



THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

WHOSE SECURITY? WHOSE DEFENCE?

COMECE contribution to the reflection process on the future of European security and defence

1. Introduction

Security has become a **major concern for people** in Europe and worldwide. Unceasing violent conflicts, not least in Europe's neighbourhood, the perception of pressing flows of migrants and refugees, the repeated terror attacks – these are some of the major challenges that contribute to **feelings of unease and fear** in the public opinion.

Moreover, a **sense of safety** is also negatively affected by a variety of threats fed by growing economic inequality, the lack of future prospects and perceived social injustice or environmental degradation. Digitalisation and globalisation are bringing numerous opportunities but they are also opening up vulnerabilities that do not know territorial boundaries. By eroding **trust and predictability**, Brexit and the first decisions of the new U.S. administration have led to a change in the geopolitical balance.

Europe is confronted with **multifaceted internal and external threats**. In order to achieve its **strategic objectives** to provide prosperity and sustainable peace, the European Union should become a **stronger global actor**. The main challenge is now to **focus** more on the **security needs of the people** and to **counter these challenges primarily at the point of their inception**.

2. Recent developments in European security and defence

One year ago, the EU High Representative/Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini, presented the [Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy](#) to the 28 Heads of State and Government.

COMECE actively contributed to the drafting process of the Global Strategy with its "[Peace report](#)". After the presentation of the EU strategy, COMECE welcomed its **global geographical scope** and its focus on an **integral approach** with **human security** and **pre-emptive peace-building** being important pillars. COMECE encouraged the process leading to a **better articulation between a diplomatic and a defence** approach. In this respect, the Global Strategy defines as priorities for EU's External Action security and defence, the strengthening of resilience, the pursuit of an integrated approach, the promotion of regional cooperation and of effective global governance.

Despite the **initial concerns about a lacking ownership** of the EU Global Strategy by the Member States, the following months have shown quite significant steps in its further elaboration and implementation.

Even though the Global Strategy defines five – interlinked and mutually reinforcing – priorities for EU’s External Action, the pace and the level of (financial) commitment indicate a **strong emphasis on security and defence** in the past twelve months.

In the autumn 2016, the EU presented the [Implementation Plan on Security and Defence](#) setting out a **new level of ambition**¹ and respective actions. We took note of the first steps in this regard, aiming at the enhancement of the EU crisis response mechanisms, deepening the cooperation between Member States as well as joint development of some defence capabilities. The European Commission complemented these proposals through the [European Defence Action Plan](#) by envisaging [financial incentives](#)² for collaborative **defence research** projects³ and fostering European **defence industry** and procurement. A [list of actions](#) has also been proposed to implement the [EU-NATO Joint Declaration](#) in areas, such as hybrid threats, cyber defence or maritime security. The EU Heads of State and Government⁴ as well as the European Parliament⁵ have repeatedly encouraged further progress in the implementation of these proposals.

The recently published [Reflection Paper of the European Commission on the future of European defence](#) as part of the “[White Paper process](#)” presents three possible scenarios. These range from cooperation to a common European Security and Defence with a certain level of integration of national defence markets and military forces. The Commission stresses the **primary competence of the Member States** to decide on the degree of the EU defence integration. It nevertheless makes a strong appeal for deepening the European dimension of the security and defence policy on the basis of strategic, political and, [above all, economic considerations](#) in order to avoid duplications and make defence spending more efficient.

These efforts to enforce European security and defence policies have been complemented by steps to implement the other priority areas of EU External Action as defined by the Global Strategy. Only recently, and after some delay, the EU presented its [Communication on a strategic approach to resilience in its External Action](#). Moreover, the structures of the European External Action Service have been adapted⁶ to better implement the EU’s integrated, comprehensive approach.

In addition, the EU Global Strategy has become a point of reference for EU’s external actions. Thus, a number of EU initiatives have been presented in the context of the implementation of the Global Strategy, such as the new [European Consensus on Development](#), the [EU Trust Fund for Colombia](#) or the [EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations](#).

¹ According to the EU Implementation Plan, the new level of ambition is threefold: 1) respond to external conflicts and crisis; 2) build capacities of partners; 3) protect the EU and its citizens.

² The European Defence Fund [foresees dedicating](#) €90 Mio. until 2020 to defence research. After 2020, the EU Commission intends to propose a dedicated defence research programme with a budget of €500 Mio. per year. Moreover, with regard to joint development and acquisition of defence capabilities, the EU wants to offer co-financing with €500 Mio. until 2020, and with €1 bn. per year after 2020.

