

# Towards 'European sovereignty' in security and defence? The view from Romania and Finland

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Report

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On 14 June 2019, the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) and the Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Stratégie (DGRIS) of the French Ministry for the Armed Forces co-organised a seminar in Paris, the third of its kind following the two seminars held in June and November 2018. The aim was to assess progress made in the development of a European strategic culture under the outgoing Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU and define the priorities as well as further challenges to a more responsible EU in security and defence that will need to be addressed by the incoming Finnish Presidency.

Progress on EU security and defence during the Romanian Presidency was noted with the potential agreement on the European Defence Fund (EDF) secured, progress on how third-states might participate in Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), work towards the first fully-fledged cycle of the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), negotiations on the European Peace Facility (EPF) and success on the EU's Maritime Security Strategy, military mobility and energy sustainability in defence. Finally, it was made clear that the Sibiu Summit on 9 May 2019 saw EU heads of state and government affirm the importance of defending 'one Europe from East to West, from North to South' in a comprehensive manner.

The audience were also reminded that 2019 marks the 20-year anniversary of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the 70-year anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). In this respect, there was a discussion about the coherence of newly created EU defence initiatives, the EU-NATO partnership and multinational defence frameworks such as the European Intervention Initiative (EI2). A point was also raised about the EU's military level of ambition. Accordingly, although the EU is enhancing its capability development and industrial competitiveness, the Union should not lose sight of its operational credibility. PESCO binding commitments are important in this regard, but so too is force preparedness and deployability.

Furthermore, while there is greater clarity when it comes to the meaning of concepts such as 'strategic autonomy' or 'strategic culture', speakers and audience members debated the relevance of even trying to define these terms at an EU level. It was acknowledged that EU member states find it difficult to agree on core concepts in defence. However, there were discussions between individuals that want to focus on developing capabilities without getting hung up on concepts, and those that believe that the EU should define these key concepts and work towards them as a precondition to further initiatives on defence.

Audience members and speakers were also split on how the EU has come to define strategic autonomy. One group tended to stress the importance of defining autonomy as a form of responsibility whereby the EU would enhance its position as a credible partner, but some audience members disputed this notion and called for the EU to move to as great a level of independence as possible. So, whereas some participants stressed the importance of the NATO alliance as the cornerstone of national security in Europe, others called for the EU to plan for a future where the US might not be willing or able to assist Europe. Finally, it was highlighted that having a coherent EU narrative on defence would be good for the Union's strategic communication with citizens and partners.

It was also clear that many audience members and some speakers had an appetite for the EU to develop a common threat perception and situational awareness. This point was raised despite the third-year anniversary of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS), and many audience members asked what would follow the EUGS under the new leadership. One participant spoke of the need for a defence roadmap or compass that would cut through the technical discussions on the EDF and PESCO and provide answers to some basic questions: why should Europe invest in defence, and why and how should the EU project power?

Despite these questions, however, other speakers were keen to centre the debate on defence capabilities. The debate focused on the EU's long-standing capability shortfalls but there was also a call to invest strategic capabilities such as intelligence capacities, command and control systems, navigation and positioning, cyber defence and disruptive technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). Here, a compelling case was made that the EU could not really think about political sovereignty without aiming at technological sovereignty, and this means that the EU needs to urgently invest in strategic enablers and capabilities. It also means that the EU needs to become even better at linking critical sectors such as defence, space, energy, economy and transport together and to develop a coherent over-arching industrial strategy.

The incoming Finnish Presidency of the Council of the EU laid out its vision, stating that it looked forward to working with the European External Action Service (EEAS) and agencies such as the EUISS. Finland would be focusing on some key issues during its presidency: 1) supporting the EPF; 2) ensuring coherence between PESCO and the EDF; 3) enhancing the EU's ability to counter hybrid threats; 4) developing the EU's technological edge with a focus on Artificial Intelligence; and 5) looking to the future of EU-UK defence relations after Brexit. On the issue of EU's mutual assistance clause (Article 42.7 TEU), there was a debate about the strategic merit of maintaining a certain level of ambiguity in order to keep adversaries such as Russia guessing about potential EU responses in times of crisis.

When discussing the transatlantic relationship, most speakers and audience members were agreed on the importance of the EU-US relationship and the EU-NATO partnership. Nevertheless, on numerous occasions reference to China was made and here it was felt that the EU would be put under increasing pressure to answer some strategically vital questions: 1) if the US asks the EU and its member states to take sides vis-à-vis China, what will its answer be?; 2) with the US shifting its strategic centre of gravity to the Asia-Pacific, what more will the EU be expected to do in its neighbourhood?; and 3) if the US asks the EU and its member states to join its political and military objectives in the Asia-Pacific, what response would the Union give?