

Common Security and Defence in 2014: Revise and resubmit

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The conclusions of the December 2013 European Council on defence sounded like a 'revise and resubmit' recommendation for the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). That outcome was not too disappointing in itself, because precise technical guidelines were provided to revamp Europe's defence, with good prospects of real progress. But it was not too ambitious either, as a clear indication of Europe's future role in global security was in effect postponed until 2015, thus requiring 'resubmission' at a later date. Furthermore, member states did not seem particularly committed to reaching a formal agreement on a common strategic narrative; a sign that the governance gap continues to affect CSDP.

An assessment of the last trimester suggests that the success of any revision process clearly depends on the willingness of member states to work together and to fill that gap. The 'acid test' will also come in the document outlining Europe's main strategic challenges, which the High Representative is expected to present in 2015. Did the European Council on defence mark the twilight of CSDP, or is this the beginning of a new phase of cooperation, characterised by escalating external pressures, such as instability in the southern neighbourhood and a resurgent Russian threat in the east?

The revisions recommended by the European Council

The CSDP will need to be revised according to three priorities: effectiveness, visibility and impact. The Council revisions fall under the following headings:

Comprehensiveness. The European Council welcomed the joint communication from the Commission and the High Representative on the EU Comprehensive Approach (CA), recommending further improvement of the CA's effectiveness and efficiency, and that application of the CA to EU crisis management be prioritised.

Rapid deployment. The European Council stressed the need for the EU and its member states to deploy civilian and military assets rapidly and effectively. It recognised that the concept of 'Battlegroups' is problematic and should be more flexible and deployable.

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Recommendations also focused on the review of financial mechanisms (e.g. Athena) for EU missions and operations, as well as the procedures and rules for deployment.

New security challenges. The European Council's conclusions prioritise cooperation in five emerging security challenges, calling for:

- a) an EU cyber defence policy framework in 2014;
- b) an EU maritime security strategy by June 2014, putting forward an HR/Commission joint communication;
- c) increased synergies between CSDP and Freedom, Security and Justice actors to tackle horizontal issues such as illegal immigration, organised crime, and terrorism;
- d) progress in CSDP support for third states and regions, to improve border management;
- e) strengthened cooperation to tackle energy security challenges.

Development of military capabilities. The European Council also highlighted the benefits of economies of scale, pooling demand and consolidating requirements, which would result in enhanced capabilities and R&D – all under the heading of **pooling and sharing**. The report mentions four key capabilities in this regard:

- a) drones: remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS) and preparations for a next-generation European medium altitude long endurance RPAS;
- b) air-to-air refuelling capacity, in particular the multi-role tanker transport;
- c) satellite communication;
- d) cyber, through the development of a roadmap and concrete projects focusing on training and exercises.

Procurement. The European Defence Agency (EDA) is tasked with examining ways in which member states can cooperate more effectively in pooled procurement projects, and should report back to the Council by the end of 2014.

Defence planning. Transparency and information-sharing should facilitate convergence among national defence planning needs and timelines: the High Representative and the EDA are asked to develop a framework by the end of 2014, in line with NATO processes.

Strengthening Europe's defence industry. The European Council stressed the need for a more competitive defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB) to ensure strategic autonomy and the ability to act with partners, but also to stimulate jobs, innovation and growth within the EU. Important recommendations include:

- the full and correct implementation and of the two defence directives of 2009 to open up the defence market;
- investments in dual-use research, in line with the broader objective to retain and expand Research & Technology (R&T) expertise;
- promote greater access of small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to defence and security markets and their involvement in EU funding programmes.

A year of deadlines

The setting up of a concrete timeline for the revisions represents, undoubtedly, a major step forward in the evolution of European defence. The latter has become – at last – defined as a problem and prioritised on the Council's agenda. Herman Van Rompuy has initiated a momentous 'top-down steering' dynamic. Furthermore, the Council has been successful in linking concrete initiatives to the intention of framing of a new, comprehensive strategy steering the future course of foreign and security policy.

The stakes are high; 2014 will be a busy year – indeed a crucial one, as some authors have observed. New leadership (a High Representative and European Council president from December 1st; a European Commission president from November 1st) and institutional changes (the new European Parliament from July 1st, the new European Commission from November 1st) will reconfigure the dynamics of power in Brussels. This could provide an additional boost to strategy making, particularly as one of the first acts of Catherine Ashton's successor will be to present and implement the new strategic doctrine for Europe. NATO will also have a new Secretary General in August 2014. One month later, the September 2014 NATO Summit will pave the way for the new rationale of the Atlantic Alliance post-Afghanistan, including the relationship with the EU.

