MULTIPLE SECURITY INTERESTS, MULTIPLE THREATS, ONE EUROPEAN RESPONSE?

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ANALYSIS #11

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This note has been built on a series of 11 interviews conducted from April 14th, 2020 to May 29th, 2020 with experts on security and defence from across Europe[1]. The first salient point from these interviews has been the centrality of the European Union in the discussions. Whereas questions where not necessarily oriented towards this specific institutional level to allow developments on NATO, OSCE or ad hoc formats, debates very much focused on the EU. This result shall not be over-interpreted but seems to confirm the seriousness of the current institutional dynamic within the EU on defence and security matters.

♦ Despite a real convergence on the conceptual framework used to define their national security interests, Member States remain quasi exclusively nationally focused. Consideration for other Member States' interests remains mostly symbolic and the EU proves rather ill-equipped institutionally speaking to enable the emergence of truly shared security interest. The multiplication of questions and concerns about the future of European internal cohesion (authoritarian backsliding of some Member States, economic and social divergences, etc.) is a very serious obstacle to any further integration of security interests.

♦ This hiatus between diverging attitudes and a convergent conceptual framework can also be identified when it comes to the elaboration of common responses to threat. European States are more and more aligned in the analysis of threats, but the lack of trust among them has prevented any joint threat assessment to be led, which limits very much the reach of common European responses – within or outside the EU framework. However, the (strategic, economic, etc.) cost of this paralysis seems to be increasing and may well be unaffordable for Europeans in a near future.

♦ Growing concerns on Europe's cohesion and future prevent further commitment of European States in common solutions while the complexification of threats Europe must face (especially the new economy-security nexus) would require a much more integrated approach. The further definition of common objectives and expectations appear as a first necessary step, provided it is led in an inclusive way. The strategic compass, but also the future Conference on the Future of Europe, may be useful, if not decisive, stages. In a longer run, both the reinforcement of the institutional locus for defence and security and the development of transversality at policy level need to be sought.

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[1] For the list of interviewed experts, please refer to the annex.

DEFINING EUROPEAN SECURITY INTERESTS

Acommon framework for defining national security interests. From a conceptual perspective, Member States use the same framework to analyse and define their security. Whereas some Member States (Germany and Sweden) had no tradition or even reluctance for defining security interests, it appears that they all now share approximately the same conceptual framework to define their security interests, which encompasses a very wide set of issues (military security, economic prosperity, safeguard of the welfare State, environmental sustainability, security of energy supply, protection of the rule of law, etc.). However, the weight of each factors varies significantly among European member States and national security interests remain quite logically deeply rooted in the historical, cultural and geographical context of each Member States[2]: from Russia for Baltic States or Poland to Jihadi terrorism for France. In Germany, the so-called Munich consensus that emerged after the 2014 annexation of Crimea seems to have significantly dwindled.

Europeanisation of national security interests remains limited. The awareness of interdependencies seems to be real at analytical level but appears to be hard to implement. On several occasions, Member States have considered other Member States security interests and proved solidarity in taking part in or supporting initiatives that do not affect their security directly (e.g. Poland's participation in operations in Mali, Chad or Central African Republic). The objective of such commitments seems to be mainly to ensure a form of reciprocity in case of threat on national interests. However, European solidarity ceases when Member States interests are at stake (e.g. the German position on Nordstream II is still perceived by Poland as a lack of consideration for its security), which may cause frustration (e.g. Italy felt abandoned in the handling of migration especially by Central Europe despite its support to sanctions against Russia).

According to a typology proposed by one of the experts and that has been mostly confirmed by interviews, 3 groups of countries can be distinguished:

- A 'neutral club' which groups small countries (e.g. Austria, Ireland or Malta) claiming their neutrality, and whose constitutional constraints prevent from expressing a deeper European dimension in their security interests.

- A 'status quo club' which gather both non-NATO countries (Sweden and Finland) and Central and Eastern European states (such as Poland or Baltic States) which

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[2] As it has been stated in the French Defence and National Security Strategic Review. See: République Française, Defence and National Security Strategic Review, 2017, p. 56:
https://www.defense.gouv.fr/layout/set/popup/content/download/520198/8733095/version/2/file/DEFENCE+A ND+NATIONAL+SECURITY+STRATEGIC+REVIEW+2017.pdf

have a more panoramic approach of their security interests but are divided internally on European defence cooperation.

