

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions regarding the European Defence Action Plan (COM (2016) 950 final)

Final Document Approved by the Committee

The Defence Committee of Italy's Chamber of Deputies,

having examined the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions regarding the European Defence Action Plan (COM(2016)950 *final*);

whereas:

changes in the geopolitical balances of power existing at the beginning of this millennium have made the building of a common European defence relevant again: on the one hand, new and increasingly serious threats (terror, cybernetic, hybrid and generally asymmetric) have hit citizens, enterprises and even European institutions and heightened their feeling of vulnerability and, on the other, the end of the Cold War and the bipolar system has led to a new, multipolar world order in which Europe and her Member States are effectively called to take greater direct responsibility for protecting their own interests and, therefore, to make choices independently of their traditional allies, beginning with the United States of America, without prejudice to the fact that European unity must be understood as a further strong point for the alliance systems of which the European countries are members, beginning with NATO;

a global approach to the crises remains the main road to follow and thus the building of a more integrated European defence must continue to proceed in tandem with the effort to tackle the causes of the world's emergencies primarily by way of support and co-operation initiatives in favour of the areas neighbouring those of strategic interest to Europe;

the building of a European defence is also possible on the basis of the treaties currently in force and can foster a further growth in European unity during this current historic phase in which the other reasons for Europe remaining united may, at times, appear undermined;

the construction of a common European defence must be considered an absolute priority, both because the greatest effort must be made to preserve peace, that supreme good that Europe has known over the last seventy years and that is nevertheless an exception even for its secular history, so that it may also be enjoyed by the next generations, and because protecting Europe means

defending her founding values, beginning with human rights, of which the European legal orders are the greatest champions in the world;

the departure from the European Union of the United Kingdom, the most important of the Member States opposed to building a European defence, on the one hand creates more favourable conditions for the latter's birth and, on the other, turns this birth into a priority, given that Brexit means the loss of one of the militarily strongest States in the European Union;

without sustained investment, the European defence industry risks lacking the technological skills to build the next generation of critical defence capabilities, which would affect the Union's strategic autonomy and its ability to act as guarantor of its own security;

the Member States' combined defence spending is currently inefficient, in terms of performance, if compared to that of other countries. Indeed, collectively, the European countries constitute the world's second largest military spender, after the United States, but their spending is less efficient and productive because of fragmentation both on the side of demand (the States) and on that of supply (the companies), a lack of interoperability between the various weapons systems and technological gaps;

the European Defence Action Plan (EDAP) fits into a more articulated series of European Union initiatives promoting the Member States' integration in the defence sector, all such initiatives being grafted onto the comprehensive vision outlined in the Global Strategy (EUGS) on security and defence and the principle stated in it that the European Union must acquire capability and strategic autonomy and that Europeans must, in collaboration with their partners, provide themselves with the capabilities needed to defend themselves and honour their mutual assistance and solidarity commitments; to such end, the Global Strategy provides, inter alia, for initiatives promoting the European defence industry through a fair, functioning and transparent internal market, secure forms of procurement and a structured dialogue with the sector's industries that involves small and medium enterprises;

the Action Plan rests on the assumption that taking responsibility for their own security implies that Europeans must invest in the development of essential defence capabilities so as to be able to deter, respond to and protect themselves against external threats;

the overall objective of the measures outlined in the Action Plan is to help make the Member States' defence spending more efficient, without prejudice to the fact that the amount spent remains the decision of each State autonomously;

it is indispensable to keep in mind, on the one hand, the ever increasing importance of research and production in the field of dual-use technologies and therefore the close interdependence of civil industry and the defence industry in terms of knowhow, applications and production processes, and, on the other, the considerable wealth of technical-scientific skills developed by enterprises in the defence sector, the dispersion of which would harm the country's interests and not only in terms of its military defence capability;

defence systems nowadays require such a high level of technological development that they presuppose and generate industrial cycles that inevitably go beyond the military market in the strict sense and also define a country's civil research and industry;

the economic recovery under way in Europe can be harnessed by investing primarily - so that they may act as a driving force - in the sectors with the highest concentration of high technology solutions and, above all, in those in which Italy has national companies operating with recognised world-level competitiveness (beginning with those in the aerospace sector). There is therefore a need not to dissipate this heritage that must, on the contrary, be maximized through interventions directed at preventing the penalization of companies that might be marginalized with a consequential negative impact on employment, following processes integrating and rationalizing the defence sector at a European level;

the European Commission has, in the meantime, on 7 June 2017, adopted a Reflection Paper on the Future of European Defence having the aim of contributing to the debate on the subject (COM(2017)315 final), a Communication regarding the launching of the European Defence Fund (COM(2017) 295 final) and a Proposal for a Regulation that establishes the European Defence Industrial Development Programme, aiming at supporting the EU defence industry's competitiveness and innovative capacity (COM(2017)294 final);

at the European Council meeting held on 22 June 2017, the Heads of State or Government welcomed the Communication regarding the launching of the European Defence Fund and requested a rapid approval of the Regulation that establishes the European Defence Industrial Development Programme; they likewise agreed on the need to launch a permanent structured cooperation in the area of defence as soon as possible,

EXPRESSES A POSITIVE ASSESSMENT

With the following observations:

1) the Italian Government needs to continue not only supporting the European initiatives seeking to build forms of common defence and integrate Member States in the defence sector but also actively participating in this process (as, indeed, it has up until now), proposing solutions and stimulating engagement, in synergy with the other leading European countries in this line of work;

2) at the same time, the Government needs to support the Italian Defence Technological and Industrial Base in its entirety, taking care that the concrete implementation of the ambitious project outlined in the Action Plan does not harm national industry – and the highly specialized Italian small and medium enterprises, in particular – or the national research centres (the National Research Council, the universities and other bodies); the Government must therefore spare no effort, at a European institutional level, to help national industry and research both to compete, in conditions that are really equal to those of the other countries, for access to the Action Plan's funding and to integrate themselves virtuously in the future European system, thereby preventing the initiatives taken at the European level for the building of a common defence from ending up, at the moment of implementation, actually favouring only other countries' enterprises and research centres;

3) the opportunity must be taken to strengthen systematic, non-episodic collaboration between the production system, the universities and the most authoritative research centres, including on the basis of the most advanced international-level experiences, with the aim of promoting innovation and technological upgrading; and

4) the possibility of realizing initiatives supporting potential industrial reconversion processes ought to be assessed, for the purposes of cushioning the possible negative consequences for employment deriving from the integration and rationalization of the defence industrial sector at a European level .