



MEPs push for pooling and sharing military capabilities in the EU

Committees: Subcommittee on Security and Defence

EU defence ministers should give higher priority to pooling and sharing member states' military resources in times of tighter national budgets, said security and defence subcommittee MEPs on Tuesday. They also called for better coordination with NATO and more flexible use of EU battle groups.

Committee members said it was vital to further enhance cooperation between EU member states in the acquisition, use and shared management of military capabilities in separate discussions with European External Action Service (EEAS) Deputy Secretary General Maciej Popowski and Claude-France Arnould, Chief Executive of the European Defence Agency (EDA) together with Eric Huybrechts, Deputy Director of the Organisation for Joint Armaments Co-operation - OCCAR-EA.

Tunne Kelam (EPP, EE) regretted that defence ministers, at their informal gathering in Cyprus in September, referred only to a voluntary code of conduct on pooling and sharing. "Speaking about delivering and concrete results, they could not have been more vague," he said.

Luis Yáñez-Barnuevo (S&D, ES) favoured strengthening collaboration and complementarity between the EU and NATO. He stressed that the EDA has a role to play in improving interoperability. "We need to eliminate overlaps and the proliferation of expenses," he underscored.

Claude-France Arnould stressed that the EDA intended to work only on the capabilities for which member states wished to cooperate in terms of sharing and pooling. She highlighted the lack of air-refuelling capabilities as one of the "obvious and manifest gaps" in the EU, as the Libyan conflict had demonstrated. Ms Arnould also underlined that the US's expectation was very clear: Europe should "do more!" to develop European capabilities".

Andrew Duff (ALDE, UK) pointed out that despite good technical cooperation between NATO and the EU, "the political collaboration scarcely exists." He wondered whether a merger between EADS and British Aerospace could not do "more in an afternoon to bring about the integration of military industries than years of work by the EDA."

Battle groups – go for flexible use

"It is very bad for morale for member states to deploy their best troops to battle groups that are never used", said Janusz Zemke (S&D, PL). "We are keeping up a costly fiction. We should either use them or do away with this."

The EEAS's Maciej Popowski acknowledged a "widespread sense of frustration that the battle groups have never been used." One of the possibilities floated by the member states would be to use some elements of the battle groups instead of using them as a whole, he said.

Press release

Mr Popowski also pointed out that the European Council in December 2013 would be devoted to security and defence questions and he welcomed the work under way in the security and defence subcommittee, which would feed into discussions ahead of the meeting. The last time heads of state and government had had comprehensive discussions on defence was in 2008, he recalled.

MEPs to call for more efficient Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

The foreign affairs committee will adopt a non-binding resolution on the implementation of the CSDP on 25 October. It is being drafted by security and defence subcommittee chair, Arnaud Danjean (EPP, FR), and is set to call for a white paper on the security and defence of the EU, a deepening of the European industrial base, the acquisition of basic capabilities and the creation of an EU operational headquarters (OHQ) for operational planning and the conduct of military operations.

"Parliament is fulfilling its role when it maintains a high level of ambition," said Mr Danjean. "A white paper on European defence is important in this period of profound geopolitical and budgetary challenges," he argued. He also welcomed the impact of the civilian and military CSDP missions, which "must constitute part of the comprehensive approach" that MEPs will call for.

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