

The European Union's so-called Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) celebrates its 15th birthday in a state of deep hibernation, to use the expression employed by the French Chief of the Defence Staff, admiral Guillaud. [1] Once the centre of attention and the winner of all popularity contests — Eurobarometers made a point of showcasing its level of support in public opinion (consistently topping the 70 per cent mark) during the first couple of years, but then apparently lost interest in the question —, considered both the symbol of the Union's strategic ambitions and the depository of its true potential, the CSDP is now the “stepchild” of European integration: the one that puts its weaknesses in a cruel light, while at the same time diverting attention and resources from the “real issues” on Europe's agenda.

Blaming the financial crisis and the subsequent turmoil for the CSDP's fall from grace would be all too easy but, more importantly, it would be false. The derailment of the EU's defence policy from its original course pre-dates the onset of the crisis; indeed, were it not for this derailment, the CSDP would have all the potential to be part of the solution to Europe's current predicaments. And a crucial part at that: a shared strategic vision underpinned by actual defence initiatives would give Europe a badly needed boost, both psychological and economic. The European Council's so-called Defence Summit in December 2013 may turn out to be the starting point for a revival. The present paper will argue that even keeping the CSDP in hibernation would be better, for Europe, than re-launching it along the route it had started to go down before falling into its artificial coma. A radical return to the foundations is needed, if European defence is ever to live up to its name, in other words to both the “defence” and the “European” parts.

The re-NATO-isation of the EU's Security and Defence Policy

If there is one clear illustration of why constructive ambiguity, a much-touted concept, should never be cultivated in order to overcome deeply rooted divergences, and to create the appearance of unity and the illusion of a policy, it is that provided by the defence domain. A *faux pas* here might jeopardise vital interests and leave the states that made it constrained, for several decades (the lifespan of major equipment programmes), to follow a counterproductive course. This is obviously the risk now facing European defence. When it was launched in 1998-1999, the principles on which it was officially based upon were clearly left deliberately ambiguous to accommodate two irreconcilable visions. The decision to include the question of military equipment opened the way for a re-interpretation of the original intention and even for the prospect of a possible return to the *status quo ante* — this time, however, with Europe in a much weaker position.

The Original Idea of Emancipation through the CSDP.

Even in hindsight, knowing its very mixed results, the Franco-British proposal announced in December 1998 in Saint-Malo, adopted half a year later in Cologne by the Fifteen, which then

officially launched what was first called the CESDP (Common European Security and Defence Policy), did indeed represent a genuine breakthrough. This is true even though it was actually just a clever cover for two visions that were still diametrically opposed. For Britain, the new instrument was a means of enhancing the Europeans' capabilities for the sake of NATO: the more capable the allies became, the more valuable they would be for Washington, which, therefore, would be more inclined to stay engaged in Europe — this being, as much as ever, the key strategic priority for London. France, on the other hand, saw the CESDP as a decisive step towards laying the foundations for European sovereignty and for turning the EU into a fully-fledged, autonomous player on the international stage. Notwithstanding these irreconcilable differences, Saint-Malo saw the achievement of what nobody would have thought possible even a couple of years before. The former NATO monopoly on European security matters was replaced by a sort of *cohabitation* between the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union. The main functions of the Western European Union — in the nineties the WEU floated between the two institutions — were absorbed by the EU. The Alliance's attempt, a non-starter from the outset, to establish a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) within NATO, based on the principle of "separable but not separate" European capabilities, had to make way for the EU's brand new, and far more dynamic and popular policy: the CESDP.

Regardless of British reservations, the fact was that NATO no longer had a monopoly, and the EU was henceforth a legitimate setting in which to discuss and develop policies on military matters. As Richard Hatfield, Policy Director at the UK Ministry of Defence, put it: Saint-Malo "let the genie out of the bottle." [2] This was an opinion widely shared in the American policy establishment from the outset. The United States' representation in Brussels was quickly increased by half, and US Secretary of State Albright did not shy away from publicly setting conditions for this "autonomous" defence endeavour on the part of America's closest friends and allies. She famously stressed the need for Europeans to avoid "the three Ds": namely "decoupling" European decision-making from the Alliance (thereby enshrining NATO's so-called right of first refusal); "duplication" of NATO structures and planning processes; and "discrimination" against non-EU member NATO allies (most notably Turkey). To further demonstrate US discontent, and perhaps also their hope that the Europeans might have second thoughts, American diplomats persisted for months, sometimes even years, in confusing European security "identity" with European security "policy", using the acronym ESDI when referring to the CESDP. [3]

However, the difference between the two was anything but insignificant, as pointed out by Peter Rodman at a congressional hearing in 1999: "This EU effort to construct a separate European defense identity comes three years after NATO adapted its own procedures to recognize and promote a European Security and Defense Identity within the Alliance framework. The new EU procedure, in contrast (at least in some Europeans' minds), will enable Europe to dispense with the Americans, 'if it wishes'. That seems to be, indeed, its whole point." [4] The future Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs could not have been more right. Leo Michel, from the US National Defense University, recently summed up the Americans' main worries: "American officials and experts worried that key consultations and decisions affecting European political-military and defense matters might migrate over time from NATO, where America's unique political and military strengths ensure it has a prominent role in shaping Alliance policies and operations, to the EU, where there is no US seat

at the table.” [5] Or as the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* put it back in 2005: “NATO is ours to lead, unlike the increasingly powerful European Union.” [6]

