

PRIHODNOST SKUPNE VARNOSTNE IN OBRAMBNE POLITIKE IN MAJHNE DRŽAVE ČLANICE

THE FUTURE OF THE COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY AND SMALL MEMBER STATES

Povzetek Dvaindvajset let po srečanju na vrhu v Kölnu, ki velja za zgodovinsko za Skupno varnostno in obrambno politiko (SVOP), danes še vedno ne moremo govoriti o popolnoma funkcionalni in operativni SVOP. Prispevek analizira PESCO, CARD, CDP in EDF ter nekatere najpomembnejše težave evropskega obrambnega prizorišča, ki mu primanjkuje skladnosti in ostaja razdrobljeno v številnih vidikih. Države članice še vedno namenjajo veliko več finančnih sredstev za druge varnostne okvire, ki niso del EU, kot je na primer Nato. Prav tako države članice ohranjajo nacionalno osredotočenost na področju obrambnega načrtovanja in v resnici zelo slabo izpolnjujejo dane obljube. Vprašanje je, kaj in koliko v trenutni evropski arhitekturi majhna država članica sploh lahko doseže. Prispevek osvetli vlogo majhnih držav skozi institucijo predsedovanja Evropskemu svetu.

Ključne besede *SVOP, Slovenija, PESCO, CARD, EDF*

Abstract Twenty-two years after the EC meeting in Cologne where the CSDP came to life, we still cannot talk about a fully functional and operational CSDP. This article reflects on PESCO, CARD, the CDP and the EDF, and on some of the main issues in the European defence landscape today, which continues to be fragmented and lacks coherence in several aspects. Member States are still investing more in non-EU frameworks such as NATO, and still retain a national focus in their defence planning, showing very little discipline in meeting the commitments that they have undertaken. The question arises of what a small state can achieve in the current European architecture, if anything. The role of the small state is reflected through the Presidency of the European Council.

Key words *CSDP, Slovenia, PESCO, CARD, EDF*

Introduction

Over six-plus decades¹, the trend of improving cooperation between European countries in the field of defence has been slow but mostly positive. There have been several moments in the »life« of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) which can be identified as crucial, and which have accelerated European states' desire and need for stronger defence and military cooperation. Serrano (2020, p 16) mentions two main development stages in the life of the CSDP: »the birth and initial steps of the ESDP, as it was called prior to the Lisbon Treaty from 1999 to 2003; and its adolescence and adulthood, as the CSDP from 2016 to date. The 2003 European Security Strategy crowns the first phase, and the 2016 Global Strategy marks the beginning of the second phase«. As also noted by Culetto and Himelrajh (2018, p 15) the 15 years after 1991 showed very slow progress in the area of common defence. »Perhaps the most important event was the Saint-Malo summit between Tony Blair² and Jacques Chirac³ in December 1998« (Ibid.), which paved the way for the creation of the CSDP at the European Council meeting in Cologne in June 1999. However, for many years to follow, the CDSP remained very far from being functional and operational. Moving on 22 years from the Cologne meeting, we are still asking ourselves whether the CSDP can be considered functional and operational, especially considering the new threats to European security which have emerged during the last decade(s) and how (if at all) a CSDP framework could effectively offer answers and solutions to them. »When the CSDP is weighed against the Trump presidency, the rise of China and a crumbling multilateral order, it cannot help but disappoint« (Fiott, 2020c, p 10).

The main issue of the European defence landscape today is that it still continues to be fragmented and lacks coherence in several aspects. »Existing capabilities are characterised by a very high diversity of types in major equipment and different levels of modernisation and of interoperability, including logistic systems and supply chains« (CARD Report, 2020). As noted by Fiott (2020b), over the past 20 years European governments have collectively invested more in non-EU frameworks such as NATO or in bilateral and mini-lateral endeavours, rather than engage in defence cooperation with other EU Member States through the CSDP. »Conversely, the CSDP may have been overtaken by the geopolitical realities that have developed over the past two decades« (Fiott, 2020b, p 4). The EU, its Member States and its institutions have been trying to make European defence more unified, with several initiatives which have followed the Lisbon Treaty. This article reflects and analyzes the new initiatives taken on since 2016, when the new EU Global Strategy was adopted. In the second part the article analyzes the role of small Member States, especially through the institute of the Presidency of the Council of the EU, with Slovenia starting its Presidency on July 1st 2021.

