

The European Security and Defence Union

Saving the European Union

The final stretch before the European elections



The next elections are of utmost importance for the EU

Antonio Tajani MEP,
President of the European Parliament



Disaster Management: the Union Civil Protection Mechanism

Monique Pariat,
Director-General of DG ECHO,
European Commission



A European army: a vital debate

Europe needs an army to defend itself and stay united

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On 6th November 2018, the president of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, raised the idea of a “true European army”. Six days later, at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, called for the “elaboration of a vision enabling us to achieve one day a true European army” as a “complement to NATO”. On 22nd January 2019, at the time of the signing of the new Franco-German treaty in Aachen, they reaffirmed this perspective. Taboo for a long time, these two words – European army – were spoken for the first time by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker. They still irritate Eurosceptics, who see them as infringing upon national sovereignty, but also those who prefer to leave the defence of Europe to the United States, as well as those who fear the militarisation of the European Union (EU).

Widespread support from European citizens

However, according to the spring 2018 Eurobarometer, on average 75 % of Europeans support the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). In 2007, they were even 79% to want more autonomy from the United States for this CSDP. It is unfortunate that this question has not been asked again since then. When it comes to the French, if we believe the rare surveys that exist, 62% of them are favourable to the creation of a “European army”¹

This can doubtless be explained by the fact that the words “European army” are understandable by all citizens in all countries, which is far from being the case when it comes to the CSDP, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defence Fund (EDF), the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and other acronyms that are comprehensible only to experts in the field.

In the political debate, these two words enable the clarification of an objective – common defence – which should unite the European people. However, the critics of the idea of a European army have mainly focused on proving that it is unrealistic, without considering whether it is desirable. Why? Simply because the idea is frightening and seems impossible to enforce.

An idea that frightens through its implications

Because of the underlying principle of autonomy, the idea of a European army annoys Donald Trump and a number of American leaders, even though they are demanding increased European investment in defence. However, at this stage of the transatlantic relationship, it has become obvious that the United States is only interested in the defence of Europe as long as it serves its own interests. This is very clearly what the attitude of the President of the United States translated to at the July 2018 NATO summit in Brussels. It is also what is motivating his repeated attacks against the European Union. The very idea of a militarily autonomous European Union repulses him as he prefers to confront Europeans in a dispersed way. And it is precisely because the EU forms a bloc on which he has no hold that he considers the Union a commercial “foe”, an organisation to be destroyed.

Because it is synonym of integration, the idea of a European

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army scares Europeans. It is also symptomatic that, at the Helsinki summit, which is in many ways the founding act of the CSDP, the writers took care to mention that the process being enforced “did not involve the creation of a European army”. Indeed, what characterises an army in the first place is its strategist. Thus, who will lead this European army? Who will give orders? Who will be responsible for the loss of lives? The idea of this army is not one of a big Franco-German brigade extended to the whole continent. If it exists one day, it will be born of the capacity of Europeans to take, together and independently of others, decisions in the area of defence and to execute them. In other words, before anything else it is a political question which offers Europeans the choice between freedom and submission.

A long-term vision...

Much has been achieved since 2016 for European defence, but there is still a lot to be done if we want the EU to truly protect Europe and its citizens. Threats in our neighbourhood are multiplying, the credibility of the Atlantic Alliance is eroding, and we are powerless to defend ourselves collectively without the Americans. But we will not go further with the current method based on cooperation in an intergovernmental framework with the objective of preserving the façade of twenty-seven sovereignties.

If European defence is facing an impasse, it is because it has twenty-seven brains and only one, atrophied arm: the CSDP. It will never work. Not now, nor in one hundred years. We must change methods.

... to which we can quickly give shape

An effective European defence assumes that we can plan, develop, produce, acquire, support and use our capacities together. We need to move from simple operational and industrial

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photo: private

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cooperation to the progressive integration of our defence tools. This is the path that the vision of a European army proposes. It does not mean that each Member State will abandon its flag and that, from one day to the next, all regiments will be merged into a vast group marching under the European banner every 9th May at the Schuman roundabout. It means that European forces must be able to autonomously lead clearly identified missions, relying on effective common planning and a strong chain of command. In other words, they must be capable of acting as if they constituted a single army. Why should what is feasible within NATO not be possible within the Union? To move forwards, a few conditions must absolutely be met. These involve, first, ensuring that decisions are taken by qualified majority and constituting a sufficient defence budget, based on a proportional funding key, to allow the development of joint capabilities, the acquisition of common capacities and to cover the entirety of the costs of operations carried out together. Then, they involve adopting a strategic concept which clearly identifies the missions assigned to European forces and assuring, through the strong and committed involvement of the chiefs of defence, common planning of the capacities needed to this end. Finally, they involve the creation of an European headquarters with adequate resources for the planning and command of operations.

