

The positive developments of the Italian proposal on European common security and defence policy

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Abstract

Long exiled from the community debate, European security and defence policy, revived and significantly innovated by the Lisbon Treaty (2007), is today given new urgency by a rapidly changing security environment, where challenges are increasingly interconnected and threats ever more hybridized. As the paper argues, this alarming scenario calls for a reconfiguration of the European security order, currently inadequate in meeting the demands of a broadened, more comprehensive and in a way more challenging, notion of security.

By advancing the creation of a ‘European Defence Union’ as the most effective solution to a multiplicity of contemporary threats facing the EU and suggesting a specific framework for its achievement, the research aims at proving that a unified European voice in defence would constitute a strategic – concrete – way to reaffirm Europe’s credibility and capability as a security actor, strengthening at the same time the Union’s potential as a global player. In today’s post-Brexit Europe, such response, by echoing the federalist dream of a ‘United States of Europe’, would constitute also a strong message to populist and Euroscepticist voices, in the conviction that new challenges require new and concrete answers. At present, the first concrete results of the enhanced cooperation among the so-called ‘Big Four’ on migration, anti-terrorism and public finance, indicates as possible and viable a closer and more effective cooperation also on European security and defence matters.

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Part One: Introduction

1. The project of European defence has entered the European policy agenda

At the Prague Defence and Security Conference (9 June 2017), the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker took a decisive step in favour of the creation of a common European defence system, on the rationale that ‘it is the most basic and universal of rights to feel safe and secure in your own home’¹. As reflected in the European Council conclusions of 18 May and 19 June 2017, significant progress has been achieved in implementing the EU Global Strategy in the area of Security and Defence and the Joint Declaration signed in Warsaw by EU and NATO leaders. The transatlantic relationship and the EU-NATO cooperation remain key to Europe’s overall security, allowing the EU to respond to evolving security threats, including cyber, hybrid and terrorism. The high-level conference on security and defence held in Prague underlined both the complementarity between the EU and NATO and the need to step up European efforts to strengthen defence-related research, capabilities and operations. According to Juncker, the time has come for Europe to give new, concrete, substance to defence efforts in an inclusive and ambitious plan envisioning the implementation of previously dormant mechanisms in the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, first of all PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), a possible form of cooperation among those willing Member States with sufficient capabilities to contribute – either at a national level or as a component of multinational forces – to targeted combat units structured as a battle group (Art 42.6 and 46 TEU).

‘The protection of Europe’ – Juncker asserts – ‘can no longer be outsourced. Even our biggest military powers cannot combat all the challenges and threats alone. We do not have to look much further than our doorstep to see that war is not a thing of the past’². Juncker’s position finds also the support of the Italian Defence Minister Roberta Pinotti, who maintains that ‘in face of these challenges, it is clear that we have to do much more. Europe is not, unfortunately, as prosperous, free

¹ Jean-Claude Juncker, Defence and Security Conference Prague: In defence of Europe, Prague, 9 June 2017

² *ibid.*

and safe as affirmed by Javier Solana in 2003³.

‘Europeans’ – President Juncker continues – ‘rightly expect their Union to provide security for them. And they want their governments to work together to make it happen.’ European leaders heeded that call four months ago in signing the Rome Declaration (25 March 2017). Together, they committed to strengthening Europe's security and defence by doing more and by cooperating closer. Yet, without doubts, ‘the difficulties are real, but they can be overcome. We have diametrically different defence reflexes amongst our Member States. This diversity was formed by different histories, by different geographies. As recognized by President Juncker moreover, central to the discussion is ‘a long-standing, fundamental, question about sovereignty. Many of our Member States consider defence as a matter of strict national sovereignty. But sharing sovereignty does not mean forgoing sovereignty. On the contrary, having stronger and more sovereign Member States in a globalised world requires having more cooperation within the European Union, especially on defence. Systematic defence cooperation and further integration will contribute to the preservation of national sovereignty’⁴.

Beyond the diversity of views among EU Member States, important steps towards a common defence cooperation in Europe have however been taken in the past months. The delineation of the EU Global Strategy, the Joint EU-NATO Declaration, the creation of a European ‘Joint Support Coordination Cell’, a common defence fund, the Rome Declaration (25 March 2016), but also the drafting of a European White Book, all signal the elaboration of a new, collective, strategic thinking adequately adapted to the changed perception of threats in the post-1989, and post-09/11, world. The discourse around security is in fact a consolidated topic in Europe due to three major reasons. The first is undoubtedly linked to the perception of increased political and military instability at the European Union’s Southern and Eastern borders, exacerbated by the crisis in Ukraine (2013-present), accompanied by the increased Russian military activism in the Baltic and Black Sea, by the strong

³ Roberta Pinotti, *Corriere della Sera*, 25 giugno 2017, p.28

⁴ *ibid.*

reaffirmation of transnational terrorism and by the consequent, unprecedented, migratory wave from Africa and the Middle East. Today in fact this situation, worsened by the dramatic Syrian civil war, the ongoing conflicts for water and resources, the Libyan meltdown and the failure of other important Arab states, have brought to the fore the inefficacy and insufficiency of the European Union's defence efforts, revealing two basic truths: the EU's limited preparedness to deal with external crises, and the necessity for the Union to actively engage externally to ensure security also within its borders. Insecurity, fear and uncertainty are now widespread feelings among European citizens themselves, constantly threatened by an enemy that is becoming ever more 'internal', undeclared, hidden, and therefore difficult to foresee, anticipate and defeat.

