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What Future for the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy?

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On 22d of May 2008, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland organized a "Round Table on the Future of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy" in Helsinki. Jean-Sylvestre MONGRENIER, Associated Fellow at the Thomas More Institute and Fellow at the Institut Français de Géopolitique (Paris VIII Vincennes-Saint-Denis University) participated at this conference, with Dr Jolyon HOWORTH, Jean Monnet Professor of European Politics at Bath University, and Visiting Professor of Political Schience at the Yale University, Dr Tuomas FORSBERG, Professor at the University of Helsinki, Dr Hanna OJANEN, Programme Director at Finnish Institute for International Affairs, Dr Johanna VALENIUS, Adjunct Professor at the University of Helsinki.

It's the text of the conference of Jean-Sylvestre MONGRENIER that we publish here, with the kind Approval of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland.



First, I would like to thank the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland for its invitation; I'm very honoured of it. Sometimes, French people forget that all Europeans are entitled to speak up but we need your expertise, your historic experience, your strategic culture too, about Russia and Russian affairs, for example. We must keep in mind your long-running border with this big country.

If we have a look at the scope of European and Westerner challenges, the isthmus that is running from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea is a major area, for the geopolitical cohesion of European Union and the stability of Europe as a whole. In this area, Finland is a "transition facilitator" that support and escort some of the newborn democracies, in Central and Eastern Europe, and around (Balkans and Southern Caucasus).

Today, I would like to expose a French point of view about the renewal of NATO, on the one hand, and the future of the European Common Security and Defense Policy, on the other hand. Defense and security are regalian questions, with high sovereignty stakes, and our nations intend to remain sovereign bodies. Military capabilities belong to the nations, national governments decide about war and peace, and they can intervene in a national framework, through the European Union or through NATO, for the Allies.

So, it would be well advised and far-seeing to avoid a new ruinous quarrel between these two main security organizations, and among their member-states, because it would be a zero-sum game. We have to think both European Union and NATO, which are too often presented as mutually exclusive and incompatible. Let's remember of this Latin maxim: "*Contraria sunt complementa*".

About the French paradoxical Atlanticism

My first point will be about the French paradoxical Atlanticism. Since the last Atlantic summit, in Bucharest, it has been well known that France could be involved in a full-participation into the NATO military structure. Moreover, France will expand its contribution in Afghanistan, as far as becoming a significant player against this Islamic front.

The possible decision of returning to military structure is seen as a rupture (at least, as an historic turning point) in the French attitude towards NATO. Indeed, De Gaulle's decision, in 1966, to withdraw French troops from the military structure threw NATO into a serious crisis. For most of the French people, NATO became something strange, far-off and disquieting, just a US tool, and, in the twelve last years, the former President, Jacques Chirac, has long championed the European defence over NATO.

However, it must not be forgotten that France is a founding member-state of the Atlantic Alliance, in 1949, build-up to face down the Soviet threat. French diplomats then emphasized on the Atlantic "integration" and its virtues. French territory was in the heart of the Atlantic defence: the North Atlantic Council was located in Paris and the SHAPE, around the French capital, in Rocquencourt. It was a turn-table.

It's after De Gaulle's decision that NATO became a "bogeyman" for a part of French leaders and public opinion, and the "integration" became a coarse word (a foul word). This decision had a heavy cost: France went out of the internal political circuit, without talking about French language within NATO. In the following years, French authorities had to set the fracture between their country and NATO: military and logistic agreements were signed and the French battle corps was called to a major role in Centre-Europe, for the "forward defence".

At the end of the Cold War, new challenges (Balkan conflicts and stabilization of newborn democracies in Central and Eastern Europe) ran to increase French participation into NATO structures. French officers were back in the Military Committee in 1995 and France joined the Transformation process and the NATO Response Force in 2002. High Readiness Headquarters (Land, Air and Navy) are now certified by NATO and one-hundred-and-ten military men are "inserted" in the NATO Headquarters ("integration" remains a taboo word). So, many French officers and analysts say that: "*La messe est dite*" (The mass is said).

