The Defence–Security Nexus
Towards an EU Collective Security

Recent developments inside and around the EU are challenging the traditional boundaries of security and defence. New, borderless and versatile threats and challenges – from terrorism and cyberattacks to recent waves of illegal immigration exacerbated by wars and instability in Europe’s neighbourhood – have put the spotlight on the intricate connections at play between internal security and external defence.

The traditional divide between internal security and external defence hampers the ability of Member States to effectively detect, prevent and respond to new threats, and creates loopholes that could be exploited with a view to destabilising European democracies and economies. It is increasingly clear that Europe cannot protect its own with a patchwork of security and defence policies, instruments, actors and capabilities.

Over the past year, there has been renewed enthusiasm for EU cooperation on security and defence and much progress has been made. But all too often, advances have relied on ad hoc and piecemeal approaches. It is now time to build on the momentum and implement a doctrinal shift to collective security.

**EU is in unique position to help counter new threats**
The increasing versatility and cross-border nature of the threats and challenges faced by Member States today mean that the EU has a unique added value in providing Europeans with a stronger collective security. This is also recognised by a large majority of Europeans.

**Effective EU action requires a stronger defence–security nexus**
As coined by European Commission President Juncker: ‘A Europe that protects is a Europe that defends – at home and abroad.’ But this can only be achieved through a more joined-up approach between Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and Freedom, Security and Justice (FSJ) policies.

**Strengthening existing good practices can provide easy wins**
Driven by the crises of recent years, there have already been various attempts to strengthen the ties between internal security and external defence at EU level. The EU must build on these and continue to break down existing silos.

**Visionary measures are also needed**
In the longer term, the EU must pursue more far-reaching structural changes, including by reviewing the internal set-up of the European Commission, and establishing an EU Security and Defence Union budget.
Unconventional threats call for unconventional approaches

The EU and its Member States are increasingly faced with non-conventional threats that are global and transboundary and have a strong disruptive effect on the EU. Whether it is the proliferation of low-tech but high-impact terrorism targeting civilians; the spread of cyberattacks capable of disrupting critical infrastructures; or the use of disinformation and propaganda as a weapon of war. New threats now stem both from within the EU’s borders and outside (Figure 1) and are likely to expand in the future (Figure 2), with the potential to destabilise whole cities, economies and countries.

Some of the defining characteristics of these non-conventional threats is that they: (1) are not executed – nor can they be tackled – exclusively by military means, and they do not qualify as an armed attack in the sense of Article 5 of the NATO Treaty; (2) ignore borders; (3) target individuals or companies rather than states directly; (4) have major psychological and economic impacts; and (5) require strong intelligence capabilities for their detection, prevention and attribution.

These characteristics mean that purely national efforts have a limited impact – as do measures taken within the traditional boundaries of security and defence. Against this backdrop, the EU is in a unique position to foster the necessary deeper synergies between internal and external security, and defence policies and instruments.

Importantly, this is well understood by European citizens, with 75% of them supporting the establishment of a common defence and security policy among Member States. Yet, the EU has so far specialised more in crisis management, focusing on projecting its soft and harder power to stabilise fragile countries outside of the EU’s external borders – with 35 EU-led operations so far.

A doctrinal shift: from crisis management to collective security

The evolving nature of threats points to the need for a better alignment and synchronisation of internal and external defence and security. A more ‘joined-up approach’ combining elements of the Union’s toolbox for the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and for the area of Freedom, Security and Justice (FSJ) is needed.

Already in 2011, Member States agreed on a roadmap to strengthen the ties between these two fields, with the objective of increasing synergies in the field of intelligence, decision-making processes, planning of EU external action, and capabilities (human resources and training).
However, the culture of cooperation between Freedom, Security and Justice and Common Security and Defence Policy is still nascent and was, to date, largely deployed on an ad hoc basis, rather than by design. Nonetheless, this ad hoc approach has had the merit of bringing to the forefront a number of prominent and promising cases of deeper interaction and cooperation between the two (Box 2) – thereby contributing to the beginning of a doctrinal shift.

This shift became most visible in 2016, with the launch of the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Strategy, which placed the need to ‘protect Europe’ at the very heart of the EU’s missions, and called on the EU ‘to step up its contribution to Europe’s collective security’.

The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, echoed this message in his 2016 State of the Union speech, stressing the need for a ‘Europe that defends, both at home and outside external borders’.

