



e-Note 12

What Can We Expect from the December 2013 European Summit?

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The views expressed in this paper are only those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or the policy of the Belgian Ministry of Defence or the Royal Higher Institute for Defence.

Introduction

In response to the Chicago Summit and following the difficulties that have arisen over the growing importance of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), it was decided at the European Council of 13 and 14 December 2012 that the 19-20 December summit would be devoted to the European security and defence. Three clusters were identified by President Van Rompuy for further discussion: increasing the effectiveness, visibility and impact of CSDP, enhancing the development of defence capabilities and strengthening Europe's defence industry. What can one expect from the December summit? What level of ambition will be proposed? What initiatives will be taken? The declared intention for the end of 2013 is to *"review progress achieved in pursuing these goals, assess the situation and, on the basis of recommendations by its President, provide guidance, including by setting priorities and timelines, to ensure the effectiveness of EU efforts aimed at meeting Europe's security responsibilities"*.

These questions are crucial in view of the "pessimistic" environment in which the CSDP, this sectoral policy at the service of the EU, seems to have come to a standstill and to be held back by organisational burden, while some member states are showing reluctance to improve its functioning, its resources and its ambitions. Other factors account for this need to take stock of the situation and to open up new avenues. On the one hand, defence issues have not been on the agenda for five years. On the other hand, the economic and banking crisis has adverse effects on defence economics and the Defence Technological and Industrial Base (DTIB). Besides, the European Council met several times between late 2012 and the autumn of this year to discuss other issues, which makes it possible for the December summit to focus on this particular topic (except for urgent matters linked to current events). Finally, the Treaty of Lisbon lets the Council play a role in defining the political direction in defence matters, which it

has allowed itself to do, under the influence of some countries keen on moving forward with regard to the CSDP. As a matter of fact, a window of opportunity does exist, as it was the case in December 2008 with the Franco-British Summit held in Saint-Malo, although it is not known whether the December meeting will “bring forth a mouse”, will be just another frenzy quickly fading away and resulting in the lowest common denominator or, on the contrary, will create the conditions for awareness, leading to future “strategic” progress and enabling the CSDP to come to maturity.

Preparations

Two institutions published an official document written on the basis of the mandate described in the conclusions of the December 2012 summit: the Commission¹ and the European Defence Agency (EDA)².

These official documents have been the subject of analyses and diplomatic discussions between member states as well as with, according to their competences, the European Union Military Staff (EUMS) and different European services and agencies. A draft was prepared by Herman Van Rompuy’s cabinet (in consultation with the member states), before being forwarded to the ambassadors and foreign ministers in order to take their views and comments into account and to reduce the bracketed parts, i.e. the national divergences, as much as possible. The meetings of defence ministers in September and of foreign ministers (“Gymnich”) also provided the opportunity to debate the different positions. The president of the European Council asked this autumn that the Foreign Affairs/Defence Council presents conclusions on the first two points of the mandate (CSDP and capacities, cf. table page 5). Besides, Mr Van Rompuy asked the Lithuanian Presidency to provide him, through the Competitiveness Council which is to meet on 2 December, with its conclusions about the third part (defence industry). However, EU foreign affairs and defence ministers chose to go beyond their mandate as they have been preparing a conclusion about all three sections since 4 November.

Yet, the formal meeting of EU defence ministers held on 18 November 2013 sought to answer the unresolved issues and to discuss the final conclusions, but differences of opinion made it necessary to return to the Permanent Representatives Committee (COREPER), with a likely adoption during an Education Council to be held on 25 November! By then, most of the conclusions of the December 2013 defence summit will be finalised.

In addition to this preliminary negotiations process, which is all the more necessary since the duration of the Council is fairly short³, a great many⁴ documents, reports, opinions and other focus papers have been written, which analyse and put forward recommendations on the chosen themes but also beyond. This includes reactions in the media by some political and military authorities⁵ working within European institutions, but also reports, opinions, conclusions and recommendations from the EUISS⁶, the European Parliament⁷, the inter-parliamentary conference⁸ on CSDP, the European Economic and Social Committee⁹, national parliaments¹⁰, lobby organisations¹¹, research centres and other think tanks¹², political groups¹³, but also directly from some member states¹⁴. This also covers publications in special issues of journals and conferences organised in order to enrich the debate of December as well as analyses by journalists specialised in the matter¹⁵.

