

## Defence Policy Briefing

# First steps to a European Union army

Without prejudice to NATO commitments or a standing policy of neutrality, member states have to assist each other “by all means in their power” and in accordance with the UN charter.



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**A**n army for the European Union? Well, not quite yet. But almost a century after the eve of the Great War which left millions and millions of fallen soldiers, a great many of them Canadians, we have come a long way and made tremendous progress, also in the more robust aspects of foreign affairs.

The Treaty on European Union contains special provisions for a Common Security and Defence Policy. CSDP is part of the EU's wider Foreign and Security Policy under the guidance of the Union's high representative, Cathy Ashton. Structures are in place for planning and conducting of EU military operations.

These structures include the EU Military Committee and the EU Military Staff. Political guidance flows from the Political and Security Committee. Unlike ordinary EU legislation, which is adopted by qualified majorities, CSDP decisions require a consensus among all EU member states.

Since 2003, the EU has conducted 33 military operations and civilian security-related missions. Sixteen of them are ongoing. In line with the treaty's mandate they reach from humanitarian and rescue tasks, military advice and conflict prevention, to peacekeeping—but also to more robust interventions with combat forces in crisis management, peacemaking and post-conflict stabilization.

Currently the EU is engaged globally from the Balkans to the Middle East to Africa and Afghanistan. The operations include the fight against piracy in the Indian Ocean, military stabilization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, military training in Mali and Somalia, as well as police training in Afghanistan and rule of law missions in Kosovo and Iraq.

The troops and civilian personnel on the ground, as well as their hardware, are provided by the member states. Right now, some 7,300 men and women serve under an EU command. They wear their national uniforms but also sport the blue and golden insignia of the EU.

Like-minded partners are regularly invited to join these operations which are always conducted in accordance with the principles of the United Nations. Canada, a strategic partner for the EU, has accepted such invitations frequently and is currently contributing to the EU Police and Rule of Law Mission for the Palestine Territories as well as in the EU Police mission in Afghanistan.

Defence is a costly matter, especially when conducted only on a national basis. Therefore, larger projects are usually undertaken in some form of international co-operation to share the costs and realize synergies. The EU has moved from ad-hoc arrangements to more structured forms of co-operation among member states: The European Defence Agency has, as its mandate, to support the council and the member states in their effort to improve the European Union's defence capabilities for CSDP.

This means running and supporting co-operative European defence projects; supporting research and technology development; boosting the European defence technological and industrial base; and providing a forum for European ministries of defence.

EDA is also co-ordinating efforts under a pooling and sharing scheme in order to overcome shortfalls in European defence capabilities and to avoid unnecessary duplication. The EDA and its participating member states have, for example, launched projects such as helicopters availability, the European Air Transport Fleet, or the insertion of Unmanned Aircraft Systems into normal airspace.

The EU is significantly contributing to global conflict resolution and crisis management by deploying the missions and operations described and, through EDA, by looking for more efficient ways to acquire the necessary capabilities.

But the treaty also contains provisions on a more classical role of military defence. Art. 42 VII TEU contains an obligation for aid and assistance to member states which

fall victim to an armed aggression. Without prejudice to NATO commitments or a standing policy of neutrality, member states have to assist each other “by all means in their power” and in accordance with the UN charter. This is a far reaching commitment of solidarity and an expression of the closeness among the members of the union. It complements the obligation of the large number of member states that are also part of the North Atlantic Alliance.

Finally, a look ahead. The European project is always an ongoing process, and this is equally true for defence. So, what about a truly European army?

Art. 42 II stipulates that CSDP “shall include the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy. This will lead to a common defence, when the European Council, acting unanimously, so decides.”

Granted, we are not there yet. And no motion to that effect is pending before the European Council (the meeting of heads of state and government). The treaty also recognizes the specific character of some member states' defence policies, for example neutrality or their relation with NATO.

But it is the legal basis for the next step. The 27 member states clearly and in a legally binding form commit themselves to a perspective for common defence. So it remains a question of when, rather than if. In the meantime, the work will continue within the established structures of the European Union.

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