These announcements confirmed the need for a more joined-up approach that puts collective security at the centre-stage and whereby defence is directly intertwined with the EU’s internal security.
The joined-up approach has since been gathering support in the Member States – eager to pave the way for a swifter and more effective response to threats of the future.

In February 2017, Member States agreed on the ‘Malta declaration’, calling for a joint mobilisation of Common Security and Defence Policy tools and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) to handle the security aspects of migration on the central Mediterranean route.

And in June 2017, they called for a reinforcement of the internal/external nexus with regard to counter-terrorism, and for the activation of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) measures – including restrictive measures and the implementation of the Network Information Security Directive (NIS Directive)\(^4\) – to respond to cyber threats.

So it is clear that there is a growing momentum for making the defence-security nexus a reality at EU level (Box 2).

**Box 2: Nascent synergies: examples of ad hoc combinations of security and defence at EU level**

Recent crises have triggered new forms of interaction between Common Security and Defence Policy and Freedom, Security and Justice policies in a number of areas:

- **On counter-terrorism:** The inextricable link between international terrorism and internal security has resulted in the EU and Member States making novel uses of a combination of both defence instruments and security measures for instance when France invoked Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union in the aftermath of the 2015 Paris attacks.

- **On border management:** The response to the irregular migrant crisis in the Mediterranean was a prime example of the EU combining Freedom, Security and Justice and Common Security and Defence Policy measures. Indeed, the European Union Naval Force Mediterranean – launched in 2015 and now known as ‘Operation Sophia’ – is a military Common Security and Defence Policy operation that works at the intersection between the EU’s migration, security and defence agendas, aiming to prevent illegal and irregular migratory flows by disrupting smuggling and trafficking networks, while also saving lives at sea. Within this context, the operation cooperates closely with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX). This is a case of internal security deployed in support of external defence, outside EU borders.

- **On cybersecurity:** The EU is in the process of boosting its cyber capacities with a strong eye on protecting critical infrastructures. At the same time, its cybersecurity approach is fully anchored in its external security toolbox. The EU recently agreed on a cyber diplomacy toolbox\(^5\) that includes economic sanctions and can be used gradually in the case of such attacks. Another significant proposal\(^6\) is the adaptation of the mandate and resources of the European Union Agency for Network and Information Security (ENISA) so that it can adequately respond to present and future cybersecurity challenges. The proposed mandate clarifies the role of ENISA as the EU agency for cybersecurity and the reference point in the EU cybersecurity ecosystem, acting in close cooperation with all the other relevant entities of this ecosystem, including the European Cybercrime Centre at Europol and the European Defence Agency.

- **On asymmetric threats from Africa:** Following the collapse of government authority in Libya in 2011, Europe is only one border away from the Sahel region, making it all the more important to take action to counter terrorism and radicalisation in the region and safeguard European citizens at home. The EU has been deploying the full range of measures available in its external action toolbox – from Common Security and Defence Policy missions tasked with training security forces, to programmes for de-radicalisation and border security – to respond to the asymmetric, cross-border challenges stemming from the region.
Bridging the EU’s defence-security divide

No single measure, structure or policy will suffice to magically align traditional thinking and policymaking in the areas of internal and external security and defence. Rather, a multi-dimensional approach will be required to bridge the current gap.

In the first instance, the adoption of a European White Book on Security and Defence could enable a practical translation of the EU Global Strategy into common internal-external security objectives that need to be fulfilled and provide a clear political framework to further align and synchronise Common Security and Defence Policy and Freedom, Security and Justice measures. It could also guide research and capability development.

Thereafter, further changes would be necessary. While some of these could be implemented already in the short term by strengthening practices that already exist – albeit in an ad hoc manner – others would require more structural change in the longer term.

Building on existing arrangements and practices offers immediate benefits

- **Introducing regular meetings of the European Council over a dedicated defence and security agenda.** This would serve the dual purpose of fostering a more integrated understanding of common defence and security risks and challenges – and better anticipating future ones – while providing a framework for developing strategic guidance as to the best articulation of European responses.

