

Franco-German tandem in EU's security policy – industrial interests and military differences

Justyna Gotkowska

On 26 September, two days after parliamentary elections in Germany, the French President Emmanuel Macron at the Sorbonne University in Paris presented his vision on how to reform the EU. His speech also included proposals on security and defence, such as creating a European military intervention force and a common EU defence budget. Germany's response to Macron's vision will be crucial. So far, security and defence has been one of the few areas, in which France and Germany could find common ground and present joint proposals in the EU in the last years. This was possible despite substantial differences in the strategic cultures of both countries that adversely affected bilateral military cooperation. Current French proposals on strengthening European military cooperation reach beyond the existing compromise and will cause controversies in Germany. Even if they are included in some form in a possible Franco-German agreement on EU reform, they will not be truly supported by Germany. At the same time security cooperation between both countries will thrive in a different area – the arms industry.

French and German proposals in the CSDP

Franco-German discussions on strengthening security cooperation within the EU intensified after the Brexit referendum in 2016. Faced with a crisis of the European project, France and Germany wanted to show that more integration can be agreed upon and realised swiftly within the EU. EU's security and defence policy was one of the few areas in which Paris and Berlin were able to find the lowest common denominator. In 2016 the French and German ministers of foreign affairs and of defence put forward proposals that - with the support of the European Commission - stimulated the development of new initiatives in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). As a result, in 2017 the European Council decided: (1) to activate the permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) to make a more intense defence cooperation within a smaller group of member states possible, (2) to launch a European Defence Fund (EDF) to co-finance multilateral armaments and R&D programmes, (3) to introduce a coordinated annual review on defence (CARD) to coordinate the development of national military capabilities in the EU.

French ambitions with regard to enhancing the EU's security policy go far beyond that, as Macron's vision shows. According to the French President, the EU is confronted with the USA's gradual and inevitable disengagement from Europe and a terrorism phenomenon that is permanent in nature. For France, the southern neighbourhood emerges as the priority area

for the EU's security and defence policy. Therefore France endorses developing the EU's autonomous capacity for military action, complementary to NATO. Beyond supporting the existing CSDP initiatives - PESCO and the EDF – Macron advocates for creating a European intervention force, a common defence budget and a joint military doctrine.

Limits for Franco-German military cooperation

In spite of putting forward joint CSDP proposals in the last two years, the French and German goals in developing the EU's security and defence policy differ substantially. France is interested in creating financial and military instruments and mechanisms that could be used in crisis management operations in the EU's southern neighbourhood (Africa, the Middle East) to complement French security and defence policy. Paris therefore advocates ambitious goals in developing the CSDP. It wants to create a smaller and more exclusive group of member states that is politically and militarily ready to integrate and to jointly conduct military interventions. It also aims to provide more financial support for such operations from the common EU budget. Germany, reluctant to use military instruments in solving regional crises and conflicts, is interested in developing the EU's security and defence policy for quite different reasons. On the one hand, Berlin sees a general need to enhance Europe's military capabilities, also due to being faced with pressure from the USA. The narrative supporting more military integration in the EU (and not in the unpopular NATO) is used partly for domestic reasons – in order to generate popular support for strengthening the Bundeswehr and increasing military spending. On the other hand, by promoting in the EU concepts of the structural integration of the armed forces with the Bundeswehr as the core of (regional) military cooperation, Germany wants to enhance its own political, military and industrial position. It seems however that Berlin is more interested in creating such integrated structures (and improving its own position) than in making them operational.

Due to these differences Paris has in recent years treated the United Kingdom as its priority partner for both crisis management operations, and training and exercises. The bilateral military cooperation developed swiftly after signing the Lancaster House Treaties in 2010. At the same time Berlin has concentrated on pursuing military integration with smaller partners from Benelux, and Northern and Central Europe. Strategic differences between Paris and Berlin have proved to be an obstacle for deepening bilateral military cooperation. The flagship cooperation projects like the Franco-German Brigade and the Eurocorps have been more important to Berlin - as a symbol of German-French reconciliation and maintaining peace in Europe. For Paris the value of these symbolic projects, which have not been used fully operationally, has been of diminishing importance. Therefore in 2013 France decided to dissolve the 110th Infantry Regiment based in Germany as a part of the Franco-German Brigade. In 2016 the French and German parts of the Brigade were subordinated to the French and German national division headquarters.

