



The Future of EU Defence Integration Post-Brexit

A Lecture by Dr David Garcia Cantalapiedra

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Dr David Garcia Cantalapiedra, the EU Centre's Visiting Fellow and Associate Professor at the Department of International Law and International Relations at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM) and former senior analyst for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), opened his public lecture on “The Future of EU Defence Integration Post-Brexit” reminding the audience that the European Union (EU) is in a constant process of adapting to the changing world. He stressed that the process of defence integration started already long before Brexit and one could trace it back to the aspirations embodied in the Maastricht Treaty (1992). Nevertheless, he believed that Brexit has increased the speed of integration.

He went on to elaborate on the framework of the EU's defence integration which was more specifically spelled out in the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) with the provision for Permanent Structured Cooperation reaffirmed in the [EU's Global Strategy](#) (EUGS), and calling for the EU to be able to exercise strategic autonomy. Brexit and the loss of confidence in the transatlantic relations (not only since Trump but dating back to the two previous administrations as well) have made this an even more pressing issue. It has to be borne in mind that the EU's global strategy is more of a foreign policy and a consensus document than an actual security strategy. Dr Garcia pointed out the shortcomings of the EUGS, such as lacking a real vision and not linking the external and internal dimensions of the various challenges and threats. This lack of connection

gets exacerbated through the fact that these policy dimensions are compartmentalised between the member states (mainly focusing on external security and defence) and the European institutions, e.g. the Commission (mainly focusing on internal security).

Other challenges that the EU faces besides the changing transatlantic partnership and doubts over American defence support include the resurgence of nationalism (as epitomised by Brexit), effects of asymmetry, interdependence and multipolarity. Furthermore, its former peaceful, “strategic” periphery has become unstable with the conflicts in the Ukraine, Syria and the jihadist terrorism. As an illustration of the importance placed on its strategic autonomy Dr Garcia pointed out that France invoked [Article 42.7](#) of the Treaty of Lisbon (the mutual defence clause), following the attacks on Paris in November 2015. Besides the continued troubles in the Eastern neighbourhood caused by Russia with regards to Ukraine, Dr Garcia also sees developments in the Sahel zone and North Africa, such as trafficking in human beings, terrorism and organised crime as the main threat to the EU.

Dr Garcia further explained the meaning of [strategic autonomy](#) and went back to the European Commission's communication of 24 July 2013 which called for the creation of a strong and competitive armaments industry supporting the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The EUGS 2016 highlighted that having “a sustainable innovative and competitive European defence industry is essential for Europe’s strategic autonomy and for a credible CSDP”. However, the truth is that there is still no common understanding of what strategic autonomy entails as EU member states have different views on its meaning and scope.

Brexit has also created a new scenario for European integration, European security and for the EU's strategic autonomy. The UK is after all a key player with regard to EU security and defence since it accounts for around 25% of the EU's military capability. It is also a solid actor in terms of intelligence capabilities and power projection.

Dr Garcia then spoke about the EU's defence spending, also with regard to EU member states' contributions to NATO. He highlighted that the US spends more than double on defence compared to the EU28 (in total terms), third comes China in terms of defence spending. With respect to NATO's alliance goal of spending at least 2% of the GDP on defence there is a problematic trend that many EU countries have been reducing their defence spending in the post-Cold war period, being well below the 2% threshold. This creates many problems in terms of capabilities and power projection. He went on to look at the distribution of the defence spending among EU member states. The figures (for 2011) he showed that the UK is crucial for European defence and security, contributing around 24% of total defence spending of the EU, the biggest share of amongst all EU member states (France came second with around 19%).

Brexit led to several initiatives by the EU to address -related challenges and in the process, push forward the European defence integration agenda, including the “Implementation Plan on Security and Defence”, “The European Defence Action Plan” and “The European Defence Package”. The Joint NATO-EU Declaration also contains 42 proposals on how the EU will coordinate all these initiatives within NATO, specifically regarding the cooperation in the Mediterranean, strategic communication and defining links between the EU, NATO and the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence.

In order to further illustrate the seriousness in pursuing defence integration post-Brexit, Dr Garcia elaborated on the “Defence Package” (2017) which consists of the “Reflection Paper on the Future of European Defence” and proposal to set up a European Defence Fund. The Reflection Paper outlines three scenarios for the implementation, the first one being a security and defence cooperation (solidarity remains ad hoc and is interpreted individually by member states); the second scenario defines a shared security and defence (operational and financial solidarity between member states); and the third one being a common security and defence scenario (solidarity and mutual assistance).

As for the European Defence Fund, its aim is to stimulate research in the field of defence with a budget of €90 million for 2017-2019 and is expected to be increased to €500 million from 2020. Under this fund the European Commission will be the main investor in research and development in the area of defence. The fund will also be used to spur industrial development programmes, with the Commission promising €500 million annually from 2019-2020 and from 2020 €1 billion annually. In order to ensure coordination between the technological-industrial and policy-making process, the European Defence Agency (EDA) will play a crucial role in providing the link between the two processes. The EDA will also help member states to identify priority areas for capacity building and in research and technological development.

During the last part of the presentation Dr Garcia spoke about EU member state's initiatives with a focus on the UK (pre- and post-Brexit) and cooperation between France and Germany. On the one hand, he sees the UK maintaining its role as a “offshore balancer” and “strategic raider” as outlined in the UK's Security and Defence Strategic Review 2015. He also foresees difficulties in carrying out some of the joint projects between France and the UK, such as the Lancaster House Treaties (covering military cooperation), due to Brexit. On the other hand, France and Germany are strengthening their cooperation with an agreement to develop a new combat-aircraft. According to the French White Paper on Defence 2013, France sees itself as a “European power with global reach”, since it is a nuclear power and a permanent

member of the UN Security Council, effectively pushing forward with the strategic autonomy. Germany, however, declared in a 2016 White Paper on security policy to play a more active role internationally and to provide more leadership and responsibility in close cooperation with other EU member states. There are already some initiatives in place, namely with Romania, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic. All these initiatives are a direct response to current geopolitical developments and uncertainties.

The lecture ended with an interesting question & answer session, one question raised by the audience was on how to handle the co-existence (and therefore to some extent duplication) of NATO and a EU Defence. Dr Garcia said that most Eastern European countries have more trust in NATO than the EU, while other European countries, primarily France and Germany, are pushing for a EU Defence. However, the implementation of a EU Defence depends on many factors, also on the US and on Germany and France. There is no clear answer on this question and the future developments will also depend on the financial implications involved.

Asked whether there should be concern over the EU's intention to increase its budget in defence despite living in such a peaceful period of time, Dr Garcia pointed out that our level of tolerance for violence has become less and with increasing conflicts and terrorist attacks, governments have to increase their spending on intelligence and cyber security.