

79/2019

16 September 2019

*Luis Enrique Moya Cánovas\**

The European Intervention Initiative,  
Permanent Structured Cooperation  
and French institutional engineering

[Visit Web](#)

[Receive Newsletter](#)

## *The European Intervention Initiative, Permanent Structured Cooperation and French institutional engineering*

### *Abstract:*

*Facing an ever more complex strategic situation, the European Union has implemented in the last few years a series of initiatives aiming at developing the EU's strategic autonomy and making the Union a relevant security actor internationally. Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) is the most relevant initiative, and it seeks to structure and promote defence cooperation among member states. Simultaneously, Emmanuel Macron's government has implemented the European Intervention Initiative, which shares PESCO's objectives, outside the framework of the EU. The French government has maneuvered to ensure its country's leadership of the new set of European defence institutions and mould these institutions to French interests.*

### *Keywords:*

*European Intervention Initiative (EI2), Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), European Defence, strategic autonomy, institutional engineering.*

### *How to quote:*

MOYA CÁNOVAS, Luis Enrique. *The European Intervention Initiative, Permanent Structured Cooperation and French institutional engineering*. Documento de Opinión IEEE 79/2019. [enlace web IEEE](#) y/o [enlace bie](#)<sup>3</sup> (consultado día/mes/año)

**\*NOTE:** The ideas contained in the Opinion Papers shall be responsibility of their authors, without necessarily reflecting the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defense

## Introduction

To respond to a much deteriorated strategic situation a number of EU initiatives have been implemented in the past two years to fulfill the Union's new Level of Ambition and develop Europe's strategic autonomy. Launched in December 2017 with much fanfare, the most prominent of these initiatives, Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), seeks to provide a political framework to structure and promote EU-level cooperation in defense. However, on June 25<sup>th</sup> of 2018, very soon after PESCO was established, nine European defense ministers (Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom) met in Luxemburg, at the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council, to sign a Letter of Intent (LOI) creating the European Intervention Initiative, led by France. The EI2 is an intergovernmental initiative of purely operational character that, like PESCO, seeks to promote 'Europe's strategic autonomy' and develop a common European strategic culture. However, although there are no legal limitations preventing PESCO from having an operational dimension, the government of President Macron decided to create the EI2 outside this and any other EU or NATO framework, even at the risk of provoking the type of policy duplication and fragmentation that PESCO was meant to solve. Then, why would President Macron's government want to implement its Initiative outside PESCO? What are its intentions towards PESCO? The memorandum of understanding formalizing the EI2 has not been signed yet and the answers to these questions are not evident.

The author of this paper argues that the EI2 is a burden-sharing device for France. France wants to rely on its European partners and allies to relieve its current situations of overstretch, and, for that purpose, the EI2 aims at increasing the ability of European states to form coalitions and intervene quickly and effectively when a crisis arises in any theatre from the Sahel to the Russian border. The EI2 potentially covering both out-of-area and territorial defense missions. President Macron chose to implement its initiative outside of PESCO, despite the political risks that such a decision entails, upset with PESCO's relative lack of ambition, and as a move to promote an architecture of European defense that suits France's interests. Pure institutional engineering.

## That's what friends are for

### *Overstretched in a demanding situation*

The French Strategic Review of National Security and Defense of 2017 alerts that in the last years old threats not only have become closer to Europe, but they also have manifested themselves with unexpected intensity, all while the international-rules-based order is weakening<sup>1</sup>. Terrorism is becoming harder to fight, open warfare has returned to Europe, rival states are rising militarily, and European integration is fragile. In this increasingly demanding context, France's priority is to maintain its strategic autonomy<sup>2</sup>: Understood as its capacity to assess a given situation and intervene in defense of its interests, relying on swift decision making<sup>3</sup>. To preserve its strategic autonomy, France wants to maintain its nuclear deterrent and full-spectrum capabilities to respond to four major challenges: Defend its national territory, air space and territorial waters<sup>4</sup>; project force in its neighborhood; fight terrorism; and live up to its responsibilities in NATO and the EU in case of an inter-state conflict<sup>5</sup>.

