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Keywords

Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP); European Defense Agency; European Defense Community; EU battlegroups; EU military cooperation; independent armed forces EU; joint European army; Permanent Structured Cooperation

Topic: The EU needs its own independent armed forces

OVERVIEW

- (1) Discussions around a joint European army have been in public and political discussion since the end of the Second World War
 - In 1950 a European Defense Community was proposed as an alternative to NATO, incorporating a European army and a joined budget. This proposal was rejected by the French parliament in 1954¹
- (2) Moves towards closer security and military cooperation have since been debated controversially both in and outside of the EU and only progressed at slow pace
 - In the meanwhile, it has been argued by observers that many EU member state armies remain insufficiently funded and inadequately equipped in international comparison²
- (3) Only recently, the creation of a joint European army has been seriously brought back to the table in Brussels with the 2017 launch of a new defense pact³

IN DETAIL

- (1) After the failure to establish a European Defense Community in the 1950s, discussions around a joint European army initially faded. However, a number of policy measures were over the years, which improved security and military cooperation within the EU⁴
 - In 1993 the Maastricht Treaty introduced the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CSDP), aimed at allowing European governments to take joint action in foreign policy

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/European-Defense-Community>

² https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_a_new_beginning_for_european_defence

³ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/11/13/defence-cooperation-23-member-states-sign-joint-notification-on-pesco/>

⁴ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-security/defence-security-timeline/>

- In 2004 the European Defence Agency⁵ was forced to help EU governments develop their military capabilities
 - In 2007 rapid-reaction forces of about 1,500 soldiers, called EU Battlegroups, were formed under control of the Council of the European Union. They never actively came into operation, however
- (2) The most recent and influential step towards creating an independent EU armed force was taken in 2017 with the creation of a defense cooperation pact known as the “Permanent Structured Cooperation” (PESCO)⁶. The agreement was signed by 23 member states and is supposed to ...
- ...present an “ambitious, binding and inclusive European legal framework for investments in the security and defence of the EU's territory and its citizens”
 - ... bind member states to detailed defence commitments like “regularly increasing defence budgets in real terms in order to reach agreed objectives”
 - ... establish the Force Crisis Response Operation Core (EFOR CROC), which aims at generating an EU ground force of 60,000 troops from the contributing states alone
 - ... create a single single hub for overseas military training missions and a €5.5 billion fund to help member states buy high-end weapons.
- (3) While PESCO does not establish a clear-cut European joint army, it is believed to be a first step towards a standing intervention force under EU oversight.
- As voiced by EU foreign relations chief Federica Mogherini, the inception of the pact also marked a historical turn in EU policy as it “dismantled the ghosts of the past” and broke with “the taboo concerning EU defence”⁷
 - At the same time, observers pointed out that the creation of PESCO also stood symbol for a heightened motivation within the EU to “save costs and share access to military capabilities” as well as increase military integration “beyond strengthening political ties”⁸

FURTHER READING

<https://www.cer.eu/insights/eu-army-four-reasons-it-will-not-happen>

https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-Homepage/34226/permanent-structured-cooperation-pesco-factsheet_en

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-security/defence-security-timeline/>

https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_a_new_beginning_for_european_defence

<http://www.dw.com/en/opinion-a-small-step-toward-a-european-army/a-4136631>

⁵ <https://www.eda.europa.eu>

⁶ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-Homepage/34226/permanent-structured-cooperation-pesco-factsheet_en

⁷ <https://euobserver.com/foreign/139854>

⁸ <http://www.dw.com/en/changing-europe-revives-interest-in-an-eu-military/a-42555374>