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NEW CONCEPTS OF EUROPEAN SECURITY STRATEGY

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In a rather subtle and silent way something new is showing up on the European Union's political stage. There are already several signs that we're moving step by step towards what Paul Cornish and Geoffrey Edwards in a recent essay call "a European Strategic Culture": an unexpectedly rapid and turbulent process of collective self-consciousness both for the leaders and the people of Europe (P. Cornish and G. Edwards, "Beyond the EU/NATO Dichotomy: the Beginnings of a European Strategic Culture", *International Affairs*, n. 3, 2001). If we reflect on the well-known fact that, till the beginning of the nineties, it was forbidden even to pronounce the word "defence" at EU (EC) level and that only in the Treaty of Maastricht of 1991 was prudent mention of the "eventual framing of an European Defence" inserted, we realise the long journey that we've made in a decade or so.

On one side, we now have some basic documents like the one released by the European Council in December 2003 on the European Security Strategy, under the impulse of EU High Representative Xavier Solana. At the same time, we now have important norms included in the recently signed Constitutional Treaty, like the so-called Solidarity Clause (art. I – 42) and the new articles on European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), which range from the mechanism of structured cooperation (a stronger version of the already known enhanced cooperation) to the European Armaments, Research and Military Capabilities Agency, which is becoming a reality before the end of the ratification process of the new Constitution.

On the other side, we are witnessing growing public awareness of the fact that the present new threats, due mainly to their non-traditional nature, have to be confronted with non-national security policies and instruments; terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, environmental disasters, international crime, regional conflicts are all phenomena which at the public opinion level raise a rather automatic reaction to have the issue addressed by international or European institutions. In a way, national politicians and leaders favour this public tendency to call upon the Union or the United Nations to take the lead of multinational operations.

In other words, in order to match the new emerging threats there is a clearer need for the Union to play a kind of function that "covers" national policies and interests. This tendency reinforces the prospect both of a European security culture and policy becoming reality.

Nevertheless we must admit that we're in the midst of an evolving process both in political and institutional terms, which still has to prove its value and effectiveness. ESDP policies and mechanisms of are far from being satisfactory. Many of them are still on paper (the new Constitutional Treaty, e.g.) and existing rules have not yet been fully tested in practice to demonstrate their usefulness. We need more time and efforts to give a credible answer to political and public requests for a common security policy.

In any case, the emerging concept of European Security Strategy already has some basic features on which we can build.

1. Defence is less territorial and more functional. It is sufficient to refer to the solidarity clause of the new Constitutional Treaty by which, in case of terrorist attack, the Union should try to protect “democratic institutions and the civilian population”. The aim, in other words, is more to keep a functioning system of governance than just territorial integrity. Besides: prevention, assistance and protection are exercised *in* the territory of the state under attack and not to the advantage *of* the territory (or territorial integrity) of a member state. Collective defence, as we know it, is not yet considered among EU competences for political reasons first, but also because the concept of European security is based on the “post-modern state” theory, where borders count much less than in the past and threats have to be faced everywhere. This approach brings us to say that security might even be placed beyond the territory of the Union in order to prevent terrorist threats internationally (as stated in the EU security strategy paper) through the use of networks of cooperative institutions and organs and not necessarily of military alliances. It is a defence strategy without predefined borders: “with the new threats the first line of defence will often be abroad”, says the new European concept of security.

2. In order to act more effectively in facing new threats, the European security strategy is largely based on the principle of consistency, where civilian and military means have to be used in parallel. In fact practically all documents underline that the internal and external aspects of security are indissolubly linked. What is emerging here is the old concept of consistency, both in terms of policies and institutions, which was mentioned for the first time in art. 30 of the Single European Act of 1986. At that time, there was a strong request for Community policies “to be consistent” with foreign policy activities. Today the extent of this concept is much broader than before and applies to various levels. Consistency has to operate:

- between internal and external security, that is with regard both to justice and home affairs (the third pillar of the existing Treaty) and the so-called Petersberg tasks, which relate to peace keeping and peace enforcing through military operations abroad; soft security and hard security constitute the two faces of the same medal, as is clear in the fight against terrorism;

- between the actions of the member states and those of the Union; with intergovernmental decision-making still active in some spheres, like ESDP, the need for strict coordination between national and common policies is self-evident. Governments have to refrain from taking action before a decision is reached in Brussels and should act in the framework of the existing Treaty rules;

- between different decision-making procedures and organs of the Union itself. The Council High Representative and the Commissioner for external relations (today the President), various Committees and working groups, Council and Parliament all have to contribute in a coordinated way to the development of the Union’s action. The post 9/11 response of the Union with the many measures taken in different fields of common competences provides a typical example of how to link together the policies of the existing three pillars successfully and how to coordinate national and Union instruments for the fight against terrorism.