The second motive refers to the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union. As maintained by Besch, Britain's historical 'NATO first' attitude to European security 'has meant that the UK has resolutely opposed elements of proposed EU defence cooperation', such as the EU operational headquarters independent of NATO: many in Brussels now hope that with the UK's imminent departure the EU can 'unfreeze' some of these proposals'⁵. The third reason relates to the financial benefits deriving from increased rationalization of the operational costs of defence (armed forces, other personnel and resources), particularly relevant in a context of politico-economic uncertainties, featuring ongoing cuts in defence budgets by individual EU countries. This alarming scenario has rendered the need to delineate a new approach to European security and defence policy more urgent than ever.

As agreed by Juncker and by the European Council, 'we have reached a point where progress is the only option. The only question is the speed'⁶. What is clear is that 'the momentum behind closer defence cooperation comes first and foremost from the people of Europe. In almost all Member States, security is among the top three priorities, and three quarters of Europeans are in favour of a common security and defence policy. They want their Union to do more to protect them

⁵ Besch, S. (2016). *EU defence, Brexit and Trump: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. [online]

⁶ Jean-Claude Juncker, Defence and Security Conference Prague: In defence of Europe, Prague, 9 June 2017

from threats old and new. And it is time to listen. In the last decades, there has not been a more compelling set of security challenges, economic facts and political arguments justifying a drastic step change in European defence. But more than that, the clock is running on how long we can live in a house half built. A European Security and Defence Union will help protect our Union, which is exactly what EU citizens expect'⁷. This call is 'not only in favour of a Europe of defence — it is a call in defence of Europe'.

At present, the debate about the securitization of Europe is divided into two main different lines of thoughts, both calling inevitably into question, in opposing ways, the relationship between state sovereignty – of which security and defence matters constitute a core element – and European supranational identity. While on the one hand, Member States could reinforce their national sovereignty in continuing to cooperate with one another in a framework of tactical politico-military alliances – first of all NATO – on the other, they could take the less immediate, but innovative and strategically fundamental, decision to surrender more sovereignty in the field of security and defence, creating a real European defence system with a common strategic concept, common policies of prevention and resilience, the appropriate common military apparatus and a common budget.

In moving in the latter direction, the recent progresses in European defence policy confirm the success that the project of a common European defence elaborated in the Italian proposal for a 'Schengen of Defence' is currently experiencing at the European level. The project, advanced by the former Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Paolo Gentiloni, and the Italian Minister of Defence, Roberta Pinotti in August 2016, is driven by the conviction that it is more compelling than ever that the European Union takes now, in a moment of widespread Euroscepticism, economic, political and institutional crises, a significant step towards unity and cohesion through the creation of a 'European Defence Union', that will strengthen, and in a way transform, the visibility, effectiveness and impact of the present EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The Italian government has strongly supported and defended the proposal and it is in fact possible to observe a

⁷ *ibid.*

more widespread consent on defence cooperation at the European level. Without doubts, the road remains long and filled with obstacles and the future uncertain. Yet, it is for this same reason that the Italian project, now consolidated in a common – European – agenda, deserves to be given new substance and reconsidered together with the reasons that support it.

2. Literature Review

The existing literature on European foreign security and defence policy shows that, while the momentous relevance and increased interest in the topic is widely recognized among scholars, the debate is mostly polarized into two competing views: (1) those who, while acknowledging the strategic importance of further integration in security and defence, maintain that the disadvantages still outweigh the advantages and (2) those who support this progress, emphasizing that the EU and its citizens would benefit considerably from greater cooperation in the field.

Despite the instability caused by the post-Cold War security crisis and by the rise of unprecedented challenges (1991 to present), many scholars still share the conviction, expressed by Andrew Moravcsik in his article 'How Europe Can Win Without an Army', that 'European defence is a dangerous pipe dream' (Moravcsik, 2003:3). To Moravcsik in fact 'the world is bipolar after all': while the US is able to fight and win wars, the real superpower in conflict prevention and post-war reconstruction is Europe (ibid.). According to this view, the EU should not pretend to supersede the US or compromise the relationship with NATO by competing with it when it comes to military intervention (Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2003). Put in neorealist terms, the EU is believed to have long been engaged in a form of 'reformed bandwagoning', allying with the US in order to maximise its own power, influence and, crucially, security (Dyson, 2010:105).

However, as shown in an analysis by Meyer, since 2006 there seems to be, among core Member States such as Germany and France, support for the idea that the EU should challenge the 'traditional division of labour with the US/NATO' and that the EU is no longer willing to restrict itself, if necessary and as a last resort, to low-intensity operations and 'soft missions' (Meyer, 2006:176). As outlined in more recent analyses, Washington itself is believed to have changed – especially since 2015 – its attitude towards the idea of a stronger European security and defence force, supporting the idea that 'Europeans need to work more effectively within the EU' (Menon and Witney, 2015:4). Europe is no longer seen as a 'security consumer', but as a 'security provider' (Coelmont and Langlois, 2013:2). Parallel to the EU-US dimension, also and primarily the CSDP-NATO relationship needs to be rebalanced, on the basis of Coelmont and Langlois' so-called 'three C': 'co-operation, co-ownership and capabilities', through a 'supporting and supported' approach that entails more solidarity and mutual gain (ibid.).

Yet, disagreement remains over the *modus operandi* for reaching the necessary normative, strategic and practical convergence in military structures to bring the EU to act coherently, effectively and rapidly through the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Specifically, as shown by Meyer, the problem remains the bridging of three major cleavages between (i) non-

aligned states and NATO members, (ii) those country strongly attached to the US/NATO and those calling for European autonomy of action and (iii) between advocates of European militarisation and those who prefer the EU to retain mainly civilian powers (Meyer, 2006). To Menon however, overcoming these obstacles represents a ‘highly risky undertaking’: proceeding in further integration in security and defence carries with it the ‘possibly to foster competition rather than mutually beneficial collaboration between NATO and the EU’, undermining at the same time the ability of the West to respond to security threats (Menon, 2003:215).

