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Research Report

Warsaw's ambitious CSDP agenda: Polish Council Presidency seeks progress on Weimar Triangle initiatives

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Warsaw's Ambitious CSDP Agenda

Polish Council Presidency Seeks Progress on Weimar Triangle Initiative

Claudia Major and Florian Wassenberg

With talk of the demise of the CSDP doing the rounds, is it perhaps surprising to see the Polish Council Presidency coming up with ambitious proposals as far-reaching as a civil-military headquarters for the EU. The agenda Poland has drawn up in close consultation with France and Germany (the Weimar Triangle) addresses a wave of security problems facing the EU's member states. Trapped between falling defence budgets and growing international challenges, states will have no alternative but to cooperate with one another. Poland hopes to revitalise the Common Security and Defence Policy as the defining framework for the EU's security policy. The Weimar Triangle should support Poland and push three pragmatic ideas: developing civil-military crisis response forces, setting up a military headquarters, and shared provision and use of military capabilities.

While the official programme for the Polish Presidency vaguely asserts under "Secure Europe" that Warsaw intends to "consolidate direct dialogue between the EU and NATO" and enhance the EU's military and civilian capabilities, Poland has actually already specified three priorities:

1. EU Headquarters (HQ): Set up permanent, civil-military planning and command structures at EU level (see SWP Comment 31/2010).

2. EU Battlegroups (BGs): Reform military BGs into civil-military crisis response forces.

3. Pooling and Sharing: Identify and carry through specific projects for joint development, procurement, maintenance and deployment of military assets.

These proposals build on the Weimar Triangle's CSDP initiative of April 2010, in which Poland, Germany and France proposed reforming the Battlegroups, setting up an EU HQ, reinvigorating EU-NATO relations via concrete projects, and developing military capabilities jointly at the EU level. In December 2010 they put their ideas to EU High Representative (HR) Catherine Ashton, who welcomed the initiative and asked the European External Action Service to prepare proposals for implementation. In early summer 2011 the Weimar states held three high-level conferences on the topics of Battlegroups, EU HQ, and pooling and sharing to thrash out a basis for decisions to be made during the Polish Council Presidency. In July 2011 HR

Ashton presented her CSDP report, which largely follows the Weimar proposal, to the EU foreign ministers. Although London vetoed the proposal for an EU HQ, the other states welcomed the report.

A Poor Track Record

The ambitious Polish plans are especially surprising in the light of the CSDP's poor performance in recent months, when certain EU member states have shunned its multilateral framework.

First and foremost, Paris and London launched their military operation against Libya under Security Council Resolution 1973 bilaterally, without consultation in the EU framework. And Germany preferred to entrust enforcement of the arms embargo to NATO, although even the United Kingdom would have accepted an EU role there. As these examples show, even after ten years the CSDP has done little to bring the security objectives of the EU nations closer together. Whereas Paris and London are most interested in providing and deploying crisis management forces, Germany and Poland prioritise deepening European cooperation in the military sphere. These differences continue to obstruct joint action.

Secondly, the EU member states failed to use the CSDP as discussion forum when the financial crisis erupted. Their initial response to economic pressure was national, without seeking European exchange and without thinking through the consequences that uncoordinated drawdown of military capabilities might have for European security. Although certain EU partners have in the meantime started or revived military cooperation initiatives, for example the Franco-British Defence and Security Cooperation Treaty or the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO), these moves are frequently regional, sometimes involve non-EU states (Norway in NORDEFCO) and are often outside the CSDP.

Growing Pressure

All the same, Poland's plans are not automatically doomed to failure. They come precisely at a time when EU member states find themselves up against challenges they cannot solve alone or bilaterally. In June 2011 U.S. President Barack Obama and his departing Defence Secretary Robert Gates again admonished the Europeans to take greater international responsibility. Various scenarios are conceivable: In the longer term engagement in the Middle East after the establishment of a Palestinian state; more immediately intervention to support democratic developments in North Africa. Under the CSDP member states could offer crucial assistance, such as supplying experts to help setting up governmental, administrative and law enforcement structures.

The second challenge relates to military capabilities. The impact of budget cuts on national defence sectors is such that very soon no EU member state will be able to maintain a full range of capabilities on its own. If they are to retain their military punch they will have to work together.

What the EU Can Offer

The EU supplies these states with a unique tool. With the EU Military Committee and joint capability planning the member states have tried-and-tested mechanisms that mirror those of NATO. In addition, they can use the European Defence Agency, which deals with all aspects of military capacity development and has no counterpart in the Alliance. The power of the European Commission to influence the defence industry and defence technology through its instruments in the communitised sectors of industry, market and technology is equally unique. Neither NATO nor any single state can match this comprehensive approach in capability development.

The EU's framework is continuously developing. The member states' exclusive responsibility for their defence industry ended in summer 2011 when the Commis-

sion's Defence Package came into effect, with its Directive on Defence and Sensitive Security Procurement representing a step towards a common European defence equipment market. The EU will become the frame of reference in the defence sector, too, and states will increasingly be obliged to open military procurement to EU-wide competition. Moreover, EU rules are increasingly setting uniform technical standards even in the military sphere.