Recent years have seen a marked change in the Americans’ narration of the situation. Contrary to widespread belief, this change does not represent a genuine shift in the US approach, but is, rather, the logical consequence of the derailment of the CESDP (now called the CSDP) from its initial course. Since early 2008, [7] Washington has been issuing repeated verbal assurances that “the prevailing concern among American officials and experts is not that EU activities in the security and defense domain risk overshadowing NATO.” Quite the contrary. The main worry — according to the official line — seems to be henceforth that these activities are not enough. “Theological debates” about whether the EU or NATO is the proper framework apparently do not count any more, the only important thing is to deliver the capabilities needed to reach common goals. Obviously this is only partly true. First, Washington is as determined as ever to preserve NATO’s primacy in the two fields that are deemed crucial for staying in control, namely in the area of military operational command and in the defence industrial sectors. As for the rest, this newfound nonchalance is the direct result of a realistic assessment of the CSDP’s evolution over the past fifteen years. To put it bluntly, there is clearly no longer anything to fear. Not only has the EU’s defence policy retreated spectacularly compared to its initial dynamic, but the regression has become so blatant that even the possibility of its return to the NATO fold is nowadays being evoked increasingly openly.

The Reversal of the Initial Concept: Retreat Area by Area.

The necessity to respect the so-called complementarity with NATO resulted, in practice, in the imposition of a series of restrictions on the CSDP, [8] the first of these being the exclusion from its remit of anything even remotely resembling territorial defence *per se*. However, even though real progress, in line with what was initially planned and envisaged, would nevertheless have been possible within this strictly-defined framework, the actual outcome has turned out to be far from a realisation of the CSDP’s true potential. Expectations were deceived, taboos maintained and, due partly to the much-touted comprehensive approach, the debilitating principle of so-called complementarity even found itself reinforced over time. The CSDP, following an initial phase of dynamic advances, apparently hit a plateau around 2005, and has been plagued by missed opportunities, persistent impasses, and even spectacular retreats ever since. Suffice it to think of the very limited scope and ambition of its overwhelmingly low-risk operations (that make them almost impossible to distinguish from mere political gestures); of the lack of a coherent policy framework surrounding them, as a result of which they all seem more like haphazard adventures; or of the defining moments when the CSDP missed the call, failing to engage in operations that were tailored to its original objectives (Libya in 2001, Lebanon in 2006, and most recently Mali).

Furthermore, the member states also turned out to be unable to design the financing arrangements in a manner that might prevent them from acting as a *de facto* disincentive to countries that would otherwise volunteer to “do more” — the Athena common funding mechanism still covers only about 10 per cent of spending on military operations, while all

other “costs lie where they fall”—; unable to put to use the Battle Groups — launched in 2004, not once have the Battle Groups been engaged to date (moreover, the whole BG system is increasingly hollow: throughout 2013, for instance, only one BG was kept on the alert instead of the required two) —; unable, too, to remove the UK-imposed cap on the European Defence Agency’s annual budget in order to allow it to function as a genuine “back office” to the CSDP, tackling effectively its most significant capability deficiencies. It is also to be noted that no major defence equipment programme (with the capacity to have structuring effects on the European technological and industrial base) has been launched since the A400M in 2003. The EU’s Satellite Centre has no assigned European assets, so it has to buy all its imagery on the market — which makes it 80-90 per cent dependent on US commercial satellite imagery. Meanwhile, the EU Intelligence Analysis Centre takes about two months to process a request.

In any case, the CSDP is not about to go beyond its role as an occasional security service provider, since the question of territorial defence remains firmly excluded from its field of competence. Even though the hypothetical prospect has been present in the EU Treaties ever since Maastricht, in practice the idea of Europe-wide collective defence is at risk of dying. Indeed, the only firm collective defence commitment between Europeans disappeared with the definitive demise of the Western Union in 2011. Although the relevant provisions in the Lisbon Treaty might seem to take a step in this direction, in reality they enshrine the primacy of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Finally, the perennial question of an EU operational headquarters is a reliable barometer of trends in the field of European defence. The creation of a military planning and conduct capability remains impossible, despite the fact that the absence of such a capability reduces operational effectiveness (unduly increasing reaction time), generates a cumbersome duplication between national headquarters that repeatedly have to be re-activated and dismantled, and results in a loss of continuity and institutional memory. For the United Kingdom, it still constitutes a red line. The only way to overcome the deadlock is through civil-military fusion; however, were such a mixed operational structure to be put in place, it might well become another example of how the biased application of the EU’s comprehensive approach is on the point of smothering the CSDP’s military dimension.

In fact, today, the main risk of regression stems from the rise of the so-called comprehensive approach. Obviously there is nothing wrong with agreeing that the EU needs to use the whole range of instruments at its disposal to effectively and lastingly address security challenges. In Europe this concept is self-evident. But the comprehensive approach, turning the CSDP on its head, goes far beyond simply organising the closest coordination possible. In practice, it entails the dispersion and the marginalisation of the military component; the director of the French Defence ministry’s *Délégation aux affaires stratégiques* has likened it to “carbon monoxide”. To quote Michel Miraillet, “You do not see it. You do not smell it. But in the end it kills us all.” [9] Indeed, the comprehensive approach is a pretext to limit as much as possible the military component, not only within the EU’s external relations generally, but also within the CSDP itself. [10] Combining pro-NATO Atlanticist orthodoxy on the one hand, with pacifist daydreams of a “civilian power Europe” on the other, would result in what London has always advocated: the EU as a useful civilian complement to NATO’s hard power.

