

European defence, 'twixt the cup and the lip

Europe de la défense, loin de la coupe aux lèvres

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Pour l'Institut de coopération avec l'Europe orientale (ICEO) : **Pierre CHEVALLET**

As union means strength, and that grouping forces enables sizeable savings, all the EU countries should try to build a European Defence Community (EDC). Why is this 65 year-old idea taking so much time to become reality?

There is unfortunately a very plain reason for this: the extreme political, economical and military complexity hindering its application.

Political reasons : The political complexity for creating an EDC appeared as early as September, 1950, when the idea was first conceived.

In order to understand how the idea of an EDC appeared and was discarded, some key-dates must be reminded.

12/02/1948: The Prague “coup”

17/03/1948: The Brussels treaty adopts the idea of a military alliance between Europe and the USA

24/06/1948 to 12/05/1949: The Berlin blockade

04/04/1949: Birth of NATO (treaty signed in Washington)

29/08/1949: First Soviet atomic test in Kazakhstan

01/10/1949: Proclamation of the People's Republic of China

25/06/1950: Beginning of the Korean war

27/05/1952: The Paris treaty suggests the creation of the EDC

05/03/1953: Death of Stalin

07/05/1954: End of the battle of Dien Bien Phu

30/08/1954: The French MPs refuse to ratify the Paris treaty

05/05/1955: The German Federal Republic is allowed to create the Bundeswehr, which immediately joins NATO

14/05/1955: Creation of the Warsaw Pact

January 1956: The German Democratic Republic joins the Warsaw Pact

It is difficult nowadays to imagine that the USA impulse the idea of creating the EDC. After the creation of NATO, in April 1949, they were the ones who asked the European countries to create a supernational European army supervised by the Commander in Chief of NATO, himself being nominated by the President of the USA.

The USA have always been very pragmatic. When the Soviet ally and its communist satellites became the main enemies of the West, the Americans had few scruples to enroll any specialist and anti-communist expert whose know-how could be useful to them (Werner von BRAUN being of course the most famous example).

Until August 1949, the USA being then the only nuclear power, had such a strategic advantage that they considered it unnecessary to have a large number of divisions.

When the USSR also became a nuclear power, in 1950, it became an urgent necessity to have, close to the Iron curtain, as many conventional as possible, to avoid an eventual invasion by Soviet armoured divisions.

As both NATO and the EDC were to be under the tight control of the USA, the idea of an European army was not intended to give any military to a European Community to come. Its only goal was to enable to enrol German soldiers by by-passing the veto on German rearmament (FRG and GDR).

In her book published 2008, 'L'idée européenne au XXe siècle: Des mythes aux réalités', Elisabeth du REAU claims that, during a NATO meeting from 10th to 16th September 1950, Dean Acheson, Secretary of State, clearly asserted the American will : **"I want to see Germans in uniform by the autumn of 1951"**.

To reassure the more refractory NATO countries, it was decided that the German soldiers would not be grouped in a German army, but would be dispatched by battalions into the other national armies. Despite this, there was strong opposition in Germany and even more in France, to direct or indirect rearmament of Germany. In August of 1954, the French MPs refused to ratify the Paris treaty, thus putting an end to the EDC.

The failure of the EDC demonstrated that the Western European countries were unable to conceive a defence strategy without the USA. As R. Marjolin, one of Jean Monnet's main assistants, confessed in his memoirs: **"Europe's inability to unite was the result of the implicit decision made by the Europeans after World War II, i.e. to rely on the USA to defend them"**.

The signature of the Maastricht treaty, in 1992, relaunched the concept of a global European defence. This was confirmed in 2007 by the Lisbon treaty, but here again in the framework of NATO, that is to say, depending tightly on Washington.

Because of the great American brother's omnipotence, creating an EDC may long remain an unrealizable dream. Because of their own historical reasons, most of the 28 members of the Union think that it is impossible to create an EDC without the USA's protection.

Until recently, some aged Poles used to say: "Yes, yes, just like the French in 1939", to express to somebody that he was not trustworthy. They still were bitter against the promise to help that France had been unable to fulfill. It is not surprising that Poland took all necessary steps to join NATO in 1999, even before joining the EU in 2004, and that all new members until May 2004 did the same.

On March 16th, 1999, when the flags of the three new member states were hoisted in front of NATO's headquarters, Mr Javier SOLANA, NATO's Secretary General, declared: "The joining up of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic will mark history as a great step in Europe's trend towards cooperation and integration, **and no more reasons for division"**.

Just after the EU's enlargement in 2004, many political, economical and, later, military tensions appeared in central and oriental European countries, particularly in Georgia and Ukraine.

Speaking as I am to an audience of specialists, many of whom have witnessed with anxiety and even, for some, with pain, the end of the USSR, I shall not be impudent enough to put names on the people responsible for this.

So, no charges, but questions.

Since September, 2001, most of the Western armed forces are tangled up in many military operations, which have all turned up to be longer, more delicate and more costly than expected. Not one of these operations, even the most long-lasting ones, can be said to have definitely come to an end, nor even been merely restricted (Afghanistan, Iraq, Libia). By giving to their fights the most extremist religious character, the terrorists pretending to be Muslims are managing to attract a large number of applicants to martyrdom in the countries at war, and today in Europe.

