

European Integration and its Security Dimension: ESDP, NATO and Slovakia`s position

By Boris ECKER

The changed security environment and new security threats emerging from the demise of Cold War`s bipolar stalemate have forced European states to recognize the need for creating an appropriate framework that would enable European Community`s institutions to coordinate the foreign policies of its member states, strengthen the intergovernmental cooperation on security and defence issues and, as a final result, to act in a common and coherent manner as a full-fledged actor on the international stage. A fundamental step on the way to deepen the political integration and to form a new structure of security relations between the member states of the Community was the Maastricht Treaty adopted in 1992. In the framework of a new tree-pillar structure of a union of European states, the treaty set a goal of creating a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union, including a common defence policy.¹

The increasing importance of EU`s fledgling security dimension became also a factor influencing the transformation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization which has served as NATO`s own answer to the challenges of a new security environment. Also NATO`s process of adapting to the

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changed security conditions required its European members states (predominantly also EC/EU members) to significantly strengthen their military capabilities in order to assume more responsibility for the security of Europe. For this reason, the re-activated Western European Union (WEU) served in the initial phase of the Alliance`s transformation as a tool for strengthening NATO`s European pillar. At the same time, in case the USA didn`t get involved and only European countries would commit their troops to operations in response to

international crisis, the WEU would by providing military means serve as the “armed arm” of the EU. In such way, operational level NATO-EU relations begun to develop on the basis of the Berlin Plus Arrangements, enabling WEU access to NATO`s capabilities in order to take an effective independent action. However, the development of the security situation in the second half of the 90`s demonstrated that NATO-EU cooperation needs besides the operational level also a politico-institutional roof. The introductory phase and concept of developing an European defense in the framework of NATO, termed as the European Security and Defense Identity, was therefore replaced by European states` decision to incorporate the efforts to build a working European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) into the three-pillar structure of the EU.²

¹ The Treaty on European Union, Title V: Provisions on a Common and Foreign Policy. Available at: <http://europa.eu.int/en/record/mt/title5.html>. Although the Treaty on European Union was a milestone and set the basic preconditions for creating CFSP/ESDP, the idea of a common European defence can be traced back to 1940`s and 1950`s when the Western European Union (WEU) was created and the concept of an European Defence Community (EDC) was developed. However, the WEU went to sleep when NATO was established and the idea of EDC died in the French Parliament. From that moment on, the idea of a common European defence became a taboo for almost 40 years.

² One of the main reasons for moving the concept of ESDP to the EU were the unpleasant events in the Balkans, Europe`s doorstep, where the EU failed to restore stability and security independently, despite the six-year-long existence of the CFSP. One could even say that the ESDP was born out of frustration from the Balkan crisis where the EU had to witness US/NATO leadership in solving the situation in Kosovo.

The deepening of integration in the field of a European Security and Defense Policy, as a security and defense component of the CFSP, came so alongside the very dynamic economic integration (common currency) to the forefront of the general integration agenda. A further impetus for strengthening this field of integration was also given by the Amsterdam Treaty, which entered into force in 1999. Based on it, the EU took over from the WEU the Petersberg Tasks that provide the definition of EU member states armed forces` goals in humanitarian and rescue operations, peacekeeping operations and combat operations of crisis management, that means the functional content of ESDP. Furthermore, the European Council arrived at a decision to enlarge the CFSP/ESDP by the capacity for an autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises.³ Behind this decision was especially the “Balkan disillusionment” leading to the recognition that a credible CFSP needs adequate operational capabilities in particular. On its 1999 summit in Helsinki, the European Council specified through the Helsinki Headline Goal the required military capabilities—the 60 000 men strong European Rapid Reaction Force (ERRF). Moreover, the European Council also reached the crucial consensus that gives the EU the capacity to launch and conduct EU-lead military operations in response to international crisis independently, in case NATO as a whole is not engaged.⁴

The development of ESDP in 1999-2002 was subsequently followed by progress in 2003 and 2004, when the formation of EU`s security and defense dimension entered a new phase, focusing especially on strengthening EU`s real capabilities to act as a global security player. The reason for further intensifying these efforts has been based on the fact that pursuing EU`s foreign policy ambitions is limited by several shortcomings in the field of military capabilities. As a consequence, the EU member states decided in 2003 to embark on an approach that would put more emphasis on the development of crisis management`s military tools as an essential precondition for ESDP`s capacity to take an effective action. This is also show by the more realistic character of the new Headline Goal of the ESDP setting the timeframe for reaching its priorities in 2010.⁵

Pursuing EU`s foreign policy ambitions is limited by several shortcomings in the field of military capabilities.

In the beginning of 2004, the European Defense Agency, responsible for the advancement and harmonization of EU member states` systems of military acquisitions started its work. Its activities should lead to the reduction of costs and to the increase in quality as well as quantity of European countries` arms and weapon systems. Besides this, a proposal for the implementation of the first ever, strategic security document for the whole field of CFSP and ESDP, the European Security Strategy, was developed. Moreover, in February, Great Britain, France and Germany came with the initiative to create EU`s own Battle Groups, forming an organic, and in terms of military capabilities, the most important part of the Headline Goal 2010. The Franco-

³ The Treaty of Amsterdam amending the treaty on European Union. Available at: <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/treaties/dat/amsterdam.html>.

