

Defense Policy as a Pillar of Cohesion and Sovereignty of the EU in the Global Environment

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Abstract: During the current political period, substantial political changes are taking place in the European Union (EU) and there are particular external challenges, caused by broader geopolitical rearrangements, mainly due to the shift in US interest towards Southeast Asia. Addressing these issues requires the building of a politico-economic, military, cohesive, and sustainable trans-European network, which will provide solidarity and, above all, security to the European citizens. A decisive step in / towards this direction is the establishment of a permanent and more effective defense mechanism that will not degrade the prestige and role of NATO. In addition, and taking into account that the EU functions, in essence / substantially, as an intergovernmental rather than a supranational organization, the model of multilevel governance as an EU sustainability tool is suggested, citing the recent “Strategic Partnership for Cooperation in Defense and Security” between Greece and France. The recent Russian military invasion of Ukraine, which is upsetting the balance of the global geopolitical environment, demonstrates the need for initiatives and actions by EU Member States to build a new and modernized strategic framework for a common European security and defence policy. It is time for Europe to build a society of security and conflict prevention for all its citizens.

Keywords: Common Security and Defence Policy, Strategic Partnership in the EU, Geopolitics, Greek-American Defense Cooperation, Greek-French Strategic Partnership Agreement, European Defense and Security

1. Introduction

In this paper, the authors briefly examine the EU’s place in the modern world and the current political environment and the need to transform it into a more active and effective international actor to maintain its viability, as well as the plan and process of European integration are at a critical juncture, due to internal and external pressures exerted on the European edifice. The rearrangements in the power balance, the COVID-19 pandemic, the upheavals in the global supply chain, the global energy crisis and the possible recession and uncertainty about future developments in the post-BREXIT era, etc., are all factors that affect both the mild-regulatory as well as the strict / inflexible-economic and political power of the EU, which is in competition with the known powerhouses, but also with the emerging forces.

On this basis, the key issue for the leading groups in Europe is the possibility of transforming the EU into a more powerful-effective global actor “*The European Union is at a turning point and, as in other such historical periods, the need for a new overall balance is obvious. Marginal, small maneuvers and changes, either transparent or secret, may partially address one or the other crisis, but they are not enough (...). A new big agreement, a covenant that will lead to a brave review/reassessment of the status quo in all policy areas is considered not only desirable but necessary*” [11].

The conclusions of the research are of great importance: the intricacy and complexity of the events in the area under consideration are certified and the significance of joint political initiatives by the Member States, in order to strengthen the EU defenses, which will function as a pillar of its cohesion, is highlighted.

2. EU and the Global Environment: Current State - Developments and Prospects

Given the institutional weaknesses in the 'architectural' design of the euro area/Eurozone [13] and its financial weakening [19] due to the gravitational shift of the global economic center because of the rapid growth of China and India [12], the proposed concept emphasizes the adoption of a more diverse strategy, which will aim at developing trade and investment relations with countries with emerging and prosperous economies (Australia, New Zealand, etc.).

On the other hand, there are critical issues of foreign policy, defense, security, due to the rapidly and ever-changing global environment. Taking into account other data, such as, in essence, the absence of an institutional provision in the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), which is an integral part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) [7] so that the EU can act as a joint actor, the existing decision-making mechanism and the low level of accountability and voluntary commitment, it is concluded that the feeling of insecurity of European citizens is strengthened and the EU's ability to be a world-leading power is questioned. *"(...) Europe's future is at a crucial juncture and its role in the international system is now murky/uncertain - in order to speak of something more than a commercial power - and must be redefined immediately. (...) EU citizens feel more and more insecure as well as afraid of what will follow in the near future"* [18]. Moreover, *"today, security and defence policy cooperation in the EU is only weakly vertically integrated and horizontally differentiated"* [8].

Therefore, to the reasonable question *"what should the EU become"*, the answer is that it should insist on deepening its economic integration and strengthening its role as a financial and trade power, as well as creating an active unified defense pillar and common (for all its members) internal security structures. This necessity is imposed for the EU because it is a new form of non-state political power, a new political authority (a new type of state), which could provide a model of global governance and therefore progress is not only crucial for Europe but can also contribute to the development of new political mechanisms capable of dealing with the global challenges of our time [5].

3. The Europe of "Power"

In this context, it is estimated that Europe as a Global Superpower, as an antidote to the crisis of faith in the European venture, will be able to evolve-replace the Europe of "Peace" that founded the value narrative of the EU. The method-goal is to change the global balance of power through a more competitive foreign trade policy and autonomous defense-deterrence tools, in order to limit the influence of other international "players".

Achieving this requires more permanent and structured

cooperation in the field of security and defense capabilities in industrial and military means of (particularly) European origin, in a way that does not undermine NATO's prestige and role. *"(...) the EU's ability to build peace depends on the development of the right security strategy or security policy, including the capacity for autonomous action and an efficient and complementary relationship with NATO"* [2]. It seems that the adoption, from 2016, of the Global Strategy (GS) under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), is discussed - even in theory - in strategic terms (a plan that offers the means of success regarding military objectives). *"In short, this (...) is characterized as principle-based realism," through which the EU will continue to seek the achievement of a regulatory-multilateral international system, based on commonly accepted rules of conduct, which at the same time will accept that these principles should serve the interests of the EU and its citizens in a more direct way. The emphasis is on the fact that principles are also interests. An understanding of international relations based on *Realpolitik* and will be equally important and relevant for the EU as an international agent as much as politics that is based only on moral principles and values"* [1].

