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The European Army – How to Do It Right?

By Marcin Terlikowski

The growing demand for an EU-owned force

The current difficulties in the European Union, caused by the result of the Irish referendum, show that bold projects regarding European integration can be misunderstood and cause serious concerns. One of such initiatives is the idea of a European Army, which is likely to trigger equally ardent discussions. Hence, we propose to look at the issue from a different perspective.

The idea of a European Army dates back to the beginning of the European integration process of the 1950s. Even though the Pleven plan collapsed, other projects, aiming to create joint European military capabilities, were later discussed regularly (e.g. attempts to reactivate the Western European Union in the 1980s). Today, almost a decade since the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) was launched, the discussion on the EU's military capabilities is more dynamic than ever before. The reason is simple: the actual shape of the ESDP does not live up to the growing demand for a more active European Union made by many EU member states as well as by other significant actors in international relations. According to these voices, the EU should be an effective, global provider of security, capable of undertaking prompt and effective actions during crises. Meanwhile, despite many efforts, the EU does not have any dedicated force at its disposal. In conducting operations it must rely on national contingents, voluntarily contributed by member states.

Recently, a number of new conceptions of the European Army have been presented – by the Polish president Lech Kaczyński and prime minister Jarosław Kaczyński, by French president Nicolas Sarkozy, and by German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier. These ideas are based on the same principle of pooling national defence assets, as well as establishing common HQs, in order to allow the EU to more easily generate forces to be used during a crisis. It seems that the progressive integration in the sphere of defence and security is regarded as a way towards the creation of common armed forces for the European Union. It must be stated clearly that due to substantial complexity, these projects are likely to remain the endeavor of a very small group of EU member states. Such situation could result in replication of the current weak points of the ESDP.

Therefore, the aim of this brief is to present a different vision of a European Army, not based on the concept of a typical multinational force. A similar approach partly characterised the vision of the European Army formulated by René Pleven in 1950, however, this Cold War era plan concentrated on the defence of the European territory against the Soviet threat. In present circumstances, any project to develop a European force must take into account the challenges of today. Consequently, the new EU force envisioned here should be comprised of units operating under a single, European command and formed with professional soldiers — nationals of different EU countries individually contracted for duty. The Army would be separate from national armed forces, but it would replace neither them nor most of the existing ESDP assets. It would be a rapid reaction force, limited in number, able to conduct expeditionary operations (executing primarily combat tasks) and would be continually at the EU's exclusive disposal.

Although it may appear for many reasons to be a bold project, it is the proper time to discuss the future of the EU's military capabilities as well as the various visions for the European Army. In spite of an uncertain future of the Lisbon Treaty, the discussion on institutional issues will not decisively influence the implementation of the EU's external policies, the ESDP being one of the most

important. Yet, for a number of reasons, the ESDP is often singled out for criticism. Firstly, states, having distinct and clearly defined security policies, do not want to be involved in those expeditionary operations which they do not consider vital to their interests. For some states, there is also the problem of the political and human costs of the military missions. Secondly, financing of operations, which is crucial for their effectiveness, is a controversial and difficult issue. States contributing the largest contingents to missions bear most of the financial costs, while less engaged countries can be perceived as 'free riders' who may gain significant political profits disproportionate to their engagement. This seriously affects the willingness of those states with the most needed capabilities to provide contingents. Simultaneously, growing complexity of operations increases their total cost, which further discourages governments from fielding the necessary capabilities. Thirdly, even if a sufficient number of forces is eventually generated for a mission, there are still interoperability problems. These derive from differences in equipment, command procedures, training, level of experience as well as various national political constraints (and caveats) affecting the flexibility of contingents. Finally, although important initiatives strengthening ESDP have been undertaken in recent years, their outcome is still not clear. The European Battlegroups (BG) initiative, which was to provide the EU with a rapid reaction military force comprised of specially prepared national units, is still in its implementation phase and it is difficult to assess the usability of these units. Yet, even if the BG initiative is fully implemented it will not address the issue of EU military capabilities sufficiently. The reason is not only the relatively small size (1500 soldiers) of a battlegroup, but also there are political and financial constraints, which due to the character of these forces, may very likely hamper a government's willingness to approve the use of 'their' BGs for missions. The main thesis of this paper is that a European Army of the character described here could solve most of the current problems. It would equip the EU with a dedicated, efficient, highly integrated force, eliminate the problems of national caveats and insufficient contingent contributions, and establish effective and transparent ways to finance expeditionary operations.