The three “schools”

In the light of the various proposals and recommendations, three major schools of thought can be identified, yet with some overlaps and duplications as some initiatives also include opinions about the general set of themes of other “movements”.

The first school of thought is the “doctrinaire” one. Doctrinarians put forward the drafting of an EU Security and Defence White Paper, of which the relevance has frequently been highlighted, although it has never been officially taken into account up until now¹⁶. Among them are several research institutes¹⁷ as well as the Kangaroo group, the European’s People Party (EPP) and some European Parliament proceedings. In the same context, we can also mention those who suggest launching a strategic reflection to redesign the European Security Strategy adopted in 2003 and revised in 2008, as well as those who wish to come to a defence union on the long run.

The second school of thought is represented by the “institutional players”. Their idea is to reform EU’s organisational structures in the framework of its CSDP. They also include those who want to foster the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PSC) introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, set up a EU civil-military headquarter with separate chains of command, further integrate civilian and military staffs and organise Defence Council meetings on a more regular basis. Some of these actors suggest clarifying the EU’s mutual defence and solidarity clauses and improving the links between the European External Action Service (EEAS), the various DGs of the Commission and the member states. Several “groups” (EPP) advocate a stronger support to EDA and to the rules related to the internal market for defence as well as the necessity to include defence in the EU framework programme for research and innovation (Horizon 2020), the rapprochement between the Organisation for Joint Armaments Cooperation (OCCAR) and EDA and a better use of the Commission, ESA and EDA to meet CSDP civil-military goals. Finally, the notion of strong European pillar within the Atlantic Alliance can only materialise with political and institutional progress on the issue of Cyprus.

As for the third school of thought, that of the “pragmatists”, it proposes structural and operational reforms with the aim of enhancing the credibility of capabilities. The (sometimes competing) official documents of the Commission and EDA belongs to this category. Other suggestions also fit into this “practical” vision, i.e. that of establishing a sound European Technological and Industrial Base and creating stand-by European forces under EU command, as well as some proposals made by defence ministers, including Belgian Defence Minister Pieter De Crem, on the use of Battlegroups and the application of enhanced cooperation to some countries. The ideas put forward by the Eurodefence group or the Franco-German proposals of the summer 2013 over the finalisation of the European maritime security strategy, the global observation capability, synergies for dual-use capabilities and the suppression of economic compensations also fall in this category.

Lines of action

On the basis of these various visions corresponding to different degrees of realism, we can foresee several lines of action based on different levels of ambition.

The lines of action wished by the “ultra-Europeans” (EPP documents, think tanks) ambitiously cover the more relevant elements of the different schools. They will strive to capitalise on the opportunity offered by the December Council to build a more developed CSDP in political, strategic as well as capability terms. The primary objective will be to implement all the points relating to CSDP contained in the various articles of the Treaty of Lisbon and to launch new ambitious initiatives as from 2014. Their goal is

also to foster EU autonomy by developing a strategic culture. In this context, it is not impossible that the EU could prepare a timetable for a revised European Security Strategy focusing on the security priorities in its neighbourhood and in Africa. Here too the repeated call for a new Eurobarometer survey on defence after the last one in 2000 (on the initiative of Belgium) could finally be heard.

The lines of action which are likely to be adopted and which can be reasonably expected will lie on concrete elements in terms of capability sharing corresponding to *“the level of solidarity desired and/or accepted by the Heads of State and Government”*¹⁸. In the same spirit, a reflection is needed on the critical capabilities that the EU should have (cyber defence, communication, air-to-air refuelling, transport aircraft, hospital ships, drones, etc.). Taking the Commission proposals into account would also be a sign of openness, as much as the application of the principle of reality, i.e. getting money where it can be found in large quantities. The objective is to make better use of the financial resources (which will not increase) through capability pooling and sharing¹⁹. The seed fund in view of financing missions and operations will probably be adopted.

Concrete and non-ideological input could also come from bilateral or multilateral initiatives of some member states which have been preparing for the summit: Franco-German²⁰; Franco-British; Weimar; Weimar + (Franco-German-Italian-Spanish-Polish); Višegrad +; Benelux... Some aspects could be emphasised: support of CSDP to border management, the enhanced cooperation laid down in the Treaty of Lisbon (Article 44), but also the priority given to the neighbourhood (review of priorities) and the consideration given to necessary rapid-response capabilities with the revised concept of the Battlegroups (including as training instrument to the benefit of the forces of regional organisations). A rendezvous clause on defence could be adopted without too much trouble, while the timetable would remain the European Council’s responsibility. Yet a progress report of the High Representative would be due in the spring of 2015.

