

Can the EU army strengthen security in the Eastern Europe?

At the request of the East European Security Research Initiative, a selection of experts from Georgia, Latvia, Moldova, Slovakia and Ukraine commented on the prospects of the EU army creation, as proposed by the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, in terms of national interests and security of the East European countries.

Raimonds RUBLOVSKIS, *Researcher at Riga Stradins University, former National Military Representative of Latvia at NATO SHAPE*

The proposal of the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker to create the EU army is not entirely new one. Several discussions on this issue took place previously. However, one would see this proposal as political answer of the EU on current global security challenges as well as regional security issues in Europe itself. President Jean-Claude Juncker is known as a supporter of federalization of Europe, therefore he would be seen as the right person to offer such proposal. However, there are several substantial challenges to further implementation of the European army concept.

Firstly, it is about the issue of state sovereignty. Armed forces together with command and control system could be seen as one of the most important aspects of the sovereignty of every state. From the EU federalist perspective, the creation of European army would be seen as obvious development of Europe, if the EU transforms into federal entity. However, it seems not to be a case for the time being. Army as an institution requires sound command and control structure, and without further federalization of Europe it is highly unlikely that the EU would negotiate on creation of European army any time soon.

Secondly, taking into account that European nations have already significantly decreased their military forces, resources and manpower, a question arises about the effectiveness of the EU army without NATO and the United States capabilities. We have to take into account the fact that every state possesses only one pool of military forces for self-defense and NATO operations, and

if the EU army concept comes closer to further development, a question of relationships between NATO and the EU army in Europe will do arise. Most probably, this concept could be taken seriously, if the United States withdraws its military capabilities from European soil, and Europe is forced to take much more responsibility on its own security and defense, but in that case it will require substantial increase of the military budgets of European nations.

The conclusion is that the creation of European army will face substantial challenges due to above-mentioned facts, and it could be regarded as a long-term project for the EU, if the latter develops itself in a federal way.

Oleksandr TYTARCHUK, *Associate Research Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, Ukraine, former Military Adviser of the Ukrainian Delegation to the OSCE*

The Russia-Ukraine crisis certainly accelerated the process of negotiations on strengthening the European security system, resulted in tabling the proposal for the EU army creation. Currently, the practical side of this idea is quite questionable being extremely politicized and having a remote prospect for coming true.

In such proposal, in the first place some hints of Europeans' attempt could be seen to solve the existing security problems on their own. One of these problems is the issue of uncontrolled neighborhood area comprising a considerable number of East European countries, including Ukraine.

As for Ukraine, the result of practical implementation of this proposal would be twofold. On the one hand, given the ongoing process of formal association with the EU, there is an additional opportunity to strengthen political-military cooperation and getting support in protection of its own interests and values, which are common with European ones. It could be not a kind of new ephemeral security assurances but rather obligatory commitments under the Common EU Security and Defense Policy to be an indispensable part of the Association Agreement. Therefore, this might be considered as an alternative to NATO membership, granting of which currently seems to be quite problematic.

On the other hand, the problem is that the existing Western security guarantees do not apply fully to Ukraine, and Ukraine itself *de facto* is regarded as not to be a part of the European security architecture, and is unlikely to become one in the near future but for the aggressive policy of the Kremlin. Therefore, from this perspective, the future role of Ukraine in the formation of common European defense system may be expressed in purely military terms – to be the vanguard, whose task would be to force enemy troops advancing from the East to deploy prematurely, to exhaust their strength before engagement with the main defensive forces, and to expose enemy for further defeating. Probably Ukraine could cope with this task, but this vanguard will definitely have mere possibility for safe retreating from forward edge of the main battle area upon completing its mission.

Therefore, Ukraine needs to closely monitor the development of this process and make all possible efforts to obtain guaranteed protection for a “safe retreating from forward edge” under the umbrella of the EU, if required. Ukraine has already received initial experience of practical involvement in joint civil and military operations under the EU auspices. Now special attention should be paid to the implementation of the political components, focused on achieving its own strategic priorities and maximizing the potential of military-technical cooperation, including with the European Defense Agency.

Thus, in the context of above-mentioned proposal, one could expect increasing security cooperation between Ukraine and the EU, but current Russia-Ukraine crisis, the internal problems of the EU and its weak defense capacity will slow down this process and take time.

Kornely KAKACHIA, Executive Director of the Georgian Institute of Politics in Tbilisi, Professor at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

In general, the EU army is not a bad idea, but it could be set as a long-term project for European Union. While

idea might have positive and negative reaction from different member states, the most important question arises of how this new initiative fits with actual NATO membership. As the majority of Eastern European countries are either member or aspiring to become member of NATO, it is important that new initiative should not contradict NATO’s aims but to supplement them. As at this stage, NATO has a proven record as vehicle of successful transformation, and integration to NATO will remain a priority for most Eastern and Southern Eastern countries for years to come.

