

## CSDP on the Brink

### The Importance of Bringing France and the United Kingdom Back In

Ronja Kempin / Nicolai von Ondarza

The Lisbon reforms were aimed in particular at making the EU a more coherent and capable foreign policy player. Yet, in the face of the upheavals in its southern neighborhood, the EU and its Member States have not succeeded in crafting a common response nor have they jointly addressed the resulting challenges. To the contrary: in responding to the conflict in Libya, EU Member States have publicly taken opposing positions, bypassed High Representative Ashton and plunged the EU into another crisis. To prevent the ongoing erosion of the Union's security and defense policy, decisive policy measures are urgently needed. Here, the cooperation of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom will play a key role. Paris and London will only agree to strengthen the EU framework, however, if policy makers in Berlin are willing to make a substantial contribution to the military dimension of the CSDP.

The recent uprisings in the Arab world have made it all too clear how far the EU states really are from an effective and coherent Common Foreign, Security and Defence Policy (CFSP/CSDP). Up to now, the EU Member States have only produced isolated unilateral or bilateral responses. This was true of the EU response to the overthrow of the governments in Tunisia and Egypt as well as to the civil war in Libya and to the violence of other Arab countries' regimes against their own populations. The Member States are systematically failing to fulfill their obligation to coordinate their positions and policies. Europe suddenly finds its immediate neighborhood in flux and its strategic environment being radically redefined, yet it has not succeeded in

formulating unified positions that all 27 Member States can support.

The reforms of the last decade were designed to enable the Union to cope with precisely situations such as these: the High Representative and the European External Action Service (EEAS) were given responsibility for ensuring that the various strands of EU foreign policy—CFSP, neighborhood policy, migration policy, etc.—all work together. The CSDP was supposed to provide the EU with civilian and military capabilities to respond quickly and effectively, especially when—as with the interventions in Libya—the UN has issued a clear mandate, immediate European interests are concerned, and the USA does not want to become directly involved.

Yet the recent crises have revealed, first, that institutional reforms are not enough to solve the basic problems of EU foreign and security policy. The High Representative can only take action after the conclusion of, in some cases, highly protracted consultations with the Member States. Many of the EU's reactions to the rapid political developments in the Arab countries therefore came too late, were too timid, and thus did not bring about any tangible results. Furthermore, with the appointment of Catherine Ashton, a politician was appointed to the office of High Representative with little political backing from the Member States. Especially in essential moments of the crisis, the national governments were not willing to grant her the political mandate for taking decisive and pro-active action.

Second, the large Member States in particular have sought to advance their interests outside the EU framework. Whether in Tunisia, Egypt, or Libya, individual heads of state and government have pushed ahead without waiting for agreement on a joint EU position or involving the High Representative. This has made it very difficult to reach common EU positions.

Third, the operational weaknesses of the CSDP have become apparent once again. EU military intervention in Libya was never up for serious discussion. Even if there had been the necessary political will to carry out an EU operation, it could never have been accomplished without an autonomous EU Headquarters. More than ten years into the development of CSDP, the only viable options for large-scale military operations are those coordinated by NATO or in coalition with the USA, even in the direct vicinity of the EU. The American reluctance to become directly involved in the Libyan conflict brought home to the EU Member States that Europe's immediate periphery is rapidly decreasing in strategic importance to Washington. Although the Obama administration hesitantly expressed its willingness to participate in enforcing the

UN Security Council Resolution 1973, the US refusal to take on military or political leadership shows the Europeans that they will have to solve future security policy conflicts on their borders themselves.

### **The effects of past crises**

In the past, the EU has been able to make use of similar kinds of crises so that it emerged from them stronger. In 1999, the Member States created the European Security and Defence Policy to overcome the EU's inability to effectively address the conflicts in the Balkans. In 2003, the split that had opened up within the EU over the war in Iraq provided the impetus for the Union to define its strategic objectives in the European Security Strategy (ESS). At the same time, reforms were proposed in the European Convention, which led, through the Treaty of Lisbon, to the creation of both the office of High Representative and the EEAS.

The most important precondition for overcoming these crises was the constructive cooperation of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. In 1998, Paris and London signaled their willingness to work together to develop an independent military capability for the EU. In 2003, Germany, France, and the UK agreed on series of initiatives to invigorate the CSDP. These included the first autonomous EU operation in Africa, the debate on the ESS, and the formation of EU Battlegroups.

### **Paris and London distance themselves from the CSDP**

The current political debate, however, reveals a distinct lack of political will to revitalize the CFSP/CSDP, especially among the "big three." The different positions taken over the Libyan question indeed show just how far Berlin, on the one side, and London and Paris, on the other, are drifting apart on security and defense policy questions.

In security and defense policy, the "Berlin-Paris axis" began to weaken signifi-

cantly beginning at the latest in 2008. While France returned into the integrated military structures of NATO, it had great ambitions for the CSDP during its EU Council Presidency in the second half of 2008. From a political standpoint, President Sarkozy had expected that Germany would support the idea of reinvigorating the CSDP. His flagship projects—a revision of the ESS and the further development of military capabilities—failed, however, not least due to Germany’s reticence. In 2010, efforts made by the two defense ministries to work more closely in developing military capabilities went nowhere.