⁴ Presidency Conclusions of the Helsinki 1999 European Council, Part II: A Common European Policy on Security and Defence. Available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel1_en.htm. By setting the goal of having, by 2003, at disposal a 60 000 person strong military force, able to deploy within 60 days and sustain the operation for 1 year in support of the Petersberg Tasks, the EU learned from another lesson from the Balkans. KFOR, the NATO-lead force in Kosovo, needed exactly 60 000 men to stabilize the situation on the ground. However, the Helsinki Headline Goal was in some parts too ambitious for the member states to be met in 2003.

⁵ The Headline Goal 2010, available at: <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/2010%20Headline%20Goal.pdf>. Simultaneously with improving its military capabilities, the EU still pays an appropriate attention to the development and improvement of its “soft power” tools. Marrying both instruments of crisis management is the most efficient way of preventing and eliminating security crises and conflicts.

British-German proposal aimed to create up to 10 (today it is already 13) combined battle groups that should serve as the core of ERRF. The Battle Groups, each 1 500 men strong, should be, with a respective military, air and group support, capable of a rapid reaction and deployment in the operation theatre within 15 days and also of sustaining its mission in the area of deployment for the length of one month. In addition, the EU officially took over NATO's SFOR mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of the year, changing its name to Operation Althea.

Despite the significant progress, a common approach in the field of European security and defense remains a sensitive question among EU member states, especially because of the different views on an US role in ESDP, its future institutional form and the position of the "euro-autonomist" EU members, which advocate cutting off Europe's security policy from the United States. Nevertheless, a relatively strong support for ESDP that is deemed necessary for cases when NATO as a whole will not get involved in solving crisis on Europe's periphery, can be seen also among the "euro-atlantist" members of the EU, that means countries supporting a stronger US' and NATO's role in Europe. Furthermore, the discord of European countries on the transatlantic character of ESDP is also complicated by the existence of the "European neutrals", that means four neutral EU member states that are not members of NATO. Besides the discussion on the transatlantic dimension of ESDP, different visions of EU members exist also on the issue of its future operational tasks. While the Franco-British engine of the European security integration promotes especially a traditional military character of ESDP in high-intensity combat operations and sees the EU's as a future military power, the post-neutral countries and Germany tend to the lower spectrum of the Petersberg Tasks and try to uphold the civil dimension of EU's security and defense policy. The tangle of various positions of European countries is also mirrored in the current draft of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe.⁶ Although the Constitutional Treaty represents the consensus of a number of opinions on ESDP's character, reaching even up to collective defense promoted by France, the trend is clear—European security integration is heading towards a deeper coordination of EU members' positions, which will at the same time require changes in the transatlantic dialogue. For example, it is likely that the 21 EU member states, that are at the same time also NATO members, will more and more often follow an approach vis-à-vis non-EU members that will be based on a common position. The EU will find itself in a more central role within NATO. Most probably, it will work as a forum on which Europe will coordinate its own security policy, before it will get involved in creating NATO's policy. For this reason, the USA is slowly but surely reassessing its position towards EU and starts to see it as a relevant security actor.

Simultaneously with the increase of EU's power potential, the USA increased their interest in Europe's efforts to strengthen its own capabilities in order to bear a bigger part of Europe's security burden. However, with the consecutive formation of a specific shape of ESDP, concerns about its possible independence that would be competitive to NATO appeared on the US side of the Atlantic. These concerns stem especially from the conviction that a NATO-separated and autonomous strengthening of ESDP will not be accompanied by a significant improvement in military capabilities. Furthermore, the USA believe that the development ESDP separated from the Alliance will lead to the duplication of already existing capable assets and thus to wasting of limited resources.

⁶ The draft of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe, available at: <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/JOhtml.do?uri=OJ:C:2004:310:SOM:EN:HTML>. The fact that the Constitutional Treaty hasn't entered into force so far may slow down the progress in the field of ESDP. However, improving military capabilities is one of the least controversial issues in the EU. The problem lies rather in the absence of political will.

Because of its limited economic potential as well as human resources, Slovakia advocates the same opinion. Mutual complementarity of NATO and EU, as well as real capabilities of European states' armies should dominate Slovakia's interests. At the same time, Bratislava's position on ESDP must be based on a pragmatic approach not only towards capabilities, but also towards institutions—usability cannot be limited only to the military; it also has to account for institutions. Moreover, common sense has to stay on the first place when solving political questions. Slovakia doesn't have enough room for duplications and wasting of resources, including the wasting of political credibility. As the EU moves more towards defense, it should learn from NATO. As the Alliance goes civil, it should draw experience from the EU. However, the organizations shouldn't become the same. Consensus on an effective division of labor, based on clear positions in the transatlantic dialogue, between NATO and EU is needed. The European integration in the field of security and defense should not lead to transatlantic rivalry. Otherwise, it could weaken the cohesion of NATO and EU as well as their capacity for action. Constructive relations and dialogue between NATO and EU are in the interest of Slovakia. A competitive security and defense policy of several European states (in addition, backed also with insufficient capabilities) may lead to a conflicting competition between the EU and NATO. As a consequence, this could undermine the political and military credibility of both organizations and thus marginalize the significance of smaller member countries of both organizations.

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