

Enhancing Cooperation:

German Attitudes Towards European Security
and Defence Policy

IIEA Germany Group



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Edited by Max Muenchmeyer, Katherine Meenan and Jill Donoghue

1. Introduction: European Security and Defence

In a time of rising global uncertainty fuelled by increasing concerns about US President Trump's inconsistent stance on the future of NATO, the implications of Brexit and recent terrorist attacks in European capitals, the EU's security landscape seems particularly volatile.

Against this backdrop, increasing attention has been paid to the development of European security and defence policy as a possible way of introducing some stability into this uncertain security environment. In 2016, a host of proposals has been put forward under the umbrella of both the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), an enhanced cooperation mechanism established by Articles 42(6) and 46 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) (see next page). These aim to increase cooperation between Member States while at the same time enhancing EU-NATO complementarity, given that twenty-two EU Member States are also NATO members.

Such EU efforts to strengthen military cooperation rely to a large extent on the support of its largest member state, Germany. However, Germany finds itself in a difficult position as it is forced to reconcile its strong support for European integration with its historical reluctance to become more involved in external military operations.

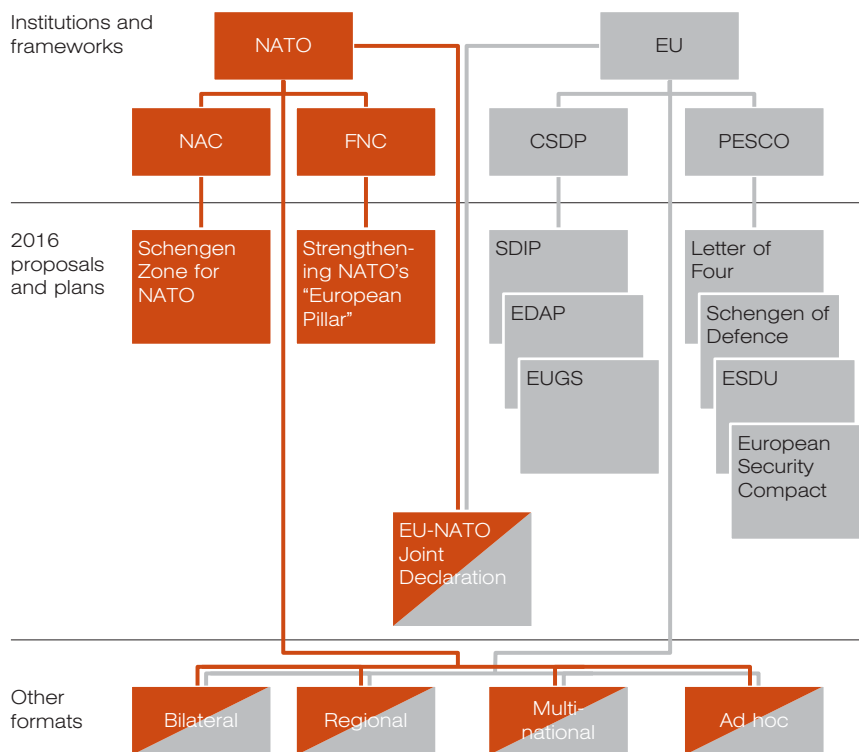
This discussion paper aims to foster greater understanding of German perspectives on and attitudes to European security and defence policy ahead of the Federal Elections, which are due to take place on 24 September 2017.

First, it will examine the reluctant position that Germany has traditionally held towards security and defence policy, especially regarding the deployment of the military in combat roles. Second, it will analyse recent speeches and actions taken by the German government to step up its role in European security and defence. Third, it will look at the attitudes of the junior coalition party, the SPD. Finally, this paper will also explore the views of the other main German parties: the left-wing *Die Linke*, the Green Party, the liberal-democratic FDP and the far right populist *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD).

In conclusion, this paper will show the careful and sophisticated manner in which the German government has sought to reconcile the seemingly contradictory stances of its reluctance to engage in military combat operations abroad and its support for European integration. It will also seek to demonstrate that the outcome of the September 2017 Federal Elections is likely to have a profound impact on the government's attitude towards this dilemma and thus the course of European security and defence policy as a whole.