- **Introducing regular joint meetings between Ministers of Interior and Ministers of Defence.** A first such meeting between the Justice and Home Affairs Council configuration and the Foreign Affairs Council took place in May 2017 to address the synergies between Justice and Home Affairs Agencies and Common Security and Defence Policy in Counter-Terrorism. Formalising such meetings would foster clearer political guidance and inject more dynamism into the joint meetings of the Political and Security Committee and the Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security.

- **Establishing a Collective Security cluster of all Commissioners with security portfolios.** This would foster synergies and horizontal cooperation within the Commission.²

- **Exploiting the opportunities in the new mandates of Europol and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) to link up Common Security and Defence Policy and Freedom, Security and Justice.** Notably, Europol now has more flexible rules on information-sharing – allowing for exchange of strategic and technical information with third partners. It also has more flexibility on operational cooperation, and the possibility to exchange personal data with other Union bodies, including Common Security and Defence Policy missions. In addition, FRONTEX has new rapid reaction pools, access to vulnerability assessments of Member States’ capacities, and the possibility to carry out operations in third countries. Combined, these new options offer ample opportunities to cooperate in more efficient ways.

- **Progressing further towards more coherent cybersecurity and cyber defence strategies and policies for the EU.** Taking advantage of the European Commission Cybersecurity package (September 2017) and of the review of the mandate for European Union Agency for Network and Information Security (ENISA), new initiatives should be considered, such as cyber defence rapid reaction teams, systematic exchanges of cyber incident information, or identification of common cyber-related projects that could be considered for support by the European Defence Fund.

- **Establishing a permanent College.** Such an institution could deliver both strategic training to facilitate the emergence of a joint European strategic culture, and operational training to facilitate operational cooperation between military and law enforcement communities.
Visionary measures are needed and warranted

While strengthening existing practices may generate improvements in the short term, the scale and versatility of the challenges faced by Member States and the EU today also warrant more forward-looking and ambitious measures, among which the following should be considered:

- Optimising the European Commission’s internal set-up: This would reflect the new priority given to defence and security at European level; maximising the impact of delivering on the defence-security nexus, and building up synergies between all policies and funding instruments underpinning the Defence Union and the Security Union to address asymmetric threats.

- Establishing an EU Security and Defence Union budget: A swift review of EU-budgeted programmes and funds across the full range of defence- and security-related activities should be conducted, with the main aim of identifying potential economies of scale and determining the merits of joined-up financing of defence and security, possibly already in the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

- Acquiring joint, dual-use capabilities for critical enablers (secure communication systems / evacuation systems / shelters / surveillance systems) and setting up logistical hubs across Europe (to pre-position assets and enable quicker reactions).

- Presently, there is also no single, cybersecure communication system at EU level. This impedes rapid decision-making and the free flow information. By establishing such a system, restricted information could be easily exchanged across relevant Common Security and Defence Policy and Freedom, Security and Justice actors.

- Making better use of the EU solidarity clause: Article 222 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), according to which the Union shall mobilise all the instruments at its disposal to prevent and protect from terrorist attacks, gives the Union a responsibility for upholding collective security. Yet, in practice, its invocation by Member States is almost impossible due to two caveats stipulated in the implementing Council Decision.

Firstly, Article 222 TFEU is presented as a last resort. Secondly, it is limited to cases where Member States are ‘overwhelmed’. This should be altered.

Figure 4: (Re)structuring for a future, joined-up Security and Defence Union

Source: European Political Strategy Centre
Seizing the momentum

As both traditional and new security pressures mount in the EU and its Member States, classical policies will no longer suffice to respond to the challenges. The entire range of security expertise will be needed and that includes an enhanced geostrategic EU foreign policy and defence outlook, as well as cybersecurity and defence policies.

By seizing the momentum of an emerging EU security and defence consensus, the EU can put in place a framework for integrated strategic thinking, targeted policy adjustments and persistent cross-sectoral coordination to support its priority goal of protecting and defending European citizens.

Notes and References


7. Alternatively, the Commissioner’s Group on External Relations could meet in a Collective Security format. This would imply, as already foreseen in the President’s Decision of 11 November 2014 on the Creation of a Commissioners’ Group of External Action, C(2014) 9003, that the Commissioner for the Security Union would partake in the meetings of the Group, along with other Commissioners on external action.

8. The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) and the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) have already initiated cooperation in the field of training at strategic level. While CEPOL is a permanent structure located in Hungary, the ESDC is a virtual college, the secretariat of which is hosted in the European External Action Service (EEAS).