SUMMARY

EU News

- Global Strategy for the EU Foreign and Security Policy insists on the strengthening of 'European Defence capabilities' by supporting military research and arms industry, and commits to strengthen arms export controls
- EU development funds for peace and stability now allowed to support military assistance in developing countries
- Impact of Brexit on EU Defence Policy not clear, but calls to subsidy the military industry with EU budget grow
- EU subsidies for military research: concrete EU budget proposal on the table for 2017

EU NEWS

● Global Strategy for the EU Foreign and Security Policy (full text in English and French here, foreword and synthesis in French and German here)

Federica Mogherini presented its Global Strategy to the heads of Member States at the European Council on June 29th. 'Global' stands both in geographical and policy terms, as it also covers military capability to antiterrorism, jobs, inclusive society and human rights. It is a voluntary document which ambitions to create a coherent and integrated EU external policy. However the general feeling is that it is more an accumulation of 'good' -and less good – but diverse intentions where tensions between human rights and international law on the one side, and security approach and geo-strategic interests on the other, are not resolved. Moreover Member States only welcomed the Strategy rather than endorsing it, thus their commitment to translate it into concrete actions with adequate means is still far from becoming reality. Keep adding slices to the cake does not make the cake taste better...

Regarding the Defence policy, the Strategy says that “the EU will systematically encourage defence cooperation and strive to create a solid European defence industry, which is critical for Europe’s autonomous of decision and action”. This means in particular “EU funds to support defence research” and a “deepened cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance”. Regarding NATO the general message is that of a stronger EU within NATO. Proposals to go 'From vision to Action' (point 4) are detailed on page 28-29 (English version) regarding military capabilities. A sectoral strategy should be agreed by the Council but the document already highlights some areas. Regarding military spending in particular, it calls for an annual coordinated review process at EU level to discuss Member States spending plans, “in full coherence with NATO’s defence planning process” and an EU funding for defence research and technology from 2017-18 (and a fully-fledged Programme from 2021). it considers that “a sustainable, innovative and competitive European defence industry is essential” for Europe’s strategic autonomy and to stimulate growth and jobs. For this the Strategy refers to the need for further integration (e.g. liberalisation) of the internal market in the defence sector as well as for a “structured dialogue with defence relevant industries”.

Under Global governance, it says that “the EU will actively participate in [arms] export control regimes, strengthen common rules governing Member States exports policies of military - including dual use - equipment and technologies, and support export control authorities in third countries and technical bodies that sustain arms control regimes”. Nice reading, but looks pretty similar to what is happening now, e.g. focus on the ATT lower standards rather than proper implementation of the Common Position; and the EU Directive on internal arms trade is not going this direction (see below).

Next steps are supposed to be sectoral strategies or “white-books” type documents for the different dimensions of the Global Strategy, to come over the autumn for the first ones. This should be discussed further at the next EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting next week (July 18th)

● EU development funds for peace and stability now allowed to support military assistance in developing countries

On July 5th, the European Commission presented a new policy document (Communication) on the EU support for
the security Sector Reform (SSR) in 'partner countries' (in other words non-EU countries benefiting from EU development funds). This is the result of a continuous pressure from Member States to open the possibility to support military-related activities with EU development funds. Indeed until now it was absolutely impossible to bring any form of support related to military forces within EU-funded development activities. Unfortunately the current trend to focus on security and military approaches eventually managed to break this taboo and the EC’s reluctance. Now security and stability in a very narrow meaning comes before development. In practice, this “capacity building in support of security and development (CBSD)” will be funded under the financial instrument devoted to Stability and Peace, which should be extended to assistance to the military forces under “exceptional and clearly delimited circumstances” according to the EC press release. Possible activities listed are “training, mentoring and advice, provision of non-lethal equipment, infrastructure improvements and other services” in order to “address urgent short-term as well as medium-term needs in the context of the achievements of sustainable development, i.e. stable, inclusive and peaceful societies.” (read the EC memo here)

If one looks at this together with the focus on EU defence capabilities within NATO and the proposals for EU military research subsidies, a clear and worrying shift is visible that affects the foundations of the EU project: this shift is to accept that the EU finances arms and the military sector. This is a fundamental political shift away from a peace-focused project, not only at conceptual level but also in very practical terms: as the EU Member States do not want to raise the EU budget for this new area of activity, this means concrete and potentially severe decrease of funds in other -civil- areas.

● What could be the impact of the Brexit on developments at EU defence policy level

In fact, as in many other areas, the impact of the Brexit on EU defence policies is rather difficult to estimate and very much depends on the different reactions of the different protagonists; articles and experts range from overoptimistic visions of a genuinely integrated and independent European Defence to rather jaded points of view that “nothing will never change”. It would not be surprising at least that some other EU countries will now start expressing their own doubts, if not clear resistance, to hurry steps in the field of European Defence. However two main points are clear at this stage: if the EU is to reinforce its defence capabilities, it is clearly to remain a strong(er) NATO partner. Secondly, the plans to use EU budget money to support the arms industry and military research are more than ever pushed forward, by several Member States like France, Germany, Italy or Finland in public declarations.

● EU subsidies for military research: concrete proposals for the 2017 EU budget

The European Commission presented on June 30 its 2017 draft EU Budget: it includes a 25 millions Euros budget line to fund research projects for the arms-related industry. Some articles in the specialized press also refer to a wider agreement between the European Commission and the Member States, for a 3-years funding up to 90 million Euros for what is usually called the Preparatory Action on Defence Research.

The European Parliament has now to discuss and agree on the draft 2017 EU budget, thus including on this specific budget line for defence research. This adoption process could go on until December 2016 according to the level of difficulty to find a compromise agreement between the EP and the Member States on the global budget. Unfortunately such a small amount of 25 million Euros may not attract to much attention in this bargaining if we don't push strongly for it.