- A 'Western block' which is intellectually led by France and uses the language of strategic sovereignty/autonomy, pushes this concept with some success at EU policy level and considers it should be the future core of the EU project.

Neither the UK nor Germany is part of one of these groups. The UK attitude towards increased European cooperation in the field of security will probably be determined by the place it will have post-Brexit in these discussions. Germany tries to play a role of mediator between the different groups.

A limited emergence of common security interests at EU level. Beyond the Europeanisation of national security interests, the nature of common European security interests (addition of national interests, lowest common denominator, or proper security interests) and their substance are still a matter for debate. Despite these conceptual divergences, European common interests are still limited. The EU Global Strategy (2016) is probably what would be the closest document to a formalisation of EU security interests. However, experts converge on criticisms over its accurateness (is it exhaustive?) and, mainly, its non-implementation (what are its consequences for EU policies?). Additionally, both political and institutional factors appear to limit the emergence of such common interests at EU level.

At political level, diverging trends within the EU are growing obstacles to the formulation of common European security interests. These divergences increase the 'Hobbesian' character of the EU forum:

1. *European cohesion is facing growing risks which obstructs long-term perspectives.* Main threats to European cohesion are probably internal ones. Experts from northern Europe especially identify the internal dynamics of Poland and Hungary away from democratic values and practice as a major source of divergence threatening the European project as a whole and de facto limiting potential shared security interests. Identically, there is a shared perception among experts that economic solidarity at EU level will act as a litmus test for the future of the European project. A long-run trend appears particularly worrying: connectivity and interdependencies which were perceived as factors of stabilisation at regional and international level are more and more perceived as source of risk and called into question (e.g. Covid-19 crisis and shortages of certain strategic goods). If such a trend failed to be properly addressed, the whole European project may be at risk. External threats may also affect European cohesion. Whereas the global context

(especially the Trump presidency) is largely a driver for European convergence and that crises are generally acknowledged as drivers for cohesion (e.g. 2014 annexation of Crimea), some external shocks may have adverse effects on European cohesion (e.g. the 2015 Refugee crisis and the perceived lack of solidarity towards Italy or Greece). As it has been pointed out by several experts, not every crisis has the potential to lead to consensus and deal-or-break conundrums are potentially harmful.

2. *The framing of European debates on security and defence is problematic.* It appears that Member States still approach the European level as a strictly intergovernmental forum on security interests, meaning they only act as representatives of their own security interests. Therefore, they compete for driving (political, financial, etc.) resources towards their own priorities. The relatively low level of resources most certainly increases this trend which limits their ability to define and implement shared security interests. The absence of endorsement by the EU Council of the EU Global Strategy is a good indicator in that respect. National approaches to the EU level have even been called by an expert "Hobbesian". This competition both witnesses and nurtures a lack of trust among Member States.

At institutional level, the EU lacks both the necessary institutional locus on defence and security issues and the ability to deal with threats in a global perspective:

3. *The traditional decoupling of security and economic issues at EU level is less and less adapted to Europe's geostrategic context.* The decoupling between security issues and economic integration is at the very core of the European project and enabled in the past significant successes in the economic field. However, this imperviousness proves to be relatively ill suited to the geo-political and -economic context of the XXIst century. These dimensions are growingly intertwined (e.g. Foreign Direct Investments, protection of critical infrastructures, etc.) and competition at global level is more and more technology oriented. Yet, technology is at the very nexus of trade and security.

4. *The EU is perceived as institutionally ill-equipped when it comes to defence and security issues.* In particular, the absence of a Council configuration dedicated to defence is also a cause of concerns. All security and defence questions are channelled through the Foreign Ministries Council and this has caused some frictions with Ministries of defence, which largely have a distinct approach. The EEAS has not been able yet to mediate between these two sets of actors. In

addition, the absence of a fully-fledged committee within the European Parliament contributes to dilute and to weaken the handling of defence issues.

