

CSDP– Views from the Member States
Spain, France, Italy and the United Kingdom

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This note presents the early findings of a collaborative research project launched in the Summer 2012 and co-ordinated by the COST (European Co-operation in Science and Technology) Action IS0805 “New Challenges of Peacekeeping and the European Union’s Role in Multilateral Crisis Management”: <http://www.peacekeeping-cost-is0805.eu/>.

Ten years after the adoption of the EU’s first security strategy (2003), the project engages the academic and policy debate on EU security and defence by inverting the typical analytical approach usually applied in this field. Rather than asking what are the common European interests and values that the CSDP should follow (Meyer, 2006; Biscop and Coelmont, 2010), this study focuses on how the CSDP is instrumentally seen by 7 targeted member states (France, the UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Poland) as a tool to serve national interests. Such insight bears relevance to the understanding of the EU’s role as a global security actor in two ways. First, the opportunity to identify common denominators among national agendas may contribute to formulating a more explicit and coherent EU security strategy. Second, points of divergence among member states’ agendas could demonstrate how the pursuit of sheer national interests may hamper the effective use of EU policy instruments, exposing issues that need to be addressed.

Drawing from co-ordinated fieldwork research in Madrid and Paris (Manuel Muniz), Rome and London (Giovanni Faleg), this note analyzes, in particular, the CSDP from the Spanish, French, Italian and British national interest perspectives. It accounts for the key elements of the four countries’ national interests and how they are crisscrossed with security co-operation at the CSDP level. The empirical findings provide new and important insights on the evolution of strategic interests and culture over the past 20 years, namely as far as the integration of civilian and military tools for crisis management missions and capacity building through pooling & sharing are concerned. The methodology is based on semi-structured interviews with security stakeholders as well as on the review and content analysis of relevant secondary sources and material available.

1. Spain: The Don Quixote of European Defense (Manuel Muniz)

Spain has over the past decade been an active member of the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). Spain deployed close to 800 troops and personnel in CSDP missions from 1999 to 2009¹. Over 700 were assigned to missions of a military character like Althea in Bosnia or EUFOR DRC in Congo. This made Spain the 6th largest troop contributor to EU military operations overall, and one of the very few Member States to participate in all missions of that character. Furthermore, Spain is a key player in the EU's current military operations. It very recently gave up the Force Command of EU NAVFOR Atlanta, the first-ever EU naval mission that is fighting piracy off the coast of Somalia, and to which it has contributed significantly in staff and equipment. Similarly Spain is a key player in efforts underway in Uganda to train Somali security forces within the framework of EUTM Somalia. As a high ranking naval officer, currently the Director General of Defense Planning at Spain's Defense Chiefs of Staff (**DIGENPOL** in its Spanish acronym), said when interviewed: "Spain feels comfortable contributing to EU operations. It feels like a valued partner and it allows it to fulfill its role as a soft power"².

Spain's strategy documents have reflected this commitment to European defense since the early 90's. Europe plays a predominant role in all of them, including the 2011 National Security Strategy where the EU is cited in almost every page. Interviews in Spain with top Defense and Foreign Policy officials confirmed this widespread support for the emergence of the EU as a foreign policy and defense actor.

However, it is complicated to find the specific reasons that led Spain to support specific missions. Simply put Spain supports CSDP in almost all its manifestations, which amounts to a lack of strategy. When faced with straightforward questions like "Why did Spain deploy troops in Congo in 2006?" or "What were the strategic interests Spain was defending by deploying military personnel in Chad in 2008?" most interviewees responded by saying that it was where our allies were going and "we had to be there with them". This lack of strategic guidance is what has given this chapter its title. Don Quixote was a fictional Spanish knight known for his commitment to the defense of causes in which he rarely had a direct stake. That noble and tragic ability to get into harm's way for a purpose "higher" than protecting one's own interests seems to have survived the four centuries that separate Don Quixote and Spain's current defense policy.

It should be also pointed out that Spain faces today significant challenges, particularly when it comes to the health of its public finances and its ability to direct sufficient resources towards its Defense. These difficulties, compounded by security risks derived from the Arab Spring and the US' pivot to Asia, will force the country to make long-lasting decisions regarding its defense policy. Tighter cooperation with the EU seems to be the default reaction for this strongly pro-European nation.

¹ Grevi, Giovanni, Helly, Damine and Keohane, Daniel (2009) European Security and Defence Policy: The First Ten Years (European Union Institute for Security Studies).