It is also important to note that the majority of the Eastern European countries enjoy close political, economic and security cooperation with the U.S. Any possibility of exclusion of the U.S. or Canada from the European security architecture may endanger the regional security.

Alexandru POSTICA, Researcher at the Institute of History, State and Law of the Academy of Sciences of Moldova

On December 13, 2012, the Republic of Moldova signed an Agreement with the European Union establishing a framework for the participation of the country in the European Union crisis management operations. According to this agreement, Moldova transforms into a contributor to regional and international security through active participation in common foreign and security policy of the European Union. Given that Moldova is a neutral state, such an agreement would ensure stability.

According to the military strategy of the Republic of Moldova, the national authorities will intensify efforts of military diplomacy aimed at integration into the EU. We consider that this integration will have as an effect the accepting of a common protection mechanism of member and partner states of the EU. At the moment, this perspective is the only one, capable to defend and protect the national defense interests of the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, the military spending of the Moldova is the smallest, compared to the budgets of other Eastern Partnership countries. Therefore, the consolidation of military power of the EU would improve the efficient use of limited military resources of the National Army.

Samuel GODA, Research Fellow within the “International Security” program at the Research Centre of Slovak Foreign Policy Association

The debates on this issue going back to 1950’s in the EU countries almost always came to a dead end. On the institutional level, from the political point of view, the issue of “labor division” between NATO and the EU is

complicated – not even thinking about the technical arrangements of such project.

Currently all CEE countries are skeptical about the EU army, as most of them are security consumers rather than providers. This leads to a very clear fact that defense spending in most of these countries is insufficient according to NATO expectations. Both financial and political commitments (paradoxically, to some extent overcome national interests) are needed to create the EU army. I do not see this commitment nowadays.

On the other hand, in the long-term perspective the developments within the EU as well as the global changes will lead to serious debates on this issue. If 28 (currently) member states have a common army, it may become a clear global security change moment.

Maksym KHYLKO, *Senior Research Fellow at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Associate Research Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, Ukraine*

Jean-Claude Juncker's idea to create the EU army hardly can be considered well-timed and well-founded. Intention of some key EU members, first of all Germany, to become more independent from the U.S. in defense issues should be backed with an adequate military capacities, strong political will and all-European solidarity. Now the EU lacks all of these things.

It is remarkable that the idea was supported (or may be inspired?) by Berlin, known for its propensity to compromise with Moscow and reluctance to be engaged in the U.S.-Russia confrontation. Much more skeptical was the reaction of the EU countries, which consider Russia's threat more feasible. East European and Baltic countries understand that the EU army idea cannot be embodied in the foreseeable future, but it can undermine the Euro-Atlantic unity right now, when Europe needs the U.S. support and presence more than ever after the collapse of bipolarity.

The EU is far from being ready for the common army. First of all, it lacks that strong political solidarity, which may persuade the member states to place their security in charge of the common army and to share with some EU supranational body their sovereign power to deploy

and use the armed forces. Army needs efficient and responsive command. When it takes quite time and strong efforts to unite the EU countries over the economic sanctions against the aggressor state, it may be almost impossible to quickly reach common consent on military respond. Army also needs resoluteness to use it when needed. Looking at cautious-minded Angela Merkel's and Francois Hollande's politics towards Moscow, the Poles and Balts are far from being sure that Berlin and Paris will dare to use force, if Russia invades. One more problem is that the EU lacks enough military capacity to protect its Eastern borders without the U.S. military umbrella. And this problem cannot be solved in the nearest future due to the insufficient military budgets of the major European countries.

Under such circumstances, the East European countries are much more interested in strengthening NATO solidarity than in creating any alternative or parallel concept. The only positive output of Juncker's idea may be the increase of EU attention to the security issues and the intensifying of European defense cooperation in the fields, which are not enough covered by NATO.

Marek LENČ, *Assistant Lecturer at the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations at the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia*

The call made by the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker sends a very clear message not only to the EU member states and Eastern neighborhood countries, but also to Russia's military adventures in Ukraine. It is a federalist statement built on the idea of common over collective defense in times when the European post-cold war security architecture has been seriously challenged.

However, in reality the majority of NATO's European members are lacking to meet the 2% target of its GDP on defense. Therefore, if the EU member states are to be serious about the defense of its values, the project of EU Battle groups should be only a first step in long-term future vision of common European defense. It would enable the EU to act more independently and effectively in response to newly emerged threats and revisionist tendencies in its neighborhood.

East European Security Research Initiative (EESRI) is an informal discussion, analytical and information-sharing international platform aimed at uniting efforts of the experts and researches from various countries to find effective ways for strengthening security in the Eastern Europe as the most vulnerable region of the contemporary Europe.

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