3. The concept of European security is multilateral in character. From a political point of view, repeated references to the UN as a pivotal multilateral organisation underline the need to reassure member governments and public opinion of the consensual nature of the EU security strategy. The Strategy Paper states that the Union is “committed to upholding and developing International Law. The fundamental framework for international relations is the UN Charter. Strengthening the UN, equipping it to fulfil its responsibilities and to act effectively, is a European priority”. In addition, as mentioned above, basic decision-making rules of ESDP follow the traditional path of intergovernmentalism in practice allowing each member veto power, but also trying to avoid the dominance of a few countries over others and keeping decisions within a common institutional framework shared by all participants. Corrective procedural mechanisms like structured or enhanced cooperation, now extended to the defence field, do not hamper the multilateral and “democratic” regime of EU security strategy.

4. The European security concept is in principle autonomous. One of the main aims of the process of European integration, since its inception, has been to create an ad hoc identity for the Union. The progressive addition to the old communitarian and economic set up of a foreign and security dimension has helped the Union to reach partially its scope of becoming an international political actor. Through the Constitutional Treaty the Union has tried also to add legal status to its international role, in order to upgrade its international profile. Therefore it is only natural to see the EU search for autonomy. But what is interesting to note is that the EU’s move towards autonomy is not addressed to balance traditional military powers. Following its multilateral nature, the EU is making an effort to become a defence power of a new kind, not willing to compete with national military powers. This policy brings us back to the concept of post-modern state which, as described above, is more applicable to the nature of the process of European integration, where signs of sovereignty are not directly linked to either geographical borders or even a defence policy in the strict sense. Due to its peculiar character and objective limits, the EU avoids falling into the trap of the old fashion “balance of power” concept. To the contrary, it would like to become a model of cooperative security to be exported into other regions of the world.

5. Finally, the European security concept is meant to be complementary to NATO. Contrary to American fears, in theory and practice the objectives of the EU security strategy are to try to avoid duplications with NATO and in some cases even to substitute NATO missions without any risk of overlapping, as is now the case with the newly launched European missions in Bosnia and Macedonia. In reality, it has to be underlined that in the framework of the European Security Strategy, NATO remains an essential instrument for providing effective operability to ESDP tasks (use of NATO facilities and forces in particular conflict situations) and (still) represents the only mechanism for Europe’s collective defence. But NATO’s main function is to provide a vital link with the US, particularly in a time of difficult transatlantic relations and in absence of other bilateral mechanisms of consultation on security threats between the US and the EU. Finally, NATO can be seen as a source of security dialogue with Russia, enlarged to the American and the other European allies, in addition to the Union’s own strategy towards Russia. Therefore the Union’s search for autonomy is not de-linked from the recognition of strict complementarities and coordination with NATO.

In conclusion: the EU is progressively moving from a Security Community of peace among its members (particularly among the founding members of the old EEC) to a Secure European Union for contributing to the maintenance of international stability and order. But in this new shape it still shows some major limits:

- it has no collective defence capability;
- traditional defence policies remain national and may interfere with the Union's new security strategy; national defence doctrines and practices have not yet been fully updated to the new European defence posture and needs;
- the risk of directories, like the Big Three (UK, France and Germany), is still very high;
- the EU lacks planning capability, a necessary tool for making the EU security strategy effective and coherent;
- inconsistency is still the rule among EU institutions and member states;
- moreover, it is unclear what kind of threat (in terms of intensity and quality) or crisis would be considered European and activate the Solidarity clause;
- finally, links with the US national security strategy remain dubious and precarious and risk weakening a credible European contribution to the fight against commonly perceived threats.

Therefore, there are still some important questions ahead:

- how to fully translate the strategy security concept into credible and functioning policies and instruments;
- how this innovative European model of security strategy can play a visible and effective role in the international arena and to the advantage of a global security system;
- how our experience and emerging security model can help reform the old international security system;
- how we can avoid returning to the "balance of power" policy.

These questions have still to be answered. We need to study the European model carefully, to assess its originality and to propose its inclusion in a renewed global system, largely based on regional security areas. But first of all we have to make this model more credible. Its basis is already well conceptualised, but the concrete actions are still far from satisfactory.