

European issues

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The Future of the European Defence

Abstract :**François Fillon****The ongoing debate about the possibility of a European defence is as old as Europe itself.**

During the past 4 decades, the subject has been discussed at length, but in fact, very few steps forward have been taken.

During the Cold War, the European defence has been reigned back by the existence of the NATO, which appeared to many Europeans as the most reliable and efficient structure.

Today, the very idea of a Common Security and Defence Policy is being questioned.

WHY IS THAT ?

1. First of all, people no longer feel that defending our territories is a vital priority.

With the end of the Cold War, the perspective of a direct and massive conflict has vanished. Clearly, our nations no longer face such urging questions of life and death.

2. Second of all, our social and economic difficulties have been at the top of our political agendas, and they still are.

Governments and public opinions alike mistakenly view defence as a secondary goal.

3. Thirdly, and this is the worst, the belief in a united and powerful Europe has weakened.

Within fifteen years, the European ideal has lost its momentum. Euroscepticism has gained ground, and, with it, populisms and national forms of selfishness.

The financial and economic crisis has fostered suspicion and deepened the divisions between our nations. How can we ever build a true Common European defence and security policy if the dream of a united and strong Europe doesn't fuel our ambition anymore?

As long as we don't find new reasons to believe in the European ideal, and are unable to arouse the collective belief that the European Union is our greatest asset for the future as well as our strongest protection, the common defence project will keep faltering.

It is precisely the role of politicians: they must have the courage to convince their people that Europe is a vital necessity in a globalized world.

WHAT SORT OF EUROPE ARE WE AFTER? This is the decisive question.

To me, Europe is not a mere market. It is not a mere currency either.

Its vocation is to be an international power, capable of defending its own independence and its own interests. Now, there is no such thing as a true power without effective defence capabilities.

«Soft power» will not be the answer to everything!

TODAY AND TOMORROW'S WORLD IS NOT SAFER THAN THE ONE WE KNEW YESTERDAY.

Geopolitical and economic interdependence force us to think our safety in global terms.

The Near and Middle East are still powder kegs.

The Arab Springs are going through chaotic times.

Terrorism is a real threat and assumes ever more sophisticated forms.

Nuclear dissemination is happening.

The rising power of China is strongly affecting the geopolitical balance in Asia.

In a word, threats do exist, and we Europeans are less and less invited to take the « American shelter » for granted.

The United States no longer consider our Continent as a priority- and rightly so!

There is no question that building a European defence and security policy is a very legitimate endeavour.

WHAT CONDITIONS DO WE NEED TO FULFIL IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE CURRENT SITUATION?

1. First condition: as I said, what we need most is political will, because all the rest derives from it.

We cannot but regret, for example, that there be such a gap between Europe's collective need to insure its security in the Sahel region and the solitude that France is facing in its current military intervention in Mali.

What is missing?

It is not a problem of consensus on the situation in Sahel. Clearly, we all agree; nobody wants Mali to be a haven for terrorists!

There is no want of military equipments, nor lack of any tools to face the situation: Europe has 2 million men and women in arms, perfectly equipped, the Military Committee and the Political and Security Committee of the European Union are fully operational, the European Union military staff is waiting to be called on...

In a word, we are ready to act, only one thing is missing, and that is political will!

Rightly or wrongly, the Europeans consider that NATO and the Americans are there to protect them inside the European borders, and that the French, the British and a few other countries are there to do the job outside the borders of the European Union.

Caught between the two, Europe still hasn't really decided that it wanted to become an important strategic actor. That's the heart of the matter.

2. Second condition: we must put an end, for good, to the worthless debate opposing NATO advocates and advocates of a European defence.

With the progressive withdrawal of the USA from the European Continent, and France's full return to NATO, this debate is over.

It is not about competing with the Atlantic Alliance, but about reinforcing it by granting Europe the capacity to act in an autonomous way.

In this respect, much depends on our British friends, who have, for example, decided against the creation of European military headquarters.

3. Third condition: we must be pragmatic about European defence, and start reinforcing the existing partnerships, because we won't build it directly between the 27 members. It is useless to dream about a Great Day of European defence !

We must work with the States which are willing to move on, and build on existing collaborations.

With the Saint Malo and Lancaster House agreements in 2010, the French-British cooperation has been given a new boost.

And many more operational partnerships exist with out Italian, Spanish or Polish allies...

But to me, Germany is a key element.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty, I wish France and Germany had been able to define their own strategy to achieve a reinforced diplomatic and military collaboration.

In Kosovo, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Afghanistan, the German armies have proved they could very well be part of a common action plan.

I am well aware of the German reluctance in this respect, and of the existing constitutional constraints. Yet, I do believe the time has come for this great economic power to enjoy the status of great diplomatic and military power.

This status also demands that France and the UK be ready to associate Germany, and more generally Europe, to the major decisions of the UN Security Council.

4. Fourth condition: we must federate our military and industrial capacities.

What is at stake is not only the operational efficiency of our armed forces, but our financial capacity.

Our public opinions will accept all the more readily that we keep up our efforts in matters of Defence if our spendings prove to be rationalized and converging.

The creation of a multinational A400M unit is a great example which must be extended and applied to other fields, including aerospace and naval forces.

Sharing, and even purchasing common equipments could give rise to efficient collaborations, in matters of training or maintenance, for instance, or grant greater access to multi-nationalized capacities.

Europe does have the legal tools required to rationalize and harmonize the fragmented landscape of European military cooperation.

The possibility of a Permanent Structured Cooperation established by the Lisbon treaty has not been used yet. Yet, it offers a European framework to systematize the efforts of the Member States willing to engage in it.

Besides military cooperation, there will be no credible defence capacity if we can't rely on a solid industrial and technological basis.

The recent failure of the attempted merger of EADS and BAE shows how difficult it is to develop a common vision of Industry in the European Union.

However, this failure should not close the door to other projects of industrial mergers in Europe; for without them, there will be no European Defence, nor impetus given to the European industry, and the European arms market will keep on declining in an ever more competitive international context.

LET'S FACE IT, EUROPE IS IN A PLIGHT.

The crisis quickens our decline in the face of the new world powers.

The peoples waver between dejection and populism,

between selfishness and collective effort.

Europe's destiny will be written out in the next decade.

Either we wake up and gather, or we slacken and divide, and our continent is doomed to sink the way old civilisation do, holding a glass of champagne and dancing an ultimate waltz...



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