Graphic 1: 2016 Developments in EU and NATO Security and Defence Policy. All months mentioned refer to 2016.¹

EUROPEAN DEFENSE: INSTITUTIONS, PROPOSALS, AND PLANS



Institutions and frameworks

NAC North Atlantic Council: Consensus-based decision-making body for all 28 NATO members

FNC Framework Nations Concept: Initiative that forms part of broader idea to strengthen the “European Pillar” of NATO

CSDP Common Security and Defense Policy: Inter-governmental framework for military cooperation housed within EU foreign policy structures

PESCO Permanent Structured Cooperation: Legal mechanism to allow a smaller group of EU countries cooperate more closely together on military matters

2016 proposals and plans

Schengen Zone for NATO: Proposal for freedom of movement for soldiers and military equipment across NATO-internal borders

Strengthening NATO’s “European Pillar”: Proposal to increase Europe’s military burden within NATO, such as meeting NATO’s 2% goal

EU-NATO Joint Declaration: Cooperation program agreed at the July NATO Warsaw summit, 40+ proposals in 7 areas such as migration, cyber, hybrid threats, exercises

EUGS EU Global Strategy: Document outlining the objectives of EU foreign and security policies

EDAP European Defense Action Plan: Proposals to augment financing of military research and joint equipment programs, and opening up national defense markets

SDIP Security and Defense Implementation Plan: Follow-on document to EUGS focusing on security and defense aspects

European Security Compact: A June Franco-German call to increase the EU’s contribution to international security and improve EU’s ability to tackle internal security threats

ESDU European Security and Defense Union: Long-term idea to create a common defense for the EU

Schengen of Defence: An August Italian proposal for a permanent multinational European force outside institutional structures but available to EU/NATO/UN

Letter of Four: An October Franco-German-Italian-Spanish call for exploring the use of the PESCO mechanism in the EU treaties



¹ Munich Security Report 2017: Post-Truth, Post-West, Post-order? (MSC, February 2017), 20. Available at: <www.securityconference.de/en/discussion/munich-security-report/> Graphic provided to MSC by Center for Security Studies (ETH Zurich)..

2. German Views and Actions

2.1. The Traditional German Stance on Security and Defence Policy

As a consequence of the legacy of two world wars, the German public has traditionally been strongly opposed to any military policy that could be seen as interventionist or expansionist. Indeed, the pattern of German participation in NATO and in UN missions has been erratic, largely due to this public sentiment.

Hence, the German government, when deciding on matters relating to the delicate and potentially politically sensitive topic of military intervention, has proceeded with the utmost caution. For example, in 2001 Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, while he could have proceeded with a simple majority vote when deciding to send troops to Afghanistan, chose to instead use the constitutional mechanism of a vote of confidence in the government by the Bundestag to demonstrate support for the move across political lines. Even then, the government was careful to frame German involvement in terms of humanitarian aid.²

Since the Munich Security Conference in 2014, a year which also saw the annexation of the Crimea by Russia and the NATO summit in Wales, Germany seems to have accepted more responsibility in security and defence policy within NATO. Defence spending in 2017 rose by 8%, now making up 1.2% of GDP and German troops are stationed in Lithuania as part of NATO's "Enhanced Forward Presence". However, the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik* (DGAP), Germany's leading foreign policy think tank, argues that this move to accept more responsibility within NATO is still "crisis-driven and reactive".³ Daniel Keohane, writing in April 2017, also notes that while Germany has recently seemed more comfortable in participating in territorial defence through NATO, its reluctance to take on combat roles remains.⁴

This conservative position on military involvement seems to conflict to some degree with another traditional German stance, that of firm support for European integration. Now that a step-up in European security and defence is proposed, Germany must confront its difficult relationship with military intervention.

“ Now that a step-up in European security and defence is proposed, Germany must confront its difficult relationship with military intervention. ”

2.2. Government Views and Actions so Far

The German government, while recognising the need for increased German involvement in European security and defence policy, is also aware of the potential public backlash this could provoke, which could be especially painful in an election year. Thus its rhetoric and actions reflect an attempt to present an increase in German defence spending as a means of fuelling the much more popular objective of European integration. The speeches given at the 2017 Munich Security Conference by the Federal Minister for Defence, Dr Ursula von der Leyen, as well as Chancellor Angela Merkel, both put strategic emphasis on two points in particular:

The first of these is the interconnection of the defence forces of EU Member States and the need for enhanced leadership capabilities at European level. Increasing the domestic defence budget is portrayed as a way of achieving closer European integration. This is reflected in the Chancellor's speech, which stated that

*“we have to do more to interlock European military capabilities ... [w]e need leadership ability within the European Union to have the possibility to create an interconnected approach, which can encompass not just military capabilities, but also development policy and good governance”.*⁵

2 Christopher Alessi, 'Learning to Fight: How Afghanistan Changed the German Military' (Spiegel Online, 15 October 2013) available at: <www.spiegel.de/international/germany/how-afghanistan-has-changed-the-bundeswehr-german-military-a-927891.html>.