The discrepancies between Paris and Berlin involve also the perceptions of threat and challenges. Africa and the Middle East have always been strategically important for France and from the French perspective require French (and European) military interventions in case of crises or conflicts. In turn Germany, after the Russian annexation of Crimea, has embraced the need to slowly return to the national defence model of the armed forces. In NATO, Germany declared it was willing to adjust the Bundeswehr to the NATO defence

planning process (with the defence of NATO's eastern flank in focus). The gradual readjustment of the German armed forces to the new realities on the eastern flank is to be sealed in the new concept of the Bundeswehr to be published soon. In the EU, Germany has also favoured a more inclusive model of European defence integration within the permanent structured cooperation in order to make it an EU-wide political project and partly to oppose the French ambitions. Germany has expanded its military involvement in Africa in recent years (with 1,000 German soldiers currently serving in Mali in the EUTM and MINUSMA missions), but it is still limited to the training, transport or protection of personnel. Germany has also been ready to cooperate with France on supporting the armed forces of the countries in the Sahel region in combating transnational terrorism with training assistance or arms deliveries. The European intervention force, the common defence budget and the EU's military doctrine as suggested by President Macron will hardly find acceptance in the new government in Berlin, in which a member of the Green Party will most likely head the Federal Foreign Office. The Greens support strengthening cooperation within the EU but they oppose military interventions while also favouring the use of soft instruments like development and economic cooperation. However, it cannot be ruled out that some of Macron's proposals on European defence may be softened and included in a wider future Franco-German agreement on the reform of the EU. However, it remains to be seen if they find EU-wide acceptance.

German-French industrial push in the EU

However, there is one area related to security and defence policy in the EU in which Paris and Berlin are united. Both strongly support the creation of a European defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB). Both countries want to create a common market for arms and military equipment, to introduce transparency in the national defence budgets and modernisation plans of armed forces, to provide EU funds for multilateral arms programmes, and to consolidate the European arms industry. New CSDP instruments like PESCO, CARD and the EDF are geared towards this purpose (and others). Paris and Berlin want to create EU-wide champions that would be able to successfully compete with biggest arms industries from outside Europe. Hence, the CSDP initiatives will most likely favour the biggest defence companies from both countries and European groups with French and German shares. Specialised and technologically advanced firms from other EU member states could find their share in their supply chain. For smaller and technologically less advanced companies, however, such a vision would mean a gradual ejection from the European arms market.

After Brexit, Paris and Berlin perceive each other as priority partners in armament cooperation as shown in an ambitious cooperation plan presented after the meeting of the Franco-German Defence and Security Council on 13 July this year (the Council includes the French President, German Chancellor, ministers of foreign affairs and defence, General Inspector of the Bundeswehr and Chief of the Defence Staff of the French Armed Forces). The plan lists several armaments projects that France and Germany want to pursue jointly: a new generation main battle tank and artillery system, a maritime patrol system, a European UAV, a new generation fighter jet. Some proposals are not new (main battle tank, UAV), some are a novelty (new generation fighter jet). It remains to be seen whether the projects

will be implemented, the Council's conclusions do however show the Franco-German ambitions in shaping the future of the European arms industry.

After the wave of consolidation in the West European arms industry that resulted in creating the EADS group in 2000 (rebranded as Airbus Group three years ago) and establishing the MBDA group in 2001, the next consolidations are on the horizon. The first step was the merger of Germany's KMW with France's Nexter – companies producing systems for the land forces (KNDS Group is now responsible for the project of the next generation main battle tank). From Germany's perspective there is no retreat from European consolidation in the arms industry, as stated in the government's strategy of 2015. Both Berlin and Paris will try hard to maintain and enhance (jointly) their position in this sector.