In fact, rather than a rupture, a full participation in the NATO Military structure would be the headline of a long-running evolution since the seventies of the past century. The rupture would be more in the psycho-political sphere. What is the stake is to reduce the gap between the mental representations and the strategic realities, that is, in other words, to reduce what psychologists name the "cognitive dissonance". In fact, France is already in NATO, with its own status, but a part of French geopolitical representations are under the influence of Third-Worldism and non-alignment. This attitude could be named the "French Titoism". Nevertheless, there is a French Atlanticism, a rational Atlanticism, with historical roots and cultural bases, but this fundamental trend is not yet full-assumed by all the political leaders.

A few words about NATO

I will add a few words about NATO, the main defence organization in Europe. The new French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, is ready to break a long-standing taboo and he means his renewed interest in NATO. Why this renewed interest for the Alliance? How this new attitude could be explained?

More than a strong and enduring alliance, NATO is a Western Community of security, with a civilization background. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, this community of security has been involved in a triple enlargement: a geographical enlargement, with new member states; a functional enlargement, with new tasks, beyond collective defence, in the Eurasian hinterland and in the Mediterranean Sea; an enlargement of NATO zone of influence, with the "Partnership for Peace" and the "Mediterranean Dialogue".

Last but not least, NATO is a bridge between Europe and North America, the main transatlantic organization which allows to the US to project forces and power in the Former World. The US presence is important for the balance of power in Europe, in Eurasia and in the Mediterranean Geopolitics. Thus, Washington assumes a role of "hegemonic stabilizer", vital for European security, and the Transatlantic Partnership should be more important again, with the growing role of emerging powers in a possible post-Western world

So, new French leaders, or a part of them, seem aware of the NATO importance for stabilizing Europe, especially in the current and future continental balance of power. Of course, one think first of Russia, which is recovering a great power status and remains a "geopolitical encumbrance", but let's not forget the new Middle East threats: the Iran nuclear program, its fall-out around and Tehran ambition, from the Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea.

Renewing NATO is a demanding task for guaranteeing our security, yes indeed, but also for spreading freedom and establishing the rule of law, in our entire Continent. Europe must not be divided by new ideological fault-lines. In consequence, it is necessary to practice the open door policy and it should be dangerous to delay a decision which we know needs to be made (the Membership Action Plans of Georgia and Ukraine).

However, one could be more sceptical about a "Global Nato", which would drop the anchor into Asia-Pacific: a strong and enduring community of security requires a geographical, historical and cultural background. Perhaps it would be more useful to involve relations between NATO and a "new ANZUS", enlarged to Japan and South-Korea.

But it has to be said that scepticism about a "Global NATO" doesn't mean we wouldn't need a "global partnership" with Finland and Sweden. NATO as a whole and its member-states are interested in closer ties with these two countries.

A least, NATO needs a new comprehensive grand strategy, because its member-states have to deal with a new world and global threats; NATO must be able for encompassing the full spectrum of any crisis. France is ready to participate in this enterprise but in closer cooperation with the European Union, by building up a Common Security and Defense Policy. It will be my third and last point.

The European Union and its future Common Security and Defense Policy

In fact, returning to full-participation in NATO is not the top priority for all the French leaders and most of them would prefer to strengthen "European Defence" and to keep NATO in its Cold War box. However, it must be recognized that the "European Defense" is a French expression, as "Europe Power", but it is not the reality.

European Union is not a Commonwill, with a unified Foreign Policy, underpinned by diplomatic clout and military capabilities. The Union is rather a Pan European Commonwealth – more than a Free Trade zone, but less than a Federation - and, if Turkey was within, it would even be a Eurasian Commonwealth.