If the EU member states operate through the institutional framework of CSDP and EU, they can make better use of their resources by bundling and coordinating. The urgency of this was exposed by the Libya operation, where the EU's two biggest military powers quickly hit their operational limits. Bilateral agreements outside of the CSDP risk creating duplication, leading to additional costs and inefficiencies. Thus the Franco-British Defence Treaty duplicates existing collaborations in the European Defence Agency, for example for maritime mine countermeasures.

Bilateral and multilateral collaboration outside the EU framework will not solve the states' security problems, being incapable of supplying satisfactory military punch or sufficient numbers of civilian experts, nor able to generate the volume of orders required to keep a defence industry alive.

Slow Realisation

Awareness is growing within the EU of the scale of the challenges and the potential that CSDP cooperation offers for dealing with them. Some member states have turned bilateral pooling and sharing initiatives into EU projects. One such is the Ghent initiative, launched by Germany and Sweden at the end of 2010 and since Europeanised, where the European Defence Agency helps member states to identify potential for savings and cooperation.

This cautious revival of interest in the CSDP is driven less by abstract European conviction than by a pragmatic realisation that without the CSDP it will be even more

difficult to overcome the capability crisis and meet the global demand for crisis management. Such pragmatism is not per se negative. At the moment working together to avoid a Europe without defence, that is, a Europe hamstrung by security feuding, might be a better motivation than the fading normative idea of an autonomous European power, a "Europe puissance".

Poland's Opportunity

If Poland supports this awakening process and stresses the pragmatic benefits of the EU framework, it stands a fighting chance of reviving the CSDP. Three factors mitigate in its favour:

1. The member states accept Poland as a military partner, for example by virtue of its participation in Afghanistan. But Warsaw played no great role in recent squabbles (Libya), allowing it to play the role of honest broker and bring the most important EU actors back to the table. And through the Weimar Triangle Poland can rely on German and French backing.

2. Poland is pursuing pragmatic goals that all member states share, such as enhancing military capabilities, while steering clear of potentially controversial questions of principle, such as the drafting of an EU defence strategy.

3. The member states are coming to realise that time is of the essence for CSDP initiatives. Next in line for the Council Presidency are Denmark and Cyprus, neither of have much in the way of interest or leverage with respect to the CSDP, so it is more or less a matter of now or never.

The Council Presidency may have lost a great deal of clout under the Lisbon Treaty, but if Poland does no more than fulfil the role of "inspiring the CSDP" sought by Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski it still has great scope for progress.

Pragmatic Action Now

Germany should support Poland's agenda with precise ideas and work to integrate France via the Weimar Triangle. Poland should maintain its pragmatic approach and push for its three CSDP priorities with clear implementation plans, without getting distracted by controversial debates about new EU strategies or suchlike. The goal for the end of the Council Presidency should be Council decisions to anchor the three priorities as new CSDP acquis. The following would be obvious steps to take:

Reform and deploy Battlegroups:

Poland should advance Battlegroup reform and develop a model for a civil-military *Comprehensive Rapid Reaction Force* where the military Battlegroup forms a nucleus to which civil or civil-military elements can be attached (for example police or civil administration). The point here is not to subjugate civil elements under military leadership, but to adapt the EU instrument to the requirements of today's crises. Such Battlegroups could, for example, secure a port to allow delivery of humanitarian aid. Poland should also put two further options on the table: an *extension* of the length of readiness periods and a numerical *expansion* (see SWP Research Paper 8/2011). That could expand the spectrum of operations and increase the likelihood of deployment. Poland should initiate a debate about the actual use of such Battlegroups, for example in the course of drawing down KFOR in Kosovo.

Create acceptance for an EU HQ:

Poland should stress the benefits of permanent civil-military planning and command structures, especially to London, and develop institutional and procedural blueprints to bring the HQ debate back from abstract principles to the level of the useful and doable. Poland's concrete goal should be to create political readiness paving the way for later action, rather than actually setting up an HQ during its EU Presidency.

Progress on pooling and sharing:

Poland should establish the Weimar Triangle as a laboratory for small successful

projects in three areas: 1. merging training facilities and operating them jointly (which would also improve interoperability); 2. expanding successful formats like the European Air Transport Command with new members, to rectify the lack of strategic transport capacity; 3. joint provision of battlefield medical support.

Successful projects can convince member states of the benefits of European cooperation and create the trust that is a vital precondition for accepting the ensuing dependencies. They could forge the way to progress in more sensitive fields, such as a multinational helicopter unit, and encourage other states to join the cooperation or set up their own projects.

Only after the EU member states have accepted the CSDP as a useful framework through pragmatic steps and tangible successes, will the basis be restored for the necessary strategic debates about the future of security and defence cooperation in the EU.

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