3 Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, 'Was genau heißt „neue Verantwortung“' (DGAP, 1 March 2017) available at: <zeitschrift-ip.dgap.org/de/ip-die-zeitschrift/archiv/jahrgang-2017/maerz-april/was-genau-heisst-neue-verantwortung>.

4 Daniel Keohane, 'The Renationalization of European Defense Cooperation' in Oliver Thranert and Martin Zapfe (eds), *Strategic Trends 2016: Key Developments in Global Affairs* (Center for Security Studies, 2016). Available at: <www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-security-studies/pdfs/ST2016.pdf>.

5 Author's translation. Full speech (in German) available at: <www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Rede/2017/02/2017-02-18-rede-bk-merkel-muesiko.html>

Minister von der Leyen spoke of the

“steadfast political will to serve the cause of peace, together and indivisible, as Europeans”.⁶

A second point emphasised by both speakers was that a step-up in European security and defence efforts would not be aimed at replacing NATO but would be complementary to it and would serve to strengthen the transatlantic relationship. The Chancellor stressed that *“European defence capabilities, according to my firm convictions, can never be seen as an alternative to NATO, but they must integrate into the capabilities of NATO”*.⁷ Minister von der Leyen explained that Germany knew that it had to bear a greater share of the financial burden within NATO, but emphasised that Germany wanted to grow in responsibility *“in a European way”*.⁸

The *White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr* also echoes these sentiments. The White Paper, published in July 2016, reflects the culmination of an inclusive consultation process, which involved cooperation across government ministries, as well as extensive input by experts and the public over the course of more than a year. The White Paper provides that *“Germany... embraces mutual interdependence in the domain of security”*.⁹ The paper further states Germany’s commitment to further European integration,¹⁰ the long-term goal of a common European Security and Defence Union and the strengthening of NATO’s European pillar through closer and more effective military cooperation in the EU.¹¹

At the NATO summit on 25 May 2017, US President Trump reiterated his demand that the European members of NATO step up their efforts to reach the two percent target. Chancellor Merkel’s subsequent remarks at a campaign event in Munich, where she stated that Europe could no longer “fully rely” on US support, may be seen as adding more urgency to European efforts in security and defence policy. However, the basic premise of NATO-complementarity as expressed in the *White Paper* and at the 2017 Munich Security Conference is likely to remain a core priority for Germany.

Evidence that Germany is beginning to follow through on its rhetoric in the area of European security and defence policy can be seen in the strategic bilateral and minilateral¹² relationships it has sought to foster with other European countries over the last year.

A good example for this is Germany’s collaboration with France to call jointly for stronger Member State and EU action in the area of security and defence.¹³ A communiqué by both countries’ then-foreign ministers, Frank-Walter Steinmeier (now Federal President of Germany) and Jean-Marc Ayrault in June 2016 called for greater cooperation between Member States in the area of security and defence as well as enhanced institutional capabilities at the European level to formulate quick and coherent responses to emerging security threats.¹⁴

This was followed in September 2016 by a paper by the German and French defence ministers arguing that the EU needed to establish a new command centre for coordinating the EU’s missions abroad. Indeed, on 8 June 2017, the Council of the EU decided to establish a Military Planning and Conduct Capabilities (MPCC) unit, which would coordinate the EU’s overseas security operations.

Especially after the Brexit vote in June 2016, Germany has also started to explore cooperation with France, Spain and Italy - the EU27’s three largest military powers. A joint letter by the defence ministers of the four countries in October 2016, which called for further explo-

6 Author’s translation. Full speech (in German) available at: <www.bmvg.de/resource/resource/TU1jZzdTaGNNanAzeDRBMIRGeEU3WHVDTGFRc3R5bHFEclVIR0M0b-mjM2Vya0lYejdaWUITNjFtZi8rT0ZPMXE4YmhlcEF2Smxs3AySkRNbVdKR1FnQWhJcCcxZ01rb0dPcXg5ekRMajQ9/Rede_BMin_MSC.pdf>

7 See n 5.

8 See n 6.

9 *White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr* (German Federal Government, 2016), 23.

10 *ibid* 25.

11 *ibid* 72,73.

12 ‘Minilateralism’ is used here to describe strategic collaboration between a small group of states (i.e. not on the EU-28 level) on specific issues. For further elaboration on the definition of minilateralism in the context of European Security and Defence policy, see also Erica Moret, ‘Effective Minilateralism for the EU - What, When and How’ (European Union Institute for Security Studies, 03 June 2016), available at: <www.iss.europa.eu/publications/detail/article/effective-minilateralism-for-the-eu-what-when-and-how/>.