France wants to maintain its level of influence and commitment abroad in an increasingly demanding context, yet it is aware that it cannot do so without cooperating with its European partners. The issue is that France is already in a situation of overstretch due to its 'current and lasting commitments in distant and demanding theatres'<sup>6</sup>. This situation was made evident in autumn of 2015, when France felt forced to invoke for the first time in history the mutual assistance article of the Maastricht treaty (TEU 42.7) following the terrorist attacks in Paris. France had to ask for relief to its European partners in order to rechannel its resources to defend its homeland from terrorism with 'Opération Sentinelle'.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ministère des Armées, "Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale 2017" Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Ministère des Armées, "Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale 2017" Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité, 56.

<sup>3</sup> LEBRUN, Maxime. "Behind the European Intervention Initiative: An Expeditionary Coalition of the Willing?" *RKK International Centre for Defence and Security*. 07/03/2018

<sup>4</sup> We remind here that France has overseas territories in all the oceans.

<sup>5</sup> Ministère des Armées, "Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale 2017" Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité, 53.

<sup>6</sup> Ministère des Armées, "Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale 2017" Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité, 24.

As a result of this overstretch, France's strategy is to complement its national defense efforts with increased cooperation with European partners<sup>7</sup>. However, as The French Chief of Staff, General François Lecointre, complained about in a parliamentary committee in July 2018, the assessment of threats and risk perceptions at the European level remains diverse and sometimes contradictory, which makes operational cooperation among Europeans difficult<sup>8</sup>.

### ***What is the European Intervention Initiative and what it is not?***

The French government proposed the EI2 to solve the problem of diverging strategic cultures among European states. The EI2 is a means to facilitate coalition-building and burden sharing in European military operations. According the letter of intent (LOI), the EI2 is an intergovernmental "flexible, non-binding forum," gathering 'the most capable and willing European states' to defend European security<sup>9</sup>. The EI2 works as a sort of 'military Erasmus'<sup>10</sup> in which military officers of participating states meet to work on four main fields: intelligence sharing and strategic foresight, scenario development and planning, support of operations and lessons learned and doctrine<sup>11</sup>.

The short run goal of the EI2 is to reinforce the capacity of members to quickly intervene together in crisis ranging across all spectrum by creating the optimal preliminary conditions for action and based on jointly elaborated blueprints<sup>12</sup>. In the long run, the goal is to develop a shared strategic culture that would allow Europe to become a significant military actor capable of carrying out high-intensity operations under the framework of the EU, NATO, the UN, and/or ad hoc coalitions<sup>13</sup>. The logic is that, by planning together, assessing situations together, and deploying together, the strategic cultures of participant

---

<sup>7</sup> Ministère des Armées, "Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale 2017" Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité, 53.

<sup>8</sup> LEBRUN, Maxime. "Strategic Autonomy? France, the eFP and the EII." *RKK International Centre for Defence and Security*. 10/12/2018.

<sup>9</sup> Ministère des Armées, "Lettre d'Intention Signée par les Ministres le 25 Juin 2018." Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité

<sup>10</sup> WITNEY, Nick. "Macron and the European Intervention Initiative: Erasmus for Soldiers." European Council on Foreign Relations. 05/22/2018.

<sup>11</sup> Ministère des Armées, "Lettre d'Intention Signée par les Ministres le 25 Juin 2018." Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité.

<sup>12</sup> Ministère des Armées, "L'Initiative Européenne d'Intervention." Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité.

<sup>13</sup> Ministère des Armées, "Lettre d'Intention Signée par les Ministres le 25 Juin 2018." Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité.

states will converge. Member states will ultimately understand their security collectively at the European level, and not egocentrically.

The LOI emphasizes that, although the EI2 has been placed outside of NATO and the EU, these organizations will benefit from participating states' enhanced ability to operate together<sup>14</sup>.

