

Keeping up the momentum on European defence



Looking back and moving forward with the Bulgarian and Austrian presidencies

Pilot-seminar co-organised by the EU Institute for Security Studies, Direction générale des relations internationales et de la stratégie (DGRIS) of the French Ministry of the Armed Forces and the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

13 June 2018 (11:00-16:30), 'Access Balard', Amphitheatre No1 (Room o.D.455), French Ministry for the Armed Forces, 60 boulevard du Général Martial Valin, 75509, Paris Cedex 15.

Final Report

The EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) in collaboration with the Direction générale des relations internationales et de la stratégie (DGRIS) of the French Ministry for the Armed Forces and the Bulgarian presidency of the Council of the EU organised a pilot-seminar which aimed at looking back over the Bulgarian presidency and forward to the Austrian presidency with what have been the key successes and progress made on the various initiatives on EU security and defence launched in 2016-2017.

Looking back with Bulgaria

During the first panel, it was underlined that the Presidency needs to be more proactive than several years ago. Initially a facilitator, the Presidency becomes an active player that shapes the European agenda as well as coordinates and cooperates with the EU institutions. Overall, the Bulgarian Presidency was considered as a success due to the concrete and visible progress achieved in security and defence. Despite initial criticism, this success would not have been possible without the organisation of 28 activities that reflected Bulgarian priorities.

The debate provided an overview of the policies launched since the adoption of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS). PESCO could create far-reaching results and change the way of thinking about capabilities. In the forthcoming months, it will also be important to explain PESCO's philosophy to the public. In this respect, one of the major breakthroughs under the Bulgarian presidency was agreement on the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP), which aims to contribute to EU defence innovation and competitiveness. Finally, the actions and projects launched in the framework of military mobility will offer the opportunity to enhance EU and NATO cooperation.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of communicating with European citizens about EU action and policies. A key strategic communication tool used by the Bulgarian presidency prior to taking up its Presidency role was to reach out to Bulgarian Members of the European Parliament to enhance knowledge and stimulate interest in security and defence.

Finally, the debate focused on the challenges that might face the Austrian Presidency. There was a consensus about the idea that concrete actions need to be taken in the near future in order to translate

the current political level of ambition. This was particularly so with regard to ensuring that the European Defence Fund (EDF) – particularly with the Preparatory Action on Defence Research (PADR) – prioritises defence-relevant research and technologies of relevance for Europe's strategic autonomy. In addition, Member States will have to define a common understanding of strategic European autonomy which might be challenging due to the differences in national threat assessments.

Looking forward with Austria

The pilot-seminar also aimed at discussing the main priorities of the forthcoming Austrian presidency of the Council of the EU in the area of security and defence and particularly Austria's position on PESCO, the European Defence Fund (EDF), and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence and its plan to engage with NATO.

The motto of the Austrian Presidency will be 'A Europe that protects' and the Presidency will seek to strengthen and restore faith in the EU. As far as Austrian priorities are concerned, the Presidency will focus on migration and stability in the neighbourhood of the Western Balkans. In this sense, the Austrian Presidency will work on the reform of the common asylum system, the reinforcement of Frontex and on the implementation of the repatriation programme. Regarding this neighbourhood, the Austrian Presidency will continue the work initiated by the Bulgarian Presidency. The Austrian Presidency will also support the HR/VP to promote CFSP, multilateralism and a rules-based international order.

Regarding security and defence, the Presidency will adopt a broad approach in order to favour the cooperation between civilian and military aspects of CSDP and the work on the internal-external nexus. The Presidency will also support the EDIDP by setting up the working programme and defining the necessary tasks to ensure its implementation and market access to small and medium-sized enterprises. Regarding PESCO, the Presidency will pursue the negotiation on governance rules. Finally, it will also work on the extension and funding of CSDP missions, terrorism, organised crime, cyber and hybrid threats. Based on these priorities, the Austrian Presidency will organise three conferences on civ-mil cooperation in July, on the Western Balkans in September and on the EDF and EDIDP in October.

The discussion highlighted the importance of maintaining coherence among the EU's security and defence initiatives, as well as among the EU and other multinational initiatives such as France's 'European Intervention Initiative' (E2I). There was also a consensus among the participants on the need to operationalise the EU's security and defence initiatives by ensuring a coherent link between the priorities agreed under the EDF and projects developed under PESCO. One speaker also stressed the need to ensure that a focus on civil-military cooperation does not get lost following the introduction of initiatives such as the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), PESCO and the EDF.

The question and answer session focused on the Austrian position on the partnership with the United Kingdom after the Brexit, the role played by the European Parliament in the negotiation of the EDIDP, a solution to the South-East dilemma, the negotiation of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework in the context of the forthcoming European elections in May of 2019, and on the way to better communicate with citizens.