On a more practical basis, many believe that, especially after the sharp cuts in Member States’ security and defence budgets inflicted by the economic crisis in 2008 (a decrease by 14.5 % in total defence spending from 2007 to 2015), the EU lacks the material and financial means to recalibrate the transatlantic bond and to construct at the same time its military autonomy (Solana et al. 2016). But before drawing this conclusion, it is necessary to considerate what is the actual cost of ‘non-Europe’ (Ballester, 2013). In fact, the idea that a common European defence system is too expensive contains in itself a paradox, given that, as estimated by the EDA’s 2015 Defence Data Report, the current defence expenditure of single Member States far outweighs the costs that each state would have to support by pooling and sharing resources – ‘an efficiency gain of approximately 6.5 billion a year’ (Eda.europa.eu, 2015).

Other than the economic aspect, it is also feared that Member States’ ‘different conceptions of the use of force’ and diverse national priorities, combined with states’ historical reluctance to surrender sovereignty in core fields of exclusive national competence such as security and defence, could constitute a concrete obstacle to more integration (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2013:7). One of the greatest challenge for the EU is in fact to re-examine its own foundational myths and organizational identity: especially in light of the resurgence of nationalisms on the European continent, the ideational commitment to effective multilateralism constitutes possibly one of the strongest obstacles yet to overcome. Like Menon, many believe that the EU does not possess the

‘glue’ that the common recognition of the ‘territorial defence function enshrined in Article 5’ provides in NATO (Menon, 2003:211).

However, as maintained by Blockmans and Faleg (2015), the identification of common threats per se should constitute a reason of cohesion in the name of those shared values upon which the EU was founded. Without doubts, as outlined by Howorth, to defend its recently growing ambition in security and defence integration, ‘the Union will have to develop the institutional capacity to cope with executive decisions taken rapidly and effectively in security matters’ (Howorth, 2003:235). Not without criticisms, the need to advance the Union’s institutional ability to act more decisively and autonomously in security and defence is currently recognized. Yet, what seems to be lacking in the present literature is the delineation of an actual framework to create a ‘European Defence Union’, a model that provides the EU with effective guidance on how to proceed in further integration in the field.

1. Argument

By outlining the traditional positions on the issue, the previous section points to the main obstacles propounded by opponents of further integration, political, economic, institutional and ideational in nature. While arguments on both sides focus on what to do, too little addresses how to do it, failing to substantiate the discourse by reconciling theory with practice. In this sense, the recent Italian proposal for the creation of a ‘Schengen of Defence’ (August 2016) advanced by the Italian Ministers Gentiloni and Pinotti, sets forth a rational, clear and viable – although not unproblematic – model to follow. The proposal suggests the creation of a multilateral European force, based on a common mandate and a shared vision. Other than full implementation of the existing treaty provisions – most importantly articles 42.7, 44 and 46 of the Lisbon Treaty – Member States need to proceed further by effectively joining forces in a collective mechanism that

embodies, in the most coherent way possible, all of the principles set forth until now (Gentiloni and Pinotti, 2016).

Without doubt, the project would trigger a number of different, and inevitable, considerations, such as the redefinition of the relationship between national and supranational defence mechanisms, the implications that a higher level of EU military autonomy (parallel but not alternative to NATO) would have for the EU-NATO relationship and for the EU- US dimension more in general, but also the position of Britain in this delicate post-Brexit context. Given the changes in the US political scenario brought about by the Trump presidency, much of the debate about the securitization of Europe and the role of the EU as a global security actor is contingent also on whether the US will ultimately assume a more individualistic approach to security matters, as presently demonstrated. In this case, the creation of a 'European Defence Union' will become not only advisable, but also urgent.

The aim of this pooling and sharing initiative is not simply to construct a European army, but to adopt, along with enhanced military autonomy, a new comprehensive approach to security and defence issues able to strengthen the EU's internal and external resilience – its ability to prevent, respond to and recovery from possible crises and threats – contributing at the same time to decrease the likeliness of turmoil and humanitarian emergencies and help to stabilize, where necessary, neighbouring countries.

2. Organization of the Study

Starting with a note on the concept of security, Part Two will assess the functioning of the existing mechanisms of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy, analysing the innovations introduced by the Lisbon Treaty in the field of foreign policy and, more specifically, their impact on CSDP. In Part Three, the discussion will turn to a detailed analysis of the Italian proposal for a 'Schengen of Defence', its rationale and implications, along with how and why such Defence Union is expected to tackle in a more coherent, comprehensive and effective way contemporary challenges. The section will then evaluate the political, economic and strategic advantages and disadvantages of the project, its political reactions and evaluations, including two interviews conducted with two eminent experts in the field and important players in the very shaping of the discourse on security and defence in the EU at the Italian, but also European and international level, the President of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Italian Senate, Pierferdinando Casini, and the President of the Italian Delegation to NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Andrea Manciulli.

A note in Appendix I, contextual to the discussion, will provide an overview of the shifting dynamics of power at the end of World War II, delineating how these have determined the rise of new challenges and the consequent quest for a new security order in the post-1989 multipolar world.

Part Two: Common Security and Defence Policy in the European Union

The Lisbon Constitutional Treaty (2007), which represents a real watershed in the institutional architecture of European security and defence, articulates a detailed legal framework for CSDP, with provisions that, if concretely implemented, could actually pave the way for a common defence, namely a European Defence Union. This discussion demonstrates that the existing principles guiding CSDP contain a far greater potential for effectiveness in European-led operations than their present implementation status shows. In effect, at present, the lack of concrete application of these essential provisions, aimed at allowing for more flexibility in implementing CSDP, renders, on the contrary, the current European system of defence limited and inadequate in meeting the demands of a broadened, more comprehensive and in a way more challenging, notion of security. As argued more specifically in the next chapter, these treaty provisions should constitute the building blocks for the reconfiguration of security in Europe – and beyond.