Jihadism, a new form of nihilism, is presently THE main threat. Everything must be done to fight it efficiently. **The allied powers were unable to overthrow Nazism without Stalin's USSR. The Western countries will have outmost difficulties to eradicate jihadism without help from Putin' Russia. The present Ukrainian crisis cannot be solved if only central and oriental Europe is taken into account.**

Same causes, same results: just as the euro zone has met difficulties ever since it was created, due to the too large gap between the economies of the countries in the single currency zone, so would major dysfunctions occur in one single European army, due to the large range of differences in the operational levels and military cultures and above all because of **their governments' geopolitical and diplomatic concerns**.

There is presently a unanimous agreement that an EDC's goal should be not to built up **ONE SINGLE** European army but to coordinate the member states' defence policies.

So to do, a coherent European defence policy should be elaborated: that is, this policy should be really global and not just be the summing-up of the states' policies. Europe should determine its common good, which would go further than the nations' personal interests and thus optimize and pool up all of the 28's available military forces.

Since 1950, prerequisites for creating an EDC are still lacking. But many measures related to NATO's requirements have obtained positive harmonizations in the fields of procedures, equipments and weapons.

Economical reasons : Harmonizing equipments and weapons has unfortunately not gone far enough. The competition between European arm dealers, in too many spheres (worsened by 'national markets'), hinders the notion of EDC. It is especially unfortunate that all equipment and weapon factories in Europe were not enticed to apply an industrial and sales strategy such as the one used in the aircraft industry, with the wonderful success of Airbus.

Because of increasing costs of R & D in the field of equipment and weapons, their industries must cooperate, diversify themselves, or disappear. It is a paradox that many European arm dealers are leading fierce competition in the world market, whilst many European armed forces are constrained to buy a lot of equipment and weapons outside of Europe.

Except for the UK and France, no European army has a projection capacity. And even so, neither the UK nor France, who are the better off, can launch military operations if not helped by the USA and sometimes Russia.

Were there to be an EDC, it would be desirable that European armed forces be complementary and pool up their means and military equipments in a "Cooperative for the use of military equipments". This structure would be responsible for buying, with European funds, weapons and troop transport units that no European army could buy alone, and for a hypothetical use.

Our recommendations could make an EDC possible, but are derisory given the need for necessary changes. **The 28 member states shall show a real willing to build up an EDC only if they agree to have identical budget expenses in the defence field.** This is unfortunately far from reality – worse even, the gaps between defence expenses (in Gross national product percentages) are increasing more and more since 1989, between countries like Germany (who completely rely on NATO and have their military expenses by 55%) and the few countries, like France, who are trying to give their armed forces the means to obtain a minimum of autonomy.

Military reasons : After WW2, the world long remained **militarily** bipolar and the vocabulary binary (E/W). The European countries who were not in the Soviet block and wanted to stay out of it, had no choice but to become allies of the USA and be subordinated to them in the framework of NATO. No country nor coalition in Europe could seriously expect to oppose the Soviet Union's military and ideological power without resorting to the USA's incomparable military-industrial complex. Even in France, which had left NATO's integrated structure in 1966, under Charles de Gaulle's presidency, for the sake of national independence, most of the French high-ranking officers have tried to maintain close collaboration with the Atlantic alliance.

Since the fall of the Berlin wall, even though the world has become multipolar, the member countries of NATO have not thought it necessary to alter the aims and intervention conditions of the Atlantic alliance. The USA have of course no reason to change the rules of the game which have been, and still are, so much in their favour. But it is now time for the European countries to see the world differently, with a European brain with two hemispheres thinking in the same way.

During the cold war, the USA added a fierce ideological and mediatic battle to their armaments' race. In the binary logic of frontal impact, their 'spin doctors' have created language elements allowing to connotate the Western world in a positive way and the communist world in a negative way. Using the 'Storytelling

technique', the medias have shaped up in the Western imagination a 'key for reading' **criminalizing everything in the East and idealizing everything in the West.**

These media processings have proved their remarkable efficiency, but have had, and still have today, a perverse side-effect, because **the people in the West in general, and the Americans in particular, have ended up by confusing the stories they made up and told themselves, with reality.**

When the American general staffs imagine that they can easily hoist the flag of democracy wherever their soldiers set foot, **they are deluded by their own government's propaganda.** They are thus disregarding SUN TZU' recommendations, in his 6th century BC book, 'The art of war': "The good general has won the battle before giving it. The bad general gives battle with the hope of winning it".

To win battles before giving them, the opponent must be perfectly well known: one must eventually postpone a battle whose issue is uncertain.

But, for cultural and linguistic reasons, the Americans (and more and more Western people) are quite unaware of the world's complexity, and have but a biased knowledge of what they think alterity is.

Only if the European members of NATO retrieve a necessary freedom of thought can they make the Alliance benefit of their experience and rich diversity. This is why an EDC has a future and an interest only if created beside NATO.

Because of their mighty military and economic power, the USA are not ready to be prudent, and often seem to be **reading backwards** Clausewitz's sentence: **Politics follow war with other means.**

For our multicultural Europe, Islamism is the most awful and certain threat. Recent history teaches us that the jihadist violence cannot be eradicated by the sheer strength of arms. The Islamic State, or **Daech**, can be lastingly overthrown only by solving the social, societal, political and cultural problems that created it.

Last Sunday in Paris, a large heteroclite coalition was formed. Marshal Foch is supposed to have declared: "Now that I know what a coalition is, I admire Napoleon much less!"

We can but hope that the wiser of the coalized nations will be plucky enough to remind the more impatient of their partners that **a good ally is not the one who agrees to follow you in all your blunders, but the one who helps you not to blunder and, better still, the one who helps you to repair them by giving you his moral strength.**