ANALYSING, ASSESSING, AND MANAGING THREATS TOGETHER

An increasing convergence limited to threat analysis. Interviews have revealed a quasi-consensus among experts on a finding: there is an increasing convergence among European Member States in the way they perceive and analyse threats, especially on global issues. This is a long-term trend that can be observed at European level, and notably among E3 countries. Two main factors may explain this convergence. First, interdependencies among EU Member States level threat perception and can act as an equalizer at European level. Awareness about security implications of economic interdependencies may have been raised by some macroeconomic choices in the aftermath of the 2010 Eurozone crisis, and especially the divestment of critical infrastructures and assets (e.g. the Greek Port of Piraeus which has been sold to Cosco Shipping Corporation, a Chinese State-Owned Enterprise). Second, the fact that certain threats (such as ones related to Foreign Direct Investments) have implications for non-defence actors (notably, economic actors), which are much more Europeanised. With sources of information that are shared, perception is likely to converge.

Threat assessment remains highly divisive. Convergence appears to be limited to threat perception and solid divergences remain when it comes to assess, prioritize, and elaborate responses to these threats. Threat prioritization remains logically driven by national consideration and the possibility to conduct joint threat assessment exercises at European level has been limited so far by the lack of trust among Member States and the competition for resources that comes with. Threat prioritization at EU level has been reported as particularly politically sensitive for certain Member States (Central and Eastern Europe) or even taboo (Netherlands). However, new initiatives such as PESCO or the future European Defence Fund (EDF) will probably constitute new incentives for Member States to prioritize threats at EU level. In any case, the EDF work programme will de facto be a form of prioritization of threats, by prioritizing capability projects over others.

Threat assessment notably diverges when it comes to relationships with Great Powers:

- Russia remains of course the main bone of contention between Europeans and a source of distrust among Europeans. First, at the perception level, the level of threats posed by Russia is, quite logically, assessed differently in Nordic, Central

and Eastern Europe and in Western and Southern Europe. The wide-ranging palette of threats used by Russia complexifies this analysis and the main divergence lies in the assessment of Russia's willingness to lead Crimea-like offensives against EU Member States. The internal political evolution of Russia has been assessed by one of the respondents as a major source of instability and concerns. Indeed, a further exploitation of external factors to ensure national cohesion or, on the contrary, a collapse of the Russian regime would be major threats to Europe stability. As a consequence, traditional divergences in political responses remain and do not seem likely to evolve in a foreseeable future.

- China is more and more perceived as a source of threats, but this perception is uneven, and China may be perceived more as a challenge by some experts. The main threat posed by China is certainly its ability to divide Europeans much more effectively than Russia as it resorts more to economic tools than to purely military and strategic ones. The Chinese authoritarian political model and its relative success is also a threat for democracies as it can fuel the idea it is more effective. Another source of threats and concerns for Europeans from China stems from its confrontation with the US as it could require Europe to 'choose a camp' which it is not ready to do.

- The US is not perceived as such as a source of threat. But the weakening of the transatlantic relation is. If Europeans mostly agree that the EU-US link will have to be rethought in different terms, they diverge on the temporality and the priority (stabilizing the US presence in Europe vs. preparing the hypothesis of a disengagement). One of the experts observed that the security dependency is partly psychological, and so deeply rooted. However, the effects of the Trump presidency on the multilateral system and the stability of the world order are shared sources of concern.

New threats complexify threat assessment and threat management as they add up to classical ones. The first consequence of the emergence of new threats (cyber, space) has been to enlarge the fields of potential confrontation with existing sources of threats, such as Russia but also increasingly China. However, while Russia is still very much strategic-oriented, China has been more focused on economics. The relative accessibility and low cost of information and communication technologies (ICT) enable new actors to pose a threat to European interests: smaller nations such as Iran or North Korea but also non-State actors such as criminal networks. Similarly, the lowering cost of space technologies triggers the ambition of regional actors (e.g. Iran).

Common responses remain rather limited. The lack of convergence on threat assessment limits quite logically Europe's ability to formulate common response and so to manage collectively threats. The lack of common approach on major issues adds up to the limitations of the current EU institutional system (such as the imperviousness between security and economic issues) and limits the ability of Europeans to use in a effective manner the available tools (such as EU trade policy, for instance). This is particularly an issue for threats that would require a global approach and extreme reactiveness (e.g. cyber-threats). In the military field, the mismanagement of resources has been less a priority for long as Europeans could rely on the US security umbrella. According to one of the interviewees, this dependency to US capabilities is embedded from the very planning of an operation by Europeans. The 2011 military intervention in Libya has been designed from the outset on the assumption that US capabilities (air-to-air refuelling, notably) would be available. This situation may lead to a conundrum in a near future given both the lesser appetite of the US to take part in multilateral coalitions in the European neighbourhood and the effect of the COVID-19 crisis on Europe's investments in military capabilities.