As for the most pessimistic lines of action, they could be based, at worst, on the hypothesis of the suppression of the euro, which would in turn lead to the end of the CSDP or, at best, on the hypothesis of short-sightedness, without a real take-off of the CSDP and with a smokescreen of rhetoric. In this context, the Atlantic Alliance would become the reference by granting itself more competences in security matters. Some defence difficulties related to the issue of competitiveness and offsets (DTIB) could also appear at the summit as well as perverse effects of Article 346 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which could significantly weaken the relevance of the arguments of the European Commission.

In all three cases, the comprehensive approach will be put forward, even if the concept, in contrast with its wording, does not in the least resolve the strategic questions and the sovereignty and risk-taking issues.

Despite the many papers written by think tanks, which, admittedly, were examined by institutions and governments, the publications which are mainly taken into account revolve around the Commission, EDA and national interests. In this regard, the tensions between London and Warsaw regarding the DTIB at the Foreign Affairs/Defence Council in November are particularly telling. The problem stems from the culture shock and the power play between the Commission and EDA, with the states waiting for the right time to come up with their own agendas.

Finally, it should be noted that in the document of the European Commission, it is stated that *“Defence is still at the heart of national sovereignty”* and that *“decisions on military capabilities remain with Member States”*. Between an opportunity to be seized and the renationalisation of defence against the

backdrop of the economic crisis, solutions as well as dead ends called “inward-looking sovereignty” and “renationalisation of security and defence” could be found. Clearly, political impetus remains key and December 2013 could be a strategic opportunity that European states cannot afford to miss, but there are still many safeguards and hopes remain postponed to a new post-Ashton agenda.

Table: Extract of the recommendations of December 2012

§23. The European Council invites the High Representative, notably through the European External Action Service and the European Defence Agency, as well as the Commission, all acting in accordance with their respective responsibilities and cooperating closely as required, to develop further proposals and actions to strengthen CSDP and improve the availability of the required civilian and military capabilities, and to report on such initiatives, at the latest by September 2013, with a view to the December 2013 European Council. Member States will be closely involved throughout this process.

§24 To that end, the European Council underlines i.a. the following issues:

Increase the effectiveness, visibility and impact of CSDP by

- further developing the comprehensive approach to conflict prevention, crisis management and stabilisation, including by developing the ability to respond to emerging security challenges;
- strengthening the EU's ability to deploy the right civilian and military capabilities and personnel rapidly and effectively on the whole spectrum of crisis management action.

Enhance the development of defence capabilities by

- identifying current redundancies and capabilities shortfalls and prioritising future requirements for European civilian and military capabilities;
- facilitating a more systematic and longer term European defence cooperation, including through "pooling and sharing" of military capabilities; and in this regard, systematically considering cooperation from the outset in national defence planning by Member States;
- facilitating synergies between bilateral, sub-regional, European and multilateral initiatives, including the EU's "pooling and sharing" and NATO's "smart defence".

Strengthen Europe's defence industry by

- developing a more integrated, sustainable, innovative and competitive European defence technological and industrial base;
- developing greater synergies between civilian and military research and development; promoting a well-functioning defence market, in particular through the effective implementation of the directives on public procurement and on intra-EU transfers, open to SMEs and benefiting from their contributions.

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *Towards a more competitive and efficient European defence and security sector*, COM(2013) 542 final, European Commission, Brussels, 24 July 2013.

² *Preparing the December 2013 European Council on Security and Defence*. Final Report by the High Representative/Head of the EDA on the Common Security and Defence Policy, Brussels, 15 October 2013.

³ I.e., between 17:00 on Thursday 19 December (including a dinner) and the end of the morning on Friday 20 December 2013. According to an unofficial source, the discussions on defence will only be held on Thursday!

⁴ In view of the scale of the literature in preparation of the December 2013 European Council, it is not possible to analyse them here in the framework of this e-Note. For further detail, see the different references in footnotes.

⁵ Viewpoints from the French General de Rousiers (*Robert Schuman Foundation*, 14 January 2013), the German General Bentler (*La Lettre de la RMF UE*, March 2013), the Dutch General Van Osch, then director-general of the EUMS (*EDD*, Agence Europe, 5 March 2013), the Swedish General Syrén, then chairman of the EUMC (www.bruxelles2.eu, 14 July 2012), of the Austrian General Wosolsobe, director-general of the EUMS (*La Lettre de la RMF UE*, September 2013).

