through the EU; the latter's translation into defence planning is a task for NATO and the CSDP jointly. Finally, through the guarantees enshrined in Article 5, NATO allows the Europeans to assume the responsibilities that they prioritize with confidence.

## A NATO COMMAND STRUCTURE FOR EUROPE

Together with Article 5, the NATO command structure remains the core of the Alliance and therefore the key to its continued relevance. NATO has an excellent service to provide: the command and control of military operations. It will ensure its legitimacy and funding by consolidating and even improving its excellent performance in that field.

In many scenarios when Europeans decide to take military action, they will need a NATO headquarters. Indeed, only the Europeans need NATO to conduct their military operations. Whether anybody will make use of the command structure depends on whether Europeans can forge a strategic consensus on their responsibilities as security providers. If they don't use it, nobody will. Europeans must, however, have the certainty that the command structure is available when they require it. Unfortunately, the latest operation for which a NATO headquarters was activated, the intervention in Libya in 2011, showed that this is not necessarily the case. Only under heavy pressure from the US did a reluctant Turkey give way and abandon its opposition to a NATO role in the crisis. This is a major concern, coming just as the US expects the European Allies and partners to take the lead in stabilizing their increasingly volatile neighbourhood.

Much more than any other partnership or potential membership therefore, Cyprus' recently announced bid to join the Partnership for Peace ought to be high on the agenda of the Wales Summit. In return for a normalization of Cyprus' relations with the Alliance, an arrangement could be concluded between Turkey and the EDA, following those with Norway and Switzerland. This would go a long way to overcome some of the political blockages that so often prevent the Alliance from tackling the real issues.

**CONCLUSION**

European defence: the story is not a cliff-hanger, but it's not pulp fiction either. Having set ambitious objectives, Europeans must prove that they can deliver. All the instruments are at hand, in the EDA, the Commission, and the capitals. NATO's Wales Summit will be an opportunity to put into action the implications for the Alliance of the decisions that the European Allies and partners / the EU Member States took at the European Council last December, and to take stock of progress while looking ahead to the next major deadline: the June 2015 European Council. The plot thickens.

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