³ As examples of possible defence research and technology development projects to be supported by the European Defence Fund, [the European Commission mentions](#) *inter alia* encrypted software systems, satellite communication, but also drones and robotics.

⁴ Cf. the [Bratislava Summit](#) in September 2016, the [European Council in December 2016](#) or the [Rome Declaration](#) adopted in March 2017.

⁵ Cf. the European Parliament [resolution](#) of 22 November 2016 on the European Defence Union [resolution](#), or the resolution of 23 November 2016 on the implementation of CSDP.

⁶ Most notably, the division “PRISM“ has been created that aims to combine efforts of early warning, peacebuilding, security sector reform, stabilisation, crisis response and mediation.

3. Strengthening whose security? Fostering whose defence?

a) **Human security and sustainable peace**

Over the last months, the European Union has made several commitments and taken some concrete steps in view of strengthening security and defence. From a Church perspective, the evaluation of these efforts should primarily focus on enhancing the **security of people**, rather than the security of states or the interest of businesses.

Security is essential since it protects **human dignity**. True security can exist only in **sustainable peace**. In the understanding of the Church⁷, peace is more than the absence of war and violence. It above all requires the establishment of an order which is based on **justice**, on **integral human development**, on respect for **fundamental human rights** and on the **care of creation**.

If not focusing on **human security**, including the enforcement of human rights and the rule of law, merely technical security measures may allow or even lead to a new conflict⁸.

b) **Clear strategic objectives**

The efforts to strengthen European security and defence, combined with concrete steps for their implementation, need to be based on **clear long-term strategic objectives**. **Reactive and short-term measures of a tactical nature** can provide only **limited results** and they do not address the **root causes** of crises and conflicts.

The setting of strategic objectives at the European level first of all requires a clear **definition of national foreign policy objectives** of the Member States. It also requires a **shared analysis of security threats** and challenges, as well as **opportunities** for a common engagement.

A prerequisite for this process is a **shared political will** and the awareness of a **common European responsibility**. As long as these elements, along with sufficient **trust** between Member States and European institutions are not given, progress in fostering European security and defence will be limited.

This process requires **deep commitment** to enter into a **substantial dialogue with all the stakeholders**. It should **not** be hijacked by the urgency to **show quick**, however often only **superficial, results**.

The EU's **new level of ambition** as defined in [the Implementation Plan on Security and Defence](#) constitutes a **good basis** for a further specification of EU's strategic goals. The objective to "*protect the Union and its citizens*" would, in particular, require **further reference to the specific types of threats and risks** that the Union and its citizens may face. Only then it will be possible to **define and develop the capabilities and actions** that can **adequately respond** to these challenges.

⁷ Cf. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 494.

⁸ Cf. Conference of European Justice & Peace Commissions, [Build bridges of justice rather than walls of fear](#) (2016).

c) Industry and research at the service of the people and of peace

The European Commission has made an appeal for fostering European cooperation in the area of [defence-related research](#) as well as [defence industry and procurement](#).

Efforts aiming to make the defence **spending more efficient**, to **avoid unnecessary duplications** and **save costs**⁹ deserve further careful consideration. These proposals and initiatives are to be measured to what extent they serve the **security of the people** and contribute to **sustainable peace**.

Pope Francis [recently recalled](#) that *“it is an absurd contradiction to speak of peace, to negotiate peace, and at the same time, promote or permit the arms trade. Is this [...] a war to solve problems or is it a commercial war for selling weapons in illegal trade and so that the merchants of death get rich?”*

In this respect, **more effective and coherent regulatory frameworks for arms export control** should be developed at the European level. Moreover, when intensifying defence cooperation among Member States, particular attention should be paid to ensure that this does **not reinforce an arms race** in Europe and globally.

A **long-term disarmament strategy**, including nuclear disarmament, should be integrated within the European security strategy with a view to gradually developing alternative economic models.