² Interview with Admiral Juan Francisco Martínez Nuñez, Madrid, 30/10/2012

2. France: The Frustrated Leader (Manuel Muniz)

France has been the strongest proponent of a strong European defense since the end of the Cold War. This fact has not only been demonstrated through continued support for the development of Europe's defense institutions, but also through active participation in the EU's defense initiatives. France was of course fundamental in the emergence of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy in the 1990's, and the largest contributor to its missions with over 5,500 personnel deployed between 1999 and 2009³. It would be fair to say that France has been behind all the major developments in EU defense over the past decades. A Europe of Defense is, simply put, unthinkable without French participation.

France's central role in the EU's defense policy makes its loss of faith in it all the more worrying. Despite calls in France's national security documents for a stronger EU defense, the general feeling in foreign policy and defense circles is one of disappointment, and, in many cases, frustration with European allies. Time and time again, be it Chad, Libya or recently Mali, France has struggled to get the EU to act decisively. It is because of these failures to act in cases where France saw key European interests at stake, together with a generalized collapse in defense capacities across Europe, that France has lost a great deal of its faith in the Europe of Defense. Frustration on the other hand seems to be high regarding German attitudes to defense in general and to CSDP in particular. The issue of the German inability to act or even to shoulder part of the costs of military action came up repeatedly in interviews.

In parallel to this slow process of erosion of French hopes for EU defense, the country has moved in directions if not opposed at least divergent from CSDP. Despite the rhetoric, this is the case of France's rapprochement to NATO. Although it is disputed in Paris that France had ever been distant from NATO one needs to agree that being in the integrated military command has symbolic value. At the very least it is perceived as different by your allies who see in that attitude an acceptance of the possibility that NATO will retain, *sine die*, its preponderance over defense matters in Europe. The Lancaster House Agreement with the UK is yet again another example of French pragmatism that would have probably not been taken had CSDP been a true alternative to the merely bilateral route.

If one single quote could summarize the attitudes in Paris today regarding European defense it would be the following sentence from a report directed to President Hollande from the current French defense Minister, Hubert Vedrine: "Unless there is a strong reawakening of political determination to make Europe a global power, to prevent it from becoming powerless, and dependent, all of the arrangements for the Europe of Defense will be nothing more than incomplete or lifeless words on paper"⁴.

³ Grevi, Giovanni, Helly, Damine and Keohane, Daniel (2009) *European Security and Defence Policy: The First Ten Years* (European Union Institute for Security Studies).

⁴ Vedrine, Hubert (2012), "Report for the President of the French Republic on the Consequences of France's Return to NATO's Integrated Military Command, On the Future of Transatlantic Relations, and the Outlook for the Europe of Defense", p. 23

3. Italy's Third Way to European Defense (Giovanni Faleg)

Against the backdrop of a changing global security landscape, Italy's strategic posture in the second decade of the 2000s displays a widening gap between the persistence of some traditional elements of its strategic culture (e.g. the allegiance to the Atlantic Alliance and the enthusiasm towards deeper EU security integration) and the emergence of new shared beliefs regarding the use of force in response to adaptation pressures, such as a stronger emphasis on the integration of civilian and military tools to face peace-building challenges, or the push for more pooling and sharing of military assets. Italy's participation to the CSDP is tightly linked to this broader evolutionary pattern.

As a middle power (Santoro, 1991) with global trade and economic interests but limited political and military assets, Italy has traditionally relied on multilateralism as a means to achieve its strategic objectives. According to the *politica della sedia* (the "chair policy"), the involvement in intergovernmental summits, meetings and conferences is considered as a top priority by Italy's political élites, as a way to influence decisions and counter-balance the country's structural weaknesses. A logic corollary is the feeling of frustration arising whenever Rome is left aside the constitution of *directoires* (Gardner, 2004). Therefore, Italy's participation to multilateral peace operations (in the UN, NATO or EU frameworks) proceeds from the awareness that active participation increases the capacity to control decisions or processes in areas considered of national interest, such as the Southern Mediterranean.