The 25 EU member states are moving in the direction of an innovative model of cooperation - Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) - which provides a framework of rules for the joint planning, development and investment of projects of shared potential, enhanced operational readiness and contribution of the armed forces. The purpose of this cooperation is to address the difficulties of collaboration among the Member States (arising from the close connection between defense and security and the essence of national sovereignty). These difficulties stem from:

- 1) the different capabilities of armed forces and the degree of willingness to use them when they are under pressure.
- 2) the differences in the degree of commitment of NATO and the US.
- 3) the existence of alternatives [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), ad hoc alliances].
- 4) disagreements over purposes and means (of production, communication, etc.).
- 5) insufficient financial resources to strengthen research-innovation.
- 6) the inability to resolve regional conflicts or decide on autonomous settlement strategies.
- 7) the inability to take joint military action.
- 8) non-common armaments supplies.

However, it should not be overlooked that the internal processes in the EU are almost at a very high level of coordination, (defining means of achieving objectives) even with conditions of "power politics". At the same time, there is no time limit for its transition to the level of 'harmonization'-attunement (from the intergovernmental to the supranational level), as it functions as a regulatory factor [10] that acts in global affairs to support standards and not interests [5]. In this regard, it is noted that in the past the EU had deployed forces around the world to undertake military operations.

“Although these operations implement the EU’s decision to formulate a common crisis management policy with the important strategic goal of providing security and taking a leading role in world politics, they, unfortunately, have limited objectives and means. In essence, they reveal a gap of “will-implementation”, a decisive division between the political will of the EU to take action to enforce or maintain the peace and the operational manner in which such actions are implemented in the field” [3].

In addition, the “extreme voices” (extremists) are still strengthened, while conditions of wider instability are created due to regional crises (Crimea, Western Balkans, Syria, Libya, Sahel region, etc.), important developments in “geo-energy” issues [16], Russia’s claims and consecutive actions, the unstable factor that is Turkey, and the rise of China at the top of a multipolar system of equilibrium/imbalance with the consequent “*emerging shift of American interest in Southeast Asia*” [17] with the exception of the area of the south-eastern Mediterranean, where with the signing of the recent Greek-American defense cooperation agreement [15] and the auxiliary diplomatic correspondence [14] they are said to attempt to deconstruct Turkey’s intentions to play the leading regional power. This political climate is likely to increase the cost of European security for member states, while simultaneously leading to the consolidation of the United States’ influence in some European governments, the application of “hybrid” war techniques, the strengthening of asymmetric threats-terrorism, the reintroduction and reestablishment of the immigration issue, etc.

Furthermore, the proposals included in the - questionable for its usefulness - Summit of EU leaders in Sibiu, Romania on the eve of the 2019 European elections, which “*had been presaged (since 2017) as a critical historical moment that will chart the course of the EU for the next five years (...), focus on the extent of the deepening of the Union and seem to ignore its other important aspect, that of its enlargement*” [4].

It is noted that in the aforementioned Summit the priorities and objectives of the Global Strategy (GS) were simply reiterated, especially with regard to the following commitments:

- 1) “We will defend one Europe”
- 2) “We will protect our citizens”
- 3) “Europe will be a responsible global leader”.

4. Multilevel Governance as a Model of EU Viability - The Example of Bilateral Defense Agreements

Nevertheless, *in addition to what needs to be done*, it becomes imperative to explore what is the most viable-possible solution for the EU. It is estimated that a multi-level, multi-faceted governance model (an environment of parallel frameworks for cooperation in specific areas) will eventually be followed, involving different Member states, giving some of them time to adapt to the requirements of EU policy, while allowing others to work together more quickly or to seek

renegotiation of the terms of cooperation in a policy sector. That means different groups of countries in different political areas and not a core group that will separate its position from the rest. At the same time, fighting differences through consensus is of utmost importance. A relevant example of such a framework, bilaterally, could be the recent Strategic Partnership for Cooperation in Defense and Security Partnership Agreement between Greece and France. Despite the fact that the leaders of the two countries have emphatically stated that the agreement contributes to the establishment of a permanent European military mechanism and to European sovereignty, nevertheless some diplomatic circles in the EU state that this is a traditional defense agreement/pact between two European powers like those of the 19th century, which is geared towards the pursuit of narrow national interests rather than Europe’s interest [9]. However, this agreement could possibly be “*a practical basis for the final implementation of a common European defense system with France as a pioneer, Greece as a follower-supporter and later with the accession of other countries that will co-sign the same or a similar agreement*” [6].

Considering that there is not much room for radical reform of the Treaties, intergovernmental cooperation can be adopted more easily, without excluding the idea of a future federation, provided that in the field of defense and security there will be no countries that precariously block further cooperation of others (a typical example of this is the Visegrad Group, which had opposed the idea of unifying the “willing” countries).

5. Epilogue - Conclusions

Notwithstanding, the model of multi-level governance also has adverse consequences, as the common European bloc splits in a number of areas. The possible adoption of enhanced defense cooperation versus a common defense platform is expected to further contribute to the weakening of the EU, further/exponentially reducing its coherence, weight, and prestige in the global environment and reinforcing the view that it lacks substantive elements of power, and is already a declining/decadent force.

However, the situation would be reversible, only if the EU could indeed defend its interests (after being convinced that all European countries share common interests). The European Union must express the necessary political will, that currently rests on rhetoric, and taking on the essential security of its territory and its citizens, in order for its role as a responsible world leader to be effective and respected by other political powerhouses.

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