Berlin Debates 7, February 17, 2016, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Berlin

Motion: The EU needs its own army

The debate began with comments by debate moderator **Sarah Raine**, Senior Consulting Fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies and a non-resident Transatlantic Fellow for the Berlin office of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Ms Raine highlighted that the debate surrounding a supra-national European Army dates back almost to the start of the European project, with, for example, a European Defence Community proposed by French Prime Minister Rene Pleven in 1950. However, she added that escalating geopolitical tensions over the last two years - most notably Russia's annexation of Crimea, the escalating conflict and rise of Islamist extremism in the Middle East, and resulting refugee crisis - have refocused attention on the lack of European security and defence policy coordination, as well as the retrenchment in EU military expenditure. She also highlighted the call for a EU army by Commission President Juncker last year, and the political support this ambition had since garnered, including in Germany.

The debate:

The four speakers were in universal agreement that enhanced cooperation between EU national armies and defence apparatus is fundamental to meeting current and future regional security challenges. The main point of division focused on the practicality of establishing a new EU army, as well as the effectiveness and cohesion of such an autonomous supra-national force. Whilst the proposition acknowledged this would be difficult and advocated an incremental approach, the opposition argued that it would be so difficult as to risk being counter-productive to European integration. They also questioned its potential effectiveness given past differences over key EU foreign and security policy issues, from Iraq to Libya.

Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, two-term President of of Latvia during 1999-2007, opened the case in support of the motion by stating that the time has finally arrived for the creation of a pan-EU military capacity. According to Ms Vīķe-Freiberga, this army should encompass all EU member states, including current members and non-members of the Nato alliance, as well as non-aligned neutral countries such as Sweden, Finland and Ireland. She used an ostrich metaphor to illustrate that the EU has consistently ignored escalating external threats to regional security over the last decade, and in particular from an increasingly revanchist Russia. The former Latvian head of state also stressed that Europe can no longer afford to outsource regional security and defence to Nato, and in particular a US government that no longer has the capacity or willingness to provide a blanket defence guarantee to its European allies. Ms Vīķe-Freiberga highlighted the example of the recent military intervention in Libya as a stark example of Europe's dwindling military capacity, including a continued inability to meet fresh security challenges without US assistance. She added that a EU army should act in compliment rather than as a replacement to national armies.

Also speaking in support of the motion, **Constanze Stelzenmüller**, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, again voiced concern over the extent to which EU defence policy has become excessively reliant on the US and Nato. The prospect of a potentially more isolationist future US administration has also increased the urgency for enhanced military cooperation between EU member states, according to Ms Stelzenmüller. She added, however, that a EU army should be fully interoperable with Nato, and would presage neither the creation of a European superstate nor an excessively militaristic European foreign policy. A supra-national army would therefore offer a unique framework from which to meet new security challenges, without threatening the trans-Atlantic alliance, according to Ms Stelzenmüller, who also emphasised the likelihood of US support for enhanced intra-EU defence and security cooperation. In response to the retrenchment of European military expenditure, she highlighted the debilitating dependency culture that has resulted from excessive reliance on Nato and US defence guarantees. Even the EU's strongest militarily powers, the UK and France, have witnessed a fundamental reduction in hard power capabilities in recent years, with the increased costs of military technological advances requiring the integration and pooling of existing military resources, according to Ms Stelzenmüller.

Gideon Rachman, chief foreign affairs commentator for The Financial Times, opened the case in opposition to the motion. As with other members of the panel, Mr Rachman expressed support for enhanced regional military cooperation as the most effective means of meeting current and future security challenges. However, with reference to his time reporting on EU affairs in Brussels during the early 2000s, Mr Rachman highlighted risks associated with overly ambitious efforts to advance integration without adequate regard for the subsequent consequences of these actions on both sovereignty and public opinion. He was sceptical that public opinion in neutral states, such as Ireland, would support membership of a supra-national force. Mr Rachman also cited the creation of the European single currency as the most obvious example where a pooling of national competencies has ultimately fuelled divergence rather than the intended convergence between EU member states. With reference to the 2003 Iraq war, Mr Rachman highlighted the continued differences between external policies of EU member states, and stressed that future political and security crises are likely to reveal continued intra-EU divisions. He therefore cast doubt over the capacity of the EU to successfully manage the deployment of a single supra-national army, with insufficient cohesiveness and unity to respond effectively to future security threats.

Also speaking in opposition to the motion was **Jeremy Shapiro**, Research Director at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Mr Shapiro emphasised the increasing inability and unwillingness of the US to provide the same security guarantees to its European allies that have been in place during the post war period. The US would therefore support any form of increased EU military capacity, he added. According to Mr Shapiro, there are three possible routes to greater European defence capabilities: at the individual member state level, through enhanced surpra-national EU coordination, and within the Nato alliance. He made the case that a combination of all three is most preferable, while stressing that there is currently little evidence of European countries boosting military capabilities at any of these levels. Alongside greater government

defence expenditure, Mr Shapiro outlined the need for increased cooperation and interoperability between European national armies. However, he cast doubt on their capacity to establish a genuine supra-national force, complete with the necessary common command structures and military units, repeating Mr Rachman's assertion that overly ambitious efforts towards integration may ultimately result in political fragmentation. In the unlikely scenario that such an army was established, Mr Shapiro viewed structural impediments within regional policymaking procedures, as well as divisions in national foreign policy priorities, as likely to prohibit its effectiveness in responding to external security challenges.

Debate Result:

The post debate vote revealed an absolute majority of the audience in favour of the motion - The EU needs its own army - with 53% voting for, 32% against and 15% abstaining.