But, the lack of common response has an increasing cost for Europeans. This cost can be purely strategic and is very clear when it comes to Libya for instance. Oppositions among Europeans (and especially between France and Italy) and the paralysis it created enabled various actors, among which especially Turkey to gain some influence in the region and to further threaten the stability of EU neighbourhood. On new threats which scale would justify a common European approach, responses remain very much national-oriented. In the case of cyber-defence and cyber-security, European response is fragmented along national lines. The lack of trust among Europeans, which complexifies greatly the sharing of intelligence, is a major limitation. However, the absence of such common response shall be balanced with the potential effect of an uncoordinated response to a major cyber-attack. Even when it comes to economic threats or challenges where the gain of a collective action is concrete, such as the technological dependency to big US and Chinese tech players (GAFAM and BATX), the economic rivalry of European States hinders any common response. The factors for such a rivalry and such a lack of trust (which are not necessarily only in the field of defence and security) need to be dealt with, if the European Union wants to be fit for tackling XXIst century challenges.

CONSOLIDATING EUROPEAN UNITY AND IMPROVING COMMON RESPONSES

Redefining common objectives and expectations. The necessity to clarify the European narrative and a common vision for the future of Europe growingly appears as a political priority, even before any necessary policy or institutional adjustment. The absence of a clearly defined and shared vision of security in Europe is widely perceived as an impediment to any progress. With the definition of a common project, what is at stake is the bundling of national approaches and interests on the long run. Even though 'European strategic autonomy' may appear as a potentially fruitful path – as it is present in many European Council's conclusions, its appropriation by Member States and European societies is a major stake for its future and its effectiveness. The **Strategic Compass** process (which begins during the German Presidency of the Council and is expected to end during the French one) could be a determining factor as it precisely aims at ensuring the highest degree of appropriation by Member States. More broadly, the **Conference on the Future of Europe** may appear as a unique opportunity to 'reconnect' with European societies and to ensure their support to this project. It requires a true involvement of these societies in the definition of this project which means that the results of the two processes shall be linked to a certain extent, at least they shall be compatible.

European security architecture: building the way towards a necessary further EU integration. Given its very wide scope of competencies, the EU appears to be central in the future of Europe's security. It seems necessary to achieve a higher level of integration (and so to achieve more integrated governance and policies) in order to improve the effectiveness of European common responses. This further integration shall notably aim at achieving greater synergies between EU policies. One of the main challenges for the EU is the better articulation of different actors and governance processes involved. This is particularly true for issues which are at the crossroads of security and economic issues (e.g. Foreign Direct Investments) and the imperviousness between these issues at EU level is growingly problematic. It notably triggers a problem of economic knowledge and skill gaps within the security community and institutions (such as the Political and Security Committee), which could be overcome by a greater cooperation with the Commission. New forms of transversality need to be found at policy level to ensure (1) the mainstreaming of common defence objectives in EU policies and (2) the correct level securitization in EU policy fields (climate, health, migration). Paradoxically, such a transversality would certainly require a reinforcement of institutions in charge of defence with the creation of a Council configuration dedicated to defence and the transformation the Security and Defence subcommittee of the European Parliament into a fully-fledged committee.

A major obstacle will remain the reluctance from proponents of intergovernmentalism in the field of defence (Poland, for instance). This reluctance is, at least partly, related to the fear that such integration could result in a weakening of their position towards the existential threat posed by Russia. Hence, debates on a potential reform of the European security architecture are perceived in some countries as an unjustified concession to Russia. Achieving greater integration with their consent would require a greater consideration for their particular security situation from their European partners. The Security Compass exercise may have a role here, but will not be sufficient and greater political commitments would certainly be needed.

