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Guest Editorial

The EU, Arms Control and Armaments*

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Since 1999 the EU has emerged more clearly as an 'armed' power (thanks to advances in the European Security and Defence Policy, and the European Defence Agency), but also as a power seeking non-violent solutions to proliferation and arms control challenges – the most obvious example being the intervention of European powers and institutions in the case of Iran. The EU today also more clearly sees DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration) as part of its repertory for post-conflict work, and is preparing to adopt a concept on Security Sector Reform (SSR) which may be expected to recommend transparent and responsible, 'necessary minimum' approaches to defence planning for the nations where it is applied. This would be a good time, therefore, to ask such questions as: is the EU the *right power* to be tackling the arms control (or more generally, the 'restraint') part of the international security agenda; is it doing it the *right way*; and is its overall approach to arms and their use as '*joined up*' as it should be? (It is easy to answer that last question with 'No' in advance.)

The Right Power?

From one viewpoint, it may seem strange to question whether the EU should be 'doing' arms control. Such work, including notably the preparation of common positions for global treaty negotiations, has figured in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy from the outset (and even from the earlier days of Political Cooperation, when armaments-related UN issues were discussed). Non-violent – that is, non-armed – solutions to security challenges are explicitly part of the EU gospel (vide the European Security Strategy of 2003), and are genuinely preferred by most EU Member States most of the

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time in their own best interest. The ESDP itself, by making Member States focus more on small and suitably equipped spearhead forces for 'altruistic' out-of-area intervention, should in principle lead them to (further) reduce arms stocks and personnel designed for more old-fashioned, territorial, defence or offence.

Nevertheless, an advocatus diaboli could make some telling points. First and most obviously, the EU's 'common voice' on *nuclear* issues is still undermined by the divisions and differences between nuclear, non-nuclear and anti-nuclear states in its own membership. The evidence of the Europeans hanging together at the last (2005) review of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, or achieving anything on these points in the UN Summit process that culminated in September 2005, is actually not very impressive. Secondly, the EU is still effectively out of the picture on major *conventional* disarmament issues in its own region because of NATO's role as the de facto Western interlocutor in the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) negotiations, plus the ongoing political blockage of that process. There is a similar no-go area regarding policy on the remaining shorter-range nuclear weapons in Europe. What the EU has been able to do regarding control and destruction of small arms, as a menace to weaker states in other regions, is all very well, but it is also supposed to be a European principle that 'charity should begin at home'.

Thirdly, if the EU did want to ask its own members to practise arms control – through measures of, for example, 'necessary minimum' planning for their own defences, a faster switch away from major armaments only relevant to high-intensity local combat, and speedy and efficient destruction of major armaments – its locus for doing so would be very doubtful because ESDP competence still only covers capabilities and planning for operations abroad (which still only use a fraction of individual nations' manpower and arsenals).

Fourth and last, as the Iran case has reminded us, solving arms control and proliferation challenges today is not just a matter for technical and legal expertise, perceived legitimacy, and good intentions – all of which the EU can usually lay claim to. It also requires serious negotiating leverage to develop and enforce multi-dimensional 'package' deals with political, economic, financial and maybe military elements. Typically, the EU lacks the strongest sticks and carrots that might achieve something in these contexts; and it is also not very good at combining those instruments it does have. This highlights the importance of the next question: namely, the *way* the EU approaches these matters within its own mechanisms and on a day-to-day basis.

The Right Way?

As in so many fields of EU endeavour, there is a whole set of self-inflicted internal obstacles to effectiveness in Europe's collective arms control policy. The most general problem is the split of roles between Member States and central institutions/processes, and the tendency for a few big states to dominate in realpolitik instances (vide Iran) while more idealistic smaller states also go their own way (e.g. Sweden's initiative to establish the Blix Commission on WMD). Within Brussels, it is fair to say that the Council Secretariat and Commission have demonstrated more common purpose and synergy in this field than some others; but there is still sporadic tension (going so far as a recent legal challenge on small arms) between the Council's claim to a steering role on policy and the fact that the Commission has the big money and have spent big money effectively in the past, for example on Cooperative Threat Reduction (the control and destruction of surplus WMD materials). Within the Commission itself there are risks of schizophrenia because different bits of very relevant expertise and money (e.g. on nuclear safety, bio-safety/public health, export control, border control and enlargement) are situated in different Directorates-General, none of which wants to be subordinated to 'pure' arms control policy made in RELEX – with the result that all too often, EU offices abroad are pretty unsighted on this whole agenda. Last but perhaps most fatal is the persistent under-funding of this whole area through the various parts of the EU Budget, partly because it is always bound to be less 'sexy' and well-known than the operative part of ESDP, but also probably because of many different states' wariness over 'Brusselization' in this sensitive – and now highly politicized – field.

'Joining Up' the Pieces, and Why Bother?

