

European interview

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“If we do not give priority attention to the crises we now face we are in danger of having an extremely rude awakening!”

Interview with Arnaud DANJEAN

Just one month before the European Council on 19th and 20th December which will be devoted in part to defence issues and just day after the meeting of the 28 Defence Ministers in Brussels[1] and the assessment by the European Parliament[2], in plenary session of the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy and the technological and industrial base of European Defence[3], the Foundation interviews Arnaud Danjean, Chair of the European Parliament's "Security and Defence" Subcommittee.

1. The issue of "Defence" in the European Union is important since the European Council on 19th and 20th December 2013 is due to be devoted to questions of defence and security in Europe. Does Catherine Ashton's report published on 10th October seem to be moving in the right direction and do you think the Heads of State and government will take any real decisions?

We can only be pleased that Defence is on the agenda of the European Council. It is rare enough to be important in its own right. The preparatory report by Ms Ashton, as well as the communication by Commissioners Barnier and Tajani, are sound documents which contain interesting observations and ideas. There is – or at least should be – matter for inspiration in order to rationalise our capabilities and harmonise our various national policies – industrial, capabilities, operational – which we can see are not in a position to respond alone to the security challenges faced by Europe and its environment.

Having said this I am not sure that it would be healthy or reasonable to expect any spectacular announcements during this European Council. It would be wiser to perceive the start of a process, with the launch of work, the real results of which will undoubtedly not be effective or noticeable for several years. Defence time is long, but it requires strong, immediate decisions. The Council will have to provide impetus, mainly in the area

of capabilities. It is undeniably here that most evident potential lies: drones, air-to-air refuelling, satellites, communications etc. There is room, and the need, for strong European cooperation between the industries and Member States to launch programmes, harmonise certification procedures and develop joint training. If the Council of 19th and 20th December leads to progress in these areas at least, it will be a success.

2. What are the major points of disagreement between Europeans and how can these be reduced?

Apart from one or two extremely emblematic issues, like the famous operational HQ over which there have indeed been some major clashes between certain countries (the UK and others), disagreements do not occur much over the main policy guidelines but rather over the very idea of what are defence policies for the Member States. Some countries have significant capabilities and budgets and are ready to use them and others, have only almost residual armies or hesitate to commit themselves (rightly or wrongly, either for institutional, political and even "philosophical" reasons). Others traditionally prefer NATO or are more open to other types of cooperation; Finally, there are those who have a clearly defined a strategic vision with priority zones of interest and those who are more "isolationist" or neutral etc ... the diversity of approaches, traditions, formats has an effect on the definition of common goals.

1. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/139633.pdf
2. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A7-2013-0360&language=FR>
3. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A7-2013-0358&language=FR>
4. http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131015_02_en.pdf

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This diversity is consubstantial to Europe and is not insurmountable. It seems to me that the first exercise to be undertaken to reduce natural differences lies in the definition of mutually accepted strategic priority goals as well as an improved synchronisation of national planning, particularly in the area of capabilities. Moving towards the establishment of a kind of “European Semester” in terms of military programming law would make sense in order to define joint views of capability shortfalls and common actions that might be undertaken.

We also need more assertive political leadership to bring this convergence about. This is valid both for the European executive and for the Member States, who remain the key players. A more formal Defence Council of Ministers, really able to take decisions, would make sense. We have not reached that point yet and the attendance to “informal” meetings is unpredictable and ad hoc. This is no longer acceptable. The 19th and 20th December Council is a starting point: a Defence Council of Ministers should be institutionalised so that decisions can be taken.

3. How should we foster real European initiatives in defence?

Above all, with incentives. These might be budgetary and fiscal incentives such as exonerating certain equipment from VAT when acquired in cooperation, financing dual programmes through the EU budget and helping the constitution of SME clusters. These might be capability and operational incentives with the introduction of pooled intelligent tools such as the European Air Transport Command (EATC), which does not deny States their sovereignty but enables them to manage an air fleet more in line with participating States’ requirements.

4. Which form do you think is most appropriate for the most effective kind of defence cooperation: the pooling of means between sovereign States; enhanced cooperation within a hard core; true communitarisation with common European defence institutions?

Quality results will only be achieved by combining these three aspects. The pooling of means is occurring

progressively – yet, it is easier to implement in some areas (I have quoted the example of air transport) than in others. Ideally of course the aim would be to achieve common equipment programmes but that would only happen progressively. To be more precise, enhanced cooperation programmes are the most appropriate. As much as I believe that we cannot move forward all 28 Member States together in Defence matters, I do believe in the format of variable geometry, depending on the issue at hand. No one should feel excluded from a more advanced group but no one should prevent those who want to move ahead from doing so. It is a difficult exercise but if realistic pragmatism does not prevail then we shall have to say goodbye to the European Defence Policy.