A new narrative seems to be emerging in the European discourse on defence. The nexus between external peace and the EU's domestic stability is accompanied by a growing awareness of the costs of non-Europe and the benefits of deeper integration within the defence sector. Unsurprisingly, the Ukraine crisis and the renewed Russian threat is pushing some EU member states to reverse the trend of cuts to defence spending and to consider increased European cooperation. While this logic holds true for the Baltic, Nordic and Central and Eastern European states, reverberations are likely to engender a comprehensive military re-think on strategy and capabilities affecting the rest of the continent. In sum, there are reasons to believe that European defence is finally turning a corner.

The problem with CSDP revisions

Revising CSDP may not prove to be an easy task, however. Despite the impetus provided by the Council's conclusions, the governance gap persists. Member states still hold divergent views as to what type of defence cooperation they envisage. The UK and France squabble over whether NATO or an upgraded CSDP should be the focal point of European defence efforts, especially in terms of military command structures. Opening the 2014 Munich security conference, Germany's President Joachim Gauck called for greater defence integration in Europe and made a plea for a more active German participation in military operations. While this might be the dawn of new security thinking in Berlin, overnight change is not likely to happen, especially because the German public opposes military missions overseas. Moving from talks to deeds, Germany still seems adamant not to take a leading role in defence.

As a matter of fact, 2014 has started with the EU showing the usual divisions, sluggishness and hesitation. The launch of an EU military mission in the Central African Republic (EUFOR CAR) is at odds with the "Defence matters" slogan of the December 2013 Council conclusions. The UK, Germany and Italy have refused to send troops because it is too risky. The initial budget for EUFOR CAR of €40 million was reduced to €26 million to comply with some member states' concerns about the excessive cost of the operation. It is expected that the full operational capacity will not be attained before the end of May. The troubles have frustrated France. Paris may be compelled to increase its contingent to fill the gap in the force generation process, and seems left with the bulk of the responsibility to avoid state failures and the spread of instability in Africa. As for the Battlegroups, it is business as usual; they have remained in Europe. To ensure a rapid reaction to the crisis, Europeans have once again avoided use of the stand-by force created to provide the EU with a rapid reaction capability.

With the usual disagreements about states' commitment to high-risk military operations in and beyond the neighbourhood, the first two months of 2014 have shown little sign of the 'small revolution' that could reinvigorate Europe's role in global security. If evidence matters as much as defence does, the chances that the EU will act more strategically on the global scale are not too high.

Resubmission

Perhaps now more than ever, CSDP is what member states make of it. The roadmap provided by the European Council conclusions can be seen as a glass half full. As such, they do make for a good starting point for a new chapter on European defence. The potential for progress is all-encompassing. The technical roadmap addresses long-standing shortfalls such as the lack of a competitive European defence industry; it indicates what capabilities are considered as key (drones, air-to-air refuelling, satellite communications, cyber) and recommends concrete steps forward; most importantly, it links those initiatives to important elements of a future strategic concept, such as comprehensiveness, responsiveness and the identification of new security challenges. Overall, an important decision has been taken to kick the can further down the road.

Technical guidelines will have little impact without appropriate political guidance, however. To reach the resubmission target, EU member states must be willing to work together, constructively, on revising the CSDP. Without such willingness, the 'top-down steering' started by the December 2013 European Council is doomed to result in an empty glass.

The new leadership of the EEAS will prove an important reality check. The new appointments should reflect member states' willingness to entrust the EEAS with the authority and capacity to forge a coherent strategic framework for Europe by 2015.

Creating and sustaining better CSDP governance should therefore accompany the implementation of the European Council's guidelines all the way. A recent CEPS Policy Brief¹ spelled out four yardsticks for member states to measure their progress towards that goal: greater similarity of strategic cultures, solidarity and trust, clarity of strategic interests, and unity or degree of integration. It looks like the biggest challenge to Europe's security in the coming year is Europeans' commitment to rise to the many challenges together.

¹ G. Faleg, (2013) "[The Governance Gap in European Security and Defence](#)", *CEPS Policy Brief*, No. 310, 17 December 2013.