European Army – proposed structure

When discussing the structure and character of the European Army, two factors have to be taken into account. The first is the types of tasks to be performed by the EU with the use of force. These tasks have not changed over the last decade and involve mainly expeditionary operations performed under the conditions of local armed conflicts and/or human rights abuses on a large scale, acts of genocide, or in the midst of other humanitarian crises created by such conflicts. The second factor to be considered is the need for an operationally effective force, which has to be able to act in harsh conditions and achieve expected goals. Thus, it should be stressed again, the proposed European Army shall be a dedicated rapid reaction force, able to enter a theater of conflict and perform combat tasks that will stabilize the security situation, protect civilians and eventually make room for 'classic', peacekeeping missions. The proposed Army has to be a specialized strike force, with significant combat capabilities, skills and firepower, used exclusively for the most complicated expeditionary tasks. The EU leaders, with such force at their disposal, could act without delay, for example, in a situation where enforcement of the peace could be the sole precondition to the prevention of a humanitarian crisis.

All units of the European Army should be composed of EU nationals, from different countries, who are willing to pursue a professional military career path by means of standard, individual employment contracts with the corresponding cell of the Army (this gives the Army the character of a supranational institution). In order to prepare and train servicemen, a special European Military Academy should be established as an integral part of the Army. It should be comprised of international staff but cooperate closely with the national military academies and colleges. It is vital to once again highlight the assertion that the Army would not be a substitute for national armies (as well as existing ESDP assets) but, on the contrary, will exist alongside them and fully cooperate with them.

The military chain of command in the European Army would also be organized on a transnational basis. Commanding officers should be recruited in the same manner as non-officers and promoted on the basis of their personal achievements in the course of duty. It seems plausible to create two main levels of military command in the Army. The first and lower level would involve an operational, European Headquarters (HQ), which would deal predominately with planning and conducting specific operations, including expeditionary missions. The top level would be a European Central Command, composed of high level, skilled officers, responsible mainly for strategic planning.

When it comes to the issue of the Army's size, there shall be a force of 10 000 soldiers at the EU's disposal at any given time, plus the requisite number of supporting staff. A force of this strength is powerful enough to effectively bring stability to the most probable regions of conflict and would be

reasonably easy to deploy in the area of operation as well. However, due to the widely used three rotation system, in order to achieve sustainability, the total, constant size of the Army will be around 30 000 servicewomen and servicemen. Bearing in mind that the original EU Helsinki Headline Goal set forth an ambitious requirement of 50 000-60 000 deployable troops, which turned out to be impossible to implement, the number of 30 000 seems much more feasible. Moreover, in most operations, the Army could be supported by national or existing ESDP assets, which would effectively raise the number of forces in the theater whenever such a surge would be needed.

If the European Army is to be the most efficient military tool of the EU, it needs to possess substantial combat capabilities. As it is nowadays a precondition of effectiveness, the Army will have to conduct joint operations. Therefore it should possess land, air and maritime components. Ground forces should be comprised of a highly maneuverable (motorized and/or airborne) entry force with a significant component of special units. The air component should involve both in-theater, tactical transport assets (as experience shows, helicopters are now a vital asset for most expeditionary operations) and be possessed of sufficient air strike capabilities as well. The maritime component should be comprised of a group of vessels performing mainly transport and support tasks (communication, maintenance), but with the ability also to perform policing missions in the area of an operation.

It is vital to the effectiveness of the European Army that it acquire certain additional capabilities. The establishment of a separate strategic air transport unit should be regarded as one of the basic steps in building up the operational readiness of the Army. One possible solution could involve the purchase of a number of transport airplanes which are to remain under the exclusive control of a dedicated, separate HQ. Another important issue is that of combat support capabilities. For the sake of effectiveness, most tasks of this kind will have to be performed by the Army's own, special units, which are best able to guarantee an on-time and flawless provision of supplies, munitions, etc. The same is true for command, control and communications — the establishment of a separate unit responsible for those tasks at all levels (tactical, operational, strategic) is an obvious necessity. Moreover, it would be desirable to develop the Army's own reconnaissance assets, which would involve access to the most needed satellite systems (navigation, remote sensing).

It must be stressed that the European Army will still have to rely on the special capabilities of national armed forces. In specific cases, national units, subordinated temporarily to the European Army command, could provide advanced assets and services such as precision air strikes, armored assault forces or maritime combat vessels. Moreover, national contingents could also be responsible for post-conflict stabilization and could perform 'classical' peacekeeping missions following upon the accomplishment of the European Army's initial objectives. Another vital area of close cooperation between the Army and the national armed forces would be intelligence — certain data, gathered by national intelligence services, will need to be exchanged in order to assure the safety of the Army's operations. This will require a closer cooperation between those services. Additionally, while in the phase of establishing the Army, national units will be needed to set up the core of the Army's commanding cells, run the training programmes and provide other support. Therefore, governments will have to make clear commitments with regard to those national defence assets and services which might be used to support the Army.