In this spirit, and with the purpose of keeping European defence firmly constrained by the “complementarity” principle, a significant EU-NATO rapprochement is ongoing, and, according

to some, might ultimately lead to a re-merger. Let us not forget here the initial misgivings about letting the EU and NATO get too close to each other. As noted in a Centre for European Reform policy paper, “The French seem to worry that EU defence is a delicate flower which risks being squashed in the embrace of a military giant such as NATO. French officials sometimes say that close EU-NATO co-operation could lead to the US gaining excessive influence over EU foreign and defence policy. French fears about US priorities are not completely unfounded.” [11] However, even though the Turkey-Cyprus dispute continues to limit formal cooperation, practical rapprochement between the two organisations is now a clearly perceptible trend. The NATO Permanent Liaison Team to the EU and the EU cell in NATO attend most of the daily operational briefings held at the headquarters of the organisations with which, respectively, they liaise, while the NATO Secretary General’s presence at the EU defence ministers’ meeting has practically become a tradition — in addition to his attendance at numerous non-institutional occasions that provide plenty of opportunities for coordination and discussion (such as “transatlantic dinners” for EU and NATO foreign ministers) —, and the representatives, to NATO, of the rotating EU presidency provide the North Atlantic Council and NATO Military Committee with weekly updates on EU activities. Moreover, double-hatting of military representatives has become a standard practice — indeed, with even France deciding to send the same general to EU and NATO meetings, Belgium, Luxemburg and Greece are now the only countries still adhering to the principle of separate hats. The problem, again, is not coordination, but the obvious pro-NATO bias. It speaks volumes that the generals representing their nations in European defence settings spend most of their time (routinely six days out of seven, and even when discussing EU issues) at NATO headquarters.

The Conceptualisation of Abdication.

The regression of the CSDP has now reached a point at which the notion of transferring its structures back to NATO is openly evoked. The fact that a former defence minister of Bulgaria, speaking at a conference, could go as far as to say that the financial crisis clearly shows that “it is time to stop bothering ourselves with the CSDP, and to put all our eggs into the NATO basket instead”, is a faithful reflection of the general atmosphere. [12] Albeit lacking the Bulgarian minister’s inimitable style, a number of experts have recently expressed similar ideas. The director of Carnegie Europe, Jan Techau, back in 2011, urged “Forget CSDP, it’s time for Plan B.” If his remark is not, in itself, surprising, neither should it come as a surprise that, to him, Plan B means unconditional Atlanticist loyalty. As he put it, “Europe should stop building a Potemkin village called CSDP when what it really needs will be delivered in return for some solid cultivation of the transatlantic link.” Europeans simply need to give up “futile strategies of independence or counterbalancing”, and admit to themselves and to anybody interested that “in the end, it’s Americans who will guarantee Europe’s security.” [13]

The way to institutionalise this explicitly non-ambitious approach is to recognise, as Latvia’s defence minister did at the 2012 Riga Conference, that EU-NATO relations are a “hindrance”, for which there is a simple solution: namely to “basically merge the two organisations.” Even Jolyon Howorth, one of the leading specialists on the CSDP and formerly known to be clearly in

favour of European autonomy, has now started to strike a different chord. In 2012, he started to float the idea that “there must gradually and progressively be an institutional and political merger between CSDP and NATO.” [14] By 2013, the idea had been further developed: “Allied Command Operations/SHAPE should be merged into CSDP” (if, in fact, given the disparity between SHAPE’s 13,000-strong personnel and the EUMS’s staff of 350, it is possible to talk of a merger rather than a takeover); a “robust CSDP/NATO entity” should be created and the political steering bodies adjusted accordingly; there should also be a merger between the European Defence Agency and ACT (Allied Command Transformation, based in Norfolk, Virginia, that traditionally acts as the conveyor belt of US doctrinal-industrial priorities into the Alliance). [15]

Behind these merger ideas, we can observe a parallel ideological shift towards Occidentalism as a philosophical-political stance. It was duly celebrated at this year’s (2013) Riga conference, where the above-mentioned Jan Techau, for instance, stated that for Europe to become a real partner to the US, the Europeans have “to develop a sense that the Americans and us, we are in it together.” In order to face the challenges of the 21st century, we need to reaffirm our Western togetherness. The fact is that even formerly sceptical thinkers now seem tempted to adopt this approach. In his 2007 *rapport* to President Sarkozy, former French foreign minister Hubert Védrine rang the alarm bells against what he called “Atlanticist/Occidentalism temptation”, pointing out that yielding to it is justifiable only if we see ourselves as belonging, first and foremost, to the so-called West, before considering ourselves Europeans or, in his case, French. However, Védrine himself is using the word “West” more and more frequently; in one of his recent interviews he used it no fewer than six times. [16] Another example, on the other side of the Atlantic, is Charles Kupchan, former Director for European Affairs in the National Security Council under President Clinton. In 2006, Kupchan wrote that “American and European interests have diverged, institutionalized cooperation can no longer be taken for granted, and a shared Western identity has attenuated.” [17] Yet the same Kupchan speaks now, in the very title of his latest book, of “the West and the rest”. A re-assertion of the West paralleled by the achievement of a CSDP-NATO merger would return European defence to its pre-CSDP stage. In short, it would be back within NATO, but this time without even the prospect of possibly becoming autonomous one day — since its very return would signal that this option had already been explored and abandoned.

