Evaluating the Effects of Brexit on the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy

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Abstract: Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is one of the few intergovernmental fields in the current European Union institutional framework with unanimous decisions, except for the Permanent Structured Cooperation, which allows stronger cooperation among its members in the field of defence. Member States (MSs) of the European Union transferred their sovereignty to the European Commission in several policy fields to some extent, but as foreign and defence policies are two of the most important pillars of national sovereignty, Member States usually insist on their primacy in this area, complemented by their commitment to NATO.

On the other hand, growing uncertainties, especially as a result of the looming Brexit talks and the unusual approach of US President Donald Trump’s tenure at the White House, which signals a more combative approach from the American side regarding NATO commitment and the 2 percent pledge (which, according to the Wales Summit in 2014 requires all NATO Member States to spend at least 2 percent of their GDP on defence) amplifies the necessity for a more coordinated European approach to defence and security. In that sense, UK’s exit could be a revival point for the France–German axis in CSDP as well, however only in some extent due to NATO’s primacy.

INTRODUCTION

Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is one of the few intergovernmental fields in the current European Union (EU) institutional framework with unanimous decisions, except for the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which allows stronger cooperation among its members in the field of defence. The first attempt to invent a common security policy in Europe was the Western European Union (WEU) as early as 1955. Following the Saint Malo Declaration in 1998, the EU Council in Cologne in 1999 decided that the WEU should be integrated into the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). ESDP was intended to enhance European cooperation on defence, but it was never meant to provide collective security due to the ‘NATO first’ principle.

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The need for common defence is raised from time to time in European political statements, but the most recent question is whether Brexit and the presidential tenure of Donald Trump can have a positive influence on CSDP’s development, especially by increasing defence budgets and pushing for more cooperation between Member States.

This paper intends to analyse the changes in Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) initiated by the UK’s exit (Brexit) from the EU, while taking into consideration the new US administration’s changing approach towards the European Union.

**CHANGING CONDITIONS**

The European Union is primarily an economic integration and it was created to better coordinate industrial production and trade. Inventing a common security policy or a common European army was not on the agenda of the time. During the integration process certain policy areas become subject to pooled sovereignty, and while security policy made much progress, it is still decided by unanimity and there is a lack of a common army, while we are in the process of creating a federal headquarters (Military Planning and Conduct Capacity facility), at the same time trying to reduce financial and administrative burdens. After Great Britain, one of the militarily most powerful and influential Member States, as well as the greatest opponent of common defence policy, will leave the European Union, the CSDP’s reinterpretation besides the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) may receive a new impetus to move forward towards more enhanced cooperation.

Since CFSP came into existence, the European Union published two security strategies (2003 European Security Strategy, 2016 European Security and Global Strategy). For the first time, the European Security Strategy was inspired by the US National Security Strategy and it details the threats and the challenges which the EU had to face. The strategy underlined the main requirements for the EU, such as coping with emerging challenges (like terrorism, regional conflicts, and failed states), building security in the neighbourhood, maintaining multilateral cooperation and preserving the importance of international organisations.

The European Security and Global Strategy (EUSG) was presented in 2016. There were two major incidents in the EU’s neighbourhood, which influenced the elaboration of the EUGS: the outbreak of the Arab Spring and the Russian intervention in Ukraine and the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. The Arab Spring indirectly resulted in an unprecedented influx of migrants, which affected the European Union’s migration policy and highlighted unsettled issues related to border management, and the requirements of dealing with failed states,
such as Libya. The Ukrainian war resulted in the sanctions policy towards the Russian Federation, which was a clear point of division between the different MSs. Even though sanctions had always been voted on unanimously, several Member States have signalled their dissatisfaction with the EU’s approach to countering and punishing Russia. Aside from the economic front, most Member States have increased their defence spending and they are committed to the 2 percent pledge. According to the EUSG, the European Union should be capable to defend itself and play a bigger role in the international scene, and more spending on the military will clearly serve this objective.