Since then, German government has given mostly verbal expression to an interest in working harder to advance the CSDP. In November 2010, Germany and Sweden released a “Food for Thought” paper entitled “A European Imperative: Intensifying Military Cooperation in Europe—‘Ghent Initiative’.” In December 2010, the foreign and defense ministers of the Weimar Triangle countries wrote a joint letter to Catherine Ashton, urging more concrete results in the development of capabilities in the CSDP under the upcoming Polish Presidency. The German-Swedish proposals for the pooling and sharing of defense capabilities, however, have failed to live up to French ambitions, being aimed primarily at training, logistics, and command structures. These proposals do not address capacities for medium- to high-intensity military operations, which the French consider to be urgently needed. In addition, faced with the largest reform of the Bundeswehr’s history, the latest German “Defence Policy Guidelines” from May 2011 show that European capability development is hardly high up on the German defense policy priority list.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the Sarkozy government currently prefers London as its partner on security and defense policy. Shifting the center of gravity in European security and defense policy toward Anglo-French cooperation has become possible because the two

countries now stand much closer in their strategic orientations. While France has largely normalized its relationship to NATO, the decision makers in London have sought to reduce dependence on the USA. UK participation in military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan taught British government representatives that they could only influence Washington’s policies when working together with other partners. For this reason and faced with the deep defense budget cuts, the UK government stated in the October 2010 “Strategic Defence and Security Review” that it aims to seek intensified bilateral cooperation with France.

The new French-British bilateralism found expression in the treaties signed on November 2010 on the far-reaching defense and security cooperation. These treaties have support from all of the political parties in both countries. By way of bilateral cooperation among equals, Paris and London aim to ensure their ability to maintain core strategic capabilities even in times of intense pressure on defense budgets. Furthermore, in these treaties—in contrast to the 1998 agreement in St. Malo—they clearly rejected security and defense policy cooperation in the EU-27 framework. France and the UK are united in their desire to make Europe more capable of effective military action. For them, the CSDP is only useful if it can influence international policy in defense of Europe’s strategic interests. Thus, the message France and the UK are sending to their EU partners is this: they will continue on their course outside the EU framework if their partners do not demonstrate their commitment to achieving the goals for military capabilities re-emphasized under the French Presidency in December of 2008.

If France and the UK were to permanently distance themselves from the rest of the EU, this would have severe consequences for the CSDP. Without them, the other EU Member States would not even be capable of carrying out small-scale operations. Such an admission would mark the failure of

the EU's comprehensive security policy ambitions.

### **A difficult position for Berlin**

Against this backdrop, the question of how the CSDP can be guided out of the crisis becomes all the more pressing. The German federal government carries a great responsibility for this, since it will be impossible to halt the erosion of the CSDP without a resolute reaction from Berlin. At the same time, the German position on the Libyan crisis has further distanced Germany from France and the UK. Thus, Berlin will have to reach out to these two partners in the framework of the CSDP and give them a clear signal that the message contained in their increased bilateral cooperation has been understood.

Germany can only succeed in this if it demonstrates a clear commitment to improving the CSDP's capacity for effective action—both in the civilian and the military domain. Two consecutive steps are key to reinvigorating the CSDP. First, German leaders should consider how credible progress can be achieved in improving military capabilities in the CSDP framework. The Ghent process for the pooling and sharing of capabilities could be used as a starting point. At present, however, Berlin risks long-term damage to its own initiative. The German proposal of intensified cooperation in training, logistics, and command structures was viewed as inadequate in France. And the UK has shown little interest in supporting the process in its current form. After past disappointments with capability initiatives in the EU, skepticism has set in on both sides of the English Channel. Here, Germany has the opportunity to demonstrate a different course by contributing new initiatives to the process aimed at core strategic capabilities. In designing these initiatives, Berlin should cooperate closely with the High Representative and the European Defence Agency (EDA). This would also allow Germany to make an important contribution

towards ensuring that the new structures are both vital and meaningful. Further concrete steps should soon follow, for example, the revision of the Battlegroup concept and proposals for the use of Permanent Structured Cooperation.

In a second step, Berlin should work to convince France, the UK, and the other Member States to support the idea of developing strategic priorities for the CSDP, and thus to facilitate developments that would lead to the revised ESS. The strategic environment of the EU is changing rapidly. A joint analysis of this environment is therefore urgently needed, as is a perspective on the future security and defense policy priorities of the EU and its Member States. Not least in view of the current split over the Libyan crisis, such a strategic dialog certainly bears the risk of bringing differences between the Member States to the surface. It is therefore all the more important that, in the interest of the CSDP's long-term capacity for effective action, the strategic differences of opinion between the Member States are addressed at the highest political level of the European Council. With preparations conducted by the High Representative in cooperation with the Member States, this process could also strengthen the structures of the CSDP.

Both the reinvigoration of the Ghent initiative and an open strategic dialog require that Germany undertake serious efforts and make significant concessions to its partners. At the same time, both of these efforts are imperative if the erosion of the CSDP is to be brought to a halt. If the current course of restraint in security and defense policy is maintained, the project of an effective and capable CSDP will be exposed to incalculable risks. Only if Berlin acts rapidly and purposefully will it have a chance of reintegrating Paris and London into the EU framework and in leading the CSDP out of this crisis.

© Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2011  
All rights reserved

These Comments reflect solely the authors' views.

**SWP**  
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik  
German Institute for International and Security Affairs

Ludwigkirchplatz 3–4  
10719 Berlin  
Telephone +49 30 880 07-0  
Fax +49 30 880 07-100  
www.swp-berlin.org  
swp@swp-berlin.org

ISSN 1861-1761

Translation by  
*Deborah Anne Bowen*

(English version of  
SWP-Aktuell 25/2011)