Chairman of the European Union Military Committee

CEUMC Points at the Annual Baltic Conference on Defence 2017

Panel II: "Resources and Political Will-It takes two to tango"

Tallinn, 06 September 2017

Thank you Tony,

First of all, I would like to thank you and the organisers of this Conference for inviting me here today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Security and defence constitute the hard core of the national sovereignty of every nation, therefore, any discussions about cooperation or integration at the strategic level automatically become hot and sensitive. A number of sensitive issues, some of which are left unsaid, sometimes become show stoppers. We usually talk about different threat assessments and different national interests depending on which part of Europe we are looking at. We see diverging priorities when it comes down to defence procurements or capability development. And although we all understand that the need to preserve national SMEs, both for security of supply reasons but also for the preservation of jobs, is a driving factor, not much has been done in this direction. To all the above, one might add the different perspectives between North and South, East and West, as well as those between small and big Member-States.
This is the political landscape and although the values that unite us are stronger, bigger and more important than our differences, it is always very difficult to find the political common ground among 28. It will take a lot of effort, lucrative incentives and convincing reassurances about an end-state that will address all these and other sensitivities to achieve a genuine political agreement on all these issues at 28.

On the issue of resources, things are worse. According to the Treaties, no funds can be allocated to military purposes. So, the EU, all helpful and generous when it comes to offering humanitarian and development aid, is not allowed to allocate funds to its own missions and operations. The very missions and operations that pursue the same goal: bring security, growth and prosperity to these people! EU is not allowed neither to cover their operational needs nor to equip its partners for their security purposes. Our efforts through the ATHINA mechanism do not fill the gaps we encounter and CBSD has not brought any results either. Neither will the upcoming review of the ATHINA mechanism solve the problem. It seems that getting funding directly from the Member-States is the solution. Sometimes it works. Most of the times, it doesn't. The basic NATO principle, "Costs lay where they fall", is OK with NATO, but not with us, because we have to deal with crises instead of all-out wars. The subsequent will of the Member-States to spend becomes very limited.

From my point of view, two are the main challenges that we have to tackle: first, develop the necessary capabilities to be in the position to realise the agreed Level of Ambition. This entails that a strong political will, will be displayed to overcome the obstacles and the institutional push-back that is expected at the national level. This political will should take the form of allocating adequate funding to the realisation of whatever commitments will be agreed upon.
The second challenge is to develop a mentality that will allow the use of these capabilities, when the conditions call and justify their use. The Battlegroups' history should serve as a lesson of how a tool created with enthusiasm and ambition became blunt, victim of the lack of political will to use it. To be more specific, the political will that led to their establishment, vanished when the estimated cost for its use was presented. A financial cost, as well as a political cost of any potential casualties that might occur. And I stress here that unless we are willing to use whatever capabilities we develop, and these are political decisions, we should not embark on this endeavour to create them. At least this way we will not put our credibility at risk.

Most of the times, insufficient funding of our military responses to crises and lack of political will, come hand in hand. Member-States which have the obligation to honour their commitments at a certain period, when they realise that the time to pay the resulting financial and political cost has come, they refrain to political excuses and exercise political manoeuvres to avoid the fulfilment of their obligations. And they succeed. Sometimes the most volunteering Member-States to contribute to an EU military action are the ones which have no obligation or intention whatsoever to participate significantly.

But I should not be misunderstood. We are in a positive spin. It seems that this concern of mine, the one about the existence of genuine political will to go all the way, has been answered in a positive way, judging by the progress achieved so far in the various defence related work-strands. The **Level of Ambition** of the EU Global Strategy, determined by the November 2016 Council, and more specifically, the types of possible military operations deriving from it, provide us with the guidelines to work with. And we do that,
avoiding overlapping with NATO. Specific capability requirements remain priority areas for the EU. The acknowledgement of the fact that there is a single set of forces, as well as a single pool of funds, leads to increased efforts to ensure the maximum effectiveness and coherence of output between the Member-States.

The same is true about defence spending. I will not repeat the 2% pledge since this is a NATO issue. But let me be clear here: Europe needs to invest more for its defence. I can tell you one thing: defence does not come cheap, but it can come cheaper if we join forces, plans and efforts. As we all understand, this again is a serious political issue. I strongly believe that the future lies in cooperation among Member-States, and cooperation is also a genuine political issue. The EU Military Committee is the appropriate forum for such discussions to take place among those who combine the expertise and the responsibility to advice accordingly their political leaderships.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In our endeavour to build the future of the European defence, we should not forget to upgrade our existing tools. The Battlegroups are here and they have matured as a concept. It is true that they have not yet proved their effectiveness on the ground, but they were never given a chance. We should enable them to perform their task as designed, if and when the conditions are met. The obstacles that prevented their use so far are all well identified. Let us remove them now. And let us find out if these were the real obstacles or just excuses in order to remain at a safe distance from the crises they were supposed to address.

This leads me to the title of this panel: Yes, resources, funding force generation, capabilities, military cooperation, all need the proper political will in order to tango, or even to walk. But, as I said
before, all Member-States of this Union share the same values and principles. They approach contemporary world affairs through the same free-world ideology. Therefore, I remain confident that we will be successful in all our efforts to build a European defence that will last. We definitely deserve a stronger, safer and more secure Europe. This is the challenge that European Union's new tools, Permanent Structured Cooperation, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence and European Defence Fund need to address. A balanced and fine-tuned approach may be the best way to achieve lasting buy-in. An approach that will lead to an inclusive and ambitious PESCO, informed by the CARD and supported by the EDF.

Thank you.

Edited by Captain (GRC/N) Vasileios Loukovitis