



## TEPSA POLICY PAPER

### 'SECURITY AND DEFENCE – AN ISSUE FOR THE EUROPEAN CITIZEN?'

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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

During the last few years financial issues have tended to dominate in Europe. However, two new challenges – the recent Russian policy towards Ukraine and the upcoming European Parliament elections – have, each in its own way, made it clear that European citizens must address and engage in discussions over a wider field, prominent among which are discussions about security and defence. This task is neither easy nor without potential pitfalls but it is necessary in order to ascertain that the values that lay behind the forming of the European Union will prevail.

#### 2. THE DOMINANCE OF ECONOMIC ISSUES

In December 2013 the European Council met to debate the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and in particular defence issues. Such discussions had not been held since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the ambition was to take cooperation one step further. However, little was agreed on at the meeting and reports in the newspapers spoke mainly about disagreement among the member countries.<sup>2</sup> Still, few seemed worried about the outcome, which had been more or less expected.

This reaction stands in stark contrast to the results of meetings related to financial issues, for which agreements are considered crucial, and lack of results invariably leads to continued efforts and concerns about the EU's future. One explanation is that during the last few years member states and citizens have become used to a lack of progress within the field of security and defence. Another explanation, backed by Eurobarometer results, is that these fields have become less crucial in the minds of Europeans. Instead, as the Eurobarometer survey of late 2013 reports, the economic situation, unemployment and the state of member states' public finances are at the top of the list of citizens' concerns for Europe. At the bottom of the list are worries about the

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<sup>2</sup> European Council Conclusions, European Council 19/20 December 2013. EUCO 217/13 CO EUR 15 CONCL 8

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&t=PDF&gc=true&sc=false&f=ST%20217%202013%20INIT&r=http%3A%2F%2Fregister.consilium.europa.eu%2Fpd%2Fen%2F13%2Fst00%2Fst00217.en13.pdf>

environment, energy supply, climate change, terrorism, the EU's influence in the world, and crime, which are seen as crucial by less than 10 per cent of those interviewed.<sup>3</sup>

These results are not surprising and reflect the huge effect that the financial crisis has had on the lives of many millions of Europeans. In contrast, increased checks at airports have become a routine and reports on climate change no longer get the same attention as they did a few years ago. Decisions related to security and defence are dealt with by the political decision-makers without much engagement by people in general, especially when no crisis is looming. This also means that disagreement among countries has not been seen as disturbing – it simply means that the results of meetings are meager but they are not perceived as affecting people in general.

### 3. TWO IMMINENT CHALLENGES

A short time ago, however, Russian military forces entered Crimea, and since then Europe has been in a serious crisis. This breach of international law has implications on a global scale and most seriously for Europe. The situation affects a European Union that has no common strategy on Russia, nor any updated general strategy on the whole. This is not to say that updated versions of the security strategies of 2003 and 2008 would have provided a detailed road map for handling the situation as it unfolded. Some progress towards a more coherent European policy would, however, have been more helpful than the largely national policies that we have seen hitherto.

Discussions on forming a more united European security stance towards other countries and regions need to reflect the fact that security today involves much more than military aspects. This means that in addition to the hard immediate choices of policy towards Russia the EU must now also consider its future relations with that country. Such relations span wide areas. Best known is the import of Russian energy, on which some countries are highly dependent, but many other types of relationship with Russia, such as arms exports and financial transactions, are highly relevant as well. These are issues that are within the remit of European citizens and in order to engage them these complicated relationships need to be brought up in discussions.

This crucial time for Europe coincides with the elections in May to the European Parliament. Many fear for the outcome of these elections: they may be more or less ignored by the European citizens, leading to a situation in which the Parliament – and even the EU itself – will be considered as irrelevant to Europeans. Another equally bad outcome would be the discussions before the elections, and thereby also their results, being taken over by populists or extremists who are actually seeking to destroy the values for which the EU stands. Parties with such agendas have increased in numbers and popularity in Europe over the last few years and have even influenced other parties' views. Invariably their messages contain false simplifications, usually of a nationalist and xenophobic character.