The overall result of these factors up to now has been a clear dominance of the 'armed' wing of EU security policy both in substance and in outside perception. Indeed, since May 2004 the progress made in EU militarization through a more active and ambitious ESDP has sometimes seemed to be one of very few things still driving the Union forward. A similar though less highly publicized movement has taken place on the internal security, anti-terrorist front – incidentally implying a possibly increased demand for homeland security-relevant equipment, which is subject to far fewer, if any, normative controls than weapons per se. It is true that some non-military dimensions of security have risen in salience in European collective policy-making (most obviously, energy security policy since early 2006); but while this provides a welcome boost for the 'joining up' of related dimensions of external and

internal policies, it cannot provide a counterweight to the militarization or operationalization of the ESDP agenda within the narrower field of the traditional second pillar.

Does this matter? That depends on what the EU's states and citizens want the Union's overall security role and security image to be in future. Should the EU move towards directly competing with the USA as a military/strategic power, and/or as a supplier of defence equipment? (That is the only context in which talk of 'closing the trans-Atlantic technology gap' would make sense as a goal *for the EU as such* – and thus for the EDA – as distinct from its nations' possible aims and commitments in NATO.) Or should the EU profile itself as an active military power (and arms supplier) of a *different* and alternative – and hopefully better – sort from the USA? Or should the Union preserve the stance that it has, generally speaking, adopted up to now as a security power that knows the importance of restraint as well as action, and that is ready to work for getting rid of unnecessary armaments *on its own side* (not just in Iran or Darfur) – as well as refining and cleverly applying the weapons it really needs?

This author would vote for the third alternative, not just because it is hard to see any other major power bloc in the world filling that role at present (NATO in particular has virtually moved out of the arms control business since the early 1990s), but also but because of some hard facts about the EU itself. The Union can in practice never out-arm either the USA or its potential enemies; it is not likely ito acquire any further nuclear-weapon states; and thus, it has prima facie much more to gain than lose by restraint in any arms-related field. Highlighting this aspect of the European mission would certainly bring new meaning to relevant areas of EU/UN (and EU/OSCE) cooperation, and give new angles – new European credibility as well as new disputes – in the EU's collective dialogues with major regional organizations and powers like China and Russia. It would also of course mean articulating more clearly a basic difference between the EU and (current) US security strategies. It would demand significantly more effort to 'join up' the armament and disarmament dimensions of EU policy, and the related efforts of the different institutions; to increase the relevant central budgets; and at least gradually, to reduce the space for free play by Member States.

Is this a hopeless prescription? Probably so, if it were treated as a monolithic agenda to realize all at once. But there are places to start and specific things can be done that are not wholly unrealistic, and that would seem to be in tune with the hopes and priorities of several incoming Presidencies (notably, Germany). They could include:

– new efforts to overcome the blockage on the EU's proposed new Code of Conduct on exports of conventional military equipment and make it legally binding – perhaps as part of a presentational package with the EU's support

for the UK's Arms Trade Treaty initiative, or any similar global proposals for restraint?
- reserving more funds for CTR-type spending within the Commission's future external policy budget (and parallel spending by Member States), and enhancing the political profile of this issue; expanding it beyond the former Soviet region; and bringing the Council's and Commission's efforts into closer synergy under political priorities to be updated by Ministers;
- brainstorming in the Political and Security Committee on roles that the EU could play in the field of *major* conventional disarmament and weapons destruction, including in its own region and the former Soviet space; also considering the relevance of arms management to tackling nearby 'frozen conflicts', which could increase the openings for EU/OSCE synergy;
- ensuring that EU policies on health and bio-safety (e.g. in the context of bird 'flu) and on the chemical industry take relevant CBW security issues into account;
- developing a positive dialogue with the European defence and security industry on ways to accommodate these factors, and in particular to internalize good export-control practice, in European defence industrial policy without undue loss of competitivity. (Indeed, a 'responsible' label on European producers might sometimes serve them well – why not develop this as part of a wider European initiative on 'Corporate Security Responsibility' modelled upon Corporate Social Responsibility and the 'greening' of business, where large European companies are often already in the lead?). EU members and the Commission might also start discussing normative guidelines for the homeland security industry;
- including arms control or general 'restraint' factors as part of the framework for the EDA's planning especially for the longer term (the Agency's recent report on itst Long Term Review has opened the door for this);
- further raising the profile of relevant issues in EU dialogues with USA, Russia, China and the regional organizations;
- more consciously and coherently developing the disarmament and arms restraint elements in the EU's DDR and SSR concepts/operations, as well as in the EU's broader efforts for sustainable development and good governance in other world regions.

At the level of high policy, the EU should consider espousing the Blix Commission's proposals for a UN arms control and disarmament summit in a few years' time, and set out to dictate/prepare suitable bits of the agenda. In particular, at least during internal preparations, Member States should consider breaking the taboo on brainstorming about the general way ahead for nuclear arms control after the US–Russian START agreement expires in 2009.

Idealistic as they may seem in combination, none of these points would call for Member States to surrender major further parts of their national political/

institutional control of *policies* related to armaments and arms restraint. What they do inescapably imply – just as with any real boost in effectiveness to other non-military parts of the EU Security Strategy – is a willingness to further pool and channel *resources* through Brussels.