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Europe of Defence: Has Pandora's Box Been Opened?

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In a joint statement reaffirming their resolve to rekindle bilateral cooperation in specific areas of their defence programmes given the impact that the economic crisis has had on their military budgets, Paris and London have certainly made the right diagnosis of the problem but seem to have prescribed the wrong treatment. There are in fact two ways of assessing this joint decision. The first would be to welcome the fact that the two main arms producers in Europe are agreeing, albeit partially, to “align” their industrial and planning timetables as part of a large-scale economy drive. In other terms, cooperation limited to the bilateral framework

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would still be better than nothing. A second interpretation would be to assess the prospect of this cooperation in the light of the provisions adopted by the EU27 in the field of Europe of Defence. Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, Europe of Defence has not been devoid of rapprochement and solidarity mechanisms. It is obvious that London and Paris have not aimed their diplomatic effort towards (re)activating these mechanisms. Also, it is to be highlighted that, despite the importance that the joint statement has for the future of the European defence industry, there is no reference to the role of the European Defence Agency in the text. EU member states will most certainly have to learn from this for the future. Such a course of action proves all the more worrying as it comes shortly after the 27 EU member states agreed to open negotiations for review of the treaty – although this was for economic and financial regulation considerations. Has Pandora's box just been opened? Given the difficulties encountered in implementing the Lisbon Treaty, are we not now seeing doubts hovering over the tools it sets in place? That question must be asked.

At the same time, it is appropriate to put the scope of the joint statement signed by the two capitals into perspective. First of all, it is to be noted that their joint efforts will above all be on "*technical*" aspects of defence cooperation (simulation and experimentation linked to nuclear deterrence, aircraft carriers, missiles, UAVs). As described, some of the industrial objectives evoked seem, moreover, to combine with technological projects. UAVs and UCAVs thus concern different levels of ambition.

Although crucial, this kind of collaboration will not, however, "*create organisations*". One cannot expect that doctrinal rapprochement will "*naturally*" flow from the measures promised. London and Paris are aware of this, moreover, as they point out that, under no circumstances, will the arrangement reached between their defence systems mean giving up any of their sovereignty. It is therefore more than unlikely that these rapprochements will generate the ground in which the future and long-hoped-for "*European strategic culture*" will take root – helped along in its germination by recent operations conducted under the European banner. Furthermore, the announced creation of a joint Anglo-French expeditionary force – though not a permanent one! – will finally only add a force system to the list of the many units already existing which are, at best, under-employed (NATO's NRF, for example) or, at worse, not employed at all (EU Battlegroups).

Budgetary constraints linked to the unprecedented economic crisis that has swept across Europe should, however, have opened an un hoped-for window of opportunity for activating the variable geometry solidarity process set out in the Lisbon Treaty and, more especially, the implementation of *permanent structured*

cooperation, (PSC). However, rather than constituting the driving force for a new European defence dynamic – that the PSC could in fact have embodied – France and the United Kingdom seem to have preferred pragmatic and calculated rapprochement around targeted but nonetheless only partial objectives.

Although NATO is gratified by a passage specifically dedicated to it, the European Union, on the other hand, is visibly absent from the Anglo-French statement. At best, it is presented as a partner of the transatlantic organisation. The resolve expressed by France and the United Kingdom to establish conditions favourable for better rationalisation of European missile activity comes, moreover, within a logic of solidarity that is essentially transatlantic, while the consolidation that had allowed the MBDA to be set up at the heart of this plan were based on an approach that was initially European. No doubt France and the United Kingdom intend to prepare their industrial and technological bases with a view to developing territorial missile defence which should, eventually, be adopted within NATO during the Lisbon Summit.

In truth, the Anglo-French treaty leaves us as perplex as it does pensive. If it had been signed by all 27, it would indeed have been wonderful for the Europe of Defence to have a treaty based on such rhetorical determination.