

## Ensuring the EU's future as a security provider Five recommendations for the June European Council's session on CSDP

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On 25 and 26 June 2015, the Heads of State or Government of the European Union (EU) will convene to discuss the implementation of their Conclusions on the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) from December 2013. A substantial and frank debate among EU leaders is urgently needed in order to forge a lasting and credible vision for CSDP.

Since early 2014, an intense intra-European assessment process has been put in place to deliver an effective and multi-faceted policy response to the many challenges affecting European defence in general, and CSDP in particular. The early results (or lack thereof) of such a considerable mobilisation effort have been highlighted in several EU documents last May, including the High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP) Mogherini's 'Report on the CSDP' and her forthcoming presentation on the strategic changes and challenges in the global environment, in possible preparation of a 'review of the 2003 European Security Strategy', the European Commission's 'Report on the Implementation of the Communication on Defence' from last summer, a (rather punchy) 'Resolution on the Implementation of the CSDP' by the European Parliament and the 'Conclusions on CSDP' by the EU Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), largely providing the play script for the Summit's own resolutions.

Two and a half years after the decision of the (then) European Council President Herman Van Rompuy to put defence back on the agenda of EU's 'high politics', the balance sheet of CSDP offers very mixed results in each of its three dimensions: missions and operations, capability development and the defence industry. This reflects the wider constraints of the current defence debate in Europe, involving the pervasive impacts of the enduring economic and financial crisis on most military budgets, a general reluctance towards the use of hard power among policy-makers and citizens, as well as the absence of a clear-cut consensus among member states on the exact role of CSDP in the EU's global strategy.

Once again, the European Council's overburdened agenda, spanning from the renewed risks of Grexit and the future of EU-UK relations, to some delicate discussions on the diverse crises affecting Ukraine and the Mediterranean Sea, will make it difficult to secure enough time for an in-depth debate on CSDP. Yet, should EU leaders succeed in ring-fencing a spot in their challenging to-do-list, there are five main points that could help guide this much-needed conversation and its potential follow-up.

**1) Avoid the automatic generator of statements.** The regular, high-level review process inaugurated in December 2013 is an important achievement, which needs to be maintained well beyond the forthcoming *rendezvous* of EU leaders. However, such an appointment should avoid becoming an 'automatic generator of statements', but rather strive to fully exploit the expected added value of a top-level political event. A (relatively) short and clear set of future deliverables for CSDP, accompanied by a politically charged emphasis on Europe's security interdependence, would be an encouraging outcome of the next Summit's CSDP session.

**2) Skip catalogues, talk politics.** Consequently, EU leaders have to refrain from merely endorsing the bulky catalogue of (undoubtedly important) decisions and actions taken at a lower political (e.g. FAC) or bureaucratic (i.e. EU service) level. Instead, they actually need to 'talk (tough) politics' when discussing a policy area so vital for the security of European citizens but severely constrained by (often overplayed) considerations of national sovereignty.

**3) Focus on the basic questions about European security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.** What are the key security challenges? When is European military power really needed to tackle crises and conflicts (and when, on the contrary, should other EU tools be employed)? Where should Europeans concentrate their security and defence projection in the next years, both geographically (EU's neighbourhood and/or beyond) and function-wise (e.g. territorial defence versus external crisis-management)? How could Europeans concretely fulfil their security interests via common operations, capabilities and technologies, while maximising the

impacts of their anaemic defence spending? And who should be coordinating and streamlining member states' participation in each of the (many) work strands of European security cooperation in the foreseeable future (i.e. EU and its bodies, NATO, mini-lateral 'coalitions of the willing', or a pragmatic combination of all these)? Mogherini's expected 'strategic presentation' could provide a useful *entrée en matière* for this crucial, substantial debate.

**4) Craft a policy, not just a toolbox.** Like other EU dossiers, CSDP still looks like a (moderately) ordered collection of instruments rather than a fully-fledged and truly collective policy like the one called for in EU Treaties. In order for the latter to guide the former, European leaders should urgently make up their mind on what kind of overarching political vision and ancillary strategic culture (if any) should steer CSDP in the next decade, or else be content with keeping it as a less ambitious, second-class component of the EU's external action.

**5) Fill the communication gap.** Despite its acknowledged shortfalls, since its creation in the late 1990s, CSDP has delivered considerable achievements, from its early engagement in the post-war Western Balkans in the early 2000s up to current successes such as countering piracy off the Somali coast or securing humanitarian relief in the Central African Republic. If one adds on the more technical yet valuable projects by EU bodies enhancing military and civilian capabilities and integrating the European defence and security market(s), the overall result amounts to a considerable set of materials to be actively communicated to policy makers, public opinion and the media, both in Europe and across the world. Yet so far, little effort has been put in making CSDP a true flagship of the EU's in-depth integration process and its international security engagement. Time has come for EU leaders to promptly fill such a risky communication gap.

Since member states will keep occupying the pilot seat in driving CSDP in the foreseeable future, the forthcoming European Summit might offer a precious opportunity to ensure the EU's future as a credible and reliable security provider, one that protects and promotes European interests and values in a transforming world (dis)order.

Back in December 2013, EU leaders had commandingly declared that "defence matters": if they really meant what they said, all they have to do now is put their preaching into practice. Europe's unprecedented security concerns deserve far more than just a *pro forma* CSDP Summit.

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