1. A new understanding of security

Traditionally, and particularly as a Cold War idea, security has been understood purely in military terms. Yet, the beginning of European integration determined a figurative enlargement of the concept of security from the nation-state to the regional space and a parallel broadening of the notion to include not merely military functions but also economic, environmental and social welfare issues (Deutsch, 1969). As pointed out by Sperling and Kirchner (1995), security in the post-1989 world has come to be defined almost more in economic than in military terms, with globalisation bringing about new opportunities, but also making threats more complex and interconnected.

As a consequence of the changed politico-strategic environment, a much more comprehensive, holistic, approach to security, *resilience*, has gradually emerged in the EU foreign and security policy ‘as an answer to the growing complexity of the international security environment’ (Pawlak,

2016:2). In the EU context, this notion integrates different policy areas: humanitarian aid, disaster-risk reduction, development assistance, conflict prevention, peacebuilding and climate change adaptation (ibid.). Inevitably then, these transformations and the need to adapt collective strategic thinking to the changed perception of threat after 1989 raise debate about the institutional choices available to reconfigure the European security space and, to an extent, about the consequences of the choices already made. ‘As a relatively new addition to EU jargon’, the aim of building resilience still needs to be translated into tangible, concrete, practicable measures and this is in fact what this research proposes: a way forward (Pawlak, 2016:3).

2. The innovations introduced by the Lisbon Treaty on security and defence

In the field of foreign, security and defence policy, the Treaty of Lisbon, entered into force in 2009, incorporates a large part of the innovations already envisioned by the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (2004), giving new substance to the fundamental principles guiding the Union’s international action – democracy, rule of law, solidarity and respect for human rights in accordance also with the UN framework within which it operates. One of the major contributions of the Lisbon Treaty to the definition of the Union’s external action is the principle of ‘coherence’, which identifies a connection between foreign affairs and traditionally internal policies, such as the energy sector, the environment and migratory issues. Yet, despite this greater consistency with other EU policy fields, Article 24.1 TEU clarifies that the Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy remains ‘subject to specific rules and procedures’ (Eur-lex.europa.eu, 2007). While the provisions adopted in the Treaty of Lisbon are designed to favour a more inclusive, coherent and multilateral approach to foreign policy, the Treaty maintains a largely intergovernmental character, allowing governments to retain a primary role, not affecting in this sense ‘the responsibility of Member States in the formulation and conduct of their own national foreign policy’ (Piris, 2010:260).

In 2003, the adoption of the European Security Strategy (ESS) witnessed Member States' effort to render security policy more effective. Some of the innovations brought about by the Lisbon Treaty had already been envisioned in the Strategy, but 'some of its suggestions, such as the structured cooperation between 'the able' and closer cooperation in mutual defence between 'the willing', did not find Member States' unanimous support' (Piris, 2010:273). Five years after – with the EU strong of major experiences such as Operation 'Concordia' in the Former-Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (March-December 2003) and EULEX Kosovo (February 2008) – the '2008 Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy', constituted an important occasion of reflection for the Union and a realistic prediction of the challenges yet to face.

The importance of the 2008 Report and its specific relevance for this discussion rests in its effectiveness in posing the premises for the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009:

Twenty years after the Cold War, Europe faces increasingly complex threats and challenges. The EU must strengthen its own coherence, through better institutional co-ordination and more strategic decision-making. *The provisions of the Lisbon Treaty provide a framework to achieve this* (Consilium.europa.eu, 2008). [emphasis added]

2.1 In particular: the principle of 'permanent structured cooperation' and the clauses of 'mutual assistance' and 'solidarity'

On the specific subject of security and defence, the Lisbon Treaty has brought about important modifications. Among the most relevant, is the creation of a 'permanent structured cooperation' mechanism (PESCO), a possible form of cooperation among those willing Member States with sufficient capabilities to contribute, either at a national level or as a component of multinational forces, to targeted combat units structured as a battle group (Art 42.6 and 46 TEU). Participation in PESCO is voluntary and its activation requires a qualified majority in the Council of Ministers and the concurrent deliberation of the High Representative: states deemed 'able to meet the

commitments' are allowed to join also 'at a later stage', while they can withdraw their contribution at any time by notifying the Council (Piris, 2010:275).

Given the terms regulating it, PESCO is without doubt a potentially effective incentive to cooperation on paper. The possibility for those willing Member States 'whose military capabilities fulfil higher criteria' (Art 42.6) of starting a form of cooperation to which other Members can progressively join, is founded on Article 44 TEU, which allows a minimum of two states to be entrusted, following a unanimous Council decision, with the 'implementation of a task' (planning and conduct) (Anghel and Bacian, 2016:4). Despite the January 2016 European Parliament resolution stating that EU institutions need to actively promote the implementation of all the provisions on security and defence policy enshrined in the Treaties and that 'CSDP shall include the progressive framing of a Common Union Defence Policy' which '*will lead* to a common defence', Article 44 'has never been used and its added value remains to be proven' (Europarl.europa.eu, 2016) (ibid.). The lack of concrete implementation of both Articles 44 and 42.6 (establishing PESCO), explains why permanent structured cooperation has been termed 'the sleeping beauty of European defence' (Mauro, 2015:2).

Protocol no.10 on PESCO annexed to the Treaty of Lisbon identifies two other main objectives: (1) proceeding more intensively in the development of defence capabilities through the activities of the European Defence Agency (EDA) (Art 45.2 TEU) and (2) ensuring participation in the so-called EU battlegroups. Although the past years have presented many occasions for the deployment of battlegroups, opportunities to test the effectiveness of these tactical units have either failed, as in Lebanon and Libya, or lagged, as in Mali, proving that a number of occasions to advance CSDP have been missed. Similarly, 'the results of the work of the EDA have remained' – and continue to remain at the time of writing – 'modest' (Piris, 2010:278).

