

EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE IDENTITY AND TURKEY

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The European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) is an evolving concept. While its underlying philosophy dates perhaps as far back as the aborted European Defence Community initiative of 1952, its current day manifestation is a product of the post-Cold War phase of the European Union's (EU) development. Today, ESDI finds its expression in separate institutional frameworks in terms of a complexity of relationships between the Western European Union (WEU), EU and NATO. This is the result of a grand compromise of sorts, produced by one of the hardest fought battles in Europe -the battle of Maastricht of 1991. Like most compromises, it represents half-fulfilled expectations for most of the parties involved, with certain fundamental questions deferred for the present.

As my readers will recall, Maastricht is a historic Dutch city where the Treaty on European Union was signed in December 1991. Indeed, from my personal vantage point as a participant on the NATO front of the developments, I would characterise the debate that raged concerning the development of a European identity in defence -an area which had been the unchallenged domain of North Atlantic relations during the Cold War years -as nothing less than acrimonious, and essentially ideological. One side consisted of those who pursued the logic of integration and wanted the Union to have its integral defence dimension, to be reflected in the Treaty. On the opposing side was a mix of concerns: there were those who saw a potential for the erosion of the trans-Atlantic relations embodied in NATO and wanted to avoid that eventuality; and there was likewise opposition to defence being brought into the scope of European unification, reflecting attachment to national sovereignty and to retaining collective defence at a strictly intergovernmental level.

Of course, if Western Europeans could afford to be engaged in experimentation in a sombre area such as defence, it was essentially due to the removal from the strategic scene of the colossal Soviet threat. The Kohl-Mitterand axis was very much the driving force, with the German Chancellor seeking to embed a now united Germany in NATO and in deepening Union structures, and the socialist French President attached essentially to the latter part of this proposition. On the other hand, it was not yet clear what to expect by way of security challenges in the post-Cold War environment. The sobering effects of the Bosnian tragedy and the chill of Russian assertiveness had not yet been experienced. In short, one could still contemplate institution building for its own sake, rather than in direct response to actual strategic requirements.

Now, at the risk of boring my readers, I will indulge in a series of quotations from Maastricht texts. This is necessary in order to understand the basis of the ESDI arrangements that were reached, and to comment intelligibly about the future. The following most quoted sentence from Article J-4 of the Treaty on European Union is of central importance in that it relates to a fundamental dimension of the compromise that I alluded to:

"The common foreign and security policy (CFSP) shall include all questions related to the security of the European Union, including the eventual framing of a common defence policy which might in time lead to common defence."

What the paragraph says in a cryptic way, is this: CFSP will cover security issues as part of the common foreign policy, but when it comes to defence matters in a military and operational sense, CFSP will not have competence beyond the framing of a defence policy, let alone having its own integrated defence structure, at least for the time being.

But can a CFSP which is not backed by dedicated defence capabilities be viable and credible? In theory the logic of this theoretical question is difficult to assail, however in real life certain constraints interfere, as has since been learned the hard way. In any case, by virtue of the following language at Maastricht, defence proper was eventually kept

outside the scope of the Union Treaty and entrusted to a separate organisation which had its own defence treaty basis:

"The Union requests the Western European Union, which is an integral part of the development of the European Union, to elaborate and implement decisions and actions of the Union which have defence implications."

A simultaneous declaration issued by the WEU Ministerial Council left little hesitation about what was intended:

"WEU member states agree on the need to develop a genuine European security and defence identity and a greater European responsibility on defence matters. This identity will be pursued through a gradual process involving successive phases. WEU will form an integral part of the process of the development of the European Union and will enhance its contribution to the solidarity within the Atlantic Alliance. WEU member states agree to strengthen the role of WEU, in the longer term perspective of a common defence policy within the European Union which might in time lead to a common defence, compatible with that of the Atlantic Alliance.

"WEU will be developed as the defence component of the European Union and as the means to strengthen the European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance. To this end, it will formulate common European defence policy and carry forward its concrete implementation through the further development of its own operational role."

Thus, the ESDI that emerged from Maastricht assigned a central role to the WEU - in essence, a role of double allegiance to both the Union and NATO. The two relationships are asymmetrical in nature and evolutionary in substance. To reflect this relationship in more concrete terms, the Maastricht declaration of the WEU Ministerial Council made the following offers:

"States which are members of the European Union are invited to accede to WEU on conditions to be agreed in accordance with Article XI of the modified Brussels Treaty, or to become observers if they so wish. Simultaneously, other European member states of NATO are invited to become associate members of WEU in a way which will give them the possibility to participate fully in the activities of WEU."

This is a paragraph of fateful importance to Turkey in that it makes full membership in WEU conditional on full membership of the EU. There are three European NATO countries which are not at the same time members of EU: Turkey, Norway and Iceland. When one considers the particularities of the latter two, it can be argued that associate membership of the WEU was conceived essentially with Turkey in mind. Everything considered, Turkey, which had been consistent by applying for WEU membership back in 1987 along with her bid for membership in the (then) EEC, had to settle for an inferior status in WEU. Among the countries who were made the offer, Greece was most happy to accede to the Brussels Treaty and become the tenth full member, ahead of Turkey. Following its EEC membership, the historic aberration of according Greece preferential treatment over Turkey had again been repeated, this time in the even more sensitive area of security and defence.