The Twin Crises: an Opportunity for the re-Europeanisation of our Defence

Discussion and reflection on European security matters have been dominated over the last two years by two issues presented as having a determining impact on the future of European defence: the economic and financial crisis and America’s strategic rebalancing towards Asia. The former is widely referred to as a “black swan” (i.e. an unexpected event of huge impact), while the so-called US pivot is sometimes interpreted as an abandonment of Europe by its protector-ally (sometimes as a wake-up call for Europe to do more; most often both). Both these assertions are arguably misleading. First, the crisis has merely accentuated and shed an unforgiving light on trends and preferences that were, in fact, already present. Second, as regards the pivot, it can hardly be imagined that the US is about to take a hands-off approach to Europe in the strategically decisive fields, thereby leaving a void that could be filled with genuinely European defence initiatives. Having said this, both developments represent

formidable opportunities, provided they are assessed realistically, and seized upon in order to fundamentally reset Europe's defence priorities.

The Budgetary Impact of the Crisis and the Psychological Shock of the “Pivot”.

As far as the cuts in European military budgets are concerned, the figures speak for themselves. The project leaders of a one-year research programme conducted by the National Defense University and the Atlantic Council pointed out that: “European defense capabilities were already at a very low level of investment and stretched thin by years of deployments when fresh precipitous decline began for most European states in 2008.” [18] Thereafter, growing budgetary constraints led to increasingly rapid and substantial defence cuts, amounting to up to 20 per cent in the smaller states, around 10 per cent in most of the medium-sized ones, and around 8 per cent in the UK and Germany. [19]

These significant budgetary constraints led mainly to so-called horizontal cuts: drastic reductions of existing capabilities across the spectrum and of operational and maintenance costs, thereby leaving capabilities unready and/or unavailable, in other words hollowing out the armed forces. There have also been some vertical cuts (elimination of entire national capabilities), such as the scrapping of the UK's maritime patrol capability; the loss, to the Dutch army, of all its tanks, as well as France's abandonment of its second aircraft carrier programme, and with it of the idea of having a permanent carrier presence at sea. In all cases, the result is an erosion of capabilities, which necessarily entails a lowering of strategic ambition. As the British establishment now admits (and others take for granted without admitting it) “British defence policy rests on the assumption that we will not fight a major war except in partnership with the United States.” [20] Even within this dependence-based framework, continuing cuts mean that, in the words of the UK Chief of Defence staff, “we have to recalibrate our expectation of the level of capabilities we can field.” [21]

All this makes it easier to understand why the announcement of the US “pivot” to Asia left the European governments deeply traumatised. [22] The comment that “Most European countries are now producers of security rather than consumers of it. Combined with the drawdown in Iraq and Afghanistan, this has created a strategic opportunity to rebalance the U.S. military investment in Europe” set alarm bells ringing all over Europe, especially in view of the withdrawal of a significant part of American forces stationed on the Continent, and the clear shift of focus towards the Asia-Pacific region. The questions asked about our importance to America caused a general sense of unease as people began wondering how much longer Europeans can expect to go on benefiting from US security guarantees; meanwhile, the expectation, expressed by Washington, that Europe should do more to look after its own backyard is generally interpreted as a condition that the European countries must meet in order to keep Washington interested in its oldest and closest allies. To paraphrase a famous remark by Belgian foreign minister Jacques Poos in 1990, these developments, at first glance, appear to show that it is “Europe's hour” once again. Indeed, there seems to, not least in view of the budget cuts, a compelling case for the Europeans, at last, to act in unison, and reach strategic adulthood.

Reality Check: Perspectives on Defence Budgets and American Disengagement.

Alas, the impact of the pivot is relative, both for the Europeans and the Americans. Judging by the reaction shown by most European governments so far, the more America seems to start looking away the more they rush to swear allegiance to it (for instance, making desperate efforts to remain part of exorbitantly expensive and highly uncertain US-led equipment projects). What we are witnessing is not so much a re-evaluation of the need for autonomy, as a kind of Atlanticist spasm. On the American side, the pivot does not mean abandonment of Washington's European preeminence, far from it. Indeed, at the same time as it is turning its interest to other areas, the US is also trying to reassert its control in Europe, repeatedly reminding its allies how incapable they are without US assistance (a recent example in this sense being operation Unified Protector in Libya), reassuring them of its commitment to Article 5 through the strengthening of Reforger-type (Cold War era relic) military exercises, or if all else fails, implementing the well-proven method of "divide and rule". As Obama's top diplomat for Europe, Philip Gordon remarked rather outspokenly: "We want to see a strong and united Europe, speaking with one voice. In the best of all possible worlds, this voice would be saying what we want to hear... If it is not saying what we want to hear, then we would rather that voice was less united. For the foreseeable future we will have to have relations with the EU and with nations;" [23] in short, with whoever is saying the right thing on a particular issue.

One sector in which US determination to stay in control is destined to remain as solid as ever is that of the defence industry. As the European Defence Agency's former chief, Nick Witney observed: "For sure, the US do not expect Europeans to act fully independently from Washington"; rather, the Americans would like to see as much transatlantic coordination as possible, "especially to allow the use of American military equipment", [24] particularly in view of the serious constraints on the US defence budget, which are leading the Americans to strengthen their presence in what they consider their European captive markets, and increase their exports to third countries. In this context, the NATO Smart Defence initiative, launched as a response to the EU's similar project (Pooling & Sharing or P&S) can be seen indeed as a Trojan horse for obtaining a US/US-dominated transatlantic defence industry.

