

EUROPEAN DEFENSE: TIME HAS COME TO PLOT UP THE ROADMAP

by Emma Bonino, former member of the European Commission, former Minister for Foreign Affairs in Italy, and Marco de Andreis, economist, former member of her staff.

Since the beginning of its mandate, three years ago, the European Commission led by Jean-Claude Juncker has given great importance to security issues. "A Europe that protects" has become a key motto of this college. Which actually corresponds to the concerns of European citizens, as they are recorded by Eurobarometer polls.

The creation, in October 2016, in the record time of just nine months, of a European Border and Coast Guard was the first response to this need for protection.

In parallel, the European Commission has turned its attention to security in its more hard and classic sense, i.e. military defense. Here too, Eurobarometer surveys provide support, since from the year 2000 to the present they have been consistently showing that between 70 and 80 percent of European citizens favor "a common security and defense policy between Member states".

Going through various intermediate stages - including closer EU-NATO cooperation enshrined in a joint statement of June 2016 in Warsaw - the Commission has moved even further on June 7th last, with the launch of a European Defense Fund and a reflection paper on the future of European defense.

How to judge these developments? It all depends, obviously, from the point of view. There are in Europe those who are completely deaf to any talk of a military role for the EU - Britain, which is out of the picture now, but also Denmark - because they believe this is an exclusive NATO competence. There are others who are lukewarm - all the countries of the former Warsaw Pact - because they are afraid of weakening NATO and others still who are reluctant simply because they are neutral - Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Ireland, Malta, Sweden. Then there are the six founding members of the EU and a few others who are convinced that Security and Defense are, with the economy, the privileged ground for advancing European integration.

If you belong, as these writers do, to the latter group - with federalist aspirations on top - you'll probably see the initiatives taken so far by the European Commission as very modest.

The European Border and Coast Guard is a tiny contingent that can help the corresponding national forces of a member state *asking for it*. It is, in other words, a small thing that might even never be put to a serious test. We Europeans could do a lot more, by transferring *in toto* to the Union the control of our external borders - for goods and people - without even having to change the treaty, but we don't seem keen to do it.

The European Defense Fund aims to foster military research and development projects carried out by companies from different Member States. Leveraging the sums earmarked from the Community budget is expected to generate multiple volumes of investment from the Member States. From 2020, the Commission thinks that, on a yearly basis, committing 1 billion and a half euros will induce Member States to invest 4 billion more. It may turn out to be mere wishful thinking, judging at least from what happened with a similar idea, the European Fund for Strategic Investment, otherwise called Juncker Plan.

Finally, the reflection paper on the future of European defense. This is a byproduct of the White Paper on the Future of Europe, presented last March. In both cases, options (or scenarios) are offered in any odd number such that the reader's choice falls on the apparently more reasonable one: the median. Following this logic the "common defense" (scenario number three) looks too bold and we are supposed to pick up the "shared defense" (scenario number two). Which is about rather vague "bigger commitments" on a voluntary basis, without no new institutional framework. Not very encouraging.

Especially in comparison with what has been going on over the last twelve months. Great Britain has decided to leave the European Union. Americans have elected a president, Donald Trump, for whom NATO does not seem to be a priority. Things that led Christya Freeland, Canada's Foreign Minister, to declare that "to rely solely on the U.S. security umbrella would make us a client state [...] such a dependence would not be in Canada's interest". Or the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, to say that "the times in which we could rely fully on others – they are somewhat over" and that Europeans countries should "really take our fate into our own hands."¹

The European Union can certainly have its own autonomous defense if it so wishes. It is after all, even without Britain, one of the world's largest economies, with some of the richest countries of the world, among them a permanent member of the Security Council, as well as nuclear power, France. Autonomy does not mean competition. On the contrary, NATO would only gain, in effectiveness and operational capabilities, if at least some of the European countries set up an integrated European military force: *e pluribus unum* is an approach that Americans should be the first to subscribe to.

Not all member states need to be involved, as implied by the concept of a multi-speed Europe sponsored by the current German Government, as well as by the possibility provided for in the current treaty to have in the field of defense a "permanent structured cooperation" between Member States who so desire.

Then, both France and Germany seem now keener to change the treaty. This should not be an excuse to keep wasting the opportunities offered by the Lisbon treaty in force to get closer to "a Europe that protects" both in the field of border control and in the field of defense. However, if in the end the treaty gets open to change, then the quantum leap would be - seventy-two years after the end of World War II, with Britain and the U.S. in the process of disengaging from Europe - to consider Defense as a function of government to be transferred from the national to the federal level. As was done with the single European currency.

And as the creation of the European Central Bank did not lead to the disappearance of national central banks, the creation of European armed forces need not lead to the disappearance of national armies, which may stay on a smaller scale for territorial defense or as reinforcements, with a role similar to the U.S. National Guard.

This idea is not new, since it was floated back in 1999 as part of the platform of the "Emma Bonino List" at the European elections of the same year² – the List got 8.5% of the popular vote in Italy. It called for making of the creation of a European army an explicit objective to pursue in a clear institutional framework and through a series of intermediate steps.

¹ Both quotations are in Ian Austes, "A growing global role for Canada", *The New York Times International Edition*, June 14, 2017.

² See Emma Bonino, "A single European Army", *Financial Times*, 3 febbraio 1999.

Exactly as it was done with the euro. It all started with a committee of twelve central bankers and three independent experts, chaired by then-European Commission President Jacques Delors, who presented a three-stage Monetary Union plan approved by the Madrid European Council in June 1989. The final goal and intermediate phases were incorporated into the Maastricht Treaty two years later. The institutional framework was provided by the European Monetary Institute (EMI), the forerunner of the ECB.

This procedure served the purpose of making clear to all that a final goal was there and that it was to be achieved by a series of successive stages – with national governments firmly in control throughout the whole process and from one stage to another. It is therefore time for the governments of the Union and the Commission to state, contrary to what they do today, that the ultimate goal is indeed the creation of a European army. But since no one knows today what form it should take (manning and equipment levels, missions, doctrines etc.) a mandate should be given to the relevant institutions to go to work to study it, while at the same time fixing deadlines for the intermediate steps and the entry into force. Unlike the EMI that had to be created, these institutions, such as the Military Committee and the European Defense Agency, already exist. A substantial advantage.

Big reforms in European affairs invariably need three things: a firm commitment to a final goal, however distant in the future; the attendant sense of direction to guide successive generations of politicians and bureaucrats; an institutional framework to work toward that goal.

So it was done with the euro and so it should be done today with Defense.