13 Gabriela Baczyńska and Robin Emmott, ‘Germany, France Seek Stronger EU Defense After Brexit: Document’ (Reuters, 12 September 2016), available at: <www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-defence-idUSKCN1111XU>.

14 Jean-Marc Ayrault and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, ‘A Strong Europe in a World of Uncertainties’ available at: <www.voltairenet.org/IMG/pdf/DokumentUE-2.pdf>.

ration of PESCO, as well as the March 2017 meeting at Versailles of the countries' leaders could be signs that Germany will make use of PESCO in the future. Beyond the EU27, it is worth noting an agreement on German-British military cooperation, which both countries agreed to sign to ensure post-Brexit defence cooperation.¹⁵

The election of the pro-European Emmanuel Macron to the French Presidency on 7 May, as well as the victory of his party, La République en Marche!, in the French Parliamentary Election, might be a positive signs in this regard, heralding greater Franco-German initiative in European security and defence policy cooperation.

In any event, if bilateral and minilateral plans come to fruition, Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) might present an attractive option for the German government to solidify these relationships within the EU and to demonstrate its commitment to greater interdependence in European defence. This also reflects the conclusions of the June 2017 European Council which state the aim of making PESCO more accessible and attractive for Member States.¹⁶

“ if bilateral and minilateral plans come to fruition, Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) might present an attractive option for the German government to solidify these relationships within the EU ”

2.3. SPD Viewpoints

While the CDU is pursuing a course of stepping up Germany's defence expenditure and at the same time promoting European unity and integration, the SPD has adopted a more careful stance regarding security and defence policy. In recent months, there has been open disagreement with Minister von der Leyen on Germany's NATO commitments, voiced in particular by Sigmar Gabriel in his new capacity as Foreign Minister.¹⁷

Mr Gabriel's speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2017 put significantly less emphasis on the importance of European security and defence as a means of integration and strengthening of the transatlantic alliance. Instead, Mr Gabriel argued that formulating a strong common foreign policy always has to take priority over security and defence policy. He further cautioned that while he acknowledged the NATO commitment, *“we need to be careful that we do not go back to a time where we believed that an increase in military expenditure was an increase in security”*.¹⁸ This is why Mr Gabriel has advocated a broader conception of the term “defence spending”, arguing that spending on development aid should also count as it helps to resolve the causes of domestic security threats. He has also disagreed with Minister von der Leyen over how realistic reaching the two percent target by 2024, in accordance with the 2014 Wales Summit Declaration, would be.

The Party's Manifesto, which was adopted unanimously at a party conference in Dortmund on 25 June 2017, confirms these views. It rejects what it calls “completely unnecessary and unrealistic rates of increase in the German defence budget” in favour of a more inclusive approach, which puts emphasis on development aid and crisis prevention.¹⁹ While still emphasising the importance of NATO-complementarity, the manifesto calls for the use of PESCO as an “important step .. on the way to a European Army”.²⁰

2.4. Other Major German Parties

If a “Grand Coalition” does not emerge after the September Federal Elections, the views of the junior coalition partner(s) of either the CDU or SPD will further shape the direction of the next government's approach to security and defence policy. This is why it is worth-

15 Stefan Wagstyl and George Parker, 'Britain and Germany Set to Sign Defence Co-Operation Deal' (Financial Times, 19 March 2017), available at: <www.ft.com/content/2deb3c7c-0ca7-11e7-b030-768954394623>.

16 See European Council Meeting (22 and 23 June 2017) – Conclusions, EUCO 8/17 (23 June 2017), para 8

17 Bundesregierung Uneins über Höhere Verteidigungsausgaben (Zeit Online, 3 March 2017) available at: <www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2017-03/nato-bundesregierung-verteidigungsausgaben-zwei-prozent-ziel-ursula-von-der-leyen-sigmar-gabriel>; Jochen Bittner and Peter Dausend, 'Aufrüsten für Amerika' (Zeit Online, 26 February 2017) available at: <www.zeit.de/2017/09/verteidigung-deutschland-aufruestung-nato-laender-donald-trump/komplettansicht>.

18 Author's translation. Full speech (in German) available at: <www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2017/170218_Rede_BM_Gabriel_Muesiko.html>.

