The European Intervention Initiative:

Why we should listen to German Chancellor Merkel

In September 2017, the President of the French Republic launched the idea of a "European Intervention Initiative" (EII) in the field of defence whose goal is to develop a "common strategic culture". The overarching aim is to equip Europe, by the beginning of the next decade, with a "common intervention force", a "common defence budget" and a "common doctrine for action" to enable Europeans to act "convincingly" together militarily.

Let us note at once that one of the three objectives - the "common defence budget" - is about to be reached, which was not yet certain last September. To this effect, the next multiannual financial framework 2021-2027 will likely set up a € 13 billion European defence fund dedicated to defence research, a € 10.5 billion European peace facility dedicated to financing EU operations with military or defence implications, and finally a package of measures to promote "military mobility" within the Union for an additional € 6 billion, for a total budget of almost € 30 billion over seven years.

As for a "common intervention force", numerous examples already exist : the Franco-British *Combined Joint Expeditionary Force* set up by the Treaty of Lancaster House in 2010; the *Joint Expeditionary Force* between the British, the Baltic states, the Scandinavians and the Dutch set up by another Lancaster House agreement in 2015 and completed in 2017; the German *Nation Framework Concept* of 2014,set up within NATO; *Battle Groups*; the Franco-German brigade currently deployed in Mali; and lastly the most recent of these initiatives: the EUFOR CROC (*European Union Force - Crisis Response Operation Core*) a structuring capacity process project established within the permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) created in November 2017 between 25 European states with the exception of the United Kingdom, Denmark and Malta. The coherence of all these "forces" of intervention is the primary challenge for Europe.

An attractive initiative

It is difficult to judge an initiative whose content is still being defined. Nevertheless, on paper, the idea is attractive and presents several benefits.

Firstly, the EII tackles the root cause of the problem, namely the significant differences between Member states in threat perception and ways to protect themselves from these threats. Despite all the recent developments, each state continues to assess and judge situations from their own viewpoint. To each his obsessions. To each his solutions. Changing this state of mind might be more effective than legislating on European defence and has the merit of never having been tried. In order to achieve this, states must scrutinise the Strategic Foresights together, exchange intelligence, then plan capabilities and develop operational procedures and doctrines. Changing the general mind-set also requires common rules of engagement without which an allied operation can quickly degenerate because of the limitations (caveats) specific to each force. We must also develop scenarios (wargames). Finally, one can imagine learning lessons from joint interventions. All this does not exclude increasing officer exchanges in the armed forces between Member States.

The EII's second advantage is that it performs outside the institutions of the Union with extremely flexible operating procedures. This approach could be described as ultra-pragmatic: no entry criteria, a simple invitation, no commitments in the long term, no obligations or

sanctions and even less evaluation along the way since, by definition, culture cannot be measured in meters or kilos. The EII is a group of states fostering the same perception of things as they relate to defence, in other words: a Eurogroup of defence that would not say its name.

Lastly, precisely because it operates outside the structures of the Union, the EII makes it possible, on the one hand, to hold on to the British in spite of Brexit as well as the Danes who opted out of the CSDP, and on the other hand to exclude countries such as Sweden or Poland. The latter swear by NATO, and fight the very idea of strategic autonomy, for fear of losing American protection. It does not follow that the outcome of the initiative must necessarily be to focus military operations on Africa and the Middle East. On the contrary, the EII must consider all kinds of activities, including those related to natural disasters but why not also military operations in the east, as a forerunner of NATO.

A mixed reception

At the Franco-British Sandhurst summit in January 2018, the French President and the British Prime Minister affirmed their shared desire to support the initiative to "create within a group of European states the conditions for future commitments in various scenarios of military intervention. " It is hardly surprising that this operation-centric, pragmatic initiative seduced the British leaders, especially as it provides them with a golden opportunity to maintain a link with Europe in the field of defence. As for Denmark, its leaders have certainly perceived the EII as the recognition of their defence capabilities and the product of military complicity with France. Finally, the leaders of the Netherlands and Belgium also declared that they would view their participation in the EII "positively".

On the other hand, and this is no secret, Germany has been reluctant. It would appear that the Chancellor first wanted to include the EII within the PESCO framework, which would have been incompatible with the British and Danish memberships. Then in an interview on 6 June for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, she ambiguously stated that she wanted to "include such an intervention force within a common military-strategic culture in the general framework of (European) cooperation in defence matters ". Finally, the Meseberg Franco-German declaration made it possible to reach an agreement by emphasising " the need to further develop the emergence of a shared strategic culture through the European Intervention Initiative, which will be linked as closely as possible with PESCO".

This reluctance, not to say hostility[1], can be explained by the fact that the EII collides head-on with German policy principles on European defence, in particular, the will to build said defence within the structures of the Union, ensuring that all Member States are part of it. Moreover, it is likely that German leaders saw the EII as a form of "revenge" from the French who had to accept an "inclusive" and "modular" PESCO which they did not want. However, if the Chancellor herself can only pay lip service to this initiative, what will the colonels responsible for implementing it do?

From a negotiation rationale to a conviction rationale

For the EII to be a success, participants need to be convinced of its usefulness and its clarity of purpose. To this end, the French need to be better able to explain that it is not a question of obtaining support for their troops in Sahel, but of creating, in the space of a decade, a strategic

[1] Why Joining France's European Intervention Initiative is the right decision for Germany" *in* Egmont publications 15 juin 2018 – Christian Mölling et Claudia Major.

European community of the type that brings together the "*five eyes*" Anglo-Saxons. To form such a community would already be a huge success.

It will also be necessary to initiate more coherence not only between the EII and PESCO but also among all current initiatives in European defence. From this point of view, Chancellor Merkel is right: these initiatives need to be articulated coherently within the overall framework of European defence - which is not solely the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). However, the EII's usefulness is to be able to insert itself - like a software - between PESCO's structuring capacity process and the various existing European forces, which each have their own "raison d'être".

Stop talking Start planning

To ensure this vital coherence between the three components of strategic autonomy: industrial programs, operational forces, and a "strategic culture" destined to facilitate political decision-making, at a given moment Europeans must cease to invent new concepts and begin to put some order in all this. In a word: they must start to plan, which will entail, whether we like it or not, the creation of a European White Paper.

Indeed, cooperation is not an objective in itself. The defence of Europe is. So, let's not lose our magnetic north: if Europe wants to have a free hand to defend its interests, it must equip itself with credible military forces capable of acting persuasively. The time has come for us Europeans to "take our destiny in our hands". For real.