



**The Chairman of the European Union Military
Committee
General Claudio GRAZIANO**



UK HIGHER COMMAND AND STAFF COURSE

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Good morning everyone.

I am pleased to join you here, today, to present you the EU Military Committee and its role for the European Union. Considering the level of your experience, I am also looking forward to a stimulating discussion at the end of my introduction.

The aim of my presentation today is to introduce you to the role of the Committee I chair, and discuss about the major work strands we are dealing with, also in reference to the security scenario affecting Europe and its neighbourhood.

The EUMC is composed of the Chiefs of Defence of all 27 EU member states who convene personally or through their Military Representatives.

The Committee was set up by a European Council Decision in January 2001, and it ensures that the voice of the end-users of military capabilities is heard among the EU institutions and that it is incorporated into the decision-making process at all stages and levels of the evolution of the Security and Defence Policy.

I also act as the spokesperson for the Military Committee and as such I attend the Council meetings when decisions with defence implications are to be taken, as it was the case a week ago, during the Foreign Affairs Council meeting discussing the crisis in Libya, on which I will come back later.

I am the Military Advisor to the High Representative and act as the primary point of contact for all Operation Commanders.

A very practical example of the key activities in which the EUMC have been involved is the development of EU current master document, the Global Strategy, from the conceptual phase to the ongoing implementation.

The EU Global Strategy underlined the need for greater responsibility in matter of security and defence.

We raised the level of ambition of the European Union, to become an active and effective player in the overall security scenario, consistently with the evolving and new threats, challenges, but also opportunities.

To achieve the objectives of this strategy, it's important to highlight that the EU can count on a large and unique set of tools, from the political to the diplomatic, from the economic to the military, in what we call the Integrated Approach.

An approach that sees in the hard power a key instrument for crisis management.

In fact, one point must be clear: there are no military solutions to crises, but no solutions can be found without the proper use of the military tool, from the negotiating phase to the implementation and monitoring.

And I must say that never, like nowadays, the EU is called to apply its integrated approach, using all its tools at once, including the hard power, if it wants to be a credible global player in the specific field of security and defence.

In this regard, it must be noted that these days, the field of security and defence is on top of the agendas almost all the time on EU discussions' tables.

In fact, 2020 did not start very well, unfortunately.

The events in Libya and Iraq were not a surprise, as we knew the symptoms were there.

But is the magnitude of their medium and long-term effects that remain to be discovered, and represent an element of serious concern, a threat to be tackled with a renewed sense of urgency.

In fact, both those crises may have, or I say, will have many direct repercussions, regionally but also for the whole international community, as the future of Europe goes also through Libya and connected regions like the Sahel.

A combination of the Butterfly Effect, with problems originating far away reverberating on us, along with the Domino Effect, where crises cause other crises.

We are talking about new threats, hybrid, asymmetric by definition, adding to the traditional ones - that still exist - most of which now coming from the south, from Libya to Sahel, pushing us to rebalance our attention in the direction of the immediate danger, what I call the triangle of instability made of:

- International terrorism;
- Increased and irregular migration waves,
- and degraded security in the whole region, with failed states and lack of governance.

There is a war. And it's right at our doorstep.

And to complicate the already chaotic situation, we have state actors seeking a new role in the area (like Russia or Turkey, or maybe China), creating de facto extra incognita, pursuing their strategies, often filling gaps left by others.

For this and many other reasons, there is a need for an urgent and strong reaction, before the situation reaches a point of no return.

In fact, while it is now obvious that no single nation (without second interests!) is fitted (or legitimated!) to take on board all these challenges, the European Union is the organization best positioned to be proactive in these situations.

What we need is a stronger European Union, which knows how to use the language of power, also to avoid - I repeat - that the security vacuum unfilled by UN, EU or NATO becomes the target of single actors.

Of course, we could have done it many years ago.

But it's never too late, and the EU must not miss this opportunity.

Also by using the military component as an enabler: in fact, history teaches that when we seek for diplomatic solutions between contenders, we often need to establish a security framework, monitor the situation or enforce a political decision, using military means, allowing dialogue to take place.

Let's look at the situation in Libya, for which we have answers at short, medium and long term, involving all the instruments of power available.

But if we focus on the short term, on what needs to be done now, we have two immediate issues to deal with: the arms embargo and the ceasefire.

As everybody would easily understand, both these immediate actions require an important involvement of military means.

You cannot just declare a ceasefire, or call for an arms embargo and leave!

You need to remain, protecting the conditions and monitoring the implementation.