Since these two challenges coincide in time it is likely that security will be an issue in the discussions related to the elections. It would be a serious mistake if the populists were

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<sup>3</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 80, First Results Autumn 2013, December 2013, pp. 15–16. [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80\\_first\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80_first_en.pdf).



to dominate such a discussion. As *The Economist* put it, politicians need to explain hard choices and dispel misconceptions and they will find that most voters can cope with the truth.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. THE CSDP: SUCCESSES AND LOSS OF MOMENTUM

It would be wrong to dismiss the CSDP as a failure. On the contrary, for several years it was seen as one of the most successful fields of EU cooperation and since 1999 more than 20 missions, both civilian and military, have been carried out. This took place in spite of the difficulty inherent in a decision-making process in which all member states had to agree.

Furthermore, important commonality can be seen among all EU countries with the agreement on the European Security Strategy of 2003, complemented in 2008. While they are not proper strategies as such, these documents established a common list of threats, the most important being seen to be terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction and organized crime. Furthermore, in these documents the EU members declared that their common view was that no country could meet the complex challenges of the Europe of today on its own.<sup>5</sup>

The Lisbon Treaty of 2009 introduced a number of changes related to the CSDP with the intention of increasing the coherence and efficiency of the Union's work within this area. Changes outside the CSDP have also been relevant for security. One example of this was the change of decision-making from unanimity to qualified majority within the area of internal security. In terms of citizens' influence the Lisbon Treaty gave additional powers to the European Parliament and also to national parliaments. By adding these powers the treaty also gave an important impetus to the issue of democratic control of the security policy of the European Union.

In spite of the great expectations surrounding the Lisbon Treaty, developments took a different turn. The teething problems of the European External Action Service (EEAS) accounted for some lack of activity. Reluctance among some member states to see the EU engage in military missions and/or resistance to spending money on them are other reasons. On a more general level the Iraq and Afghanistan missions, both disappointments in terms of achieving the hoped-for results, have surely led to an even more cautious attitude to major military missions.

One complexity when seeking to achieve a strategic overview – as well as for the participation of citizens – is the fact that European security and defence is the preserve not of one organization but of two major ones, NATO and the European Union, whose compositions are largely but not entirely overlapping. Without any institutionalized venue where Europeans can take decisions covering both NATO and the CSDP no overall strategy can be agreed upon. Under these circumstances the EU is the best option, even

<sup>4</sup> "Europe's Tea Parties", *The Economist*, 4 January 2014, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *A Secure Europe in a Better World*. European Security Strategy, 12 December 2003; <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>; Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy. Providing Security in a Changing World, Brussels, 11 December 2008, S407/08, [http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/documents/en/081211\\_EU%20Security%20Strategy.pdf](http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/documents/en/081211_EU%20Security%20Strategy.pdf).



if it covers only part of the spectrum of policies and activities.<sup>6</sup> From a citizen's point of view, of the two the EU also offers the best chances for insight and influence.

Another factor is that the European Union no longer provides leadership in security and defence development. The renationalization of the continent has meant that initiatives now usually emanate from the national capitals of (mostly larger) countries. The various cooperation projects create patterns of variable geometry in which participation depends on the aims of the different projects. This gives the possibility (especially for larger countries) to operate on their own or together with other member countries for missions outside the EU. This development has on the one hand made it easier to initiate missions but on the other hand it has made it very difficult for European citizens to be involved in the process.

A final factor adding to the problems of dealing with security on a European level is the complexity of this subject. As spelled out in the 2003 Security Strategy, a large number of interrelated fields interact in complicated ways. This is already a complication on the national level which has created an insurmountable hurdle for thorough discussions on the European level, considering the differences in vulnerabilities, strategic interests and interests in trade and industry.

## 5. A NEW BASIS FOR DEEPER INVOLVEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY?

What are the chances of overcoming the problems and complexities that stand in the way of deeper citizens' involvement on issues of security and defence on a European level?

