

**WHAT DOES THE EUROCORPS NEED TO BECOME AN EFFECTIVE INSTRUMENT  
OF THE ESDP?**

***Address by LTG Alfredo Ramirez, Eurocorps Commanding General, at the Kangaroo Group in Strasbourg, on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016.***

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Excellences, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for this kind opportunity. It is a great pleasure for me to be here to share with you some thoughts about the European Common Security and Defence Policy and how Eurocorps can contribute to it.

First of all, let me start with some insights on our strategic scenario.

The common project of integration represented by the European Union is under unprecedented stress. You are well aware of that.

Some days ago, Chancellor Angela Merkel said that the decision of the UK people to leave the European Union is a turning point for the European unification process. Indeed, for the European Union, the result of the British referendum has been a failure, due to its impact on the European solidarity and common values.

But this result is only the most notorious sign that populist, extremist and nationalist sentiments are raising in the whole continent, putting at risk what has been built over the last decades. At a time of economic and cultural disorder, questions about leadership, course, cohesion and future of the European Union must be urgently answered.

Ladies and gentlemen, the world is changing very fast and not necessarily peacefully.

Despite our concerns on political and economic internal issues, security risks and threats remain the same as before of the British leave. The arc of instability which encircles us from the Senegal coast to the far North in the Arctic Sea, passing through the Middle East and Caucasus, has not changed. Perhaps, when our uncertainty and doubts are getting clear, threats are increasing dangerously.

Europe has seen its security environment worsen in the last two years, with geopolitical threats from the East, migration, armed conflicts, and terrorism all drawing nearer to its borders.

Today, our enemies are happier because they think we are weaker and disunited and, without hesitation, they will try to exploit the situation. I think it is time to demonstrate our resilience and determination to face them. Our closest ally, the United States, is asking us for a deeper involvement in our own security matters.

In this moment of uncertainty and, as I said before, disorder, the unity among EU member states is a must. So the first priority is unity and shared responsibility. In other terms, now is the moment to enhance the European Common Security and Defence Policy.

A few days ago, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, presented the European Global Security Strategy to the heads of state and government of the European Council. The initial idea of this document is that *"We need a stronger Europe"*.

Guided by that important document, Europe needs to think about its future without unnecessary haste, but keeping in mind the urgency of the challenges we are facing.

In the past, a lack of consensus was used as showstopper by those who wished to resist enhanced cooperation and European integration in the defence arena. Over time, some prudent initiatives to foster the Common Security and Defence Policy have been blocked, reducing the European security dimension to a minimum.

It is time for change and this time is today.

An enhanced CSDP should promote an integrated framework for EU defence cooperation, without undermining NATO. As Ms. Mogherini's document states: *"strategic autonomy is important for Europe's ability to foster peace and safeguard security"*.

On the other way round, NATO-EU close cooperation must become the cornerstone of Euro-Atlantic partnership in security.

In this challenging scenario, the question is how Eurocorps can contribute to a more effective CSDP?

Founded by France and Germany in 1992 as a genuine tool for European Defence, Eurocorps maintains today both its political and military dimensions. No nation is above the others, providing a true multinationality and a strong European legitimacy as every decision is made by consensus between our 5 framework nations. EC is the only corps with an international treaty in Europe, which enhances its multinational character.

I'm fully convinced that all those features explain the reason why Eurocorps has been often identified as a potential model of progressive integration of European military forces.

Capitalizing on our historical europeism and characteristics, our five framework nations have asked to reshuffle Eurocorps's availability towards EU.

At this time, Eurocorps is able to plan and conduct a fair number of missions to the benefit of the Common Security and Defense Policy: from Train and/or Equip missions, such as EUTM, to a Force Headquarters.

Our current Eurocorps operational commitments demonstrate that there is a clear EU focus for EUROCORPS in current missions. Just few days ago, our HQ has assumed the role of an EU Battle Group Force HQ for a six-month period. The next step will be again the role of Force HQ for another EUBG in the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of 2017.

Simultaneously, HQ EC will be engaged in EUTM- Central Africa Republic, from July 2016 to June 2017.

I would like to stress that EC is the only Headquarters to develop such a dense expertise with the EU, since we are planning and conducting several simultaneous tasks for Europe.

But, and this an essential issue, without losing our NATO standards and responsibilities. Let me be clear. As far our cooperation with NATO and EU is concerned, we are now walking with two poles, taking advantage of the membership in both organizations, in a win-win situation.

We wish to be rapidly interoperable with NATO and EU and we are conducting efforts in this field.

Our capabilities, possibilities and special status allow EC to be ready to tackle the current security challenges that European countries have to face.

All these operational commitments need to be supported politically and seen as a great opportunity for EC to develop closer ties with EU institutions.

In my opinion, an enhanced profile within the EU will be of great benefit not only for our Framework Nations, but also for the defense of Europe.

Last January, a Letter of Intent between the European Union Military Staff and Eurocorps was signed, expressing a common and mutual interest for both organizations to closely relate and co-ordinate work of joint purpose.

That is an excellent initiative, but in the long run, we think that it would be necessary to embed Eurocorps within the CSDP structure and mechanisms in a more consolidated way.

In other terms, Eurocorps aspires to become a preferred military asset for the EU in the future by increasing its availability and hence its visibility within the EU crisis management arena.

The question is how to proceed further?

Even though, multinational cooperation initiatives in the defence realm constitute a very useful tool, in my opinion, they are not enough to cope with the very challenging strategic scenario I mentioned before.

Europe needs a minimum of integration of military capabilities in order to act whenever and wherever its political authorities would decide.

It is in this endeavor in which Eurocorps can play the role of avant-garde in these processes. As I already said, the first step for Eurocorps could be to be recognized as the preferred HQ for any deployable mission.

I'm fully aware that one major sticking point would be the financing of its operational commitments. As of today, the cost lays on nations. This should be changed. European solidarity has different forms. Some nations could provide troops on the ground and others resources.

If we talk about Common Security and Defense, every single country must participate in the effort along by its possibilities.

In addition, there must be a straightforward decision-making mechanism to employ EC in EU, backed-up by a clear political will.

The promotion of peace and stability beyond EU borders should be an exercise of mutual assistance and solidarity. This is the meaning of "unity" and "common action".

Let me finish by summarizing some aspects of my intervention.

The current political evolution of Europe of Defense leads us to think that Eurocorps can become an important tool for the European Union Defence.

Eurocorps has been, from the very beginning, the perfect instrument to take an active part in the European Defence.

EC is ready to be employed further and our ambition is to become the EU preferred HQ whenever and whatever the task will be.

But, everything will depend on the political will of national authorities.

Thank you very much for your attention.