The other major innovation introduced by the Lisbon Treaty in the field of security and defence is the establishment, for the first time within the EU institutional framework, of a 'collective defence' clause (Art 42.7 TEU). The clause provides that when a Member State is the

victim of an armed aggression on its territory, the other Members are bound to an obligation of aid and assistance by all means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter and Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. However, the Treaty of Lisbon includes some important warnings relating to its implementation. In particular, compliance with the obligation to assist a country victim of armed aggression cannot undermine (1) the specific character of the security and defence policy of neutral States and (2) the compliance with commitments in security and defence in the framework of NATO, which remains, for those States which are also members of the Alliance, the foundation of their collective defence.

Together with this norms, the Lisbon Treaty also provides for a ‘solidarity clause’ (Art 222 TFEU), according to which the Union and its Member States shall act jointly if one of the latter is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-caused catastrophe. This clause represents the culmination of a process begun in Seville in 2002 with the Declaration of the European Council on the contribution of CFSP to the fight against terrorism, further incentivized by the terrorist attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005), and particularly relevant in light of the contemporary attacks in many other European countries, from France, Germany and Belgium to Russia and Sweden.

3. Implementation of the Lisbon Treaty provisions on CSDP

As discussed, the Lisbon Treaty introduced new mechanisms, including a mutual assistance clause, permanent structured cooperation and enhanced cooperation, with the aim of allowing for more flexibility in applying CSDP. However, with the exception of the collective defence clause, invoked for the first time in November 2015, the other new mechanisms have not yet been implemented, notwithstanding 20 resolutions of the European Parliament (up to February 2016) calling for the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty provisions on CSDP (Anghela and Bacian, 2016). This can be largely explained by the lack of political will especially

amongst weaker EU Member States, which fear relinquishing control over this policy area and the creation of a ‘two-speed Europe’. Moreover, despite various attempts at reform, financing rules remain rigid and non-conducive to an effective and speedy deployment of troops abroad (Van Genderen, 2015).

At present, PESCO, the collective defence and solidarity clauses, and the European Defence Agency constitute ‘the three indivisible elements’ which were eventually to give birth to the ‘European Security and Defence Union, the carbon copy of the Economic and Monetary Union’, that was supposed to be created before the enlargement (1973) (Mauro, 2015:3). Thus, while CSDP did not change substantially in the first few years following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, it has a great potential to evolve, both politically and institutionally. The mechanisms contained in it remain intact, ‘they only need one condition to be implemented: willingness’ (ibid.).

Part Three: the Italian proposal for a ‘European Defence Union’, evaluations and reactions

‘The road to pursue is neither easy nor certain. But it must be followed and it will be.’
(Altiero Spinelli, 2015)

On 26 and 27 September 2016, EU defence Ministers gathered in Bratislava agreed on the need to establish a new strategic thinking that, especially in light of the outcome of the British referendum, better defines the goals that the Union could pursue in security and defence policy, since, as it currently stands, CSDP has proved to be rather ineffective and operationally incoherent. The Bratislava meeting became necessary following the presentation of a fundamental document on a new European strategic doctrine, known as ‘EU Global Strategy’ by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, a few days after the Brexit vote (28 June 2016). The document stresses the need for European multinational units equipped, organized and, most importantly, autonomous from an operational standpoint, recommending to this end the development of unmanned aircraft, satellite communication capabilities, air refuelling and the acquisition of greater potential in cyberspace. As noted by Frontini (2016), the Global Strategy retains the undeniable merit of providing some precious building blocks for the possible evolution and potential empowerment of CSDP in its institutional capability and industrial components.

In recognition of this same potential, the Italian Government advanced a proposal that clearly demonstrates the will not only to resume, but also to constructively renovate European defence policy and whose content appears to be in harmony especially with the Franco-German vision. The specific details of the proposal, its rationale and reactions will be further elaborated in the following sections.

1. A ‘Schengen of Defence’

The result of the British referendum and the frequent sequence of terrorist attacks feed an unprecedented sense of anguish in Europe. As clearly stated by the former Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Gentiloni and by the Italian Minister of Defence Pinotti, ‘if we want to counter the populist drift driving Euroscepticism and anti-Europeism, we must offer effective responses to the concerns of our citizens, starting with security’ (Gentiloni and Pinotti, 2016:1). In this sense, one of the most pertinent answers can be given in terms of defence. Britain's exit from the EU deprives the Union of a Member State with considerable military capabilities, the resurgence of nationalisms threatens unity, the migratory crisis weakens European internal stability while terrorism continues to strike; hence the need to generate new perspectives for a common defence. The Italian vision indicates two paths in response to these reflections. As shown in the previous chapter, the prime resource is identifiable in the treaties already in force. Unleashing the untapped potential of certain provisions of the Lisbon Treaty – Art 42.6, 42.7, 44, 46 TEU and Art 222 TFEU – would equip the EU with increased autonomy of action, strengthening the joint military capabilities of the actors involved, with enhanced cooperation between the Member States.

Yet, Italy calls on the partners to start the discussion on a more ambitious option: the launch, by part of a group of Member States, of a ‘European Defence Union’. On a practical level, a group of states could accelerate its defence integration by pooling a number of assets and resources, based on a shared model and a constitutive agreement that would establish the purposes and modes of operation. This would not merely imply the creation of a European army, formed by all the national forces of the participating States, but the establishment of a multinational European force, with shared functions and a common mandate, a command structure, centralised decision-making mechanisms and a public, common, budget. This would enable Europe to improve its capacity to react in a faster, more effective and more seamless manner, as envisioned in the EU Comprehensive Approach (European Commission, 2013). Moreover, strong emphasis is put on enhancing civilian-

military synergies, building on and uniting the existing structures of the European External Action Service (EEAS). The shared expertise and forces developed in this way would be made available not only to EU military missions, but equally to NATO and the United Nations. In its starting phase, the project could be initiated and developed by a small group of countries, such as the founding states, to be then opened to all Member States on the basis of the differentiated integration scheme already applied in the EU in several areas (and which legal basis is to be found in Art 44 TEU). Eventually, the goal would be to encourage a large number of Members to join and to incorporate this initiative in the treaties, as was the case with Schengen. In line with this scheme, the current, post-Brexit and post-French Presidential elections, scenario is ever more characterized by the common action of Germany, France, Italy and Spain, a cooperation confirmed by the recent success of the new summits on anti-terrorism, migration policies and public finance.

