

To protect and to serve? EU security and defence in action

27 November 2017 – Residence Palace, Brussels.

Event Report

Meeting to discuss the recent notification on Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and broader EU security and defence efforts since 2016, the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) convened a public gathering of policymakers, think tank representatives and academics. In his last public event as EUISS Director, Antonio Missiroli ended his tenure with a reflection on how far the EU has come on security and defence over the past year. He explained that even though the strategic landscape justified greater EU efforts, the pace and extent of the initiatives agreed has taken EU security and defence cooperation to a new level.

In his keynote speech, Pedro Serrano (Deputy Secretary General for CSDP and Crisis Response at the European External Action Service (EEAS)) affirmed this sentiment by remarking how the EU has been more active in defence issues over the past 12 months than it has been for the last 12 years. The EU has improved its crisis response by establishing a Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), it has sought to improve defence planning coordination through the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and it seeks to support defence research and capability development through the European Defence Fund (EDF). PESCO is also a step forward and it is the glue which will keep all other initiatives together.

Moderated by Antonio Missiroli, panel one covered the view from the EU institutions towards PESCO and other EU security and defence initiatives. Pierre Delsaux (Deputy Director General, DG GROW, European Commission), Rini Goos (Deputy Executive Director, European Defence Agency) and Zoltan Martinusz (Director, Enlargement, Security, Civil Protection, Foreign Affairs Council Support, General Secretariat of the Council of the EU) all acknowledged that PESCO can only be made a success if EU member states adhere to the binding commitments they have made. PESCO will require patience and trust building between EU member states, but it could lead to an unprecedented level of transparency and cooperation on defence between EU member state governments. Both the CARD and the EDF were seen as important aspects of PESCO and it was recognised that the next steps will include a careful calibration of all of these initiatives.

Silvio Gonzato (Director, Strategic Communications and Parliamentary and General Affairs, EEAS) moderated panel two through which a range of policy and analytical viewpoints came together. Gonzato asked the panellists whether they thought the new 'defence package' would make a difference to EU security and defence. Isabelle Marques-Gross (France's Deputy Representative to the Political and Security Committee) stated that the EDF is a key initiative that will complement national investments and favour economies of scale on defence. Kristi Raik (Senior Research Fellow, Finnish Institute of International Affairs) was positive about the initiatives but she argued that more thinking is required on ways to strengthen territorial defence and deal with hybrid threats. Calling for closer EU-NATO cooperation, Chris Rampling (the UK's Deputy Representative to the Political and Security Committee) called for openness with third countries. Finally, Björn Fägersten (Head of Programme and Senior Research Fellow, Swedish Institute of International Affairs) pointed out that the 'defence package' was positive although there are still questions about how it can enhance the EU as a security and defence actor.

Closing the conference, Nathalie Tocci (Director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali and Special Adviser to the HR/VP Federica Mogherini) recalled all of the strategic justifications for closer EU defence cooperation. She pointed out that all of the security and defence initiatives agreed to since the publication of the EU Global Strategy are geared to allow EU governments to plan and think together, to build and buy defence capabilities and to act together. Tocci stated that sticking to the binding commitments in PESCO is key to its success but that there is a need to ensure coordination between PESCO and the CARD and EDF.