Finally, the LOI makes it clear that the European Intervention Initiative is not a new rapid reaction force<sup>15</sup>. It is simply a forum of states primarily concerned with strategic foresight and planning.

### **The scope of the EI2: From the Sahel to the Russian border**

The scope of the activity of the European Intervention Initiative deserves its own separate section as it confuses analysts<sup>16</sup> and diplomats alike. Many people believe that the EI2 is an instrument for France to involve other European states in the Sahel: That it is only about out-of-area stability and counter-terrorism operations in Africa and the Middle East. German officials were initially very wary of joining the EI2 thinking that "France is clearly concerned about Africa, about the Sahel, and a relief for the French there... [the EI2] is about operations that serve primarily French interests and less European, not to mention German interests"<sup>17</sup>. These suspicions are understandable, after all, the EI2 is a French initiative, and the Mediterranean and Sahel are the most strategically important regions to France. It does not help either that the French minister of defense, Florence Parly introduces the EI2 referring France's experience in Mali and the Central African Republic as examples of what the EI2 tries to address: France having to intervene in a crisis alone and allied relief coming much later<sup>18</sup>.

However, the scope of the European Intervention initiative is much broader; spanning from the Sahel to the Russian border, potentially including both out-of-area operations

---

<sup>14</sup> Ministère des Armées, "Lettre d'Intention Signée par les Ministres le 25 Juin 2018." Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité.

<sup>15</sup> Ministère des Armées, "Lettre d'Intention Signée par les Ministres le 25 Juin 2018." Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité.

<sup>16</sup> NOVAKY, Niklas. "France's European Intervention Initiative: Towards a Culture of Burden Sharing." Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies. 10/2018.

<sup>17</sup> SIEBOLD, Sabine. "Berlin und Paris stritten über neue Eingreiftruppe." *Reuters*, 11/06/2018.

<sup>18</sup> PARLY, Florence. "ECFR Keynote: The European Intervention Initiative" European Council on Foreign Relations Meeting. Paris, 05/28/2018.

and territorial defense of Europe. To start with, the first paragraph of the LOI is an assessment of the challenges Europe is facing and to which the EI2 is a response. The list includes terrorism, migration crises, instability in the Sahel and the Middle East, but also increasing natural disaster, and most interestingly “resumption of open warfare on [Europe’s] doorstep and displays of force on its territory, including stemming from intimidation strategy, on its Eastern Flank”<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, the five working groups of the EI2 established after the first meeting of defense ministers include both the Sahel and the Baltic<sup>20</sup>.

### **Analysis of the Membership of the European Intervention Initiative**

Analyzing the membership of the EI2 one can infer the real scope the French government intends the EI2 to have. The EI2 allows France to choose its partners for military operations and make joint use of their capabilities. Since the first ten members of the EI2 joined the initiative by French invitation, if one is skeptical of the wording of official documents and declarations, one can infer France’s intentions analyzing which states were invited and which were left out of the EI2.

#### ***The United Kingdom, Spain, and Italy***

Britain, being the only other European country with full-spectrum capabilities, the nuclear deterrent, and a permanent position in the UNSC, it is a major priority for France to maintain its privileged defense relationship with the UK and keep post-brexite UK ‘anchored’ to European security<sup>21</sup>. The ‘keen’ membership of the United Kingdom implies that the EI2 is not openly concerned with collective defense (as the UK would oppose any initiative that might duplicate NATO), but about “preparing countries to send force to, say, Africa”<sup>22</sup>. France also recognizes Spain and Italy as valuable partners in the

---

<sup>19</sup> Ministère des Armées, “Lettre d’Intention Signée par les Ministres le 25 Juin 2018.” Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité.

<sup>20</sup> Ministère des Armées, “L’Initiative Européenne d’Intervention.” Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité.

<sup>21</sup> Ministère des Armées, “Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale 2017” Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité, 62.