On security and defence issues, many EU states have already, although in an uncoordinated manner, engaged in bilateral and multilateral cooperative programmes that actually fully meet the criteria to launch PESCO (Coelmont, 2016). However, Member States must be aware that by not implementing PESCO in practice, they are missing out on important opportunities and incentives: the problem is that nobody seems to want to make the first move. In encouraging a ‘coalition of the willing and able’ to take the lead in the process, the proposal of the Italian Government is based on the principle that responding effectively to the challenges of a globalized, and globalizing, world entails taking a step ahead, joining forces through collective action rather than receding to a fragmented, overly sovereign and therefore obsolete system of defence whereby every nation provides for its own security independently of one another.

Through its traditionally strong ties to the Transatlantic Alliance, its attentiveness to NATO’s needs and its close relations with the United States, Italy proves ready to commit to dispel any kind of overlap with NATO, in the conviction that increased European autonomy of action in security and defence matter would be greatly beneficial also to the Alliance itself. ‘The main threat to the EU and its Member States today is that we could lose our partners, in particular the US, as well as

NATO, because of Europe's – so far – persistent reluctance to develop a credible security policy and forge a coherent and effective defence' (Gentiloni and Pinotti, 2016:2). Only the new way of looking at PESCO, as 'Permanent Sovereign Cooperation', is fit for purpose (Coelmont, 2016:7).

This is to underpin the EU Global Strategy with the required capabilities: ‘because a strategy without capabilities is nothing but a hallucination’ (ibid.)

2. The Italian Proposal: utopia or realism? Advantages and obstacles

If Italy, with the support of France and Germany, has shown particular enthusiasm about the development of a communitarian system of security and defence, other countries have expressed a sceptical position. This is especially the case of the so-called Visegrad Group (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia), not favourable to the creation of a defence system that could possibly reduce the politico-military weight of NATO, which has proved effective in assuring the security and integrity of their territories. NATO, on its part, has shown appreciation for a possible sharing of EU military capabilities, which could result in an increase in its own potential, provided however that the European system does not emerge as rival to the Alliance.

As already visible, the ideas put forth in the Italian proposal have played a central role in informing most of the concrete outcomes that the discourse on greater European integration in security and defence has generated in the past eight months (August 2016-March 2017). The call for greater coherence both in planning and action has been partly answered by the creation, in March 2017, of a ‘Joint Support Coordination Cell’, including a Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) and its non-military counterpart (CPCC), which aim is to develop a permanent structure ‘at the military strategic level and within the EEAS, strengthening civil/military synergy as an integral part of the process’ (expected to be operative from June 2017) (Council of the European Union, 2017).

The other concrete achievement is the creation of a European fund for defence to sustain common investments from Member States especially in research and innovation, also in non-strictly military fields such as climate change and sustainable development, essential to security. In March, the European Council has agreed to 500 million euros for research and development and 5,5 billion for

military assets and training (Audino, 2017). At present, in fact, the majority of the investments takes place on a national level, with greater expenditure from single countries and fewer outcomes: the move towards a common fund is therefore essential to guarantee more qualitative spending that would reduce the present output gap. Moreover, as maintained by High Representative Federica Mogherini, tangible advancements in security and defence cooperation would contribute to solve another gap, the one in European citizens' widespread negative perception of the legitimacy of the Union and its actual potential as a global actor, also and importantly through the possible future appointment of the president of a security union by a potentially directly-elected President of the EU Commission (EU Global Strategy, 2016). One of the greatest advantages of a European Union acting unanimously in the provision of security through both military and civil resources is the role that the EU could exert in the stabilization of neighbouring areas and the twofold benefits of this action: the strengthening of the EU's position on the international scene through a more valuable foreign policy aimed at promoting democracy and sustainable development via strategic cooperation with local governments and the consequent increase of internal security.

However, the formation of multinational units for European defence represents a goal that will require overcoming some major obstacles as robust as British obstructionism. EU foreign and defence policy decision-making mechanisms require in fact the unanimous vote of the Council of the European Union, coupled with the simultaneous availability of troops and capabilities by the supplier country. A deliberative system of this kind clearly reflects the primacy that national sovereignty continues to play in this field in relation to that of the Union. Until Member States adopt a majoritarian decision-making system also on matters of foreign policy and defence, accepting the possibility of having their authority superseded by the EU, any discussion about a common European defence structure remains abstract.

3. The post-Brexit relations with NATO

The essential role played by NATO in the maintenance of peace and stability on the European continent since the end of World War II, places the Alliance at the forefront of the debate about enhanced autonomy of action in CSDP. The European project on a Defence Union is envisioned in a closer and more effective direction: autonomy does not entail distance, indifference and competitiveness but rather greater opportunities, stronger reciprocal support and more incentives for multilateral cooperation. In this sense, a key goal under any future EU-NATO relationship is to guarantee complementarity, and, 'to make the invocation of NATO's Article 5 compatible with the other central provisions in the Lisbon Treaty' (Solana, 2016:45).

