



Chairman of the European Union Military Committee

Migration and CSDP – A role for the military?

The "*halcyon days*" are over. What was described as a "*period of peace and stability unprecedented in European history*"¹ has been succeeded by times of fluidity, volatility, turbulence and instability. The security environment along the eastern and southern European borders has severely deteriorated. We live in challenging, or "*interesting times*", as a well-known English expression has it.²

The continuous conflicts in our immediate neighbourhood and in the regions beyond them have dramatically altered the security climate. Protracted conflicts, state institutions' collapse, economic downturn, political, ethnic or religious persecution by authoritarian regimes or terrorist organizations, high rates of unemployment, each one of these reasons and their cumulative results force millions of people to flee their homes, seeking shelter and a better life either in safer areas in their countries or escaping abroad to an uncertain future. The exodus of these people results in massive flows of refugees and immigrants, multiplying the so far documented and expected ones. The enormous pressure suddenly applied to the frontal EU Member States, namely Greece and Italy, tested the limits of the existing infrastructure and state institutions as well as the cohesion of the societies. The phenomenon of migration evolved from being a challenge to European countries into dangerously reaching the threshold of becoming a threat to the European Union, as the immense dimensions it suddenly acquired have put the Union's fundamental values, such as unity and solidarity, under enormous stress, or even question. Consequently, addressing migration as just a humanitarian crisis with internal (to the EU) dimensions failing to acknowledge its external dimensions, is not adequate.

The European Union's response to this challenge encompasses all the unique characteristics of the Union: it is multi-level, multi layered and multi dimensioned. It mobilises and uses all available policies and instruments. Therefore, the military instrument could not be absent. EUNAVFORMED Operation Sophia presents a well-designed, gradually evolving operation that builds experience and a knowledge base before proceeding with the assumption of additional and more demanding tasks. Under its mandate, recently extended until 27 July 2017, two supporting tasks have been added by the European Council, namely, the training of the Libyan Coastguard and Navy and the contribution to the implementation of the UN arms embargo on the high seas off the coast of Libya. These additional tasks represent a move forward in the involvement of the EU military instrument in addressing the migration challenge. The

¹ European Security Strategy, 2003

² "*May you live in interesting times*", often referred – mistakenly - as a Chinese curse

Operation will continue to perform its original tasks, contributing to the disruption of the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks in the Southern Central Mediterranean and preventing the further loss of life at sea. Tasks that are arguably focused on managing and reducing the migratory flows, by elevating the risk factor to the smugglers.

The added tasks though are different in nature: they aim at Capacity Building and at denying the various armed groups an easy access to the means used to spread terror and chaos. This is an evolution for the military-domain's contribution to tackling migration, moving from short-term managerial tasks to mid-term substantial ones. It is also an acknowledgement of the wide range of tasks the military can perform.

In the Aegean Sea, migratory flows reached unprecedented levels in 2015. The EU response was prompt and decisive. Although Germany and Greece turned to NATO for military assistance in order to manage the monitoring of these flows, this was largely due to the fact that it also required the involvement of Turkey, a non-EU NATO member. FRONTEX, already active in the Aegean contributed to this effort, sharing with NATO the experience its extensive experience. It is though the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement that effectively put a stop to the continued flows.

Contrary to the general belief, Operation Sophia is not the sole EU effort in the military domain to address migration. It is the only executive operation and as such, it attracts the beams of publicity. And rightfully so. Each one of the lives saved in the waters of the South Central Mediterranean pays compliment to the humanitarian nature of the EU and underscores its determination to uphold its fundamental values. At the same time, our Training Missions in the Central African Republic, in Mali and in Somalia, continue to work methodically and quietly to strengthen the foundations of the local security Institutions, making them modern and accountable. These very institutions will assume the responsibility of creating a safe and secure environment for the citizens and prepare the favourable conditions for development to return in these countries. Building local-owned capacities to provide sustainable security both locally and regionally is one, if not the most important, prerequisite for development efforts to flourish. Succeeding in this, it will remove some of the pressures that lay behind irregular migration.

From a military point of view, this is the next and most decisive step in tackling migration: to deconstruct the smugglers' "Operational Triangle".³ Departing from just denying the various criminal organisations and networks the opportunity to take advantage of *people in despair* and disposing of some of their means, we focus on denying them exactly their "*raison d' être*": the very existence of *people in despair*. To achieve that, we need to transform them to *people with hope*. To people who will no longer seek of ways to flee from their country because they do not have any viable alternative there. To people who will choose to stay and work to fulfil their dreams instead of setting out into a perilous trip with an uncertain end. This is a comprehensive approach from a military perspective to stem the contemporary immense and

³ A triangle composed of Opportunity, Capability and Intent. The removal of any side of the triangle is a showstopper for the criminal operations. Initial stages of EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia obstructed the Opportunity and Capability sides of the triangle.

uncontrolled migratory flows to normal and manageable levels; flows that will be channelled through mutually agreed and formally established legal avenues between the European Union and the respective countries of origin.

The described end-state is revealing of the civilian-military dimension of the challenge. Our Training Missions in Africa, in cooperation and in conjunction with other actors on the ground, be they EU civilian actors, the United Nations or others, contribute to the achievement of this very end-state. It is not an easy task and it certainly is not one with a foreseen end-date. By continuous monitoring of our performance and of the local needs as they develop, we are able to make changes as appropriate, in order to be always as relevant and supportive of the overall effort as possible, within the limits of our mandates. The results achieved so far strengthen our persistence and our commitment to the objective.

The recently presented EU Global Strategy puts a new, totally justified emphasis on CSDP. The tools that will put flesh on the bones of the Global Strategy are mostly available. They need to be better applied; maestrically conducted; fine-tuned and complemented by additional ones in specific areas where a gap has been identified or an unforeseen need has arisen.

It has been argued that “Common Security and Defence Policy has come closer to the European borders”.⁴ This should not be of surprise. The European Union's Security Strategy is explicit in stating that “[t]he European Union will promote peace and guarantee the security of its citizens and territory”. CSDP missions and operations serve exactly this purpose, deployed at the heart of instability, addressing its root causes and mitigating the consequences before they reach the European borders. Building upon the provisions of the founding Treaties, a deepened cooperation in the military domain among Member States will provide the European Union with an upgraded and more effective instrument in its toolbox, to meet the expectations of the European citizens and the objectives set.

⁴ “A Stronger CSDP: Deepening Defence Cooperation”, Clingendael, January 2016