¹ The historical development of the different initiatives in the period following WWII which led to the CSDP as it exists today is not the subject of this paper. The paper focuses on the CSDP in the time period after the Lisbon Treaty.

² The UK Prime Minister.

³ The French President.

1 THE COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY AFTER 2016

Since 2016, the EU has developed several new initiatives on security and defence. The Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), the European Defence Fund (EDF), Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), and the latest Strategic Compass are frameworks and incentives that were designed to progressively overcome the failures of the past. Although not new, the Capability Development Plan (CDP) must also be mentioned. All these initiatives are strongly interlinked: the CDP identifies the capability priorities Member States should focus their common efforts on; CARD provides an overview of existing capabilities in Europe and identifies opportunities for cooperation; PESCO offers options on how to develop prioritized capabilities in a collaborative manner; and the EDF provides EU funding to support the implementation of cooperative defence projects, with a bonus for the PESCO project (EDA, 2018).

Previous initiatives have certainly led to greater interaction between Member States with regard to cooperation; however, the main issues of de-fragmentation and operational commitment still remain (see also CARD Report, 2020). National defence interests and related approaches continue to prevail, and financial and other allocations made by Member States to their already launched national programmes do not leave much room for manoeuvre for collaborative defence spending in the near future.

1.1 Capability Development Process (CDP)

Although the CDP is not a novel process, it deserves to be mentioned as one of the crucial ones. The CDP was jointly developed by the European Defence Agency and the EU Military Staff in 2008 and updated in 2010, with revisions occurring in 2014 and 2018. »The CDP is both a document and a process that clarifies existing capability shortfalls, plans for future technology trends, explores avenues for European cooperation and details lessons learned from the EU's military missions and operations« (Fiott, 2018, p 2). According to Fiott (Ibid.), the CDP might be seen as the glue that could enhance the coherence between the CARD, the EDF and PESCO. »The CDP is more than just a document because it sits at the intersection of the fundamental challenge of defence capability development« (Ibid.).

The most tangible output of the 2018 CDP revision was the eleven⁴ new EU Capability Development Priorities, developed together with the Member States. The CDP should be seen as a vital element of the EU's broader defence policies because of the important role it plays in arbitrating between short-term capability requirements and longer-term capability and technology needs. »The challenge facing the EU today is one that involves having to fill a multitude of capability shortfalls in the short term,

⁴ »Out of the 11 priorities, three are related to the Command, Control and Information/Cyber domain, two to land capabilities and logistics, two to the maritime domain, and three are dedicated to the air domain. One priority deals with cross-domain capabilities contributing to achieve the EU Level of Ambition. There is no ranking between the priorities« (EDA 2018, p 4).

while also thinking about what future capabilities and technologies the EU Member States should invest in« (Fiott, 2018, p 8).

1.2 CARD

The main aim of CARD is to provide a picture of the existing defence capability landscape in Europe, and to identify potential areas of cooperation. CARD was eventually approved by the EU Council in May 2017. The first full CARD cycle was launched in autumn 2019 and completed in November 2020, and has identified a total of 55 collaborative opportunities throughout the whole capability spectrum, considered to be the most promising, the most needed or the most pressing, including in terms of operational value⁵ (CARD Report, 2020). In order to overcome the current issues of the de-fragmentation of the European defence landscape, the conclusions of the first full CARD cycle suggest more coordinated and continuous efforts by the participating Member States over a long period of time in three major areas which are interlinked: defence spending, defence planning, and defence cooperation (CARD Report, 2020).

The first full cycle of CARD should help to identify capability development opportunities that could be initiated through either PESCO, the EDF or both mechanisms. »Time will tell whether there is a greater appetite for European defence collaboration, however« (Fiott et al., 2020, p 242).

