



EWG-27- The Policy Working Group; Continue, Modify or Stop An opinion of the Chair of EWG27

During the Madrid Presidents Meeting in 2019, EDNL presented an article I had written on EU defence. The title was: "Europe's security is Europe's responsibility." It emphasized the need for the EU to be able to defend itself against outside threats without the help of the USA, since the EU foreign and defense policy and US foreign and defense policy were not necessarily always identical but could one day even be contradictory. I suggested that the Eurodefense network should adopt this principle and develop concepts and recommendations to EU governments and institutions on how to develop the EU in that direction. Those were the days that the French president introduced the concept of "Strategic Autonomy." During the next Presidents Meeting Eurodefense Working Group 27 (EWG27) was mandated to start studying these issues.

On 28-10-2020 the EWG27 presented its "Recommendations" that were finally unanimously endorsed by the ED network and presented to the EU Commission. During the Lisbon ED-President's Meeting in June 2021, the follow-up of these "Recommendations" was discussed ("Recommendations on EU defense, EWG27, review and follow-up", 16-06-2021). During 2022, 2023 and 2024 the EWG27 distributed papers on related subjects, such as:

- The need for a Common foreign, security and defense policy, considering the need for Europe to defend itself without US assistance and not only for "wars of choice."
- The required unanimity on EU policy and defense matters and how to avoid it; various aspects of QMV.
- The "coalition of the willing" option; start with a number of Member States (somewhat like the EMU)
- Regional EU defense cooperation to compensate for, and as long as there is, a lack of EU leadership and decision-making capability (recent example: the Baltic states).
- How the EU should respond to crises and how to organise the decision-making process. Would some form of "Security Council" make the difference?
- Suggestions on how to make an EU-Rapid Deployment Capability an effective instrument for crisis-response, complementary to and in advance of the mobilisation of national capabilities.

- The need for an EU Defense Organisation (EUDO) combining operations and industrial policies under one EU Commissioner with a clear mandate from the Council.
- The need for an EU defense industrial base to organise and stimulate R&D and the production of adequate defense supplies for EU defense requirements.
- Develop an EU-civil defense organisation to help member states in times of peace and war. (e.g.: firefighting, floods, earthquakes, landslides, war destruction, Red Cross activities). The EU should be able to assist its Member States and prepare for the worst.
- Promote EU debt-financing through EU bonds and guarantees to stimulate and finance these activities.

I do not want to be like the rooster who thinks the sun is rising because he crows. But we can at least conclude that our Working Group participated in some progress and more awareness on a number of these issues.

In my opinion the relevance of the conclusions of the original “Recommendations” and the EWG27-position paper of 20-07-2023 has not diminished. It is worth mentioning that all the above issues are of a political nature. The initial objective of EWG27 was how to create an EU Defense Union that would be able to defend itself autonomously, but preferably together with partners/associates and as an EU-Defense Union within NATO. That is a long-term political objective, or one could even call it an ideal. But if Eurodefence is serious about its objective to combine all EU-Member States defense efforts under a common EU defense umbrella, it could be a guiding principle for EU-, and national short-term decisions and a binding principle for the Chapters of the Eurodefense Network.

Unfortunately, the prospects for further implementation of our “Recommendations” have not improved over the last years. Nationalistic, xenophobic, right-wing and protectionist tendencies have negative consequences for a further unification of the EU and for the creation of an EU Defense Union. The war in Ukraine has confronted us with immediate needs for equipment and support. National defense budgets have increased considerably, and billions of Euro's have been spent on new equipment (most of it in the US). Member States were most concerned with today's defence problems; no money, no equipment, no personnel, “no sense of urgency” and “no unity of purpose.”

This should not change our objectives for the longer term, quite the opposite. Although most EU Member States defence efforts are coordinated within the NATO framework, the Eurodefense objective to unify and develop the EU defence efforts remains the same, with, but also without the USA in NATO.

Logically it is up to the Presidents Meeting to decide about the end or the continuation of the work of the EWG27. In my opinion continuation of EWG27 makes sense if the objective of the Working Group will be the promotion by the Eurodefence network of the “work done”. One can question if this is interesting enough for people to participate, and without participants it cannot be a “Working Group.”

Changing the objectives and the mandate into “following the political and organisational aspects of EU foreign policy and defense” is more a matter of an Observatory. Changing the mandate into “observing and recommending aspects of a more practical military nature, such as ‘command and control’”, has nothing to do with the original EWG27 mandate and requires a new Working Group with new participants.

In the meantime, our modest Dutch Think Tank within EDNL that has been part of the EWG27 from the start, will follow with interest the various political issues that will determine the future of a common EU defense. It will monitor aspects such as EU-decision-making, CFSP, CSDP and the EU-defense-organisation and its institutions and is prepared to report periodically on progress if relevant and invited.

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