Financing is another important issue. Existing ways of financing EU military operations (like the Athena mechanism) would not properly address a situation in which a completely new military force needs to be created and sustained. Thus, it would be an optimal situation if all relevant costs were covered by a common budget, created on the basis of obligatory contributions; the relative size of the contributions should be determined by clear criteria allowing for the flawless execution of payments. Another problem regarding finances is the Army's relation to the European defence industry. Although the European Army will generate defence procurement programs, the *juste retour* principle could not be fully upheld due to the profound diversities in national defence industries' capabilities. It will therefore be necessary to introduce solutions that will prevent less capable member states from being excluded from such programs.

Implementing the concept – obstacles and challenges

The ideal conditions for the creation of a European Army would involve a consensus among EU member states on the need for the Army, its tasks, structure, *modus operandi* and its position within the EU's structure. With these conditions in place, implementation of the project could be achieved in about a decade and shouldn't cause significant political struggle. However, due to the profound divisions in EU member states' defence policies and approaches to the ESDP, it is highly unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future. Therefore, it is inevitable that the project of the European

Army will begin as an initiative of only a certain number of EU member states. It ought to be the largest possible group, but surely will not involve every EU member. Yet, in the end, the Army will still have to be an asset serving and representing the whole EU.

Although flexible integration practices are present in the EU (e.g. Schengen, common currency), in this case the progress would be especially difficult, as it would now involve the sensitive sphere of defence. Moreover, states not participating in the project due to insufficient capabilities, lack of political will or their own, distinctive security policies, may oppose it as an unnecessary, divisive endeavor. The Army might also be viewed as a tool serving only the interests of 'the mightiest' members, who founded the whole structure. Eventually, as a result of all these problems, the EU as a whole may not be able to use the Army, ultimately regarding it as a separate, non-European undertaking. Such an unfavorable situation must be avoided, as it would nullify the final effectiveness of, or even the possibility of establishing, the Army.

The only way to overcome these problems is through a progressive inclusiveness within the project and a wise determination of its relations with the EU's institutions and mechanisms. The project cannot begin with the assumption that it will remain an exclusive undertaking of a small group of EU member states. Constant and significant efforts, as well as political discussions, are needed to make the development of the Army as inclusive and representative a process ('European' in the best sense of the word) as possible. Governments that have initially chosen not to partake must be encouraged to join the project by participating countries who must convince them of the political and practical profits derived from taking part in this endeavor. Specifically, states that pursue the policy of neutrality should be assured that the project will neither involve them in an aggressive war nor alter their special status in the international arena.

Bearing in mind both the difficult discussions on institutional reform and the current situation regarding the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, it seems that the best way to create a solid legal basis for the Army is through the adoption of a separate treaty based on the model of the Schengen or Prüm treaties. Such a document would initially bind only those EU members who would like to participate in the project, and would remain open for further accessions (under certain terms). This should allow initial negotiations to be concluded promptly and the outcome to contain clearly defined provisions regarding the functioning of the Army. Being an endeavor legally separated from the EU framework, the Army has to be designed from the beginning as an asset connected exclusively to the European Union and one serving the purposes of the ESDP. This will require the development of a sophisticated form of political control over the Army. States party to the treaty would probably create an intergovernmental body providing political guidance for the Army's Central Command (it could be a European Army Council, composed of the relevant ministers from participating states). Yet, the decision to use the Army as an exclusive ESDP asset could be made solely by the Council of the EU acting in accordance with relevant provisions. Only this will guarantee that actions undertaken by the Army will be considered as actions of the European Union as a whole. Concerning the problem of the Council's willingness to actually use the army, it can be assumed that in the event of a crisis, especially one involving human suffering on a large scale, there would be a political consensus on the question of an EU action (experience shows that a basic consensus on the need for action in the face of a crisis has not been hard to achieve in the Council, partly due to the constructive abstention mechanism). The Army would then serve as a convenient tool to put the agreed upon action in motion (as the issues of financing, generating forces, etc., will not concern states outside of the project as these would have no reason to oppose the use of the Army). Moreover, the project will anticipate more and less formalized mechanisms of effective communication between the Army and the relevant institutions of the EU so that they may efficiently agree on the use of this force. Eventually, the growing number of EU member states participating in the project should improve the decision-making process on the EU level with regard to the Army.

Other ways of establishing the European Army are less plausible, and not only because of the uncertainty surrounding the future of the Lisbon Treaty. The 'permanent structured cooperation' mechanism aims at enhancing intergovernmental cooperation in the sphere of defence and security. It seems to have the objective of pooling national defence assets to form multinational forces operating under a common command. Thus, it is unlikely that it will be used for the creation of an asset of an entirely different character. In turn, the 'enhanced cooperation' mechanism is unlikely to be used at all, due to formal constraints limiting its activation. The incorporation of a European Army into a new, general EU reform treaty would also be possible, but only if the vast majority of EU members join the previously implemented separate agreement.

Although the action proposed here is a long term and far reaching one, such a project could firmly and irrevocably fix the Army within the whole structure of the EU and finally create the full-fledged armed forces of the European Union.