1.3 PESCO

Almost four years⁶ have passed since the establishment of PESCO, and as stated by Biscop (2020, p 4), PESCO is a capability development process, which is necessarily a slow process. We cannot, therefore, expect any revolutionary breakthroughs after only four years, but »one can assess whether decisions have been made and steps taken that will produce major effect in due time« (Ibid.). In order to evaluate progress, the first PESCO Strategic Review was carried out in 2020⁷. Forty-seven collaborative projects have been launched, with twelve of them already delivering concrete results or reaching their initial operational capability (Council of European Union 2020, p 3).

The coherence between PESCO, CARD and the EDF promotes a better use of scarce resources by increasing the joint development of the capabilities required for Europe's security. With the first strategic review PESCO's participating Member States have agreed that the binding commitments they mutually agreed upon »have

⁵ *The Member States are recommended to concentrate their efforts on the following six specific 'focus areas': Main Battle Tanks (MBT); Soldier Systems; Patrol Class Surface Ships; Counter Unmanned Aerial Systems (Counter-UAS); Defence applications in Space and Military Mobility (CARD, Report 2020).*

⁶ *PESCO was established in December 2017.*

⁷ *On 20th November 2020, the European Council approved the first PESCO Strategic Review (PSR), an assessment of the first initial phase (2018-2020) of PESCO, and guidelines for its second initial phase, commencing in 2021 and lasting until 2025.*

proven to present a solid guideline in ensuring consistent implementation of PESCO and must therefore not be changed in the context of the current PESCO Strategic Review« (Council of the European Union, 2020a, p 4). Although it may seem that only four years after its launch PESCO is a successful story, a more critical view is required. The annual report also noted that participating Member States still need to do much more on strengthening collaborative defence capability development and ensuring the availability and deployability of forces for CSDP missions and operations (Fiott et al., 2020).

Biscop (2020) has identified three major reasons why PESCO does not work as planned and will probably not give the results that were expected at the launch of this initiative in 2017. Firstly, one of the main issues with PESCO is that participating Member States have given PESCO a very broad scope. »It addresses the whole of the participating Member States' armed forces, rather than just the elements that they have declared theoretically available for the CSDP«. We can also note a more pragmatic approach, with many participating Member States seeing PESCO as an instrument to achieve both EU and NATO capability targets. As Biscop (2020) states, some of the PESCO projects would have happened anyway, but by putting it under the PESCO framework participating Member States can count on co-funding from the Commission's EDF. What is more worrying and may self-destruct the whole initiative is the fact that »this list of projects does not effectively address the priority capability shortfalls that the participating Member States have commonly identified« (Biscop, 2020, p 5).

Secondly, PESCO needs clearly defined goals and desired capabilities. Formally, the Headline Goal⁸ remains the basis for much of the EU's capability development efforts. However, there are two problems with the Headline Goal: it is no longer sufficient, and Member States simply ignore it (Biscop, 2020, p 6).

The third cause as named by Biscop (Ibid) is »a culture of non-compliance«. Member States overwhelmingly retain a national focus in their defence planning, and show very little discipline in meeting the commitments that they have undertaken. The question of how many Member States really intended to meet the commitments when they signed up for PESCO must be asked. In some countries, the defence establishment surely saw in PESCO a useful tool to impress the importance of a serious defence effort upon their national political authorities. Instead of using PESCO as an instrument to reach a common EU goal, Member States have instrumentalized it to further their own projects. »But many governments probably joined more out of fear of being left out than from a sincere desire to join in« (Biscop, 2020, p 7).