The stakes of the electoral campaign

Even though he does not dismiss the idea of a revision of the treaties, Emmanuel Macron clearly mentioned, in his recent open letter to European citizens² in the run-up to the European elections, the conclusion of a defence and security treaty. In the current political landscape, it seems indeed extremely difficult to reach the required unanimity for a revision of the European treaties. The best way to move forwards with a European army is doubtless the one that will allow those who want to, and can,



Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel at the signing of the new Franco-German treaty in Aachen, 22 January 2019. At this occasion the French President and the German Chancellor laid out their commitment to a future joint European army

photo: © European Union, 2019

to do so outside of the framework of European institutions, as long as this process is coherent with the planned developments of the EU, especially through the European Defence Fund “in connection with NATO and our European allies”, as the French president writes. The autonomy of European defence is not intended to undermine transatlantic collective defence, but to give Europe a capacity to defend its own interest, analogous to the American armed forces defending the interests of the United States.

A few weeks before the European elections that will be crucial for the future of the EU, the stakes of defence must become a central theme of the election campaign. These last few years, the threats on the international scene and especially those in our immediate neighbourhood have multiplied: political instability; conflicts of diverse natures in Georgia, Ukraine, Syria, Libya; terrorism; degradation of maritime security, etc. In this context, no European state has been able to act alone or without the support of the United States. If we want to restore our sovereignty and independence, we need a European army and a long-term strategic perspective.

Europe needs an army to defend itself and stay united. It is not an option. It is a necessity.



Merkel’s call for a European army

German Chancellor Angela Merkel in her speech at the European Parliament (Strasbourg, 13.11.2018,) called for the establishment of a true European army. She said:

“We need to create a fully capable, European military force for rapid deployment to affected regions in times of crisis. We have made great progress on permanent structured cooperation in the military domain. That is a good thing, and these efforts have received wide support here. Yet (...) we ought to work on the vision of one day establishing a proper European army. Yes, that’s how things stand. Four years ago, Jean-Claude Juncker said: a joint EU army would show the world that there would never again be a war between EU countries. That would not be an army in competition with NATO (...) but it could be an effective complement to NATO.”

→ **Web: Full speech:** <https://bit.ly/2Gr6MLD>

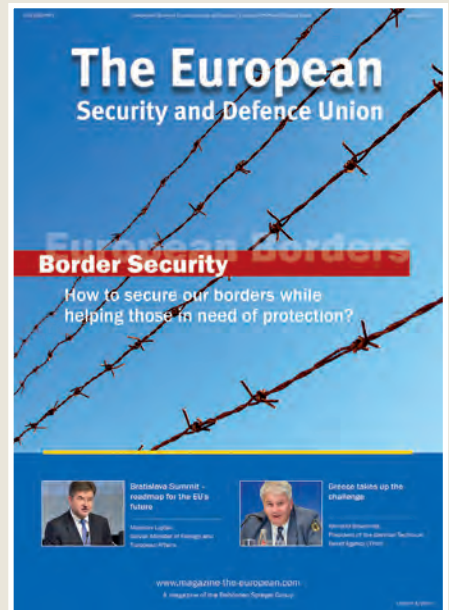
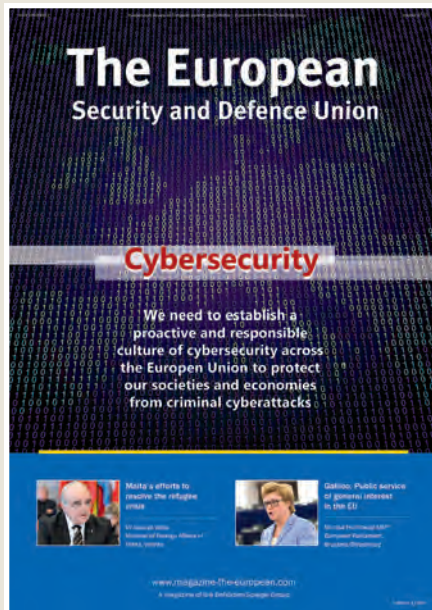
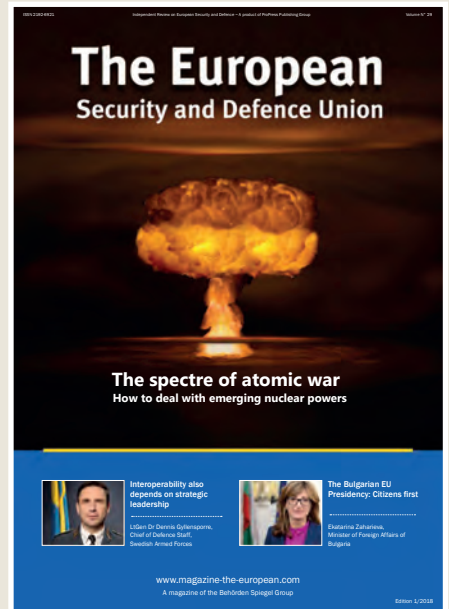
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1 Sondage Odoxa for the Institut des Relations Internationales et Stratégiques and Le Parisien : « vers l’armée européenne ? » (‘Towards a European army?’)

2 For a European Renaissance, Emmanuel Macron’s opinion piece published in Le Figaro on 4th March 2019

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