In the longer run, this integration could certainly imply a certain security specialization within the European Union. Not every security issue requires an EU response and smaller formats (frequently on a regional basis) can be more effective and legitimate to tackle such issues. Such an evolution would enable to open a frank discussion with Germany upon European burden sharing and the role it wants to play on security matters. But, this specialization is not likely in the short run as every Member States still want to intervene on every security issues, even though they may not have the ability to do so.

Ad hoc format may help if they lead to common actions. Given the difficulty to reach a consensus at 27, ad hoc cooperation is often presented as a more effective alternative. On this question, experts differently appreciate the extent to which such kind of cooperation can be useful, but they agree on the fact that it should not mean a bypass or an undermining of the EU level. Put differently, smaller formats shall only be favoured when they have the potential to lead to greater convergence at EU level. The case of the Franco-German tandem is an interesting illustration as it is a key unifying factor for Europe, especially in the field of security and defence where they have very different cultures and especially after Brexit which makes this need for convergence even more pressing. But this is a "double-edged sword" as it can be perceived as a directorate, if it fails to be inclusive. On certain issues such as capability development, inclusive formats (EU and/or NATO) must be privileged to prevent fragmentation or inconsistencies.

Building a new relationship with the UK. For now, the question of the future EU-UK relationships when it comes to defence and armament is stalled as the UK is reluctant to engage with the EU on defence matters and privileges bilateral relationships with Member States. However, should further integration happen on security and defence, a deepening of this relationship would be in the interest of both parties. A potentially new partnership between the EU and the UK would need to take into consideration that a red line for the UK seems to be what could be called "a subordinate relationship on defence with the EU". The UK would probably not accept a scenario according to which it would engage with the EU only once the EU has reached an internal agreement. The UK would expect to be

involved in the EU decision-making process through a specific cooperation mechanism. If such a mechanism were not to exist, the UK would certainly be tempted to use several Member States (such as Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, or Poland) with which it has special relationships as relays. However, it would be unacceptable from several point of views that a third State may enjoy the same institutional rights than EU Member States. Informal smaller formats may very much help here. And, the importance of E3 (on foreign affairs) and E2I (on defence and strategic culture) formats alongside bilateral relationships is expected to increase in the coming years.

Rethinking the transatlantic link. A second term for Donald Trump would certainly have put NATO and the transatlantic cooperation at risk. However, there is no consensus among experts on the effects of the election of Joe Biden. Some (from Central and Eastern Europe) still argue that calling the US' interest for European security into question is a dangerous game to play as it gives new ammunition to American supporters of a disengagement from Europe. However, this perception is losing ground, just as the traditional idea of task specialization between NATO (territorial defence and high spectrum interventions) and the EU (low-intensity crisis management operations and missions in EU wide periphery [i.e. Mediterranean Sea, Africa, etc.]). For most experts, the US interest for European security cannot be taken for granted anymore and the EU should exit the crisis management paradigm, which appears as a limiting factor for the development of EU. In this context, the future of NATO and EU-NATO cooperation need to be seriously looked into and on a renewed basis.∎

ANNEX: LIST OF INTERVIEWS

- **Sven Sakkov**, Director of the International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS), Estonia, April 14th, 2020
- **Dick Zandee**, Head of the Security Unit, Clingendael institute, Netherlands, April 16th, 2020
- **Marcin Terlikowski**, Head of European Security and Defence Economics project, PISM, Poland, April 17th, 2020
- **Daniel Fiott**, Defence and Security editor, European Union Institute for Security Strategy (EUISS), April 17th, 2020
- **Alessandro Marrone**, Head of Defence Programme, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Italy, April 22nd, 2020
- **Malcolm Chalmers**, Deputy Director General, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), United Kingdom, April 24th, 2020
- **Velina Tchakarova**, Head of the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policies (AIES, Austria, April 27th, 2020
- **Felix Arteaga**, Senior Analyst, Real Instituto Elcano, Spain, April 29th, 2020
- **Margarita Šešelgytė**, Director of the Institute of International Relations and Political Science (TSPMI), Vilnius University, Lithuania, May 7th, 2020
- **Björn Fägerstern**, Director of Europe Programme, Utrikespolitiska institutet (UI), Sweden, May 7th, 2020
- **Jana Puglierin**, Head of Berlin Office and Senior Policy Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), May 29th, 2020

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