The commitment not to leave or discard NATO but rather to intensify and reinforce the relationship between Europe and the Transatlantic Alliance is reflected in a series of recent politico-institutional developments. During the NATO Summit in Warsaw in July 2016, NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg, the President of the European Council Tusk and EU Commission President Juncker, agreed on a Joint Declaration affirming the urgency of giving new substance to the strategic partnership between the two organisations with particular reference to seven areas of cooperation, from the counter to hybrid threats, to cyber-security, research and training (NATO, 2017). The aim is to build a cooperation that, starting from eminently practical issues, would avoid any duplication of mandates and result in the definition of a structured *modus operandi*. The leaders have also agreed to strengthen political dialogue between the two organizations, continuing, *inter alia*, the regular meetings of the Political and Security Committee and the North Atlantic Council. The rationale for future EU-NATO relations is outlined in the opening of the Joint Declaration:

We believe that the time has come to give new impetus and new substance to the NATO-EU strategic partnership [...] because our security is interconnected; *a stronger NATO and a stronger EU are mutually reinforcing*. Together they can better provide security in Europe and beyond (NATO, 2017). [emphasis added]

The partnership with NATO remains unquestionably fundamental. Simply put, the continuous attacks and challenges to which the Union is subject due to its geopolitical position render self-evident the impossibility for the Union to continue to rely solely on NATO.

4. Evaluations and political reactions

Any prediction about the future developments of CSDP needs to stand the test of political reality. As mentioned, the project advocating greater integration in security and defence matters is currently finding much support among European institutions and enjoying in particular the favour of France and Germany. Two events, the Brexit referendum (June 2016) and the election of Donald Trump as US President (November 2016) have in fact given, in an already critical context of international crises, an unprecedented sense of urgency to the European defence project which, as maintained by Besch, 'has long been a paper tiger' (Besch, 2016:2). Yet, the issue seems to have ultimately found the adequate politico-institutional condition not to be overlooked anymore. Significant in this respect, are the words of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayrault and former German Foreign Minister Steinmeier, included in their joint paper 'A Strong Europe in a World of Uncertainties' (2016):

The security of EU Member States is deeply interconnected: any threat to one is also a threat to others. We therefore regard our security as one and indivisible. In this context, France and Germany recommit to a shared vision of Europe as a security union, based on solidarity and mutual assistance between Member States in support of common security and defence policy (Ayrault and Steinmeier, 2016:3)

In this post-Brexit scenario, France is positioned to take the lead of that same project blocked by the French Parliamentary Assembly in 1954: France has in fact become the country with the strongest army, the only country with veto power in the UN Security Council and with nuclear arsenal in the EU. With the victory of the centrist and Europeist leader Emmanuel Macron, it has actually become possible to see France driving EU Member States together in defence matters, strengthening not only France's position in the Union, but also Europe's position in the Security Council and, as a consequence, Europe's prestige on the international scene.

On their part, the terms of the relationship between British and European defence policies remain largely uncertain. Even after Brexit, the EU and the UK will have a mutual interest in close security relations: while the EU wants to retain access to British capabilities and expertise, the UK is interested in EU military missions, ‘since its trade, security and exposure to immigration will be directly affected by the success of these operations’ (Besch, 2016:4). At the same time, however, as clarified by Britain’s defence Secretary Fallon, the UK has already requested the negotiation of a ‘privileged’ partnership with the EU.

More uncertainties derive from the lack of interest in the European partnership manifested by President Trump, who has already questioned America’s unconditional security guarantee to Europe. The President’s concern focuses primarily on an economic cost-benefit analysis, noticing that most European members of NATO have so far failed to commit to their 2 percent GDP defence budget. As stated by Trump in an interview with the *New York Times* in 2016 ‘if we cannot be properly reimbursed for the tremendous cost of our military protecting other countries, if we cannot make a deal, then yes, I would be absolutely prepared to tell those countries, congratulations, you will be defending yourself’ (Sanger and Haberman, 2016:3). More in general, Trump has shown his preference for a dialogue with Russia and disinterest in commercial relations with Europe, especially in the import and circulation of European products on the American territory. The US military reaction in Syria, the Moab recently dropped on Afghanistan (April 2016), the operations against North Korea, confirm the implementation of a military policy based on an ‘America first’ approach. Balancing the uncertainty about the transatlantic bond has therefore become a priority for Europe.

At the institutional level, these events have lead, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome (1957), EU leaders to reinforce and jointly declare their commitment to European unity:

We will make the European Union stronger and more resilient; unity is both a necessity and our free choice. We will act together, at different paces and intensity where necessary, while moving

in the same direction, as we have done in the past, in line with the Treaties and keeping the door open to those who want to join later. Our Union is undivided and indivisible (Consilium.europa.eu, 2017).

Against the more sceptic view that ‘the EU’s political message of unity remains largely aspirational’, the Declaration, one of the most representative and symbolic passages of the past ten months, urges that ‘the stakes have never been higher for European unity and for EU’s defence policy in particular’ (Besch, 2016: 3-4). The Declaration was in fact preceded by the elaboration of the first European White Book (March 2017), which envisions the creation of a defence union, anticipating the future issuing of a subject-specific ‘reflection paper’ (Europa.eu, 2017). Given Britain’s vote of no confidence and the Trump presidency, the Ministers say Europe’s goal must be for the remaining 27 Member States to move towards ‘a comprehensive and credible defence in the European Union’ (Barker, 2016). Realistically, however, EU leaders need to remember that ‘unity is by no means predetermined’ and that ‘only if European capitals translate their recent declarations of political will into a real and sustainable increase in defence spending can the new CSDP proposal succeed’ (Besch, 2016:7).