<sup>22</sup> SAMUEL, Henry. “Nine EU states to launch joint military force as Paris pushes for post-brexite crisis defence group.” *The Telegraph*. 06/25/2018.

Mediterranean, North Africa and the Middle East. If Italy is not a current member of the EI2 is because of political reasons of the previous Italian government<sup>23</sup> <sup>24</sup>. On the French side, “Italy is welcome to join the EI2, whenever ready”<sup>25</sup>. Based on these three first cases, one could think that the EI2 is, indeed, an instrument to involve more states into out-of-area operations in the Mediterranean and Sahel.

### ***Finland and Estonia***

The cases of Finland, Estonia, and Poland are more clarifying. Finland became the tenth member of the EI2 at the first meeting of EI2 defense ministers on November 7<sup>th</sup> of 2018. President Macron seems to have been deeply interested in having Finland join the EI2. He went on an official state-visit to Helsinki<sup>26</sup> during which he seems to have convinced the Finish President, Sauli Niinistö, to have Finland join the French initiative<sup>27</sup>. Finland, like France, traditionally sought to maintain its strategic autonomy by relying on its own military means for defense and its non-aligned position. However, lately, in this more instable international context and after the Russian invasion of Georgia and annexation of Crimea, Finland has been interested on increased defense cooperation with its neighbors (especially Sweden), the EU, NATO and the US, in that order of preference<sup>28</sup>. Feeling more secure outside of the transatlantic alliance, Finland sees EU integration in defense as an investment in its own security<sup>29</sup>: They have been supportive of PESCO and the European Defense Fund, and its president seems supportive of pushing the EU towards collective defense in the near future<sup>30</sup>.

Finland has a defense model based on territorial defense with conscription, a relatively

---

<sup>23</sup> D'ARGENIO, Alberto. “Nove paesi Ue hanno lanciato ieri una forza di intervento rapida europea. Non c'è l'Italia.” *Repubblica*. 06/26/2018.

The former government of the Partito Democratico participated actively in the formulation of the EI2, but when it came to signing the LOI, the following government of the Lega and the M5S—which did not have a friendly relationship with that of President Macron – postponed its decision to join the initiative.

<sup>24</sup> Ministère des Armées, “L’Initiative Européenne d’Intervention.” Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité.

<sup>25</sup> Ministère des Armées, “L’Initiative Européenne d’Intervention.” Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité.

<sup>26</sup> “French, Finnish presidents to weigh European defence proposals.” *Yle Uutiset*. 08/29/2018.

<sup>27</sup> “Finland agrees to join France-led defence coalition.” *Yle Uutiset*. 08/30/2018.

<sup>28</sup> SZYMANSKI, Piotr. “With Russia Right Across the Border: Finland’s Security Policy.” *Centre for Eastern Studies*. May 2018.

<sup>29</sup> BALČIŪNAS, Andrius. “Why Finland feels more secure outside NATO.” *LRT*. 04/24/2019

<sup>30</sup> President of the Republic of Finland. “Opening words by President of the Republic Sauli Niinistö at the Kultaranta talks on 11 June 2017”.

large standing army, and a large reserve that can hardly be of any help in counterterrorism and stability operations in the Sahel. However, Finland sells itself as an expert in Russian affairs<sup>31</sup> and Hybrid threats: The Centre of Excellency for Countering Hybrid Threats is based in Helsinki.

Estonia (one of the original nine members), like Finland, has some of these “specific capabilities that can have important contributions in the diverse operations [France] engages in”<sup>32</sup>. Estonia excels in cyberwarfare capabilities and considers itself an expert in the Gerasimov doctrine (the current Russian military doctrine).

According to minister Florence Parly in an interview to *Le Parisien* on the occasion of Bastille Day, Sweden and Norway have shown interest in becoming the next members of the EI2<sup>33</sup>. The security threats to these four states emanate from the Baltic and neighboring Russia<sup>34</sup>, and their capabilities are only of interest for France in that region of Europe. Therefore, the interest of these countries and their membership in the EI2 can only be explained by the fact that the European Intervention Initiative will cover the full spectrum of crises in the Sahel as much as in the Russian border.