⁸ *The 1999 Headline Goal set the quantitative level of ambition for the CSDP as a whole for the first time in the EU's history.*

1.4 A Strategic Compass for the Common Security and Defence Policy

In late 2019 a new and, according to Biscop (2020), potentially promising debate began by a German proposal to provide the CSDP with political guidance. The Strategic Compass can be understood as an initiative stemming from shortcomings in the EU Global Strategy. The EU Strategic Compass will set out what the EU should be able to do and achieve in the area of crisis management and resilience in the next 5-10 years, and which capacities and partnerships (including EU-NATO) it will need. »There are questions about the EU's military level of ambition, especially in terms of what type of missions and operations the Union should be able to carry out« (EUISS, 2021a). Any operational commitments that may derive from the EU Strategic Compass will have implications for resources, command and control, and capabilities. The challenge for the Strategic Compass is also a need to assess what type of military contribution can be made to enhancing resilience and countering hybrid threats (Ibid.).

A lack of political visibility represents an additional challenge. EU security and defence initiatives can only be credibly implemented if they are reflected in national defence planning. »Without national buy-in, it will be difficult to stimulate a culture of cooperation and common strategic perceptions in the EU. This is a major task for the Strategic Compass, as defence planning rests with the Member States (EUISS, 2021b).

For now the focus of the Strategic Compass remains unclear. Through informal discussions, Member States have come to a consensus that the Compass should not affect the Global Strategy or lower the agreed level of ambition. During the German Presidency in the second half of 2020, Member States launched an assessment of the threats and challenges facing the EU. According to Fiott (2020a, p 1) the Strategic Compass could potentially provide long overdue politico-strategic guidance for EU security and defence, especially in an era when EU security is being eroded. What is crucial to emphasize is that the Compass will not fill capability shortfalls or enhance the EU's technological and operational readiness itself, but it could help to align the overall strategic guidance and capabilities. However, it is still too early to evaluate, and only time will tell whether the Strategic Compass has fulfilled its expectations.

1.5 THE EDF

The EDF is designed to support EU collaboration in defence research and capability development by offering financial incentives for cooperation. The final decision on the setting up of the EDF was taken by the Council and the European Parliament in 2019/2020. The Fund began to function on 1 January 2021, with a total agreed budget of €7.953 billion for the 2021-2027 period. »Roughly one third will finance competitive and collaborative defence research projects, in particular through grants, and two-thirds will complement Member States' investment by co-financing the costs for defence capabilities development following the research stage« (European Defence Fund).

2 THE COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY AND SMALL MEMBER STATES⁹

The role and possible influence of small states¹⁰ in international politics and international relations have been frequent subjects of analysis in studies on international relations¹¹. Small states' powers are limited and their economy and military capability do not match those of their larger neighbours, but small states enjoy certain advantages that increase their ability to influence international politics. »Small states can become much more than negligible actors if they actively pursue their agenda and consolidate all elements of their national power to achieve their desired objectives« (Urbelis, 2015, p 61). When you are a small state, it does not necessarily mean that you have no voice, or that you must remain passive in all matters of international relations.

Being a part of a larger alliance or a supranational institution is of great importance for small states. »Supranational institutions are considered a natural ally of small states both for ensuring their representation and for championing a common interest that often reflects the small states' priorities better than a compromise just among the major powers« (Weiss, 2020, p 2). According to Weiss (Ibid.) the literature has long recognized that international institutions in general, and supranational institutions in particular, allow small states to have a bigger impact on policy results, and has studied the means and channels they use. »More intergovernmental forms of cooperation, such as the CSDP, provide the small states with shelter as well, although the influence of the big states is much stronger« (Weiss, 2020, p 11).

According to Urbelis (2015, p 62), »Small states pursue active policies on internal NATO and EU matters«. An extremely successful example of small state policies is the NATO Baltic Air Policing mission in the Baltic States. From the beginning of the NATO air policing mission in 2004, the mission was considered to be of a temporary nature. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were not satisfied with this arrangement and they sought a permanent solution. »The Baltic states, with the assistance of the US and Denmark, persuaded other allies that NATO must agree to make temporary NATO air policing arrangement a more permanent one« (Urbelis, 2015, p 70). Actively pursuing their priorities is one of the most important rules for the success of small states. »Clearly defined and persistently sought priorities can lead to amazing results unless these priorities collide with a strong opposition by larger Allies« (Ibid.). However, prioritization remains crucial; small states, because of their limited resources, cannot fight for their interests on multiple fronts. Small states must choose wisely which battle to fight. If prioritization is the first rule of

⁹ Urbelis (2015) uses the term »small states« for all nations that spend less than 10 billion USD on defence.