This large and heterogeneous Commonwealth would need a benevolent hegemonic leader, fit to build a strong consensus. It's not the case and the Union is not yet able to be turned into a global actor of international relations. For the imminent future, the central questions are the following ones:

After the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, will the European Union be in a better position to assume worldwide responsibilities?

Could the European Union turn into a full-blown military entity, and so become a political body?

With a permanent president, a foreign policy high representative and vice-president of the Commission, the European Union should be better prepared to make necessary decisions. However, the mutual assistance clause and the solidarity clause are not as strong as the article 5 of the Washington Treaty (NATO), or this one of the Brussels Treaty (Western European Union).

As to the "Structured Cooperation", it will need to be clearly defined, with strong and precise criteria; "Structured Cooperation" supposes convergence of mindsets and approaches among an "avant-garde".

At least, the European institutional landscape will evolve slowly (it will take time for implementing it fully) and, whether an organizational culture is much important, it can't palliate the lack of means and the absence of a common willingness.

For a Common Security and Defense Policy, a number of conditions must be met:

We will have to spend more money for defence procurements (*"Point d'argent, point de Suisses"*) and to provide more troops, ready to be deployed where they are needed, at short notice, in the most remote corner of the planet if necessary; not only out of compassion but for our common values and interests.

For more reactivity, we will have to beef up the EU Operation Centre, with a few members of planners; it wouldn't be a waste of money. We will have to develop a common and robust strategic culture (and a global strategic expeditionary mindset). And so on ...

In short, we have to put military force in the field. As things stand, our governments are short of defence money and they are ill-prepared to face down the threats: not enough money means not enough troops and not enough weapons (*"Money is a weapon"*).

Dealing with the new emerging world is not only a practical exercise; it's also a philosophical challenge to meet. War is not dead and troops are not only for peace-keeping missions. Westerners are engaged in a decline process and these periods of decline are not peaceful times. The Soft Power rhetoric can no longer hide these hard realities to our eyes.

Europe is not an old Hegelian Sage, who could take refuge in a new utopia: free market is not the panacea welfare state is not theodicy. Europeans are in process of time and History is tragic, Geopolitics is dramatic. An operational community of defence needs a community of spiritual values.

So, do we have to change our minds by revisiting the European Security Strategy (ESS), in the light of all the evolutions which have taken place last years: fragility in the European wide periphery (regional and frozen conflicts in and around Europe); power politics eastwards; instability, proliferation and Islamic terror southwards; growing competition for resources worldwide; climate emergencies and new global threats (struggle for natural resources, destabilization of fragile regions and reinforced migratory pressures).

The "Quick in" and "Quick out" approach is no longer valid and Europeans will have to engage themselves, to face down various threats, for a long time: "Quick in" and "Long in". It's a long haul,

which requires patience and strong capabilities. Currently, the EU is too much again self-centred and inward-looking; so, Europe's demotion will have to be balanced out with a stronger presence in the outside world.

In conclusion

This broad-brush picture of European security being outlined, I will finish with a few proposals about EU-NATO links. The membership of both institutions overlaps to a large degree and it seems necessary to reach a deal between them. It's also necessary to convince the Americans not to turn in on themselves and, for that, to be a global security provider.

So do the European Union and NATO have to work closely together, each organization focusing on its "core business" (its core area of strength): for the European Union, civilian and smaller-scale military missions; for NATO, larger-scale military missions.

France's compensation for full-participation in the NATO military structure should be to beef up the EU Operation Centre. In exchange, it could be made arrangements for NATO to have access to the European Union's expertise and tools in civilian crisis management. The European planners could have close links to their opposite numbers in NATO and both organizations could enhance their cooperation to boost capabilities, harmonise procurements, and promote joint Research and Development.

In conclusion, I will repeat what I said several times in this short statement. Stakes are beyond political calculation and rivalry among European nations, and we have to be aware of the insecurity around Europe's borders.

We have to meet a Historical and Civilization challenge. Let's keep in mind Arnold Toynbee and his philosophy of history: "*Challenge and response*".

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