Thus at Maastricht, the 'European pillar of the Alliance' concept-one of the two allegiances of WEU-was given a flawed start by discriminating against three European Allies. Indeed, associate membership status has certain fundamental shortcomings:

- Associate members are not made party to the Brussels Treaty which constitutes the legal basis of the defence partnership embodied in the WEU. Most notably, they are excluded from the security guarantee under Article 5 of the Treaty. In fact, it has been the preference of certain WEU countries that the relationship to be established should be of a politically binding nature, and not be based on a legally binding international instrument.

This is avoidance par excellence of truly binding reciprocal commitments which should be the sine qua non of any defence partnership.

- The status of associate membership is not reflected in the Brussels Treaty. In other words, for all practical purposes a membership category has been created, without straightforward legal recognition.
- The parameters of associate membership have a practical purpose: to enable participation in WEU activities. The rule is full participation and its denial is the exception. However, the fact remains that in principle associate members can be denied participation when half the members object.

Within the context of the activities that they participate in, associate members can express opinions, distribute written texts, etc. But they cannot block decisions. This means they cannot effectively object to anything. Furthermore, their proposals need to find a sponsor among full members in order to be taken on board.

Subsequent exercises in upgrading this status, such as at the Kirchberg Ministerial Council meeting of May 1994, have essentially aimed at facilitating and securing Turkey's contribution to WEU's operational development, among others by providing political assurances against security risks arising from participation in such operations, without addressing the fundamental shortcomings.

These limitations notwithstanding, Turkey has sought to contribute in good faith to the political and operational development of the WEU during a critical formative period. A potentially problematic dimension for Turkey of this evolutionary process is the nature and intensity of the relationship between the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy and the WEU. Already at Maastricht it was agreed that the Union could make requests of the WEU to undertake operations in implementation of CFSP decisions. Should such interaction become dominant, given our total exclusion from the policy and decision-making phase within CFSP mechanisms, Turkey's place within the ESDI would increasingly be restricted to the receiving end of instructions. Such a situation would be politically untenable, calling for corrective institutional and procedural arrangements.

The Intergovernmental Conference which is to review the Maastricht arrangements is currently under way. A prominent area of review will no doubt be the arrangements concerning the ESDI. Compared to 1991, there seems to be less 'theology' and more pragmatism in the air. To my mind, one reason has been the realisation that in the post-Cold War environment, a host of latent and costly security challenges have suddenly become imminent, calling for appropriate responses. At the same time, there is increasing awareness about real life limitations to essentially philosophical ambitions. The Bosnian tragedy and the collective humiliation which was experienced there by a divided West has been a rude awakening. The value of trans-Atlantic partnership has been rediscovered. There is renewed confidence between those on both sides of the Atlantic. While France, under a new government, is seeking military partnership within a transformed Alliance, the US is displaying more understanding to once discomfiting European aspirations. There are statements by prominent personalities about creating ESDI within the Alliance. NATO's operational assets are being offered to the WEU in support of the so-called 'Petersberg tasks'.

In fact, in certain ways the Maastricht arrangements and understandings concerning ESDI have been overtaken by events. That is why the period that lies ahead, as the Intergovernmental Conference unfolds and as the Alliance enters the Spring 1996 ministerial meetings, is of comparable importance to the Maastricht period itself. The picture is not any less complex and confusing. Views ranging from subsuming the WEU within the EU, to retaining its political and operational autonomy are on the table. The most viable outcome seems to be an operationally more capable WEU which may now count

on Alliance resources, and an enhanced triangular relationship between the WEU, EU and NATO.

A strategically meaningful and credible ESDI, which would make political sense and be of practical utility will, above all, require political determination towards that end. It will also require flexibility. The countries concerned must get out of the rigidities of Maastricht. This is particularly true in terms of the - for us infamous- linkage of memberships in EU and WEU, which has proven to be impracticable anyway. Harmonious inter-state relations in Europe can best be achieved through widening participation in political, security and economic frameworks. Security, stability and, thereby, prosperity must be projected eastward in Europe. The solution is more than ever in variable geometry and broad congruence of memberships.

The practical contribution that Turkey can make to ESDI needs no elaboration. Those who aspire to a meaningful agenda for ESDI will be the best judges of this. With its unique geopolitical features and its capacity to wield influence in a critical region, Turkey's involvement can only bring prestige to ESDI. Furthermore, Turkey can play a pivotal role in the NATO-ESDI interface. On the other hand, partnerships in the sensitive areas of security and defence need to be full. Otherwise they are at best unconvincing and at worst fatally flawed. The time has come to do full justice to the 'European pillar' concept. The time has come to open the perspective of full WEU membership to all European NATO allies without discrimination.