As far as the European budgets are concerned, although the general observation that "Europe disarms when the rest of the world rearms" is undoubtedly true, it must be borne in mind that the choices that determine or aggravate this overall trend are not always conscious or autonomous ones. When the Chairman of the EU Military Committee observed that, along with the budget cuts, "the continuous cost increases linked to new generation of equipment, the transformation burden and last but not least the high cost of ongoing operations" [25] place military leaders before a dilemma that is almost impossible to resolve, he forgot to mention that most of these extra burdens stem from decisions that are first made first in Washington, which the Europeans subsequently copy and go along with. This Atlanticist stance is highly resource-draining: one need only think of the costs of participation in Iraq and Afghanistan, or of the "cooperation" in US weapons programmes such as the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter or the missile defence initiative. The whole process of transformation (previously hyped as the Revolution in Military Affairs or RMA), on the other hand, was originally designed to "establish a

new relationship with our allies, based on our comparative advantage” in C3I, surveillance, targeting, precision-guided weapons, etc. In the words of one of the RMA’s conceptors, Admiral Owens, the cost of developing it would be so great as to make “cooperation with the United States attractive. This would give us control over our allies’ defence policies.” [26] This is not to say that Europeans do not need to invest in defence material, far from it. But they need to do so in line with their own purposes, their own way of waging wars and in a manner that will benefit the European defence industrial and technological base.

If we are ready to acknowledge that we do not have the same ambitions, the same history, the same military traditions, the same rapport with technology, or the same approach to the waging of wars as our American friends and allies, then European capabilities can be viewed in a much more realistic (and much less budget-draining) light. As Kori Schake, former West Point professor and member of President George W. Bush’s National Security Council pointed it out: “The gap between us and our allies is not nearly as important as the gap between our allies and any country or organization they could conceivably fight against. Europe may not have what we have, their capabilities may not permit them to fight with the awareness, precision, and confidence that the United States does, but they are plenty good enough.” In her view, the Americans need “to recalibrate their approach so that it focuses less on what Europeans need to buy in order to operate the way we do, and instead focuses on how we can fight without Europeans becoming smaller replicas of the American way of war.” [27] For us Europeans, such a realisation could indeed be the starting point for a major shift in our approach to European defence as such.

The Real Opportunity: a Fundamental Reprioritization.

Rather than touting the crisis as an opportunity to simply collectivise defence assets (with the risk of increasing the degree to which individual countries are relieved of responsibility) and consolidate the transatlantic connection (with the result of wasting money on capabilities not tailored to the European armed forces and on operations not necessarily stemming from the view that we, as Europeans, have of the world), we could see it as a real chance to define the European approach to the question of war. This would provide a basis on which to assess our need for capabilities and P&S arrangements, rather than the other way around. In reality, scenarios tailored to US needs, operations defined by US concepts, and material requirements reflecting US sensitivities (such as excessive force protection specifications in order to comply with the political-philosophical imperative of “zero death” even if it means potentially more collateral damage among civilians) are not only misleading when applied as a sole standard (in that they artificially inflate the so-called transatlantic capability gap), but they also tend to hide a crucially important fact. Namely, that there is a clearly European approach to war, supported by a clear political rationale. As pointed out by former Chief of the Defence staff and President of the EU’s military committee, US-style military action, which focuses on distance strikes without the intervention of ground troops, has undeniable military advantages, such as avoiding the risk of getting bogged down, and limiting friendly casualties. But it also comes with significant political disadvantages, including lack of control over belligerents, and

therefore over the end result, the indispensable need for American support to mount an operation of this kind, and the accusations of “neo-colonialism” that it (constituting a blatant demonstration of one-sided warfighting based on “Western” technological superiority) would potentially fuel. [28]

Clarification of the doctrine to be adopted is also the necessary first step towards harmonising capability requirements and putting pooling and sharing arrangements in place later on. As for the acquisition of capabilities, Europeans need to say no to resource-draining US projects such as the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter commonly referred to in the industry as the trillion-dollar programme; they also need to resist the urge to buy arms off the shelf, where cost savings are all too illusory (especially if we consider the depreciation costs), while amounting to a real loss not only of control and of security of supply, but also of the work opportunities that the European defence and technological industrial base needs in order to survive. Indeed this latter aspect has implications that reach well beyond the political-military field: the armament sector represents, for public authorities, the last major area in which it is possible to finance crucial research and technology projects in an open competition-based liberal system and, if apprehended properly with a firm strategic vision, it could be a crucial contributor to long-term economic growth.

This leads us to the next priority to be reconsidered, namely the supposedly undisputable virtues of pooling and sharing, and of supranational initiatives in general. Whereas the reduction of redundant assets in a European framework and maximum cooperation among Europeans are highly desirable, it is necessary to proceed on a realistic basis. This means not deriding as outmoded and selfish, but rather respecting, the legitimate sovereignty concerns of those who still make an effort to produce and maintain assets that can be shared. In this regard, the European Air Transport Command (EATC) between France, Germany, Belgium, Luxemburg and the Netherlands is a model that works. It is based on a genuine pooling of capabilities (for instance 50 per cent of the French military fleet is currently under EATC operational command, and the participating nations regularly carry each other’s troops on their planes), but includes a double safeguard. The *Revoke Transfer of Authority* procedure allows the states, at any time, to take back operational control, while the procedure known as the *red card* allows the governments, again at any time, to take back control over their planes, without having to give their reasons for doing so. Needless to say, the EATC is not an all-encompassing EU initiative, but rather tellingly, the partner states describe themselves as “pioneers in the world of Pooling and Sharing capabilities.” [29]