### **Poland**

Poland is the most populous country in Eastern Europe and has the largest defense budget and industrial base; however, France did not invite Poland to join the EI2<sup>35</sup>. Poland should be a crucial member for any initiative covering European collective defense, yet, ironically, Poland was probably left out because France expects the EI2 to have some links to collective defense. The current Polish PiS government’s attitude towards EU defense initiatives has been lukewarm, or even hostile. Poland’s preference for NATO protection and capability procurement from the US make it wary of any other defense initiative that might undermine NATO’s territorial security guarantees or alienate the

---

<sup>31</sup> SZYMANSKI, Piotr. “With Russia Right Across the Border: Finland’s Security Policy.” *Centre for Eastern Studies*. May 2018, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Ministère des Armées, “Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale 2017” Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité, 62.

<sup>33</sup> DJAMSHIDI, Ava & Henri Vernet. “Florence Parly: “L’espace est devenu un espace de conflictualité”.” *Le Parisien*, 07/14/2019.

<sup>34</sup> For instance, two of the major threats to the security of Finland are subversive actions Crimea-style on its demilitarized Aland Islands, and the blocking of maritime routes in the Baltic, which transport 80% of Finnish imports, and 90% of Finnish exports.

<sup>35</sup> Is/st. “Poland Left Out of European Intervention Initiative” *Poland In*. 06/25/2018.



United States<sup>36</sup>. This might be more the case now that Poland has been negotiating with the US government for the installation of a permanent American base in Poland<sup>37</sup>.

Poland should have no problem in joining an initiative that is exclusively about out-of-area crisis management operations in Africa, but France decided to exclude Poland because the EI2 has a penchant towards collective defense, and Macron fears that Poland might attempt to sabotage the Initiative from within.

### ***France, European collective defense, and NATO***

Why would France orient its initiative towards the East when most of the threats to its mainland emanate from the south? The Strategic Review of National Security and Defense of 2017 suggests that France already considers the security of Europe as indivisible. Considering the reality of great political, economic and strategic interdependence of European states, “an external aggression against European integrity or cohesion would gravely affect [French] interests”<sup>38</sup>. Referring to France’s deployments in the Baltic states within NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence, the review explicits France’s commitment to the security of Europe from the South to the North and at the East, from the Baltic to the Black Sea<sup>39</sup>.

If the EI2 has a leaning towards collective defense, what is its relationship to NATO? France respects NATO’s role as the cornerstone of European collective defense and has multiple times restated its commitment to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty<sup>40</sup>. Nonetheless, the strategic review reflects French (and overall European) current doubts regarding American commitment to the defense of Europe: “the growing rift of the American political class and population from Europe, together with recent political changes in the United States, raise deep interrogations in Europe, even more so than in

---

<sup>36</sup> ZOBOROWSKI, Marcin. “Poland and European Defense Integration.” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, Policy Brief. 01/25/2018.

<sup>37</sup> WILLIAMS BO, Katie. “Toward ‘Fort Trump’: US Makes Poland a ‘Serious Robust Offer’.” *Defense One*. 03/13/2019.

<sup>38</sup> Ministère des Armées, “Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale 2017” Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité, 55.

<sup>39</sup> Ministère des Armées, “Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale 2017” Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité, 62.

<sup>40</sup> Ministère des Armées, “Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale 2017” Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité, 60.

the past”<sup>41</sup>. In her opening letter in the strategic review, the French minister of Defense, Florence Parly, states: “We can no longer be sure to count on our traditional partners always and everywhere”<sup>42</sup>. As stated by the LOI, the EI2 is supposed to complement and benefit NATO, not replace it, but it can be expected that EI2 planners will consider American disengagement and even non-participation in future European crises.

