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Karl von Wogau, Secretary General of the Kangaroo Group

Do we need a European Army?

Jean-Claude Juncker advocates the creation of a European Army. Angela Merkel, Ursula von der Leyen and many others have supported this idea, although everybody knows that there is still a long way off. Is this just wishful thinking or will we see a concrete follow up to these declarations? Do we really need a European Army? Moreover, how can we build it up?

First elements of answer will be given at the European Council in June where Heads of State or Government will have European Defence on their agenda.

Events in Ukraine, in North Africa, the Mediterranean and the Middle East have changed the strategic environment of the European Union. When we discussed the European Security Strategy in 2003, we could say that Europe had never been so prosperous, so free nor so secure. Today, we live in an environment that has become unpredictable. We will therefore have to spend more on defence. Of course, we also have to spend better.

The 28 Member States of the EU spend about € 190 billion per year on defence. This is more than twice the defence spending of Russia, but we know that we would not be able to defend ourselves without the assistance of the United States. And a Continent which is rich but unable to defend itself leads a dangerous life.

We permanently expect from our American allies that they risk the lives of their soldiers and their citizens for the security of Europe. In the current international insecurity and turmoil, Europe cannot escape the responsibility to carry a larger part of the burden.

The European External Action Service is a valuable instrument for common foreign and defence policy, although it has not fully been used in the last legislative period. The new High Representative, Federica Mogherini, has now the chance to build a comprehensive security and defence policy combining the means of diplomacy, development, neighbourhood policy and armed forces. She has proposed to launch the drafting of a new "Foreign Affairs and Security Strategy". Such an exercise is strongly needed to assess the threats and opportunities, to better define the European interest and the level of strategic autonomy that is needed for Europe to become a reliable security provider.

To this end, the EU needs more efficient proceedings for crisis management. This can only be achieved through the simplification of the decision process for the planning of operations, the creation of a permanent EU command capability, and greater funding flexibility. Furthermore, we need to fill the main capability gaps that have been identified. This comprises strategic transport, air-to-air refuelling, RPAS and their admission to the airspace as well as the security



aspects of European projects concerning satellite navigation, observation and telecommunication. We have seen that projects like Galileo or Copernicus can be financed by the European budget. The preparatory action on CSDP related research, which should see the light of day by 2017, will lead from 2021 on to a defence research program with an estimated allocation of some €1,4 billion over seven years.

This of course remains insufficient if there is not a clear will of Member States to address all these issues through more cooperation, more pooling and sharing, more coordinated procurement planning, common standards, certification, maintenance and upgrading. One could also mention common training, pooled logistics and in-theatre support. This is key if Europeans want to achieve greater solidarity and interoperability. To get there, the Treaty provides the right tool: the so called permanent structured cooperation. It would make a tremendous change in the cooperation among Member States and between them and the European institutions. Even a small group of countries could launch this permanent structured cooperation and thus pave the way to a European Army.