CSDP's Tools

One of the key components of CSDP is the European Defence Agency (EDA), its role and importance in current European politics. The EDA was created by the Council of Defence Ministers in 2004 as an intergovernmental body, which helps the EU to manage crises and strengthen the EU's defence capabilities. The EDA has 3-year work programmes and 1-year work plans, which are supported by general and ad hoc budgets from the Member States' contributions. The general budget for 2017 is EUR 31 million. Apart from traditional military tasks, the European Defence Agency is also committed to coordinating the measurement and evaluation of research and development on the EU's and MSs' capabilities.

The Lisbon Treaty states that the Common Security and Defence Policy is an integral part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the associated civilian and military instruments provide operational capabilities. On the one hand, CSDP allows for the creation of common defence, although responsibility lies with the Member States to offer their national civilian and military capabilities for the purposes of the Union. On the other hand, unanimity is still needed in the Council’s decision-making processes to start military engagements and other activities, not to mention that the Treaty of Maastricht and the subsequent Treaties of the EU already and obviously admit NATO's primacy when it comes to the defence of Europe.

There are three issues, which describe the relationship between the EU and NATO:

- First, the Lisbon Treaty laid down the primacy of NATO, thus CSDP could not meddle with sovereign states’ commitments to NATO.
- Second, to promote cooperation the EU–NATO declaration adopted in 2002 refers to the EU’s crisis management capacities, where NATO is not present, and the Berlin Plus Agreement allowed the EU to use capabilities otherwise offered to NATO, where NATO is not involved.
- Finally, there is cooperation and coordination between EU and NATO in crisis management, but the EU uses mainly civilian forces due to its lower military
capabilities compared to NATO. However there is a lack of a clear division of NATO’s and EU’s limits of engagement.

PESCO, which was introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, represents the EU’s intention to deepen integration in defence, as it does not require unanimous decisions, together with matters related to the EDA. PESCO is a more integrated form of cooperation in defence, which allows deeper cooperation among Member States based on their intentions and contributions, not on the size of their GDP or armed forces. Within the framework of PESCO, emphasis is placed rather on cooperation than on structure, meaning that strengthening capacities is preferred to deepening existing cooperation. PESCO from one perspective is just another extra institution of whose tasks are already assigned to the European Defence Agency; but on the other hand with strengthened and integrated cooperation. The entry conditions, stated in the Protocol on Permanent Structured Cooperation of the Treaty of Lisbon are, firstly that the acceding Member State should build its defence capabilities more intensively, and secondly that it is required to create a 30-day mission battle group and a 120-day mission battle group. Moreover, the members of PESCO should enhance their military capabilities, deployability and interoperability through close cooperation and consensus with each other, not to mention the required consensus on expenditure on defence investments.

Because of the deeper integration feature of PESCO, it is obviously supported by France and naturally opposed by the UK.

If we would like to take an example of a well-functioning cooperation which eventually had a legal framework basis too, one should refer to the Lisbon Treaty, as it contains the Solidarity Article as well. It can be invoked in case of a terrorist attack or a natural or human disaster in any of the Member States, then other MSs will help the attacked country with military or civilian capacities. The Solidarity Article was invoked by France after the terrorist attack in Paris on 13th November 2015.

**Brexit Impacts**

Brexit will impact several policies within the European Union and the EU decision-makers should re-organise the common policies and CSDP could be a particular one among them, because of the unanimous decision-making process. The UK has always been the most obstructive Member State in common decision-making process of CSDP due to its dedication to NATO instead of the European Defence Policy.

The United Kingdom is one of the most capable Member States regarding capabilities and expenditure on defence. The British capabilities, especially in power projection, a blue water navy and nuclear forces will be sorely missed from the EU’s inventory, but on the other hand, CSDP could evolve rapidly as British objections
will vanish. On the other hand, there will obviously be some form of cooperation between the EU and the UK in the future, but a lot depends on the details of this cooperation.

**Figure 1**

Number of CSDP Missions and Designated Lead States, 2003–2016

**Table 1**

Brexit: Strategies Consequences for Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UK defence overview</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall defence exp.</td>
<td>£34.4bn</td>
<td>5th largest in the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations exp.</td>
<td>£1.1bn</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Equipment and infra.</td>
<td>£738bn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence exp. p/c</td>
<td>£532</td>
<td>3rd largest in NATO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%GDP spent in defence</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>UK Full Time Trained Military Personnel &amp; Civilians</th>
<th>Strength 1 April 2015</th>
<th>Reserves</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Naval</td>
<td>30,060</td>
<td>3,160</td>
<td>33,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>82,230</td>
<td>25,880</td>
<td>108,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAF</td>
<td>31,830</td>
<td>2,220</td>
<td>34,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Service Personnel</td>
<td>144,120</td>
<td>31,260</td>
<td>175,380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian</td>
<td>58,160</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>58,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Personnel</td>
<td>202,280</td>
<td>31,260</td>
<td>233,540</td>
</tr>
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Measuring the Effects of Brexit
Although the UK has never been genuinely committed to a single European Defence Policy, it played a significant role in creating the European Defence Agency in 2004. The UK is keeping to the ‘NATO first’ principle and had started to cut their contribution to the EDA long before the referendum on EU membership took place in 2016. The UK has been always sceptical towards creating an autonomous CSDP Operational Headquarters, because they believe existing national headquarters around Europe are sufficient enough.

Without the Brits, the permanent obstruction to increasing the EDA’s budget, military integration under PESCO and setting-up a European military headquarters would be ceased. Moreover, the EU would lose its largest defence market, thus Brexit may result in more cooperation in the defence industry among the 27 Member States.

However, the British potential and capabilities to conduct military actions and to build a successful defence industry cannot be separated completely from the European Union, should the EU Member States intend to conduct a successful and efficient defence policy. Keeping the UK close to the EU should be a priority. One possible way to achieve this from the legal perspective is to use an already existing cooperation form with third countries, the Framework Participation Agreement. This enables third countries to participate in particular missions of the EU, and it would mean that British troops could still join EU missions around the world. This might be only a theoretical possibility though, as political reality is rather that the UK will remain committed to its ‘NATO first’ principle, and that would hinder London’s involvement in EU missions outside the NATO framework.

Besides losing the UK’s military capabilities, diplomatic, intelligence and military know-how, there are further other factors, which will weaken the EU’s defence policy:

- The UK is a significant nuclear power and outside France there will no further nuclear powers in Europe;
- The UK has significant capacities in intelligence cooperation, and this information stream will be sorely missed as the EU continues to struggle with various outside challenges;
- The EUFOR Atalanta mission’s operational headquarters is in the UK.

Regarding nuclear deterrence, the UK and France will inevitably continue to cooperate. Based on the Lancaster House Treaty, Paris and London intend to work together to remain nuclear powers, which will be defining the transatlantic relationship as well.

Even as the EU’s Defence Policy will be more efficient due to the missing UK in the decision-making process and thus overcoming the permanent obstruction in the Council of Defence Ministers, losing the UK’s troops and defence industry at immediate disposal will be a painful result.
German’s Changing Behaviour on CSDP and France’s New Role

Due to the changing international environment (especially the evolving Trump administration) Germany modified its traditional approach to CSDP. Berlin’s intention to strengthen European cooperation in defence has been expressed deliberately at the 2014 Munich Security Conference. German President Johannes Gauck, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen all expressed Germany’s commitment to play a bigger role in European defence. Based on Germany’s obvious economic potential and the rise of conflicts in Europe’s immediate neighbourhood, Minister von der Leyen stressed: “Indifference is not an option for Germany”.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>TEU article</th>
<th>Main provisions</th>
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| 42          | - CSDP to be an integral part of CSDP, providing the EU with an operational capacity drawing on civilian and military assets  
- CSDP shall include the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy  
- MSs shall make civilian and military capabilities available to the Union, and shall set to progressively improve their military capabilities  
- CSDP-related decision shall be adopted unanimously by the Council  
- Mutual defence clause: if a MS is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other MSs shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all means in their power  
- CSDP shall be consistent with NATO commitments |
| 43          | - “Enhanced” Petersburg tasks:  
  - Joint disarmament operations  
  - Humanitarian and rescue tasks  
  - Military advice and assistance  
  - Conflict prevention and peacekeeping  
  - Combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking and post-conflict stabilisation  
  - HRVP shall ensure coordination between the civilian and military aspects of the tasks |
| 44          | - The Council may entrust the implementation of a task to a group of MS who are able and willing |
| 45          | - European Defence Agency (EDA) shall:  
  - Contribute to identifying MSs’ capability objectives and commitments  
  - Promote operational harmonisation  
  - Propose multilateral projects  
  - Support defence technology research  
  - EDA open to all MSs  
  - Council to decide on EDA’s statute, seat and operational rules by QM |
| 46          | - Permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) (cf. art.42.6):  
  - Open to MSs whose military capabilities fulfil higher criteria  
  - Following notification from the relevant MSs, the Council shall establish PESCO by QM after consultations with the HRVP  
  - Decisions and recommendations within PESCO shall be adopted by unanimity |
The 1994 decision of the German Federal Constitutional Court gave an opportunity to German armed forces to deploy abroad, for the first time since the end of the Second World War. The Bundeswehr already participates in several current military missions in Southern Europe, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Afghanistan, and in Eastern and Western Africa as well.

Germany's defence budget does not reach 2% of their GDP, which is required within NATO, but many other MSs do not fulfil this criteria. German Chancellor Angela Merkel made a pledge to increase it from the current 1.2% towards 2% in order to fulfil the requirements, however Sigmar Gabriel, Foreign Minister of Germany underlined the necessity of efficient use instead of focusing only on more expenditure. Social-Democratic candidate for Chancellor Martin Schulz ruled out that Germany will honour its pledge should he be elected to lead Germany in the September federal elections. Furthermore, Germany issued a White Paper on defence in the summer of 2016 in order to underline Germany's engagement in strengthening Europe's defence, by playing a more active role. Due to underfunding and the bad quality of equipment of the German military, taking on a bigger role in the international scene to preserve the rule of law and manage foreign crises, Germany should increase its defence budget and the number of recruits as well.

Although it has issued joint statements on strengthening CSDP following the commencement of the Brexit talks, Germany's military policy does not allow for intensive armament, such as France's and the UK's. The main international criticism towards Germany is that it behaves more like a geo-economic power and not a geopolitical actor and Berlin does not contribute to global security and stability sufficiently. On the other hand, the German non-military approach manifested in its institutionalist attitude is due to the restrictive permission of foreign deployment of the Bundeswehr. The lower house of Germany's parliament, the Bundestag has control over the German armed forces, and the institutional arrangement obstructs the rapid application of force, which creates an efficiency burden in defence leadership compared to France's quick deployment capability.

France's stance has not changed a lot on CSDP after Brexit. Paris was always committed to common defence and promoted deeper integration among Member States. Even the planned 34,000 military job cuts during the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy (in the period of 2007–2012) for 2014–2019 were rescaled to 7,500 due to Paris terror attacks. According to the Military Planning Act for 2014–2019, Paris allocates EUR 190 billion to defence, which underlines the commitments on strengthening military capabilities.
UNITED LEADERSHIP ON DEFENCE – REVISION OF THE GERMAN–FRENCH AXIS?

When it comes to defence policy or military capabilities in Europe, the UK and France are the two leading powers. Thus, Brexit will alter the current setup in European military affairs as well.

Directly after the British referendum in 2016, the German and French foreign ministers produced a joint declaration on strengthening common defence within the European Union. This document confirmed the commitments for tight cooperation on European defence and the two determinative Member States are ready to lead the defence policy of the European Union. Berlin is keen on partnership with France on the EU’s defence and vice versa, but the visions of the two countries are somewhat different.

Both countries are determined to deepen the European integration in defence, but as Germany intends to act only as a member of a coalition, France is willing to act unilaterally, if it is needed.

Both Member States are committed to setting up an operational European Military Headquarters and unwavering in sustaining the cooperation with NATO. They intend to keep the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation as the primary guarantor of European defence.

Germany and France outlined their plans to strengthen their cooperation on European defence on 12th September 2016. One of their proposals is a joint and permanent EU command headquarters for civilian and military missions, which could be viable due to Brexit, and the lack of a constant UK veto. They also tend to strengthen Eurocorps, providing for a bigger role in EU operations. They are planning to increase their capabilities with setting up the EU’s own medical resources, joint land, air and sea transport capabilities.

Following the joint statement of Germany and France, the informal meeting of the European Council took place in Bratislava, where a Defence Action Plan was adopted. This plan outlined a vision of setting up the European Defence Fund, which will be aimed at supporting research funding for defence and to help increase the civilian and military capabilities of the EU.

France and Germany are in favour of promoting the European Defence Fund together with the EU decision-makers in order to assist in supporting military contributions. They already allocated EUR 90 million jointly for the period of 2017–2019, but the common defence expenditure will be separated from the 2020–2027 MFF for the first time.

Besides the European Defence Fund, EU decision-makers intend to launch a European Investment Fund for Defence as well, which would allow for a joint defence programme among the Member States based on their contribution to this fund.

Beside the Germany–France commitment and the Council’s decisions on increasing the EU’s defence expenditure, we should take into consideration the NATO Member States’ future compliance to increasing their defence spending,
which was articulated at the NATO Wales Summit in 2014. These commitments will strengthen the EU’s defence capabilities as well, but from the NATO-side and not from the CSDP’s perspective.

**CONCLUSION**

The Common Defence and Security Policy would probably develop and change in the future. According to Tamás Csiki, the CSDP has to face severe challenges due to the envisioned reforms of the European Union. The elections in France and Germany could seriously affect the future directions of the European Union. Even if pro-EU leaders will be elected, the European Union could be divided into a multi-speed Europe.

In this regard, a group of Member States, which are committed to deepening their cooperation on defence, would probable use institutions, such as PESCO and EDA more often and provide a bigger role for them in order to make defence policy more efficient.

Even before Brexit, changing international circumstances caused a revision of the German approach to defence policy. Germany has been criticised for decades because of alleged indifference and for not taking a bigger role in CSDP, especially regarding budget contribution and military deployment. Following the Arab Spring and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Europe had to rethink its role and responsibility, which led to the presentation of the European Global Strategy in 2016. After the Munich Security Conference in 2014, leaders of Germany expressed Berlin's intention to play a bigger role in defence policy compared to the post-Second World War period of withdrawal, however they are criticising the use of the military budget and make claims for more effective use. Moreover after the British referendum on the UK’s EU membership, German leaders made joint statements with France pledging to strengthen EU Member States’ cooperation in defence.

The UK has a significant capacity for deployment and it has a large defence budget, therefore the loss of the UK will be difficult to compensate. On the other hand, Germany intends to replace the UK as the senior partner of France in CSDP, but due to Berlin’s ‘non-military approach’ France might take a bigger role in deployment when it comes to conflict-resolution and peacekeeping.

Brexit will mean that the permanent British obstruction against increasing EDA’s budget, military integration under PESCO and setting up a joint European military headquarters will cease on the one hand, which could help building a more effective structure for CSDP. But on the other hand, most EU Member States will always regard NATO as the key guarantor of their security, therefore CSDP has only a limited possibility to grow. France and Germany (and the EU) therefore might opt more for soft-power tools, as reacting to hard security challenges in Europe’s neighbourhood will always remain a task for NATO (and therefore at the end of the day, the responsibility of the United States of America).