



After the EUGS: mainstreaming a new CSDP

by Margriet Drent and Dick Zandee

At the beginning of July, the Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte, was interviewed on national television to discuss the achievements of the Netherlands EU Presidency in the first half of 2016. Rutte probably wanted to highlight the success stories: first and foremost, stopping the migration flows across the Aegean Sea. Yet he almost lost the opportunity as the interviewer confronted him with the outcome of the UK EU referendum. Apart from everything else, Brexit spoiled Mark Rutte's party on Dutch TV.

The same happened to High Representative Federica Mogherini when she presented the new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) to the European Council of 28-29 June. It is generally considered an excellent strategy that steers the EU in its responses to the challenges of a more connected, contested and complex world. Yet the new strategy received almost no media attention. Brexit also spoiled Federica Mogherini's party.

Now, in order to implement the EUGS, more work needs to be done. One of the areas for follow-up is security and defence. The consequences for the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) need to be defined, in particular for the armed forces of the member states. To this end, a CSDP 'White Book' or a Security and Defence Strategy (SDS) will have to be developed. But what should an SDS entail?

Elements of an SDS

Luckily, work on the SDS will not have to start from scratch. The EU institutions and member state capitals have already been preparing themselves during the last few months. And the Dutch EU Presidency has stimulated the debate about the consequences of the EUGS for CSDP and for deepening European defence cooperation. Together with the Clingendael Institute, several seminars were organised to discuss the defence implications of the EUGS and, more specifically, the 'how, what and when' of a CSDP 'White Book', as it was called at the time. The result of these informal discussions can be broken down into four areas: ambition level and tasks; capabilities; tools and instruments; and, lastly, the way forward.

The existing level of ambition stems, just like the CSDP 'Petersberg tasks', from a different era. The changed security environment means that it is time for review and adjustment, taking into account both the changing nature of crisis management operations, as well as the impact of the external-internal security nexus. Preferably, a new level of ambition should not be defined by the number of military personnel to be deployed, but rather in the sorts and types of operations the EU is able to conduct. The 'Petersberg tasks' will have to be redefined as they no longer reflect all the different types of operations which the EU is already conducting

today and may carry out in the future. Clearly, in addition to external crisis management, CSDP has to play a role 'in the defence of Europe', both in response to hybrid threats from the east as well as to the spillover effects of the conflicts to the south. In particular, a structural CSDP contribution to border security will be required.

The mutual assistance clause (Article 42.7), already activated by France, could also imply a role for CSDP inside EU territory (although this would imply a treaty change). Once tasks have been defined, ambition levels can be identified, including for the full spectrum of operations. Ambition levels should be realistic for near-term implementation, yet could be more ambitious in terms of long-term goals.

Addressing existing shortfalls – in areas such as intelligence and reconnaissance, enablers for expeditionary operations, precision munitions, and securing sea lines of communication – remains high on the agenda. However, a 'new' CSDP requires additional efforts and a shift in priorities. First, hybrid threats also demand military responses. CSDP could contribute, for example, by deploying EU Battlegroups to non-NATO members Sweden and Finland or by assisting the Baltic states in reinforcing their internal security, in particular through paramilitary units (gendarmierie) – upon request.

Second, for (external) crisis management, the EU should be able to cover the whole spectrum from stabilisation, training and assistance to intervention operations. For autonomous full spectrum operations in the near term, the EU should aim for a brigade-sized force, with adequate sea and air elements as required. Border security-related tasks will increase the need for smaller vessels, surveillance assets (space and air-based) and border guard personnel. But a fresh look at naval (and air) capabilities at the high end of the spectrum is also required in view of the increasing anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) threats. Clearly, such autonomous European capabilities will not materialise overnight, but related capability goals should be defined as early as possible in view of long-term planning cycles.

Political will remains the key factor to deepen European defence cooperation. However, new tools and instruments are also needed to translate political will – as expressed in Declarations and Council Conclusions – into real capability improvement. So far, the principle of voluntarism has provided an excuse for doing too little. A step-change is needed in order to move in the

direction of greater accountability and commitment. And transparency on long-term defence and procurement plans will be the first requirement.

But sharing plans is not enough. The SDS should define a new system, based on monitoring, assessment and accountability of the member states' efforts to solve capability shortfalls and to deepen European defence cooperation. Such a system could be developed over time with data collection and assessment authority gradually shifting to the European Defence Agency. It could start with defence ministers collectively reviewing their plans annually (ministerial peer pressure) via a more structured and obligatory assessment based on EDA documentation per country (political assessment), and shift to a more 'European Semester'-like accountability regime in the long term. Benchmarks for collaborative investment should receive more political attention. Other ways of financing defence expenditure through the Union budget should also be fully explored. In particular, a sizeable defence research programme within the post-Horizon 2020 framework programme for research and innovation is needed.

The way ahead

Time is a critical factor. It took a year to formulate the EUGS, and taking one more year for developing the SDS will be very risky as the political agendas in 2017 will likely be dominated by the Brexit negotiations, as well as national elections in several EU countries, including France and Germany.

EU foreign ministers have already had a first exchange of ideas on 18 July, while the High Representative will present a plan with a timetable and proposals, most probably soon after the summer break. Defence ministers will also get involved during their informal meeting, set to take place in late September in Slovakia. By then, three months will have already passed since the June European Council. Also taking into account that the European Commission intends to publish its Defence Action Plan in the second half of 2016, there will be little time left for developing the SDS – and separating the two documents would send the wrong signal as the Commission's defence activities will have to be capability-driven.

Margriet Drent and Dick Zandee are Senior Research Fellows at the Netherlands Institute of Foreign Relations 'Clingendael' in The Hague.