⁶ Cf. Antonio Missiroli, *Strategic foresight-and the EU*, Brief issue, Paris, February 2013 (www.iss.europa.eu); Eva Gross and Anand Menon, *CSDP between internal constraints and external challenges*, Report 17, ISSUE, Paris, October 2013.

⁷ Marietta Giannakou, *Report on EU's military structures: state of play and future prospects*, document A7-0205/2013, Brussels, 6 June 2013; Michael Gahler, *Motion for a European Parliament resolution on the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base*, 2013/2125 (INI), Brussels, 28 August 2013; Arnaud Danjean, *Report on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy (based on the Annual Report from the Council to the European Parliament on the Common Foreign and Security Policy)*, document A7-0357/2012, Brussels, 31 October 2012.

⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy, Conclusions, Vilnius, 4-6 September 2013.

⁹ Van Iersel and Hrušecká, Opinion on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Towards a more competitive and efficient European defence and security sector, European Economic and Social Committee, Brussels, 17 October 2013.

¹⁰ For instance, the resolution proposal related to the future of the Belgian army in a European framework, Belgium House of Representatives, 26 April 2013; the French National Assembly report by Marie Récalde on the impetus for European Defence (April 2013), and the one by Cornut-Gentille et al. on the assessment and monitoring mission devoted to the conduct of cooperative armaments programmes (July 2013). Cf. report by Daniel Reiner et al. on "Quelle Europe, pour quelle défense ?" (French Senate, July 2013).

¹¹ "Better spending in Security and Defence through more Cooperation", Kangaroo Group Discussion Paper for the December Defence Summit, Brussels, July 2013; report by Willem van Eekelen and Jean-Paul Perruche (presidents) of Eurodefense to the president of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy, August 2013.

¹² Cf. Sven Biscop and Jo Coelmont's contributions in 2013 (Egmont Institute), the group Notre Europe Jacques Delors Institute and the projects bringing together 16 think tanks (Think Global – Act European IV); Hilmar Linnenkamp and Christian Mölling, "A Doable Agenda for the European Defence Council 2013" (www.swp-berlin.org); Olivier de France and Nick Witney, *Europe's strategic cacophony*, Policy Brief, ECFR, 2013; Clara Marina O'Donnell, *The trials and tribulations of European defence co-operation*, Centre for European Reform, London, July 2013; Les Notes de l'IRIS, Paris, September 2013.

¹³ Arnaud Danjean, Michael Gahler and Krzysztof Lisek, "Towards a stronger Union defence policy", EPP Group in the European Parliament, Brussels, 3 September 2013.

¹⁴ Cf. exchange of views with Defence Minister Pieter De Crem, subcommittee on security and defence, European Parliament, 26 September 2013 Cf. also the European chapter in the 2013 French White Paper on Defence, the Austrian non-paper of the summer of 2013 (see also www.boehlau-verlag.com); the Finnish-German-Italian-Dutch-Spanish non-paper on European support to regional organisations ("Enable & Enhance Initiative"), etc.

¹⁵ Cf. for instance, Olivier Jehin, editorials, "Carton jaune à l'AED", "De l'importance du dialogue direct entre les États membres et la Commission", "Du caractère impératif des capacités communes", in *Europe diplomatie &*

défense, Agence Europe, 11 and 18 June, 29 October 2013; Nicolas Gros-Verheyden, articles on the website www.bruxelles2.eu.

¹⁶ Cf. *European defence. A proposal for a White paper. Report of an independent Task Force*, ISSEU, Paris, May 2004; André Dumoulin, “Vers un Livre blanc européen de la sécurité et de la défense : entre ‘objet non identifié’ et fenêtre d’opportunité”, in *DSI*, Brussels, February 2007. In 2013, Sweden, Belgium, Spain and Italy are said to have mentioned (yet half-heartedly) this theme as a matter for discussion in view of the December summit.

¹⁷ Cf. European Council on Foreign Relations (www.ecfr.eu).

¹⁸ Interview, General Patrick de Rousiers, Chairman of the European Union’s Military Committee, on www.robert-schuman.eu, 14 January 2013.

¹⁹ Let it be reminded that pooling and sharing are already mentioned in the European Security Strategy of 2003.

²⁰ Joint letter of the French and German foreign and defence ministers to Catherine Ashton, 23 July 2013.