



# Ask the IIEA

## Where does the EU stand on Security and Defence Policy?



Future of the **EU27**



### Key Takeaways

- The changing geo-political landscape and high public support for greater EU defence cooperation has required the EU to rethink its approach to security and defence policy, commonly referred to as Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).
- Under the leadership of High Representative for the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, the EU has an ambitious defence policy, including the introduction of PESCO.
- There are different opinions as to how far EU cooperation on security and defence should go. These range from giving the EU no role on defence policy to full defence integration or a hybrid of shared EU and Member State competence.
- Decision making on defence policy requires unanimity.
- The idea of creating an EU army doesn't command enough political support in national capitals, other than in France and Germany.

the East and to the South. In addition, Europe's traditional anchor for security and defence—the United States—is especially volatile.

Those in favour of “a common defence and security policy among EU Member States” range from a high of 87% of those polled in Lithuania and Luxembourg to a low of 59 and 57% in Sweden and Austria

### What are the consequences of this?

As a result, while some European NATO members prioritise reinforcing NATO, others talk about the need to focus on reducing Europe's dependence on the US. All are agreed that ‘Europe’ must do more.

### How has the EU responded?

High Representative for the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, has pursued an ambitious programme to strengthen EU defence cooperation including:

- An EU-based review process for defence planning and budgeting;
- A reinforced agenda for the European Defence Agency;
- New military planning structures;
- A review of the existing EU Battlegroups (which have never been deployed);
- The funding of EU military operations overseas;
- Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).

PESCO is a patchwork of some 34 individual projects on issues such as cyber security, maritime surveillance, or military training. It was launched in December 2017 with 25 participating EU Member States including Ireland. Participation is voluntary and Ireland is a full participant in two projects: the EU Training Mission Competence Centre and the Upgrade of Maritime Surveillance.<sup>2</sup> The projects are designed to deliver tangible and practical benefits which can then be shared to build up defence capacities among all EU Member States.

### Introduction

At a time when Europe faces serious security threats, grapples with the departure of the United Kingdom and deals with innumerable internal political challenges, it is interesting that more than 75% of Europeans demand that the European Union does more to strengthen the defence of its Member States. Those in favour of “a common defence and security policy among EU Member States” range from a high of 87% of those polled in Lithuania and Luxembourg to a low of 59 and 57% in Sweden and Austria respectively (Special Eurobarometer 461, April 2017).<sup>1</sup> The Irish level of support for an EU common defence stands at 66 % according to the same poll.

### What factors have changed Europe's security environment?

There is little doubt that Europe's security environment has worsened over the last fifteen years. The Russian Federation's invasion, occupation and annexation of parts of Ukraine violated multiple treaties and undermines European security. The Union and its Member States face arcs of instability and conflict to both



## What are the scenarios under consideration for CSDP?

- Scenario one is to reject the very concept of defence for the EU. This may begin from the idea that the purpose of European integration was to make war in Europe impossible.
- Scenario two is to leave defence largely in the hands of the EU Member States but to allow for EU-level structures to facilitate cooperation on a voluntary and case-by-case basis. This could allow Member States to pursue strengthened cooperation among themselves but would minimise the engagement of the EU itself.
- A third scenario would see the EU take on the role of catalyst and promoter of defence integration, including by 'pooling and sharing' initiatives among the Member States and shared financing of research and defence. This would appear to be the track that most Member States are in favour of.
- A fourth option is essentially full defence integration at the EU level – up to and including the creation of a 'common defence' for those Member States, which choose to participate. The defence of Europe would thus become a responsibility of both the EU and NATO. In contemporary political terms, this might encompass the notion of a 'European Army.'

It must also be remembered that while the European Commission and other European actors may propose legislation or may lobby, decision-making on defence is based on unanimity and hence each member has a veto.

## Is anyone in favour of Creating a 'European Army'?

While the idea has been promoted by senior political figures in Brussels, Paris and Berlin, it is not at all clear that their political shorthand of 'European army' for deeper defence cooperation commands enough political support among national capitals.

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## What is Ireland's position?

Ireland's geographic, strategic and psychological distance from many of Europe's security threats generates a widespread ambivalence towards European defence domestically. This contrasts with the considerable support by Irish citizens of deployment of Irish defence forces on UN peacekeeping missions.

## Conclusion

Left to its own devices, the Union would probably continue on a path of slow incremental evolution on defence cooperation. However, the Union will not have that luxury. The threats that EU Member States face are complex and sometimes contradictory and are also increasing in scale and scope. A broad debate on the shape, cost and implications of the EU's development in defence has not yet taken place. In Ireland and elsewhere such a debate is necessary so that the options and implications can be fully assessed. While a 'European army' may not be on the horizon, ambivalence towards security and defence may no longer be sustainable.

*If you have a topic you would like us to address in this series please email [FutureofEurope@iiea.com](mailto:FutureofEurope@iiea.com)*

## Endnotes

1. Special Eurobarometer 461, Designing Europe's future: Security and Defence, April 2017 <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2173>
2. For more information on PESCO, please see the IIEA's blog on Ireland's Involvement in PESCO [here](#).