



## Chairman of the European Union Military Committee

### CZ Seminar on the Battlegroups – Opening Statements

#### *"More Usable EU Battlegroups for a Stronger CSDP"*

Brussels, 30 March 2017

Mr Ambassador,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is great to be here today and participate in this seminar whose aim is to provide answers to two big questions: Does the EU want to deploy its Battlegroups? And if yes, are the Battlegroups in their present form fit for purpose?

I know that the time is very limited and that everybody is interested in listening to ideas and answers to the questions set by the organisers. I will therefore skip a flash back on the events that led us here today, events that I am sure you are all aware of. I will only say that a draft military advice on the EEAS Food for Thought Paper produced by the EEAS is currently under silence procedure.

The Chair of the Seminar, Mr. Jan Jires asked us to contribute to this seminar in a *"comprehensive and open-minded manner"*. I intend to honour this request, offering you my **personal** views both on the problems that haunt the Battlegroups and on the form the Battlegroups should take if we actually want to transform them into something that would be fit to address the contemporary challenges Europe faces.

As I mentioned before, a military advice on the EEAS paper is under silence procedure as we speak. Since you are all familiar with the way the European Union works, you can read between the lines that this military advice is the least common denominator, the maximum common ground that 28 Member States have managed to reach on this subject. For this, I feel disappointed. I strongly believe that we, in a general meaning and not referring

to the military, have failed to embrace the spirit of the EU Global Strategy, adopt its vision, seize the opportunity and come up with bold and forward looking ideas for the development of an instrument that could serve as a Swiss multi tool in the EU's toolbox, strengthening its "Hard" power.

The Global Strategy calls for the enhancement of the deployability and interoperability of the Battlegroups. It also calls for the development of our capacity for rapid response by tackling the procedural, financial and political obstacles. The Council in its November 2016 conclusions confirmed that *"the EU's ambition remains to be able to respond with rapid and decisive action through the whole spectrum of crisis management tasks covered by Article 43 of the TEU"*. The tasking given was *"to present proposals by mid-2017 on strengthening the relevance, usability and deployability of the EU's Rapid Response toolbox, including the EU Battlegroups – particularly to reinforce their modularity, their preparation and their effective financing"*. Five months later, the whole discussion has descent into the review of the Athena mechanism, by the end of this year. The short-sided perspective of the accountants has prevailed, putting an abrupt end to the vision of the Global Strategy.

But I truly believe that no battle is lost before it is given. The voices of those, of us, who still believe in a stronger Europe, need to be raised. It cannot be denied that the EU Battlegroups have proven to be a valuable tool for deepened multinational cooperation and achieving enhanced military interoperability within EU Member States and participating partners. This was half the task the Battlegroups were given, as they were also meant to serve as a rapidly available military force for EU operations. I would be happy to accept as the reason behind the zero-deployment track of the Battlegroups the absence of crises that would make their deployment necessary or even demanded. But this is not the case. The nature of the actual reasons is clearly stated in the Global Strategy. They are *"procedural, financial and political"*. Allow me to say that in fact they are only political, since if there had been the political will, financial and procedural obstacles would have been easily removed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We need to have two things in our mind:

- First, no two crises are the same; they always demand their unique mix of tools;
- Second, crises have the nasty habit not to provide advance warning, preferably more than six months so that we have the right Battlegroup in place.

The challenges our Union face have proven to be diverse and extremely adaptable to the changing circumstances. Our response has to incorporate the same characteristics; therefore, our tools have to be flexible and adaptable. I can see no better way to achieve this but to have a duo of heavy and light Battlegroups always available. This combination would provide the political leadership with the most suitable option to counter any possible situation. To further increase the suitability and adaptability to the situation at hand, modularity should be a key characteristic of these formations, allowing for their fine tuning in terms of composition and capabilities. We do not need to reinvent the wheel; NATO Response Force could serve as an example to build upon.

A lot of discussions have been made on the modularity issue. Modularity is not something new; it always existed. The situation is simple: if the need is for one Company to be deployed, then one Company will. Too much noise for nothing. I consider though useful to examine the situation we had during the first semester of 2016, regarding the Battlegroups. The two respective Battlegroups in readiness were:

- HELBROC, an airborne light infantry Battlegroup, built around the Greek 71 Airborne Brigade, and
- Visegrad 4 Battlegroup, a mechanised heavy infantry Battlegroup, based on troop contributions by the V4 countries.

There are a number of useful lessons to be extracted from this combination of Battlegroups. It offers an example of follow-on forces availability that would assist the light infantry Battlegroup should operational conditions demand so. Furthermore, it provides us with a "best practise" on the "building" of a Battlegroup, supporting the concept of Framework Nation. HELBROC is actually still there waiting for its next assignment, offering and

ensuring continuity, whilst the V4 Battlegroup has been totally dismantled, resulting in the loss of money, effort and experience.

Therefore, I propose the creation of a number of 6 to 8 Battlegroups, each build around a Framework Nation which would provide the core battalion, being on a stand-by period on a rotational basis. Contributing Member–States should be encouraged to engage the same units and formations every time so as to reduce training and certification efforts, further promote interoperability and a "team spirit" and foster a specific Battlegroup identity as a way of promoting continuity. However, some Member states prefer to engage a different unit every time. If this is the case, they should be allowed to do so displaying flexibility, since the capabilities of the Member States vary. Member States should offer specific capabilities instead of small units or even sub-units that would be integrated or embedded within larger ones.

Battlegroup certification should be performed by a multinational EU military body, adopting the example one can find in the civilian domain. As before, Member States that want and are able to nationally certify their own units, they should be allowed to do so. In general though, we should free ourselves from an obsolete way of thinking and focus on the objective: to make sure that the tool we make available for a specific task is actually up to it. If it is to be proved otherwise, it is better for this to happen during the training phase than after deployment. In this unfortunate case, some difficult questions might need to be answered to the national constituencies.

The current scenario for the use of a Battlegroup is to provide a bridging solution until a regular force generation process by the United Nations has been completed. Taking into account the complexities of this process, the required sustainability of Battlegroups should be extended to have the ability to provide the necessary support during a critical period that could extend beyond 120 days, if resupplied appropriately.

On the issue of financial support, I strongly believe that any possible use of the Battlegroups should be fully reimbursed. By this I mean fully financially supported by the European Union, leaving only personnel salaries and catering costs as a national responsibility. The financial system adopted by the United

Nations should be thoroughly examined and applied to the maximum possible extent.

Last but not least, I find it completely awkward for an international actor who is so much dependent on the seas and even has a Maritime Security Strategy that states exactly this, not to have an instrument to protect and to promote its very vital interests in this critical domain. I refer off course to the absence of a Naval Battlegroup, something that I personally find incomprehensible and unacceptable. At a time when an EU Border and Coastguard has been created, at a time when two of our Operations are maritime ones, we have not yet embraced the fact that a Naval Battlegroup is something that is missing from our toolbox.

I will stop here and leave the floor to your panellists who, I am sure, will stimulate discussions. I am looking forward to a fruitful exchange of ideas. I will only add this last thing to my previous remarks: Battlegroups were designed to be primarily a rapid response tool. As such, we need to address the reasons that prevent them from being firstly, responsive and secondly, rapid in doing this. Because if they are not responsive, they do not qualify to be regarded as a tool anymore. And because if they are not deployed rapidly, there looms the danger of their becoming irrelevant, if not useless. In this context, this seminar comes in a very timely manner to contribute to the ongoing effort towards this very direction, and for this I need to thank the Czech authorities for taking this initiative.

Thank you.

Edited by Captain (GRC/N) Vasileios Loukovitis