Regarding communitarisation, I would be more careful in speaking of this because misleading interpretations are readily made and might ruin all pedagogy over this point! We have to be clear: it is not about building a European Defence Ministry and even less about transferring military power over to a Commissioner: I say this because this caricature quickly dominates the debates. But we do have common institutions in charge of managing common operations, both civilian and military. These structures could be strengthened: In particular, the way they function has to be reviewed, notably the relationship between the Commission (which maintains high prerogatives in terms of budget and logistics) and the European External Action Service.

5. The capability and industrial issue is vital and the defence industry involves nearly 800,000 employees in Europe for a total turnover of nearly 180 billion € ; it is one of the rare engines of growth, a source of irreplaceable innovation and a means for Europe’s technological independence. How can we strengthen the industrial base of European defence?

This is a vital and yet complex issue. Although we all agree that we have an efficient European defence industry providing jobs and growth, everyone tend to forge their own vision of the desirable future developments. Rationalise and restructure? This is obviously necessary in order to avoid overlapping, the multiplication of programmes and therefore

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competition between European industrial players. But once the observation has been made, who is prepared to make the sacrifices in terms of industrial installations, technological know-how and jobs? Another stumbling block is the degree to which national and European public administrations are involved in the funding of programmes, notably in terms of R&D. Some states – at least officially – prefer the laissez-faire, while others are more interventionist. Finally there is the problem of trade policy. It is no mystery; I advocate a certain form of community preference, which is still an enormous taboo amongst certain European partners. These questions have still not been settled!

6. All of the Member States are reducing their defence budgets. How should defence spending be financed in the future? The goal of pooling some national spending is still far off; doesn't the idea of launching joint R&D dual target programmes seem more accessible? What do you think?

Undeniably the launch of joint dual target (civilian-military) programmes is the most serious, the most ambitious, and most important path to follow. If such an initiative could emerge in the field of drones, it would represent a great step forward, with a high profile for public opinions. Of course the States play a driving role and initiatives like this are their primary responsibility. But the industries can also trigger co-operations themselves, by forming alliances at an early stage, facilitating thereby political decision-making. The novelty might come from EU financial support which was until now almost inaccessible regarding this type of programme. The Commission now seems prepared to commit itself.

7. On a strategic register reticence, which seemed to be expressed both on the part of the US and the UK during the Syrian crisis, was interpreted by some observers as a kind of “Europeanisation” on the part of the Anglo-Saxons. Does this seem correct to you? Does the relative failure of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan seem to you to have led to a new form of isolationism with our partners in the US?

The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, even though they obeyed to different motivations and schemas, have weighed significantly not only on States' capabilities (in terms of personnel, materials and budgets), but also on the legitimacy of external

military interventions. In addition, those operations as well as the previous ones (notably in the Balkans) have shown that the process of “nation-building” which follows a military intervention requires a great deal of commitment and patience against extremely uncertain results: A kind of fatigue has set in.

Although support can still be found for limited and time-limited operations (Libya, Mali) it is clear that States are reluctant to engage in more complex crises requiring greater, longer term and therefore more hazardous commitments. A logic of “reflux” is therefore at work, which is also being fed by changes in Western countries' priorities. Leaders focus their attention on the economic and social crisis. Any external intervention is seen as a distraction – in the literal sense of the term – from governments' primary obligations regarding their own citizens.

European States will face two phenomenons that will be difficult to deal with: on the one hand, States are increasingly reluctant to engage in long and hazardous external operations. On the other hand there is a recurrent call for Europe to take on more responsibilities collectively, and notably in our neighbourhood (“Where is Europe?” “What is Europe doing?” and even “Europe is not worthy” are the most frequently heard expressions when we speak of the Syrian or Sahel tragedies).

8. What are the main strategic challenges facing Europe and how can it best defend its interests in the world?

The main strategic challenge Europe is facing is first and foremost to find out whether Member States intend to ensure their own security or whether they will continue to believe that after all, year after year, they can limit themselves to a minimalist stance and rely on American protection. Without awareness on this question and a vital step forward, Defence policy in Europe, both at States' and Union levels, will have no specific direction. This does not necessarily mean that it will be useless and inefficient but rather that it will be erratic, tossed about from crisis to crisis without any real coherence and subject to others' sensibilities.

Beyond this key question there are challenges linked to changes in our strategic environment. From my point of view our absolute priority involves our southern flank in the wide sense of the term (North Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Near and Middle East). There are tectonic upheavals going on there,

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including terrorism and territorial conflicts which are but the smallest signs. The structural instability of these regions, on Europe's shores, forces us not only to be extremely vigilant but also to mobilise far reaching diplomatic, economic and (strategic) security action. But we struggle to set out our priorities. We consider on an equal footing and with the same degree of urgency the transitions ongoing in the former Soviet Republics, our trade partners in Latin America and Asia, development policies in East Africa and the protection of Human Rights in the four corners of the world etc All of these causes are noble and worthy of interest. But to think that the European Union must be everywhere and do everything means that we are dispersing ourselves without being decisive in the areas in which we should be taking decisions. If we do not give priority

attention to the crises we now face we are in danger of having an extremely rude awakening!



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