19 Author's translation from: *Es ist Zeit für Mehr Gerechtigkeit: Zukunft Sichern, Europa Stärken* (SPD, 2017), 67 available at: <www.spd.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Beschluesse/Leitantrag_SPD_2017.pdf>

20 ibid 63.

while to survey the election manifestos of Germany's other mainstream political parties.

The left-wing *Die Linke* party is currently Germany's largest opposition party, holding 64 of the Bundestag's 630 seats. In their manifesto, *Die Linke* state that they are against any expansion of European military capabilities, fearing that this will lead to the establishment of a European army. The manifesto demands the abolition of the European Defence Agency and EURATOM.²¹ Regarding domestic security and defence policy, *Die Linke* calls for an immediate withdrawal of all German soldiers currently on mission abroad and termination of training programmes carried out by Bundeswehr soldiers, as these would lead to indirect participation in military combat. Weapons exports and production are to be stopped and German companies to be banned from holding shares in weapons manufacturing companies abroad.

Meanwhile, the German Green Party (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*), similar to the SPD, put strong emphasis on development aid and express concern that it is being neglected in favour of increased military spending. While committed to building greater interconnection of the defence forces of EU Member States, the Greens reject an increase in military spending. Indeed, their draft manifesto states that it is a "cynical" move by the German Federal Government to promise to reach the two percent NATO target while at the same time not living up to its pledge to spend 0.7 percent of GNI on official development assistance.²²

The liberal FDP, which is currently not represented in the Bundestag after having failed to win more than 5 percent of the vote in the 2013 Federal Elections, also calls for the establishment of a European Army in their manifesto. However, contrary to the SPD, the FDP propose that, Germany, along with all other European NATO members, should endeavour to meet the NATO two percent target in accordance with the agreement reached in Wales. This strengthening of the European pillar of NATO will, in turn, equip EU states with enough capacity to establish an army. The FDP propose that a first step in this direction would be to expand the role of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to that of a "European Foreign Minister" and increase cooperation between individual Member States, inside as well as outside PESCO.²³ However, they also emphasise that NATO-complementarity of European security and defence policy must be maintained and even strengthened.

The far-right populist AfD, which at the time of writing has seats in thirteen of Germany's sixteen state parliaments and which is set to win seats in this autumn's Federal Elections, has recently published its election manifesto. It espouses strong non-interventionist views and calls for a renationalisation of German defence. It states that "the future of Europe is neither in the EU in its present state nor in its further centralisation, but in a Europe of sovereign states which cooperate in partnership".²⁴ The manifesto supports an increase in German defence spending in accordance with the NATO two percent target, as this would also enable Germany to guarantee its own territorial defence. For this purpose, it also advocates the reactivation of compulsory military service.²³

// The far-right populist AfD espouses strong non-interventionist views and calls for a renationalisation of German defence. //

3. Germany and the European Security and Defence Landscape

This discussion paper has provided a snapshot of current German attitudes towards security and defence policy. It has shown that the current government has taken a very careful approach in seeking to reconcile its firm commitment to further European integration with the politically very sensitive topic of increasing military expenditure.

With regard to German party politics and an eye to the Federal Elections, this paper has shown the spectrum of opinion on security and defence

21 *Die Zukunft, für die wir Kämpfen: Sozial. Gerecht. Für Alle.* (Die Linke, 2017), 112. Author's translation, original German version available at: <www.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/wahlen2017/leitangriff_entwurf_bundestagswahlprogramm_2017_neu.pdf>.

22 *Zukunft wird aus Mut Gemacht: Entwurf Wahlprogramm 2017* (Bündnis90/Die Grünen, 2017), 32, 35, available at: <www.gruene.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Gruener_Bundestagswahlprogramm_2017.pdf>.

23 *ibid.*

24 *Programm für die Wahl zum Deutschen Bundestag am 23. September 2017* (Alternative für Deutschland, 2017), 18. Author's translation, original German version available at: <www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/06/2017-06-01_AfD-Bundestagswahlprogramm_Onlinefassung.pdf>.

23 *ibid.*

policy, particularly with regard to the relationship between military expenditure and development aid. It has also shown that five of Germany's six biggest parties are committed to NATO, albeit for very different reasons, while on European security and defence policy, proposals range from the termination of all military operations to the establishment of a European army.

However, the German interconnected approach of "leading from the centre" (if at all) on security and defence policy means that the precise shape of German actions on security and defence policy in the future will depend not just on the outcome of the Federal Elections, but also on domestic developments within key strategic partner countries. This includes the development of the Franco-German alliance, the Trump administration's future relationship with NATO and the EU as a whole, and, looking even further ahead, the relationship between the EU and the UK after Brexit.



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