The EI2 might be a French effort within a larger process of laying the ground for a future post-US defense of Europe. The French government’s declaration that it would be willing to extend its nuclear deterrent over Germany following the signature of the Aachen treaty<sup>43</sup> and the ‘low-key’ discussions about transforming the mutual assistance clause of the Maastricht treaty (TEU 42.7) into a binding collective defense one could suggest so<sup>44</sup>.

### Risk of institutional duplication

German officials were initially wary to join the EI2 for the aforementioned motives, but also because they feared the risk of political duplication and fragmentation. Germany was worried that having the EI2 outside PESCO would draw political capital away from Permanent Structured Cooperation, reduce the EU’s added value in terms of defense cooperation, and alienate countries that were not invited to participate in the French initiative<sup>45</sup>. The risk of duplication with PESCO is significant.

For example, there is a PESCO project led by Germany called EUFOR Crisis Operation Core (EUFOR CROC)<sup>46</sup> that is quite like the European Intervention Initiative. EUFOR CROC was supposed to “contribute to the creation of a coherent full spectrum force

---

<sup>41</sup> Ministère des Armées, “Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale 2017” Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité, 61.

<sup>42</sup> Ministère des Armées, “Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale 2017” Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité, 10.

<sup>43</sup> DORZDIK, William, “France is prepared to extend its nuclear deterrent to Germany.” *The Washington Post*. 02/28/2019.

<sup>44</sup> DUKE, Simon W. “The Competing Logics of EU Security and Defense.” *Survival* 61 (2): 123-42. 03/19/2019, 136.

<sup>45</sup> SANDERS, Lewis. “Germany cautious as France leads European defense initiative.” *Deutsche Welle*. 11/08/2018.

<sup>46</sup> BLOCKMANS, Steven. “The EU’s Modular Approach to Defense Integration: An Inclusive, Ambitious and Legally Binding PESCO?” *Common Market Law Review*. Volume 55. 2018, 1815.

package, which could accelerate the provision of forces"<sup>47</sup>(a sort of database of all its member states' military units available in real-time for military operation).

In the end Germany accepted to join the initiative under political pressure: Knowing that the EI2 is a priority for France, Germany did not want to strain the Franco-German relation or look like an unreliable partner<sup>48</sup>. As a compromise, in the Meseberg declaration, France and Germany agreed to link the European Intervention Initiative as closely as possible to PESCO<sup>49</sup>, avoiding duplications with PESCO projects, and in a way that the work of the EI2 complements that of PESCO and PESCO's projects<sup>50</sup>.

Knowing the intended scope for the EI2 and the French government's intentions towards its Initiative, we must discuss why President Macron was ready to take all these political risks to situate the EI2 outside the frame of the EU and NATO.

## French institutional engineering

### *An unambitious PESCO*

The main reason for President Macron's decision is his disappointment and distrust toward how Permanent Structured Cooperation. President Macron envisioned a PESCO the way it was described in the Lisbon Treaty and like the current EI2: A small group of around 12 militarily capable and willing states integrating their defense faster than the rest of EU member states. However, during the negotiations, the German push for inclusivity prevailed over France's desire for an ambitious framework<sup>51</sup>. All but 3 EU member states have joined PESCO, which makes it impossible, in the French view for PESCO to address crisis effectively. Sign of its disillusionment with PESCO, Emmanuel Macron announced the creation of the European Intervention Initiative in its speech at the

---

<sup>47</sup> European Defense Agency, European External Action Service, EU Military Staff. "PESCO: Member States Driven." Last accessed 04/14/2019.

<sup>48</sup> MÖLLING, Christian & Claudia Major. "Why Joining France's European Intervention Initiative is the Right Decision for Germany." *Egmont*. 15 June 2018.

<sup>49</sup> France Diplomatie. Meseberg Declaration. *Europe-Franco-German declaration*. 06/19/2018.

<sup>50</sup> Ministère des Armées, "Lettre d'Intention Signée par les Ministres le 25 Juin 2018." Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité.