First of all, in spite of the hurdles spelled out above, the field of security has some dimensions that are unique in giving opportunities for cooperation. One of them is the fact that there is a wide realization in Europe that most areas of security policy need to be pursued together with other countries. This is true for all of the new threats, like terrorism, international crime, environment and many others. There are furthermore great similarities among European countries in their threat perceptions.<sup>7</sup>

Other threats that unite Europeans are the economic and technical progress of other continents. The problems are not on the long-term but on the short-term level, when economic imperatives, exacerbated by the economic crisis, force governments in a direction that they would not otherwise go.<sup>8</sup> Thus far short-term national interests have often taken the upper hand. Politicians have often given in to domestic groups whose economic or other interests are in the long term detrimental for the country.

In a situation such as the one we are in now, the best chance of overcoming the hurdles is the realization that this is a policy that we can no longer afford. Not since the wars in Yugoslavia have we faced a development in our neighbourhood as threatening as the

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<sup>6</sup> Biscop, Sven, "The European Council and Defence: The State of our Ambition", Policy Brief, NUPI, no. 20, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Menon, Anand, "Political and Strategic Aspects, Pressures and Constraints" in *CSDP between Internal Constraints and External Challenges*, EU Institute for Security Studies, Report no. 17, October 2013, pp. 52-55.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



one we see now in Russia's military invasion of Crimea and its policy towards Ukraine. Never has the internal threat been as strong as it is today when our democracy is being attacked from within by populists and extremists.

Facing such threats the EU must be more united in its security and other policies and these policies must be anchored among the population in a process in which citizens have been active. Nationalist tendencies must be met by European ones. Initiating such a process in a situation when the populist groups are the most interested and vocal ones requires some courage. Their simplistic solutions are seductive to the uninformed and the situation is not made easier when confidence in the EU and national governments is low.

Obviously there are limits to popular influence in this crucial area. Since the executive arm needs to respond rapidly to international events and to conduct negotiations in a confidential manner, no day-to-day control is possible. The issue is rather to involve citizens when establishing the principles. This already goes for national policy but is also true for European policy.<sup>9</sup>

The need for discussions and efforts related to citizens' participation and influence within the area of security should not be connected only to the present crisis. Nor are such discussions new phenomena. The primary factor in such deliberations has been the argument of democratic legitimacy. As expressed by Arnaud Danjean, chairman of the European Parliament's Sub-Committee on Security and Defence:

*"But for a European policy to be fully legitimate, that is to say, understood, accepted and, indeed, called for by the citizens of the Member States, the European Parliament must be associated with its decisions.*

*In my view, the role of the Sub-Committee on Security and Defence is precisely to examine developments in the CSDP in terms of institutions, capabilities and operations and to ensure that security and defence issues do not remain the exclusive preserve of experts, but also respond to the concerns expressed by the citizens of Europe"*<sup>10</sup>

## 6. THE STAKES

An organization like the EU, once formed by and based on values, must by necessity also accommodate interests of the member states in order to form agreements among them. At times, however, the basic foundation for it must also be invoked. Facing aggression on our borders, European citizens must know what democracy means and feel included in European policy-making. On national and European levels they must also be involved and informed rather than leaving the scene to demagogues who basically have another ideology.

Fundamentally, the issue, in the security and other fields, is about democracy and the future of the EU. The EU has for some time seen a rift between on the one hand elite

<sup>9</sup> Avery, Graham and Herolf, Gunilla, "Democratic Control of European Foreign and Security Policy: Does It Really Matter?" TEPSA Working Group on External Action. Draft prepared for the IAI/TEPSA seminar of 15 November 2010.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/SEDE/home.html>, accessed 5 March 2014.



groups, generally well informed and mainly positive towards the European cause, and on the other people who feel that they are without influence and that they have “lost” on integration. If the challenge of including citizens is not met, the European scene and the important role of the European Parliament will be handed to those who are willing to take advantage of this rift and use it for their own purposes. The stakes could hardly be higher.



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