

From Global Strategy to Global Actor?



ESDC Alumni Seminar 2019

A seminar co-organised by the European Security and Defence College (ESDC), the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) and the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU.



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Final report

On 22 February 2019, the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) and the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) organised a seminar on the EU Global Strategy. Organised under the auspices of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU and hosted by the European Commission, the EUISS and ESDC welcomed speakers from the European Commission, the European Defence Agency, the European External Action Service and the EU Military Staff.

Two panel sessions discussed how far the EU has come in moving from rhetoric to reality in security and defence.

Panel I - Strategic autonomy: from rhetoric to reality

The first panel focused on the concept of strategic autonomy and how European defence initiatives, such as the Capability Development Plan (CDP), the European Defence Fund (EDF), the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) are enabling the EU to reach an appropriate level of strategic autonomy.

The speakers explained that the idea of the EU developing an 'autonomous' military capacity dates back to the 1998 Saint Malo Declaration. However, the term 'strategic autonomy' only appeared in EU texts in 2013. The 2013 Council Conclusions used the term to refer to the need for the EU to develop a competitive European defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB) in order to be able to act autonomously and become a more effective partner. Three years later in 2016, the term appeared again, first in the EU Global Strategy and then in the Council Conclusions, which defined strategic autonomy as the 'capacity to act autonomously when and where necessary and with partners wherever possible'. More recently, in two different speeches at the Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs in December 2018 and the Munich Security Conference in February 2019, the High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini renamed the concept 'cooperative autonomy'. As one panellist put it, strategic autonomy is in fact the 'ability to act not separate but separable, when necessary'. To this end, the EU needs to develop five pillars: 1) right structures and intelligence analysis; 2) civilian and military capabilities – here the audience was reminded that the 1999 Helsinki Headline Goal has not been reached yet; 3) an integrated technological and industrial base; 4) resilience and 5) partners – as cooperation is the only way to fill the EU's capability gaps.

The implementation of the CDP, CARD, PESCO and the EDF can contribute to the EU's strategic autonomy. The idea behind the EDF is to foster investments in defence research and capability development. The research window of the EDF has been operational since 2017 with the Preparatory Action on Defence Research (PADR) receiving a budget of €90 million over 3 years. So far, eight projects have been financed and another ten are in preparation. As for the capability window, the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP) is under preparation and will receive a budget of €500 million over 2 years. The Fund is, therefore, using the EU budget to finance and support collaborative industrial research and development programmes in the EU. In June 2018, the European Commission put forward a proposal for a fully-fledged European Defence Fund worth €13 billion to cover both the research and capability windows. The speakers announced that last week, the EU institutions reached a partial political agreement on the future EDF, which is now awaiting formal approval by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. Although strategic autonomy is not a direct object of the future EDF, the panel stressed that it will indirectly help the EU become more autonomous from an industrial point of view.

Furthermore, CARD allows for a review and crosscheck of the capability development landscape. PESCO provides options for how to move on with concrete capability development in a constructive manner, on the basis of 20 binding commitments. As for the European Defence Agency's CDP, one of its priorities is to foster capabilities related to strategic autonomy, like artificial intelligence (AI), and to coordinate with NATO. It was highlighted that the Agency is currently running 100 projects, three of which – one on technological components, one on satellite communication and another one on airlift refuelling – are contributing to strategic autonomy.

Panel II - Challenges and scenarios for EU security and defence

The second panel analysed future security and defence challenges for the EU. The panellists emphasised how the security scenario has dramatically changed throughout the years. The scenario of peace, prosperity and freedom referred to by the 2003 European Security Strategy was replaced by one of existential crisis in the 2016 Global Strategy. Accordingly, the nature of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is changing. Article 42 of the Treaty of the EU allows for EU crisis management operations only outside the Union and this legal provision has always had a political dimension to it, which has so far allowed for a division of labour between the EU and NATO. However, the speakers noted that the language 'protecting Europe and its citizens' used in the EU Global Strategy implies that the CSDP might move beyond crisis management in the near future. The 'grey zone' between the EU and NATO has therefore been filled, in a legal sense, by the words 'protecting Europe and its citizens' and operationally by practical EU-NATO cooperation. One of the panellists put three definitions of strategic autonomy forward: strategic autonomy as responsibility, strategic autonomy as hedging and strategic autonomy as emancipation. However, the speaker also argued that too much focus on the conceptual side is blinding us to the realities on the ground. Ever since the inception of the CSDP, it was assumed that Europeans were operating in a permissive operational and political environment when deploying forces abroad. However, today this is no longer the case as Europeans need to think much more about Russia and China's engagement in Europe's near and wider neighbourhood and technological advancements in warfare whereby cheap yet sophisticated weapons are being used by state and non-state actors.

Another challenge for the EU was identified in the cyber domain. It was noted that military and civilian activities both depend on the use of critical and space infrastructure, common cyber assets and supply chains. Cyber threats and attacks are common to both civilian and military structures. Therefore, some level of collaboration between the civilian and military sides is needed to address these common challenges. The speakers identified three key issues related to the cyber domain: 1) the need to acquire better and more cybersecurity technology; 2) digital sovereignty; and 3) the lack

of technical knowledge and skills. In addition, it was suggested that a common mistake is to consider cybersecurity and defence as something that just revolves around technology. That is not the case. Cybersecurity and defence require a multidisciplinary approach. It was observed that, beyond capability development, the European Commission has certainly a role to play on cybersecurity. In September 2017, the Commission adopted a cybersecurity package including the Directive on Security of Network and Information Systems (NIS directive) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), as well as a number of initiatives on AI, 5G and supercomputers. A year later in 2018, the Commission presented a proposal for the creation of a European Cybersecurity Competence Centre and Network (CCCN). So far, four Horizon 2020 projects – Concordia, Echo, Sparta and CyberSec4Europe – have been launched in order to develop a sustainable European cybersecurity competence network.

Initiatives such as the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) were also discussed. The speakers explained that there are currently 16 ongoing EU CSDP missions and operations – ten civilian and six military. The latter can be divided into executive operations and non-executive missions. In 2017, the MPCC was established to command three non-executive missions: the EU Training Missions (EUTM) to Mali, Somalia and the Central African Republic. The panellists pointed out that at least two challenges face the MPCC. First, ensuring that the MPCC is staffed with the adequate personnel and resources. This is especially true given that the MPCC 2020 review potentially foresees the Centre expanding its remit. Second, making sure that the MPCC works seamlessly with its civilian counterpart, the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC). To this end, a Joint Support Coordination Cell (JSCC) has been created, which brings together civilian and military personnel in the planning and conduct of CSDP missions and operations. Nevertheless, expertise is scarce as civilian CSDP missions seemingly remain a far less attractive employer compared to the fast-developing European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex).