



Union of European Federalists  
Union Europäischer Föderalisten  
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## AN EU ARMY: FANTASY OR POLITICAL PROJECT?

*Short, Medium and Long Term Perspectives for European Security and Defence*

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### OUR GUESTS



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## INTRODUCTION

Recent comments on the prospects of an EU army by the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and the German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen, have reopened a debate that is long overdue. Today EU defence policies remain national, essentially based on an intergovernmental approach, and completely dependent on the US, leading the EU to be indecisive, slow, uncoordinated and ineffective when reacting to external crisis. The security threats at the border of Europe, from the Middle East to Russia, should lead to a serious reflection on ways to enhance European security and defence policy.

This event has brought together politicians and experts to discuss the status of European security policy and capabilities today, the advantages and disadvantages of a common EU army, the possible first steps towards an EU army considering the possibilities and constraints of the Lisbon Treaty, what the project of an EU army would entail in terms of European military capabilities, relations with national military capabilities, relations with NATO, and last but not least evolution of the EU as a political entity.

## AN EU ARMY: FANTASY OR POLITICAL PROJECT?

### **DANIEL KEOHANE, Research Director at FRIDE**

It is sometimes difficult to see progress in the EU foreign and defence policy. From an analytical point of view, there are good arguments for an EU army, for example for efficiency reasons, but there are problems on two levels: strategic and political.

Strategically, NATO defends EU territory and, from what can be seen, EU member states have no intention nor the capabilities of changing the situation and this will remain the case for a long time.

Politically, armed forces are the ultimate expression of sovereignty and nation states, which do not see EU defence as a project but as a policy. The EU is only one of many options for defence policies in the same way NATO or the UN are and defence is a part of the EU's external action.

However, there is a growing strategic case for EU common defence. Since the US is focusing more on Asian security, the EU is becoming more selective on what it wants to do in the broad neighbourhood. The EU has realised that it must act more independently already and will increasingly have to do so in the future. Given the cuts in EU capabilities, there is no choice other than to go beyond simple cooperation and push for integration of military capabilities. Nevertheless, an EU army will not become a reality soon. Unfortunately, the strategic case for an EU defence is getting stronger while the political case is getting weaker. There are growing strategic demands to reach a common defence policy but the weaker political necessities will push away the idea of creating an EU army.

### **ANA GOMES MEP, Member of the SEDE Committee at the European Parliament**

Ms Gomes became a member of the SEDE Committee in 2004 because she wanted to address the problem of terrorism and realised that there is a need to give answers to EU citizens on security. The reinforcement of EU defence is necessary for purposes such as peace, security and justice for both the EU and worldwide. However, member states are not delivering on what is essential and they know it in their rhetoric in the EU and NATO. The EU has to invest in European military capabilities, at national and European level,

otherwise they would not be a good partner for NATO. The economic crisis has weakened even further the already weak European capabilities, especially in some countries like Portugal. The EU is also vulnerable in the defence sector because of the critical situation of technologies which are under other worldwide powers, such as China.

European governments lack political will and have poor vision. The European Parliament may deliver outstanding reports with concrete recommendations but, in the end, governments are not following up and at best they content themselves with rhetoric without substance. Ms Gomes has declared to be a federalist and in favour of an EU army. She is convinced that if the Europeans do not move away from rhetoric, no steps are going to be possible in order to move forward in EU common defence.

### **JAN PIE, Secretary General of the Aerospace & Defence Industries Association of Europe (ASD)**

The current situation of European defence is severe but the preconditions for a better future are even more worrying. At the fall of the Berlin wall, Europeans were spending approximately 60 percent more than today. In the past 10 years, European defence spending has decreased from 400 to 180 USD. This is happening at a time where other regions are aggressively increasing their spending. The defence industry is currently looking for the bulk of its customers in other regions of the world, meaning that today 50 percent of exports are targeted outside Europe. This is also because while Europe has been reducing its military budget, regions in the rest of the world are increasing it. This rapidly creates imbalances, especially when the BRICs countries are spending more and more.

The impact of this situation will be seen in 10-15 years and when time will come to take urgent measures to fix the problem of a weak European defence, pouring money to the sector will not be enough because there will be a lack of competences in research and technologies, public opinion will be unstable and other problems will emerge. Even if we decided today, it could take up to 30-35 years to rebuild meaningful EU military capabilities.

In the long run, the EU defence industry would greatly benefit from EU military investment and capabilities, especially in the form of a single European army replacing national armies. Although defence industries are looking at business perspectives, and the business demand today are national, the industry would adapt in case of European integration in this field. In fact the industry at large would be in favour of such move from an industrial perspective.

### **GENERAL HANS-LOTHAR DOMRÖSE, Commander at the NATO Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum**

General Domröse stressed the need for capable forces in Europe, including soldiers with adequate training, highly motivated and adequate technical means. EU security challenges are vast on all geopolitical fronts, but the Europeans are simply unprepared and divided. Today there are only 5 EU countries with meaningful military capabilities. The main problem of military capabilities concerns armaments, as it still reflects national interest and industries. In the current situation, every single mandate in NATO has to be discussed thoroughly between EU member states, which do not always agree on the priorities for a mission.

In order to reach an EU army the main issue would be to identify who would be willing to finance such a project and how. It is also of uttermost importance that Europeans recognise that NATO is still highly responsible for defence in Europe. If the Europeans were to create an EU army, they would also have to address how responsibility and accountability would work. For example, in Germany a mandate from the

German parliament is required for the deployment of troops and a government who decides on where to deploy troops in the context of the foreign and security policy of the country. Only by creating similar democratic controls at European level, it would be possible to have a formal commitment in European defence.

According to General Domröse, the EU army is neither fantasy nor (yet) a political project; it must be considered a vision that helps to assess intermediate steps.

**TERI SCHULZ, Correspondent of the US National Public Radio and CBS Radio News**

Scepticism in creating an EU army is widely spread in the US: nobody thinks it would be possible to reach. However, the US welcomes this possibility and it would be highly appreciated if the EU could reach a defence union. Today the EU army is a fantasy but it would also be a worthy political project.

In the current situation, it is incorrect to think that the US is the main actor directing NATO since what has been seen is that the EU member states are constantly fighting against each other when it is time to reach a decision. What Europe should be focusing on is spending consistently on technology because when one day the EU will be ready to have an EU army there will be a lack of concrete capabilities.

Furthermore, it is time to put the EU battlegroups to use.

**ELMAR BORK MEP, Chairman of the AFET Committee at the European Parliament and UEF President**

In the last 25 years the EU has changed its foreign and defence strategy because it believed it was not necessary to invest in territorial defence any longer. Today this is changing again and we are seeing the importance of territorial defence again. Moreover Europe is seeing the renaissance of NATO today because defence is again a strong requirement also on European territory. A strong EU would increase the EU's influence worldwide and help it be a bigger contributor in NATO.

Although European aggregate expenditure in defence is very high and there are two times more European soldiers than American soldiers, their impact is disastrous, negligible in terms of military impact. There is no area where the cost of the lack of a united Europe is higher than in defence. The EU council is making no progress in European defence because member states are under the illusions of national sovereignty and the existence of a "national defence". This is not the case anymore.

With the constant shrink in the European defence budget, the EU needs synergies in defence procurement and investments. Hopefully member states will understand it is time to move to common investment in research and technology and organise common procurement. Within the current treaties there is space for further integration in defence, starting from the Permanent Structured Cooperation, but eventually a change to the Treaties will be required.

The EU army is the path to take only if there is a change of political responsibility and a strong parliamentary democracy.

75 percent of the EU population is in favour of an EU defence policy. There is no other policy for which the citizens' consensus is higher.

## MORE INFORMATION

- **UEF Resolution “Towards a European Army”**  
Federal Committee, Brussels, 18 April 2015
- **UEF Resolution on Ukraine**  
Federal Committee, Brussels, 13 December 2014
- **UEF Resolution on Relaunching Europe’s Foreign & Defence Policy**  
Federal Committee, Brussels, 14 June 2014
- **Reflection Paper “The Ukrainian Crisis: Lessons for EU’s Foreign and Defence Policy”**  
Elisa Lironi, UEF Policy and Advocacy Officer, May 2015

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