Arguably one of the best examples of the risks inherent in the Community approach to defence matters is provided by the recent directive on “Public procurement in the fields of defence and security”. [30] First, it seems to ignore that the vast majority of R&D investments in this sector are made by the individual states, which obviously expect a return on their investments both in terms of the final product, and in terms of employment opportunities for high-skilled workers. Hence opening procurements to competition across the EU might have the effect of making the states, already confined by budgetary constraints, even less inclined to invest. Most importantly, this Europe-wide opening of competition (with the salutary safeguard of the “essential national security interests” derogation still provided by Article 346 TFEU) is not complemented by appropriate protection mechanisms vis-à-vis non-European providers. One

can easily understand the dismay of the French who are the only ones to attach (and therefore unfortunately the only ones to apply) a *préférence communautaire* clause to the directive. The problem is that accepting interdependence with partners who are dependent on a third party is tantamount to agreeing to depend on the latter. This is the reason why the European choice will be sustainable in the long term only if it is based on a critical mass of countries serious about strategic autonomy.

The Need for a Strategically-Driven Truly European Vanguard

Nowadays, it is widely admitted that advances in the most delicate segments of European integration cannot be achieved by all twenty-eight countries together. Defence is obviously the first area incompatible with the everybody-or-nobody dogma. It is therefore no surprise that after being one of the main taboos in the European debate, “flexibility” in defence matters has now definitively gained acceptability, not only in practice but also in the framework of the Lisbon Treaty. However, it is still only tolerated, and even then only as long as the new flexible formations limit themselves to operational, practical matters, hence the preference for the mainly capability-based “clusters” approach. This approach can definitely be useful, in terms of both motivation and output, on a case by case basis, but would not by itself be sufficient to prevent Europe from “exiting history”, as former French foreign minister Hubert Védrine put it. To keep pace with the rapidly evolving international setting, a strategically-driven vanguard would have to be launched with the aim of pursuing a policy that could be genuinely called European defence.

A Necessary Rupture — from Clusters to a Vanguard.

Differentiation (the possibility for a group of like-minded countries to move faster and/or further than the rest) used to be one of the main taboos of the CSDP, together with the sensitive issues of strategic autonomy and territorial defence. However, whereas the flexibility taboo has been progressively lifted, giving room for significant Treaty changes (reflecting, in part, the variety of practical cooperation mechanisms), differentiation is still only tolerated providing it does not risk spilling over into the two “forbidden” fields: in short, there must be no collective defence and no strategic autonomy. Bearing in mind this essential limitation, the radical change in the official approach to the issue of flexibility is remarkable. Whereas the Amsterdam Treaty was careful to exclude the second pillar (CFSP) from the scope of the newly introduced enhanced cooperation option, leaving only the rather cumbersome arrangement of constructive abstention, the Nice Treaty allowed the freshly reformed enhanced cooperation formula to enter the CFSP field — but only as long as anything with military implications remained excluded from it. Considering these restrictions, the Lisbon Treaty may be regarded as a sort of mini-revolution in the defence-related differentiation area. It confirms the establishment of the European Defence Agency (EDA) within which programmes can be pursued in different groupings; it states that “The Council may entrust the execution of a task, within the Union framework, to a group of Member States in order to protect the Union’s values and serve its interests”; and it allows the launching of an essentially capability-based permanent structured cooperation between member states (the criteria for participation being

the possession of high-level military capabilities and the readiness to make more binding commitments in this area).

The truth is that, despite the significance of the introduction of these changes into the EU Treaty framework, Lisbon actually merely put its stamp on existing practice. The member states already routinely organised themselves in various groupings for producing, buying, and using military hardware and for preparing for and participating in expeditionary operations. Indeed, there exists a whole range of bi-, tri- and multilateral, capability-based, geography-based and force-based initiatives (from the aforementioned EATC, to the Franco-British Lancaster House Agreement, the Nordic Defence-cooperation NORDEFECO, the European Maritime Force EUROMARFOR, Eurocorps and the Franco-German Brigade, the Force de Gendarmerie Européenne, and the A400M military transport plane programme, to name but a few) that have no basis in the Treaties. Lisbon merely provides confirmation that differentiation is now generally recognised as the only way to progress in the defence field. As the former chief of EDA wrote: “In defence, it is time to move on from the ‘convoy’ approach — to accept the reality of a ‘multi-speed’ Europe, and to allow ‘pioneer groups’ of the willing to move things forward when not all are ready to join in.” [31] The truth is that when the expression “pioneer group” is in the plural, it no longer denotes a multi-speed logic, but rather what it has recently become common to call the “clusters approach”. As noted in a recent report by the Clingendael Institute in the Netherlands: “In recent years, there is a focus on cooperation in so-called ‘clusters’, signifying various kinds of defence cooperation in small groups of countries.” [32]

Whereas different clusters make useful contributions on specific issues and in specific sectors, there are two inherent limitations to the clusters approach. First, overall EU coordination remains essential in certain areas, both to avoid a new kind of fragmentation and to achieve the necessary impact. Second, this solution, by definition, does not address the two key issues of territorial defence and strategic autonomy. These are issues that can be addressed only by a true vanguard [33] of states (and are therefore the ones that distinguish the vanguard from both the CSDP and the clusters approach), in other words, by a pioneer group that undertakes the task of creating a *European defence* in the true sense of the term, both the “defence” and the “European” part.