In particular, for what it concerns the arms embargo, as Chairman of the Military Committee and military advisor to the High Representative, I had the opportunity to recall my position in several occasions: we can stop the flow of weapons only with a complete set of military assets, starting from ships, supported by a strong intelligence, aerial means and the use of satellites.

And I reaffirmed my military advice also last Monday, during the EU Foreign Affairs Committee, where the sense of urgency to intervene with proper military tools has finally been acknowledged by a political agreement.

What we need now is to quickly proceed with the establishment of the new mission, with a new mandate, specifically for the arms embargo, built on the experience of Operation Sophia, which proved very effective, when it was properly generated.

One critical aspect to stress is that the change from Operation Sophia to a new mission must happen in a smooth, seamless way, as there cannot be any gap in EU presence in the Mediterranean Sea.

The launch of this new mission will be a great opportunity for the EU to send a strong signal of cohesion, both for the contenders in Libya, and our partners: in time of crisis, we are capable to speak with a single voice.

Having said that, it is clear that if the EU wants to act now or in the future, confirming itself as a reliable, global security partner, it must possess both the capacity and the capabilities to do so.

As far as the capacity, we said it, the EU must show unity of intent, solve some ideological obstacles that hamper for instance the cooperation EU-NATO, and improve multilateral cooperation and partnerships with all relevant actors, willing to act in synergy for shared objectives.

But in order to become credible and be able to compete with our adversaries in the security scenario, we also need to have the proper tools and capabilities.

I must say, in the last 4-5 years the EU has done a huge amount of progresses, agreeing on a series of truly innovative security and defence initiatives.

In fact, also on the basis of the outcomes of the Headline Goal Process, which translates the EU's political level of ambition into military terms, we launched innovative initiatives like PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), CARD (Coordinated Annual Review on Defence) and the EDF (European Defence Fund). Let me briefly describe them to you.

I will start from PESCO, a framework to create a more integrated cooperation among Member States, by developing and acquiring defence capabilities and making those capabilities easily available for EU military missions and operations. It is a list of 46 projects, like the Eurodrone, the Combat Helicopter and the Integrated Unmanned Ground System - to mention a few.

We are talking about many opportunities for Member States to achieve needed capabilities in a joint manner, involving also industrial cooperation and the development of Centres of Excellence and Networking.

Then we have CARD, a useful tool that consists in mapping defence spending and capability planning by member states, in order to highlight areas at risk of duplication or opportunities for cooperation.

The process has been fully aligned with the NATO Defence Planning Process, in order to improve both mechanisms, providing better visibility on somehow parallel processes, helping nations coordinating their efforts, benefitting both the Union and the Alliance.

But among the mentioned initiatives, I must say that the EDF has attracted much interest, also by our Committee, for the great potential impact on the Europe of Defence.

The EDF is a mechanism designed to provide the means and the financial support in the field of research and development, making cooperation more attractive to participating states.

One of its clear objectives is to contribute to the improvement of European defence cooperation, avoiding waste of resources or duplication of efforts, including from an industrial point of view.

The EDF sets the ground for the EU Defence Industry to retain in Europe the know-how and those critical defence research and development capacities.

In this particular time, even thinking about cutting the budget for this initiative, which is instrumental for a long-term Strategic Autonomy, would send the wrong message about the project of a Europe of Defence.

And this allows me to introduce the concept of Strategic Autonomy.

I know that this notion has been used in many different fora, and it could create misperception and cause unnecessary controversy, especially in reference to the cooperation between EU and its main partner, NATO.

A misperception that, sometimes, has also been accompanied by unhelpful and divisive narratives about the creation of a European Army.

In principle, to act consistently with the commitments stemming from the Global Strategy, the EU has to take more responsibility.

For this, it needs to have greater autonomous capacity to conduct a wide range of military operations.

In few words, Strategic Autonomy is not the freedom from someone, but the freedom to do something, the capability to be able to act alone, if necessary, or better cooperate with partners.

Concerning the relationship between EU and NATO, the last Joint Declarations - confirmed by facts – aim clearly at strengthening such a cooperation in order to promote peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area and to improve the security of our citizens.

However, it is clear that the EU and its Member States have started a process of identifying their own strategic goals, and acting consistently for their achievement.

I do not see any contradiction in this process as it is not meant to compete with NATO, which simply wouldn't make sense as the two Organisations share basic values, interests and a large majority of their respective members, but rather to seek for complementarity with the Alliance.

This is not a zero-sum game, where putting more resources to develop the security and defence dimension within the EU means to take them away from NATO, but it is definitely a win-win situation for both Organisations.

