

## EUISS Workshop

### European defence: ambitions, visions and deliverables

*17 October 2016*

On 17 October 2016, the EU Institute for Security Studies convened a workshop where experts and policymakers discussed the forthcoming implementation plan on security and defence (SDIP). This EUISS workshop acted as a forum for Europe's leading analysts on security and defence to think about the EU's level of ambition on security and defence and how the EU communicates its defence policies to the public. The workshop built on the discussions held at workshops on the 6 July and 20 September, which each brought together approximately 20-30 participants from various think tanks and EU institutions.

The 17 October workshop welcomed Nathalie Tocci, Special Advisor to the HR/VP, the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, the Deputy Chief Executive of the European Defence Agency, the Deputy Director General of the Commission's DG Grow, European Commission, and, from the European External Action Service, the Director of the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate, the Deputy Civilian Operations Commander of the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capacity, and the Director of the Concepts and Capabilities Directorate at the EU Military Staff. A host of other representatives from the European Commission, European Parliament and European External Action Service were present.

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Participants learned that the Security and Defence Implementation Plan should not be conceived of as a defence 'white book'. The SDIP should not begin with a threat assessment because the EU Global Strategy already addresses the challenges facing the EU. The aim with the SDIP should be to build on the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) with a plan that outlines a minimum level of shared ambition on security and defence for the EU. The task really should be to use the SDIP to move from the vision set out in the EUGS to concrete action. In this regard, there will not be a focus on setting quantitative targets in the SDIP, but rather a definition of the qualitative needs of the EU and the corresponding capability needs. There is now a genuine need to move from vision to action on security and defence and not to continue an endless process of written exercises with further follow-up documents in the short-term. In this vein, a number of the participants requested that the SDIP avoid becoming a technocratic document that would not appeal to Europeans.

Turning to the EU's overall level of ambition, participants argued that the SDIP should not be overly ambitious but it should rather set down two to three key priorities that the EU can realistically achieve. In this regard, most participants agreed that it was not necessary at this stage to set down **quantitative targets** for capabilities or operations but the SDIP should outline what kinds of operations the EU would want to undertake. However, other attendees argued that the SDIP should be ambitious in order to meet the **strategic rationale** in the EU Global Strategy. The SDIP should provide clarity on how the CSDP will play a role in border protection or what the EU means by assuring access to the global commons. These are ideas concretely outlined in the EUGS so the SDIP should really aim to answer questions such as: does the EU foresee itself acting in the Asia-Pacific? If so, does it therefore want to establish a standing maritime force? One participant even suggested that the EU should develop the capabilities required for the autonomous protection of sea lines. These types of questions are vitally important if the EU is to be serious when using terms such as 'full spectrum'.

Another set of terms that caused much debate were ‘protecting Europe’ and ‘strategic autonomy’. Some of the participants stressed the need for the EU not to stray into NATO’s role of ensuring continental deterrence, but others boldly argued that the EU needed to define what it means by ‘**strategic autonomy**’ for a range of military tasks. Here, one attendee suggested strategic autonomy should mean that the EU has the capacity to act alone if needed, even if the EU is more than likely to cooperate with partners for a number of operations. The ‘**Protecting Europe**’ concept was also probed further, with some suggesting that short of conventional deterrence the concept should mean that the EU takes a leading role in areas such as cyber, hybrid, terrorism, border control and maritime security. One participant went even further by stating that if the European Commission’s plans for a European Defence Research Programme are to be successful, then the CSDP needs to mean more than just crisis management. Without a credible level of ambition for CSDP it will be difficult to justify investments in EU defence research over the long-term.

Other participants stated that the SDIP and the focus on ‘protecting Europe’ was a good opportunity to bring the EU much closer to NATO, especially in light of the EU-NATO Joint Declaration. NATO remains the EU’s most important partner, and the SDIP should pay particular attention to avoid duplicating NATO structures such as SHAPE. Here the conversation turned to the idea for an EU ‘**Operational Headquarters**’ (OHQ). Most agreed that the EU needs some permanent planning capacity for civilian and military operations because the current structures are not optimal and they delay the EU’s ability to rapidly deploy. Most participants stated that any new structure needed to ensure a strict link between the commander in the field and the Political and Security Committee. Participants disagreed on the way forward with an EU OHQ, as some called for a fusion of existing instruments whereas others called for the EU to be bold. Another asked rather provocatively whether the EU needed its own OHQ given the relatively small size of its operations and forces for CSDP operations.