The Path of re-Europeanisation: Ideas to Explore.

The events of the past 15 years together with the most recent events in the process of European integration have shown that there is a need to scale back any ambitions of advancing as a group of 28. It would already be something if all-EU measures and policies could be geared at preserving the CSDP’s *acquis* and removing the obstacles in the path of countries that would like to pursue more ambitious initiatives. To these ends, it is possible to identify five major directions that should be followed. First, there needs to be a reaffirmation of the military dimension of the comprehensive approach, according to which crisis situations must be addressed with political, civil and military instruments. This means ensuring that the integrity of the military chain of command and the specificities of military culture are preserved within those structures referred to as civil-military “fusions”; it also means ensuring that

dispersing “military expertise” across the European External Action Service is not allowed to mean eroding the military component without having first verified that the EUMS manning level and organisational structures have been left intact.

Second, it is necessary to resist any trends that might lead to a return of the CSDP to the NATO fold. Its biggest *acquis* is indeed its institutional autonomy, linked to the EU framework. Should negotiations to create a so-called European pillar of NATO be revived, all well and good, providing the pillar is set up outside the Alliance.

Third, it is necessary to impede any further opening of the defence sector across the EU, unless it goes hand in hand with the establishment of EU-wide mechanisms of protection against third states. Such mechanisms need to be in place prior to any initiative of this kind and must be as effective as the toughest protective measures implemented by the member states (otherwise it would be tantamount of giving away our European defence industrial and technological base). Fourth, pooling and sharing should be encouraged, as long as it respects the principle of reversibility, which serves to prevent free-riding by those states that have fewer capabilities and also to prevent pooling and sharing from being a disadvantage for those states that still have significant military capabilities. Fifth, in order to avoid the severely damaging effects of the single market on investments in the defence field, the criteria of the Stability and Growth Pact need to be amended as soon as possible, in particular by taking up the French proposal advanced at the time of the 2005 review of the Pact. The French proposed that military spending be listed as “another relevant factor” for avoiding the excessive deficit procedure. Today, the only trace of the original proposal is the vague possibility that “special consideration will be given to budgetary efforts towards increasing or maintaining at a high level financial contributions to achieving European policy goals if they have a detrimental effect on the growth and fiscal burden of a Member State.” Instead, it needs to be clearly stated that certain military expenses are considered an investment in Europe’s future and constitute a common good.

Apart from pushing for the EU to implement the above-mentioned priorities, and realising them within its own framework should EU-level action turn out to be impossible, a vanguard would concentrate on asserting itself as such, primarily through commitment to stronger mutual defence guarantees, but also by reviving the WEU Treaty among the participating states, and highlighting the absurdity of engaging together in external military operations without having first provided for the defence of its own territory. Similarly, the drive for strategic autonomy must be the underlying principle of each and every vanguard initiative, whether this relates to engaging in operations, launching European-only equipment programmes, or making institutional changes. The underlying vision must be to preserve and reassert both our independence (autonomy of assessment, decision and action, which also means being free from pressures or constraints imposed by a third party) and our specifically European “way of war”.

The “Conceptualisation” of European Defence.

Admittedly, conceptualisation is an exaggerated term for referring to a solution that is actually dictated by pure logic and common sense. As summed up by Nick Witney in the title of the article written in response to the paper, mentioned earlier, which recommended ditching the CSDP and relying solely on NATO: “It’s CSDP or live in world run by others.”^[34] The present version of European defence, which goes by the name of CSDP, is highly imperfect: indeed, the full realisation of this concept — i.e. the creation of a true defence that is genuinely European — can be pursued only by a vanguard of committed countries. Alas, the use of plural here might be another overstatement. France seems all too alone when it comes to following these objectives. As General de Gaulle predicted, “until the sky clears up, France continues to pursue on its own what can and should be a European and an independent policy.” Indeed, for decades France alone went against the odds, waiting patiently for its European partners to “become aware” (*prendre conscience*) of the need for such a policy direction. However, time is running out. The counterproductive impact of unbalanced EU measures, the exponential growth of military equipment costs, and the continued refusal of EU partners to engage in anything remotely resembling an independent European path might well lead France to develop a sort of *combat fatigue*.

French diplomacy over recent years seems to have abandoned its systematically Don Quixote attitude and now strikes a more conciliatory note. The French foreign ministry has engaged in coalition-building tactics, displayed symbolic gestures, made practical trade-offs, and even started borrowing catchphrases from the English-speaking world. It also appears to deliberately shying away from taking an opposition stance in public, in the hope that there might be someone else to do it. One problem with all this is that it does not work well. Simply put, this is not an approach in which the French excel. ^[35] The strength of French diplomacy, at its best, has always been its combativeness in its assumption of a solitary stance, its capacity to state clear principles with such clarity and confidence that its opponents have been left facing their own contradictions, at their own expense. Even more importantly, in the field of European defence, arguably one of the key permanent axes of French foreign policy in the post-Cold War environment, it is the wrong time to go *hors piste* and experiment. On the contrary, the latest developments are repeatedly providing confirmation of everything Paris has long been professing with regard to European defence.