The allocation of resources to promote **defence research and technology** should comply with the requirements of **proportionality** and **adequacy**. Whereas it is of key importance to develop adequate means to address pertinent security challenges and new vulnerabilities, in particular in the cyber realm, the EU spending on defence research and technology should **fully respect the international obligations** of the EU and Member States.¹⁰ The EU funds should be prohibited from promoting research in **ethically problematic technology** and weapons, including lethal autonomous weapons. In this respect, **EU Guidelines for defence-related research and technology** should be developed accordingly. As far as armed drones are concerned, the EU should lead efforts towards an international agreement ensuring transparency and accountability in their use.

d) Defence as a global concept embedded in an authentic peace policy

The European Union should **avoid the tendency to overmilitarise** its security policy. The EU is above all a **peace project** achieved through economic integration. It is a **unique player** with a wide array of instruments that can be articulated along with the efforts of other security actors, notably the UN, OSCE and NATO.

Hard security alone cannot **comprehensively address the multifaceted security challenges** of today. Thus, besides **adequate and proportionate investment** in enhancing its **“strategic autonomy”** in the security and defence domain, the EU should further develop and **invest sufficient resources** in its non-violent **pre-emptive peace-building capacities**. This should include measures promoting **human, socio-economic and environmental development** as well as **peace diplomacy** and the **political economy of peace**.

⁹ According to [estimates](#), the lack of cooperation between Member States in security and defence costs annually between €25-€100 Mio. due to fragmented defence markets and duplications in place.

¹⁰ In particular, international legal obligations in terms of Human Rights, Humanitarian Law and Non-Proliferation.

Guided by the premise that “*everything is closely interrelated*”¹¹, the EU should strive to develop an **integral approach** towards an **authentic European peace policy**.

The EU Global Strategy provides with its **integrated, comprehensive approach** a good basis in this respect. The **future orientation of European defence** should therefore be understood as a **global concept**. Embedded in an **overall people-centered peace policy framework**, security and defence should be effectively linked and integrated with other EU external and internal policy areas, including development cooperation, climate action, trade, economic and social policies or the fight against terrorism.

The recent proposals¹² that aim to incorporate a stronger security dimension into EU development policies should not, however, undermine the primary goal of development which is the eradication of poverty. Instead, a **stronger development focus** should be **integrated into** other policy fields, including **security and defence policy**. The upcoming revision of the Athena financing mechanism might constitute a good opportunity in this respect.

A more **coherent and better coordinated interaction between civilian, military, development and humanitarian actors** would be needed at all stages of the conflict cycle. At the EU level, this will above all require that the responsibilities between various institutional actors, and structural divisions between political guidance and financial resources be better coordinated. Moreover, the EU should consider **establishing a structure to genuinely implement the integrated approach**. Such a structure should combine the capacity of strategic foresight, political analysis, planning and conduct.

The **strengthening of resilience** which has been defined as another priority for EU’s external action might also constitute a helpful tool in implementing defence as a global concept. If resilience is primarily understood as a people-centred and context-specific approach, it might re-inforce EU’s peace-building actions by creating **effective synergies between different policy areas** and by bringing together **different types of actors at and across different levels**, for instance civil/military, state/non-state actors, including civil society and Churches¹³.

¹¹ Cf. Pope Francis, the [Encyclical Laudato Si’](#) (2015), Chapter IV.

¹² Cf. most notably the [proposal](#) of the European Commission of 5 July 2016 to amend the Instrument contributing to stability and peace in order to allow the provision of non-lethal equipment to military forces of third countries.

¹³ Cf. COMECE, Justice and Peace Europe, and Pax Christi International, [Fostering resilience for sustainable peace](#) (2017).

4. Conclusion

The current reflection on security and defence is timely and needed. The efforts to strengthen European security and defence should not be detached from the overall policy framework and geopolitical context. A narrow understanding of security and defence can **provide only a partial response** to the **variety of threats** faced by **the people** in Europe and worldwide today. In order to address these challenges **effectively and comprehensively**, the **future European security and defence** should, in particular:

- be based on **clear strategic objectives**,
- be oriented towards **human security** and **sustainable peace**,
- ensure **effective** and **adequate** protection of **people**, and
- be understood as a **global concept** embedded in an **authentic European peace policy**.

The Secretariat of COMECE, 19 June 2017

The Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) brings together the Bishop delegates from Bishops' Conferences of the 28 Member States. For more than thirty years now, COMECE has been closely involved in the process of European integration and sharing its reflections with EU institutions. COMECE is the Catholic Church partner of EU institutions in the Dialogue foreseen by Article 17(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Its permanent General Secretariat, based in Brussels, analyses EU policies on a day-by-day basis, striving to bring the specific contribution of the Catholic Church into the European debate.

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