On that account, the specific interest in privileging the CSDP over other IOs is driven by the four factors. First, the range of action of the CSDP: the EU's operational outreach covers geographical areas widely regarded as Italy's vital interest (in particular, the Western Balkans and, more recently, the Horn of Africa and Sahel regions). Second, the relevance for Italy's national defence industry of community and intergovernmental initiatives shaping the progressive formation of a European defence market: defence market integration is regarded by several stakeholders as a main concern, from the Ministry of Defence to the industrial base. Third, Italy's propensity to engage in low-spectrum, low-risk and non-offensive, humanitarian-type interventions matches up the design of most EU missions to date, through the prominence of civilian/comprehensive over military deployments. Fourth, Italy joins and supports CSDP activities for the sake of the survival and advancement of the European integration progress: as any other sector of EU affairs, integrative stimuli are seen as the only way ahead given the development of a multi-polar world, the emergence of new actors altering security governance and the presence of multi-dimensional threats.

It can be concluded that Italy's vision of the CSDP is comprehensive and balanced. On the one hand, Italy envisages the consolidation of the comprehensive approach in line with external and internal changes, in particular those that have occurred within the Italian armed forces after the end of the Cold War; on the other hand, Italy's behavior features the existence of a balancing will (resulting in a balanced act) between Atlanticist and Integrationist souls of its foreign and security policy. The reliance on the transatlantic defence system and the inclusion in the "leading pack" of European integration, very much including defence integration, are equally considered as vital national interests (Quille et al., 2006: 26). This results in Italy's attitude to seek a mediation, or "third way" between opposite visions of hard/soft CSDP (cf. France/UK divide) by championing the benefits of truly integrated approach at the operational strategic and political levels.

4. United Kingdom: The Elephant in The Room (Giovanni Faleg)

The United Kingdom has unquestionably a leading role in European defense, due to the size of its armed forces, defense industry and experience in high-intensity warfare. In the late 1990s, Tony Blair's support to the launch of the common security and defence policy at Saint Malo (1998) marked the end of a age-old opposition to the development of autonomous European military capabilities outside the NATO framework. The implications of Saint Malo were twofold, going in the sense of a preservation of the UK strategic culture and advancement of the national interest to cope with adaptation pressures. On the one hand, UK governments sought to maintain intact the cornerstone of British strategic culture, namely the reliance on the US as a primary security partner and on NATO as guarantor of UK territorial defence (cf. the “three Ds” shaping EU-NATO relations). On the other hand, and as a response to pressures from Washington and the lessons from Kosovo, Britain started recognizing the value of a militarily autonomous CSDP within the limited scope of crisis management or “Petersberg” operations, with a clear focus on humanitarian tasks, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. It is with this vision in mind that Labour governments continued to invest in the build up of CSDP, both in the military (e.g. Headline Goal process, Battlegroup concept, creation of the European Defence Agency) and civilian dimensions. Consistently with this vision, the CSDP main “deliverables” are unmistakably perceived in London as contained within the soft dimension of security. Accordingly, the EU is seen as having an added value in the low end of the spectrum, which entails conflict prevention, stabilisation and those crisis management operations where borders between hard and soft security are blurry and a comprehensive approach is needed (e.g. in the Horn of Africa). Instead, there continues - and will continue - to be no appetite in London for high-end capabilities or such thing as an EU operational headquarters, as long as NATO provides planning structures, procedures and resources for hard defence. Institutions and permanent planning and conduct structures are clear red lines for UK interests.

The 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review left that approach to CSDP unchanged, despite the impact of systemic transformations (growing uncertainties and changing character of conflicts) on the UK strategic posture. The Review links the future role of CSDP to the promotion of stability, the reinforcement of conflict prevention tools (possibly leading to an EU conflict prevention strategy), the support to integrated mission and military ones where NATO is not willing to intervene and where action through EU can provide good value for money (e.g. counter-piracy efforts in Somalia, Operation Atalanta). This is confirmed by the wider strategy “Building Stability Overseas” jointly drafted by DFID, FCO and the MoD.

Despite the existence of clear red lines and an unambiguous understanding of what CSDP means to British national interest, the UK's stance towards European defense has never been so uncertain, mostly because of David Cameron's Coalition government Euro-skeptic attitude. In response to austerity hitting public defence spending, Britain has privileged bilateral cooperation with France (e.g. Franco-British defence agreement) to the detriment of multilateral initiatives within the EU framework, for instance as regards pooling and sharing or operational deployments (read Libya). Finally, uncertainty is on the rise as the UK's future relationship with the EU is called into question. The possibility of an opt-out makes Britain not just the engine, but also the elephant in the room for the CSDP: is a common defence policy conceivable without the UK?