At this point the discussion turned to the EU’s ability to rapidly deploy operations and its defence capabilities. With regard to ‘**rapid reaction**’, participants noted that the EU Battle Groups (EUBGs) needed reform. Not only have the EUBGs never been deployed but there are major questions about financing and the six-month rotation system currently in place. Currently the **Athena mechanism** provides about 10% of the common funding for CSDP operations, so some participants even went as far as to suggest that the EUBGs could have their own fund to pay for deployments. In this respect, it was suggested that the ‘**Start-up Fund**’ mentioned in the EU Treaty (Article 41(3)) could be explored further. For civilian missions, participants learned that the problem was not such much available resources that hamper civilian missions, but rather getting access to funding. Finally, in thinking about civilian and military rapid reaction it was explained by some participants that the EU should not forget the importance of reserve forces and situational awareness.

**Defence capabilities** were also raised during the discussion. Here, most participants agreed that the EU needs to place much greater focus on capability output. Others stated that the SDIP should not necessarily focus on what capabilities are required but on what the EU wants to achieve strategically. It was pointed out that the planned revision of the Capability Development Plan will also give the EU scope to better define the capabilities it requires. Another participant stated that the SDIP should send the right messages to industry. There is a need to create greater linkages between the commercial and defence technology sectors. At a very basic level, the SDIP — in tandem with the forthcoming **European Defence Action Plan** — should encourage industry to get involved at an early stage in the capability development process. Another participant suggested that when thinking about capability development, the EU should not really be generating its own capabilities but it should instead jump start national and collaborative programmes.

The conversation then turned towards industrial matters. Firstly, some of the participants acknowledged that the **European Defence Technological Industrial Base** is not in the best shape at present, so the EU needs to focus on using single market instruments to enhance the European defence market. One participant asked what difference single market tools would make given that there are fewer suppliers in Europe today and hardly any major procurement programmes. In turn, it was suggested that the state of the defence market is such that without a concerted push on single market tools the EU might lose the EDTIB altogether. One area of consensus among participants was the promise offered by the Preparatory Action on Defence Research. While future EU investments in defence research should not replace national investment efforts, it is necessary to define key capabilities and concrete projects that would benefit from EU financing. Some of the participants also raised the potential role of the European Investment Bank, but others felt that more clarity was needed about what a '**European Defence Fund**' would actually look like.

Following on from the debate about financing and industry, the debate turned towards the shortcomings and deficiencies of the EU's existing security and defence structures, tools and instruments. A number of the participants pointed out that one had to be careful about a debate about institutional structures, as this would not be appealing to Europeans and it would give the impression that the EU wanted simply to develop more institutional structures. Despite this, a number of participants looked favourably on the idea of establishing a '**European Security Council**'. The idea here would be to push political attention on EU security and defence to the level of the heads of state and government, as this could potentially encourage 'top-down' steering of defence cooperation. Such a meeting could work in parallel to relevant EU councils and working groups, and it would maintain an annual focus on defence. Despite some concern about the name, a number of experts argued that the idea could be seen as another bureaucratic response to the real demands of citizens.

More concretely, some of the experts focused on the idea of having a '**coordinated annual review**' — known also as the 'defence semester'. Whatever name is given to the idea, a number of the participants signalled that a more structured process was needed to eventually lead — as called for by the EU Global Strategy — to a greater synchronisation of defence planning among EU member states. It was argued by some that there is now much greater scope to synchronise defence planning at the EU level and the European Defence Agency could play a key role here. One of the experts pointed-out that such a synchronisation of defence planning already exists within NATO's Defence Planning Process (NDPP) and it had only led to a marginal improvement. Challenging this view, one of the participants stated that NDPP only focuses on the synchronisation of force planning whereas there was a real need to synchronise defence budgets, industrial needs and capability development planning.

Finally, the participants then discussed the role of **Permanent Structured Cooperation** (PESCO). Here a cautious tone was struck. It was explained that there can only really be a 'single' PESCO, although ways in which PESCO could be internally modulated are being explored. Participants argued that what is needed overall is for member states to take the lead on and ownership of PESCO. One participant asked whether PESCO would really add anything to current efforts on EU defence cooperation. Many participants argued that the key is to ensure that those member states in favour of PESCO have a clear idea of what they want to achieve over a defined timeline (e.g. 2025-2030), because it is clear that there will have to be the same 'entry ticket' for all. As a baseline commitment to PESCO, member states could agree to the existing 2007 EDA benchmarks. Nevertheless, there was clear understanding that only member states can initiate PESCO, although one of the participants suggested that the EU could experiment with financial incentives to make PESCO more attractive.