¹⁰ De Wijk (in Urbelis 2015, p 62) emphasized that the main features of small states are easily recognized by their inability to maintain a full spectrum of military capabilities, and their limited abilities to project military power in distant regions of the world. Small states are dependent upon larger countries' military capabilities, as only they can provide the framework that small states can plug into with their available assets.

¹¹ Reiter et al. (in Urbelis 2015, p 61) and others have created a theoretical framework for the analysis of small states' behaviour and motivations within larger international formations.

success, then specialization is the second. »Specialization allows small countries to accumulate expertise in one or another particular area, thus achieving respect and importance while discussing those issues in NATO and the EU« (Urbelis, 2015, p 70).

An excellent opportunity for a small state to shape and influence EU (and CSDP) decisions is the Presidency of the Council of the EU. However, it is important to note that since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty the role of the Presidency in the area of the CSDP has decreased. Urbelis (2015) analyzed Lithuania's Presidency in the second part of 2013. Based on several examples of Lithuania's influence during the Presidency (the EU's Eastern Partnerships¹², Energy Security¹³, EU Battle Groups (EUBG))¹⁴, Urbelis concluded »that small states can have a role by taking the Presidency of the EU Council, but its possibilities to influence decision making are limited« (2015, p 77). Small states can quite easily introduce a topic onto the agenda, but when national interests come into play the role of the Presidency disappears. One very good example of Member States' national interests prevailing is the issue of the EUBG. The EU countries could not agree on the deployment option, and when actual crises hit there was no political will to use the EUBG. The discussion clearly showed that neither the Lithuanian Presidency nor the EEAS had the power to impose any decision upon the use of force to any EU Member State. When the time for real decisions came, sovereign nations followed their own national interests with little regard to the Presidency or the CSDP (Urbelis, 2015). The Presidency's powers are also limited in terms of influence on wider political debates such as the NATO-EU dialogue (Urbelis, 2015, p 77).

On 1 July 2021 Slovenia took over the Presidency, as the last country in the Germany-Portugal-Slovenia trio. The period of the trio's Presidency has been guided by an 18-month Programme of the Council (Council of the European Union, 2020b). Although 2020 and 2021 so far were strongly marked by the worldwide pandemic of Covid-19, this is not the subject of our analysis. However, it must be mentioned that the trio's Presidency programme strongly focuses on plans for recovery after the pandemic, making this also the priority for the period of Slovenia's Presidency. This chapter focuses on those goals of the Presidency directly dealing with strengthening the resilience of societies and the issues of the CSDP. »The Three Presidencies are determined to take full account of the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic for

¹² Eastern partnerships were one of the main priorities of the Lithuanian Presidency, including in the area of the CSDP. The Eastern partnership policy serves as a perfect example of how a small but active country can use existing circumstances, i.e. the Presidency of the Council, to push forward its agenda. Lithuania's partial success was supported by the fact that no major European power had big issues with moving forward with this agenda (Urbelis, 2015).

¹³ Energy security was another priority of great importance to the Lithuanian Presidency, as a result of which energy security became a part of the CSDP routine, with most of the work done at the EDA, which received a wider role in looking at the defence aspect of the energy security debate (Urbelis, 2015).

¹⁴ The future and relevance of the EUBG was discussed long before the Lithuanian Presidency. At political and expert levels the main issue with the EUBG was well known – the EUBGs had existed already for ten years; however, they had never been used (Urbelis, 2015).

the EU, also in the framework of European Civil protection./.../ the Presidencies will aim to further enhance the EU crisis response and strengthen the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, including further development of RescEU and other capacities.../« (Council of the European Union, 2020b, p 10). The trio also promised to take all possible steps to increase the EU's capacity to act decisively and in unity to effectively promote Europe's interests and values and to defend and shape a rules-based international order. The trio also promised to enhance the EU's capabilities for emergency response, making it more effective in complex emergencies. The Covid-19 pandemic and other threats (cyber attacks; natural disasters, etc.) have unveiled several gaps in the EU's crisis and emergency response, while still having enough space for improvement.