<sup>51</sup> BLOCKMANS, Steven. "The EU's Modular Approach to Defence Integration: An Inclusive, Ambitious and Legally Binding PESCO?" *Common Market Law Review*. Volume 55. 2018, 1812.

Sorbonne in the middle of the negotiations to the implement the Permanent Structured Cooperation<sup>52</sup>.

PESCO's modular approach to defense cooperation was supposed to allow like-minded countries to work together in common projects without the effective veto of other participant states<sup>53</sup>. However, after the implementation of PESCO, the European Council decided that the rules, management and scope of all projects be agreed by participating members unanimously<sup>54</sup>. This requirement clashes against France's wish for maximum flexibility, and forces project participants to work again at a lowest common denominator. Even though this decision was taken much after Macron's Sorbonne speech, the outcome of the Council decision was predictable<sup>55</sup>.

There are no legal limitations impeding operations to be conducted within PESCO<sup>56</sup>. In addition to the common commitments, many projects could be developed within the framework with a clear operational objective<sup>57</sup>. However, due to its over-inclusivity, PESCO has been implicitly relegated to projects of capability development and acquisition<sup>58</sup>. And even then, there are currently no major weapons systems being developed within the framework that would allow Europeans to solve their main capability shortcomings. The fact that France, Germany, and Spain are working together to develop their future Air Combat System (fighter yet) outside of PESCO means that participant states still have to build trust and get used to PESCO: As defense minister Parly admitted, PESCO is still in "embryonic" form<sup>59</sup>.

---

<sup>52</sup> République Française, "Initiative pour l'Europe – Discours d'Emmanuel Macron pour une Europe souveraine, unie, démocratique." Élysée, 09/26/2017.

<sup>53</sup> MOYA CANOVAS, Luis Enrique. "PESCO: L'avenir d'une Europe qui protège?" 12/16/2017, 9.

<sup>54</sup> Council of the European Union, "Council decision establishing a common set of governance rules for PESCO projects." 06/25/2018.

<sup>55</sup> BLOCKMANS, Steven. "The EU's Modular Approach to Defense Integration: An Inclusive, Ambitious and Legally Binding PESCO?" *Common Market Law Review*. Volume 55. 2018, 1812.

<sup>56</sup> Council of the European Union, "Council Decision establishing Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and determining the list of Participating Member States." 12/08/2017.

<sup>57</sup> FIOTT, Daniel et al. "Permanent Structured Cooperation: What's in a name?" Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 11/2017, 39.

<sup>58</sup> EUISS. "Report" in "Keeping up the Momentum on European Defense." 06/13/2018: There is an understanding that PeSCo is about capabilities.

<sup>59</sup> SAMUEL, Henry. "Nine EU states to launch joint military force as Paris pushes for post-brexit crisis defense group." *The Telegraph*. 06/25/2018.

The French government distrusts CSDP institutions judging them either too slow or ineffective, and referring to them as “incantatory formulas and unrealistic projects”<sup>60</sup> that hinder “Europe’s ambition”<sup>61</sup>. The EI2 allows organizing missions and operations outside any institutional framework, guaranteeing flexible and swift decision-making, and choose the most convenient institutional umbrella for the operation *a posteriori* (UE, OTAN, ONU, etc.)<sup>62</sup>. Quoting the French minister of defense, “Institutions are good, but action is much better, and action is what the European Intervention Initiatives is about”<sup>63</sup>.

### ***Ensuring French leadership***

On the other hand, taking decision making away from the EU framework and centering it in the EI2, France ensures itself a position of leadership in any joint European operation and promotes a European defense architecture that best serves its interests. According to this architecture, PESCO serves to develop capabilities, the European Defense Fund finances I+D, and the EI2 covers military operations<sup>64</sup>.

The unanimity requirement for project governance would have limited French leadership should the EI2 have been a PESCO project. On the other hand, setting the EI2 outside the EU and basing its secretariat on French personnel and the French Ministry of Defense gives France large agenda-setting powers in the operational side of European defense cooperation.