In fact, since strengthening the European pillar is also a clear strategic goal for NATO itself and a long-lasting demand by the US, then it is clear that the EU defence initiatives are not undermining NATO, but rather reinforcing it.

In very simple words: what is good for the EU, is good also for NATO.

Military Mobility within and beyond the EU is an excellent example of such complementarity, as both EU and NATO have worked together in the early stages of the process of defining the military requirements, which are at the heart of the contribution provided by the EUMC to allow the Commission to advance its work.

Having said that, capability development and partnership are all functional and enablers for our military missions and operations, which in turn continue to provide high visibility to EU foreign policy.

As a quick overlook, let me recall where we are currently engaged, starting from the oldest operation, ALTHEA, in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The operation aims at contributing to a safe and secure environment, providing Capacity-Building and collective training to the local Armed Forces and supporting the overall EU comprehensive strategy for the country.

Moving South, we have the already mentioned Operation SOPHIA in the Mediterranean, designed to disrupt the business model of illegal smuggler and arms and human traffickers from Libya to Europe, but also involved in training the Libyan coastguard in order to build its capacity to counter illegal activities.

Then, Operation Atalanta in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, which has achieved excellent operational results over the 10 years, protecting World Food Programme transports and other vulnerable shipping from piracy at sea. The operation also offers an important platform for cooperation with Third States.

One aspect to note is that there is a Capacity Building component in all the operations.

And this is where the EU has found its autonomous space: while NATO is concentrating on Collective Defence, the EU can play a very effective role in helping countries to walk back on their legs, using all the tools at its disposal.

Of course, this is even more valid for the non-executive activities, EU Military Training Missions, in Mali, Central African Republic and Somalia, which are born to cover the Capacity Building objective, providing training to the local armed forces and advice to the military leadership.

Very important to note is the ongoing review of our training missions, possibly making them more robust, moving - for instance - from a basic training role to a mentoring and accompanying one.

I am referring to the training missions in the Sahel Region, but also in Somalia.

This would not only create more efficient military CSDP activities on the ground, but also create the perception of more influent and effective EU activities in the eyes of our partners, member states, international community and, why not, our adversaries and strategic competitors.

Additionally, raising our level of ambition for these missions - for which we have also established our own coordinating structure, the Military Planning and Conduct Capability - could better mobilize MS to contribute, providing a solution to the existing shortfalls in personnel.

Drawing from my personal experience on the ground as Battalion Commander in Mozambique, Multinational Brigade Commander in Afghanistan in NATO's ISAF and in particular as Force Commander for UNIFIL in Lebanon, I know very well the problems that force generation brings to the Commanders in the field.

In reference to this problem, let me recall the ongoing process of endorsing the European Peace Facility (EPF), an important initiative in this respect, with the aim to make a better use of the existing financing instruments, by establishing also a comprehensive funding mechanism, to make force generation easier.

Another observation based on my field experience is the fact that both EU and its Member States often are engaged in parallel in the same theatre. It becomes even more complex if there is a UN mission where EU Member States may provide significant troop contributions.

Mali, with the presence of MINUSMA, EUTM MALI and Operation BARKHANE, is an illustrative example. I think we need more reflection at the strategic level on how we can manage such circumstances in the best way.

Before leaving the operational domain, I would like to remind you that the EU is conducting also 11 civilian missions under CSDP. Some are police missions, some are capacity building missions, but they are all deployed in very challenging environments.

The ambition to enhance civil-military synergies is a distinctive feature of the Global Strategy. Better cooperation and coordination between the two distinctive, but complementary, elements will improve EU's Integrated Approach to external crises and conflicts.

And I conclude:

In the last 15 minutes or so, I gave you a description of what the EUMC does, with the main challenges we are facing and the measures we are taking to face those challenges.

I also tried to stress the sense of urgency that should drive our choices today, a sense of urgency that needs to be widely communicated and understood.

And in that context, I described as the EU, with its approach and capabilities, in cooperation with its partners could be the real game changer for the crises that are affecting our neighbourhood.

Before closing, in order to anticipate some questions, let me conclude with few words on BREXIT.

In my capacity as Chairman of the EU Military Committee, of course, I will limit my comments to the purely military aspects.

First of all, let me say that the magnitude of the effect that BREXIT will have on our daily work, on our CSDP Military Missions and Operations, is yet to be evaluated.

At Military Committee level, we greeted the UK MilRep few weeks ago, and we have lost highly qualified staff here in Brussels.

But from our side, we confirmed the commitment to continue to cooperate at best: as Chairman and as a soldier, my hope is that UK and EU will remain connected for common issues of concern, like the security domain, and opportunities, in the defence sector.

Thank you again, and I stand ready for your questions.