The “pivot”, or strategic reorientation of the United States discussed in the previous pages, shows clearly that transatlantic security is far from indivisible and that US engagement cannot be taken for granted forever. The experiences of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, together with new budgetary constraints, can be used as serious arguments against copying the highly expensive American way of waging war. The functioning of the 28-member European Union has made it obvious, even to those most vehemently opposed to this route, that differentiation, both in terms of diverging visions and different practical arrangements, is from now on the only way to cope with the heterogeneity resulting from successive enlargements. Finally, the emergence of new powers, and their already perceptible activism in sovereignty-related fields make it all too clear that strategic autonomy is not a pre-modern concept driven by some presumed anti-American sentiment, but rather the only way, on an increasingly competitive international stage (*la mêlée mondiale*, in the words of Hubert Védrine), to stay in the race. At a time when former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s famous “events, my dear boy, events!” supports flawlessly France’s traditional reasoning, Paris would be better advised to go

back to displaying unapologetically its Cartesian logic, clearly stating and tirelessly repeating some self-evident principles.

Namely that there cannot be European defence without it being genuinely European (i.e. free from undue dependence on third parties outside our continent), and without it being genuinely defence (both from the military point of view and from that of the defence of the territory). Refusal of independence leads to dependence, refusal of power leads to being left powerless. Separately, and even more so when combined, they lead to loss of credibility, and ultimately result in an inexorable *déclassement stratégique*. If it is deemed that European defence should be pursued, then both dogmatic Atlanticism and ideological pacifism need to be barred from our strategic thinking. It might be worth quoting Robert Cooper, former advisor to former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and grey eminence to EU High Representatives Solana then later Ashton, speaking recently in his capacity as Counsellor at the EEAS. Cooper, who obviously cannot be accused of anti-Americanism, or suspected of Gaullist affinities, makes some common sense remarks with regard to European defence. He starts from the fact that “there is no guarantee that American and European interests will always coincide.” [36] Cooper then observes that “It is highly unsatisfactory that 450 million Europeans rely so much on 250 million Americans to defend them. There is no such thing as free defence. No one yet knows exactly how or when, but at some point Europeans will find themselves paying for these arrangements.” In Cooper’s view, although the inbuilt direction is clear, the end result is far from predictable. “The logic of European integration is that Europe should, sooner or later, develop a common foreign policy and a common security policy and, probably, a common defence. But the world does not proceed by logic. It proceeds by political choice.” The stakes are now at their highest, and the choice is ours.

Source : [THE FEDERALIST \(2013\)](#)

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- [7] Speech by Victoria Nuland, US Permanent Representative to NATO, in Paris in January 2008.
- [8] Jean-Paul Perruche, *Pour une complémentarité UE-OTAN*, in Gregory Bouterin and Emmanuel Goffi (editors), *L'Europe et sa défense*, Paris, Choiseul, 2011.
- [9] Nicolas Gros-Verheyde, *L'approche globale est comme le monoxyde de carbone...*, Brussels, 13 July 2013. (<http://www.bruxelles2.eu/defense-ue/defense-ue-droit-doctrine-politique/lapproche-globale-cest-comme-le-monoxyde-de-carbone.html>)
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- [11] Daniel Keohane, *Unblocking EU-NATO Co-operation*, CER Bulletin Issue 48, Centre for European Reform, June/July 2006.
- [12] The first part of exact quote said "cut the cr... on CSDP." Boyko Noev is former minister of defence of Bulgaria (1994-1995), (1999-2001), senior fellow with the Center for the Study of Democracy, and member of the Strategic Advisors Group of the Atlantic Council. He intervened at the "The Future of US European Command" conference, organised by the National Defense University and the Atlantic Council, 19 July 2012.
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- [14] Jolyon Howorth, *CSDP and NATO Post-Libya: Towards the Rubicon?*, Egmont Institute Security Policy Brief n. 35, July 2012.
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- [28] Hearing of Général Henri Bentégeat before the French Senate's *Commission des Affaires étrangères, de la défense et des forces armées*, 11 February 2013.
- [29] www.eatc-mil.com, accessed on 30 September 2013.
- [30] Directive 2009/81/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 on the coordination of procedures for the award of certain works contracts, supply contracts and service contracts by contracting authorities or entities in the fields of defence and security.
- [31] Nick Witney, *Re-energising Europe's Security and Defence Policy*, policy paper, European Council on Foreign Relations, July 2008.
- [32] Margriet Drent, Kees Homan, Dick Zandee, *Bold Steps in Multinational Cooperation — Taking European Defence Forward*, Clingendael Report, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, May 2013.
- [33] Various names can cover the same concept, vanguard is the one preferred here, but similar content can be referred to as *core Europe*, and was called the European Security and Defence Union (ESDU) in the Tervuren declaration of the heads of state and government of France, Germany, Belgium and Luxemburg on 29 April 2003. Here they stated that "the vocation of the ESDU should be to bring together those member States that are ready to go

faster and further in strengthening their defence cooperation.” Albeit in the specific context of opposition to the Iraq war and still with an extremely cautious formulation, the references to “mutual help and assistance in the face of risks of all nature” as one of the first areas of commitment of the ESDU, and the priority given to “harmonization of positions” and “increased investment in military equipment”, and especially the insistence on creating a “nucleus” of operational planning and conduct capability, can be seen as prudent signs of an inclination towards greater strategic autonomy.

[34] Nick Witney, *It's CSDP - or live in a world run by others*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 13 September 2011.

[35] See Charles Cogan, *French Negotiating Behavior: Dealing with La Grande Nation*, New York, Barnes & Noble, 2003.

[36] Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations, Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century*, London, Atlantic Books, 2004.