The EI2, being autonomous of the EU, allows for easier post-brexit British participation in European security, which is a major priority for France. After brexit<sup>65</sup>, the United Kingdom will become a third country to the EU, and defense cooperation within the CSDP will be

---

<sup>60</sup> Ministère des Armées, “Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale 2017” Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité, 15.

<sup>61</sup> Ministère des Armées, “Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale 2017” Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Ministère des Armées, “Lettre d’Intention Signée par les Ministres le 25 Juin 2018.” Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité.

<sup>63</sup> PARLY, Florence. “ECFR Keynote: The European Intervention Initiative” European Council on Foreign Relations Meeting. Paris, 05/28/2018.

<sup>64</sup> République Française, “L’Europe de la défense est en marche : Déclaration de Mme Florence Parly à son arrivée au Conseil Affaires étrangères/Défense (Bruxelles, 20 novembre 2018).” Représentation permanente de la France auprès de l’Union européenne.

<sup>65</sup> If it still happens.

hard<sup>66</sup>. Although the general conditions for third-country participation in PESCO have not yet been agreed, we already know that it would only happen exceptionally and, on a case, by-case basis<sup>67</sup>, and it does not seem like the UK will receive any special treatment within PESCO<sup>68 69</sup>.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the French government is advocating for very strict criteria for third –country participation in PESCO, instead of facilitating future British engagement in European defense through PESCO's projects. The reason is that, having secured British participation in European security and PESCO being relegated to capability development, France wants to ensure that PESCO's lucrative contracts and EDF funding benefit only the European Defense Technological and Industrial Base (i.e. French companies)<sup>70</sup>. In the French doctrine, strategic autonomy includes both operational autonomy and industrial and technological autonomy<sup>71</sup>.

## Conclusion

In a nutshell, France is in a situation of overstretch, and it needs greater cooperation with its European partners in an increasingly deteriorated strategic context. The EI2 seeks to facilitate European cooperation in the field and, in the long run, to promote a common European strategic culture. Unlike what many suspects, the EI2 englobes crisis scenarios in all the theatres in the European neighborhood, from the Sahel to the Russian border, and it covers both out-of-area operations and collective defense. Despite all the risks that it entails, President Macron chose to implement the Initiative outside PESCO to mold the emerging architecture of European defense to France's interests. Pure institutional engineering.

---

<sup>66</sup> TARDY, Thierry. "What Third-country role is open to the UK in Defense?" *CEPS* 04/24/2019.

<sup>67</sup> Notification on Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) to the Council and to the High Representative of the union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

<sup>68</sup> SAMUEL, Henry. "Nine EU states to launch joint military force as Paris pushes for post-brexit crisis defense group." *The Telegraph*. 06/25/2018.

<sup>69</sup> TARDY, Thierry. "What Third-country role is open to the UK in Defense?" *CEPS* 04/24/2019.

<sup>70</sup> BARIGAZZI, Jacopo. "UK and US will be allowed to join some EU military projects." *Politico*. 10/02/2018.

<sup>71</sup> Ministère des Armées, "Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale 2017" Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Sécurité, 54.

Nonetheless, the success the EI2 is not guaranteed: Decades of shared experience in NATO do not seem to have resulted in the creation of a common strategic culture. Moreover, the vague agreement at Meseberg does not solve the risk of institutional duplication, and competition between PESCO and the EI2 will surely strain the Franco-German relation. Finally, both PESCO and EI2 must prove their added value to European strategic autonomy. There is the danger that PESCO will fail to plug Europe's capability gaps and/or that the EI2 will become a mere talking shop. Political will, compromise, and clear delineation of each of the initiative's role will be needed to ensure the success of the European Intervention Initiative and Permanent Structured Cooperation.

*Luis Enrique Moya Cánovas\**

Student of International Relations and Economics  
Boston University