With regard to the CSDP it is very promising that the trio are »strongly committed to enhance all aspects of the CSDP...« (Council of the European Union, 2020b, p 29). Special mention is given to the Strategic Compass and the importance of »shared threat analysis providing a basis for this strategic dialogue« (Council of the European Union, 2020b, p 30). The trio also emphasizes the importance of several new defence initiatives, including PESCO, CARD and the EDF. However, what the programme lacks is a clearer and stronger statement on enhancing the CSDP towards a more coherent and stronger European defence. In fact, the programme does not bring any groundbreaking CSDP issue to the European table, but only emphasizes and acknowledges the importance of the existing status.

With its slogan »Together. Resilient. Europe.«, Slovenia has decided to focus on four priorities during its Presidency: »to facilitate the EU's recovery and reinforce its resilience, to reflect on the future of Europe, to strengthen the rule of law and European values, and to increase security and stability in the European neighbourhood« (Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2021a). Slovenia will focus on strengthening capacities to successfully deal with pandemics and different forms of modern and complex security risks and threats, such as large-scale cyberattacks, and will also work to further strengthen and improve the effectiveness of the EU's response to large-scale natural and other disasters. Slovenia's programme evolves from the Trio Presidency programme as it gives support to the further development of the European Civil Protection Pool and rescEU capacities, as well as increasing the efficiency of operations, including transport and logistics capacities. Unfortunately, not much attention is given to the issues of defence and the CSDP. Not only that, but surprisingly there is no mention of PESCO, CARD or the EDF anywhere in the document. One would expect at least confirmation of Slovenia's position on following and fulfilling commitments given within PESCO. As Culetto and Himelrajh (2018, p 28) noted three years ago: »...the Slovenian Presidency of the EU in the second half of 2021 will be a great opportunity to advance PESCO«. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case so far, at least based on the political goals and statements written in the programme.

Conclusion The CSDP still has many issues to be solved in order to become more coherent and effective. One of the main issues is certainly the prevailing national interests and the fact that Member States are still not willing to put the EU's interests before their own national interests. Until this obstacle is overcome, we cannot talk about a fully operational and effective CSDP. However, we must ask ourselves if this is possible at all. Maybe issues of security and defence are too strongly perceived as strictly national, and the whole idea of having a stronger, coherent and homogenous European defence is actually based on the wrong assumptions.

Another important issue is the new and emerging threats which the EU cannot offer an appropriate response to through the CSDP framework, simply because the scope of the CSDP is limited due to its nature and it was not, in the first place, intended to offer an effective response to some types of new threats (e.g. cyber threats). The CSDP was not set up to deal with global geopolitical competition; however, we may all expect to see the EU securing its values and interests in a world where old partners and new powers cannot be trusted, and where life-long alliances are being broken. It is definitely a new global landscape in which the EU must reposition itself while considering the interests of all 27 Member States.

The financial and other allocations made by Member States to their national programmes do not leave much space for manoeuvre in collaborative defence spending in the near future. This is especially the case with small(er) states with limited financial and military resources. Their first priorities are national interests, and when it comes to the EU's interests and capabilities, they simply cannot afford them. In this EU playing field, small states must position themselves, enforce their own interests, and find ways to effectively overcome their (small) size.

Even in the case of small states, a desire to influence international relations and be an active (and not a passive) player is present. But a small state must know how »to pick their own battles« and not try to solve some over-ambitious issues, such as EU-Russia relations or the question of a European Army. Maybe this is the main reason that the programme for the Slovenian Presidency does not include any mention of the CSDP initiatives. Other, more achievable, goals have prevailed, offering at least a small possibility for success. The time for a more coherent and stable EU defence is yet to come.

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