4.1 Two *ad hoc* interviews: the President of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Italian Senate and the President of the Italian Delegation to NATO Parliamentary Assembly

These *ad hoc* interviews provide at the same time special insight on highly influential political thinking and evidence in support of the argument that the creation of a European Defence Union, possibly on the model delineated by the Italian Government in its proposal, constitutes the necessary way forward. The original evidence gathered from these expert interviews provide the opportunity to further the themes elaborated so far, allowing a detailed understanding of the actual attitude towards further integration in European security and defence mechanisms at the politico-institutional level. For purposes of comparison, President Casini and President Manciuilli were asked the same set of questions, except for one specific question on the outcome of the October 2016 GSM NATO, addressed specifically to President Manciuilli. While supporting the creation of a European Defence Union and the importance of ‘making full use of the existing treaty provisions,’ these statements by actors that have political responsibilities in this very field demonstrate at the same time strong commitment to innovation and political realism, especially in the relationship with NATO.

President Casini² underlines the ‘problems arising from the ceding of additional shares of sovereignty by Member States’, but also the absolute necessity of a common European defence, as already envisioned by René Pleven and Alcide De Gasperi. After recalling ‘those missions and military operations conducted so far under the European flag’ (EUNAVFOR MED), and the measures of permanent structured cooperation (PESCO), President Casini stresses the necessity of facilitating ‘the development of Member States’ defence capabilities and strengthening European cooperation in the field, ‘making full use of the existing treaty provisions’. Casini importantly remembers that we must also consider the prospect for enhanced cooperation that was established following the signing of the Rome Declaration, on 25 March 2017. President Casini adds: ‘it is pointless to deny that the European Union is at a crossroads: the choices to be made in the coming months will be crucial to determine whether the European dream will grow and will be translated into something much more tangible, or whether it will result in an utopian and failed experience. Political decisions require a judicious vision, concreteness and long-term commitment’. As stressed, the challenge of building a European Defence Union must be pursued with determination by those political forces that have not lost their sense of identity and the value of European unity. ‘Personally, I remain optimistic about it, even and especially for the widespread awareness that Europeans have on these issues. According to figures released in November 2016 from the Eurobarometer, 75 percent of European citizens declared in favour of a common security and defence policy. We are therefore in the most favourable time since the EDC Treaty (1952) for the strengthening of defence integration. We must not lose this historic occasion’.

² Interview with the author, 27 March 2017, Rome; see full text in Appendix III

In line with President Casini, President Manciulli³ underlies that the Italian proposal goes in the direction of giving the Union effective instruments of defence policy to enable it to take a leading on the international stage and to provide in particular better common security policy. On the relationship with NATO, President Manciulli adds: ‘I have long been a convinced Atlanticist and I think the project of the Atlantic Alliance cannot be reduced merely to a military one. NATO was established in the darkest years of the Cold War, today we have passed that time, that world division between East and West, but we are witnessing global scenarios much more complicated and not less dangerous’. NATO, which finds its own profound meaning in a political project rooted in the values and history of the West – freedom, democracy, rule of law – retains an essential role, not only to ensure safety, but also to promote globally the values on which it is founded: political stability, cooperation between countries and international organizations. To President Manciulli, particular importance is to be attributed to the recent reunions of the GSM NATO that have enabled the ratification of ‘two reports, the first on the birth and evolution of DAESH and the second on the expansion of terrorism in Libya and in the Western Mediterranean, which have allowed the NATO allies, together with representatives of their Mediterranean partner countries, to undertake a serious debate about the jihadi threat, leading the NATO Parliamentary Assembly to approve two very significant reports that address in a non-ritual manner the subject of terrorism’.

³ Interview with the author, 31 March 2017, Rome; see full text in Appendix IV

Conclusion

Security and defence has historically been a field of exclusive national competence, a core sovereign element that states have traditionally felt particularly reluctant to surrender. The recent escalation of the discourse around European security and defence to a priority issues at the EU politico-institutional level has been accelerated by international events and global dynamics, from the Brexit vote and the election of Trump as U.S. president, to the rising pace of terrorist attacks on the European continent, but also and importantly to the threat posed by nuclear testing and recent bombings, with the consequent further destabilization of already precarious areas of the world, the worsening of humanitarian crises and the opening of possible future alarming prospects.

This delicate scenario has generated, especially in the past (June 2016-March 2017), significant developments – the delineation of the EU Global Strategy, the Joint EU-NATO Declaration, the creation of a European ‘Joint Support Coordination Cell’, a common defence fund, the European White Book, the Rome Declaration – all signalling the elaboration of a new, collective, strategic thinking adequately adapted to the changed perception of threats in the post-1989, and post-09/11, world. It is yet too soon to predict with any certainty whether the present tendencies towards the delineation of a new course for European security will actually lead to a common multilateral defence force, whether security will remain within the traditional sphere of NATO, or even whether we will recede to an anachronistic re-nationalization of military sovereignty. What is currently evident from the most recent summits in Versailles (march 2017), Trieste, (July 2017) and Paris (September 2017), a core group of Member States is actually proving ready to cooperate more closely on specific issues such as anti-terrorism, migration, public finance and, inevitably so, on the interconnected and fundamental matter of common security and defence policy. Under the conditions of PESCO, it is now time to let a traditionally feared multispeed-Europe proceed effectively in an inclusive, democratic and cooperative direction.

In detailing the core elements of a future EU defence and in analysing the risks, advantages

and implications of this strategy also through two accurate expert interviews, the study concludes that building resilience in the European Union's security and defence policy is both possible and necessary: the need for a holistic approach to foreign and security matters has become definitive (Pawlak, 2016). Its being premised in already existing mechanisms – the Lisbon Treaty provisions on CSDP, European battlegroups and the European Defence Agency – renders the Italian proposal a concrete and viable way forward. Inevitably, though, the project is not only strictly contingent on

Member State's willingness and commitment, but also on the outcome of the delicate geopolitical interplay between European national elections, UK-EU negotiations, the role of the U.S. and NATO's action. At the current state of affairs, 'the train cars are lined up, we are only waiting for the engine' (Coelmont, 2016:7).

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