

EU's mutual defence and solidarity clauses: political and operational dimensions

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The European Parliament adopted by 438 votes for to 53 votes against, with 104 abstentions, a resolution on the European Unions mutual defence and solidarity clauses: political and operational dimensions.

Parliament recalled that the progressive framing of a common defence policy, aimed at common defence, is reinforcing the European identity and the strategic autonomy of the European Union (EU). It also recalled that a stronger and more capable European defence is essential for consolidating the transatlantic link, in a context of structural geostrategic changes accelerated by the global economic crisis, and in particular at a time of ongoing US strategic repositioning towards Asia-Pacific.

Parliament also put forward the fact that, while Member States retain the primary responsibility for the management of crises within their territory, serious and complex security threats, from armed attacks to terrorism to natural or CBRN disasters to cyberattacks, increasingly have a cross-border nature and may easily overwhelm the capacities of any single Member State. It therefore urges the Member States, the Commission and the Vice-President/High Representative to make full use of the potential of all relevant Treaty provisions, and in particular the mutual defence clause and the solidarity clause, in order to provide all European citizens with the same security guarantees against both traditional and non-conventional threats. It also made reference to Article 42(7) TEU (mutual defence clause [or mutual assistance clause](#)) and Article 222 TFEU (solidarity clause).

The resolution details in particular the manner in which these clauses should be interpreted and implemented in terms of scope of application and capacity.

1. Mutual defence clause:

Field of application: Parliament reminds the Member States of their unequivocal obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power if a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory. And while large-scale aggression against a Member State appears improbable in the foreseeable future, both traditional territorial defence and defence against new threats need to remain high on the agenda. In this sense, non-armed attacks, for instance cyberattacks, could qualify for being covered by the clause, if the Member State's security is significantly threatened by its consequences

Parliament reminds that the Treaty stipulates that commitments and cooperation in the area of mutual defence shall be consistent with commitments under NATO. It also points out the need to be prepared for situations involving non-NATO EU Member States or EU Member States' territories that are outside the North Atlantic area, as foreseen in the Berlin Plus agreement.

Capacities: Parliament emphasises the need for European countries to possess credible military capabilities. It, therefore, encourages Member States to step up their efforts in terms of collaborative military capability development, notably through the complementary Pooling and Sharing and Smart Defence initiatives of the EU and NATO, above all in times of restrained defence budgets. It repeats its call for the work of the European Defence Agency to be fully made use of and taken into account by national defence ministries, and encourages the Member States and the EEAS to continue the debate with a view to establishing the permanent structured cooperation foreseen in the Treaty of Lisbon. Both NATO and the EU should concentrate on strengthening their basic capabilities, improving interoperability, and coordinating their doctrines, planning, technologies, equipment and training methods.

Parliament reiterates its call for the systematic harmonisation of military requirements and for a harmonised EU defence planning and acquisition process, matching up to the Union's level of ambition and coordinated with the NATO Defence Planning Process.

Structures and procedures: Parliament invites the Vice-President/High Representative to propose practical arrangements and guidelines for ensuring an effective response in the event that a Member State invokes the mutual defence clause, as well as an analysis of the role of the EU institutions should that clause be invoked. Where collective action is taken to defend a Member State under attack, it should be possible to make use of existing EU crisis management structures where appropriate, and in particular that the possibility of activating an EU Operational Headquarters should be envisaged. It reiterates its call on the Member States to establish such a permanent capacity, building on the recently activated EU Operations Centre.

2. Solidarity clause:

Scope: if a Member State is the victim of a terrorist attack or of a natural or man-made disaster, the Union and the Member States have an obligation to act jointly and to mobilise all the instruments at its disposal, including the military resources made available by the Member States (for example, in the case of a terrorist attack). It also calls for all significant threats to be taken into account, such as attacks in cyberspace, pandemics, or energy shortages.

At the same time, Member States are called upon to invest in their own security and disaster response capabilities and not to excessively rely on the solidarity of others.

In general, the solidarity clause must be invoked at the demand of a Member State before being implemented.

Capacities and resources: Parliament stresses that the implementation of the solidarity clause should form an integral part of a permanent EU crisis response, crisis management and crisis coordination system, building on the existing sectoral instruments and capabilities. To this end, it points out the fundamental role of the [European Civil Protection Mechanism](#) and supports the [future mechanism](#) which will replace it.

Parliament highlights the importance of ensuring that solidarity is underpinned by adequate EU-level funding mechanisms offering a sufficient degree of flexibility in emergencies. In this sense, it welcomes the proposed increased level of cofinancing under the Civil Protection Mechanism, in particular for transport costs. It recalls that the Solidarity Fund can provide financial assistance after a major disaster and that

further Union financial assistance may be granted by the Council pursuant to Article 122(2) TEU, when a Member State is in difficulties or is seriously threatened with severe difficulties. In general, this Treaty provision should be seen as part of a comprehensive Union solidarity toolbox for addressing new major security challenges, such as those in the area of energy security and security of supply.

Structures and procedures: the Parliament stresses that the EU needs to possess capable crisis response structures with 24/24 and 7/7 monitoring and response capacity. It notes the establishment of the Situation Room within the European External Action Service, as well as the existence of a number of sectoral monitoring centres within Commission departments and specialised EU bodies. So far as possible, it reiterates the need to avoid unnecessary duplication and to ensure coherence and effective coordination in action, all the more so given the current scarcity of resources.

The resolution further calls for:

- the development of an Integrated Situational Awareness and Analysis (ISAA) for EU institutions and Member States and welcomes the planned upgrade of the Monitoring and Information Centre to create a European Emergency Response Centre;
- the enhancement of their capacities for assistance and the exchange of best practice;
- the creation of the necessary procedural and organisational links between relevant Member State services, in order to ensure the proper functioning of the solidarity clause following its activation.

Parliament considers that the decision-making process in Council following a request for assistance under the solidarity clause must not be detrimental to EU reactivity, and that crisis response through the existing mechanisms, such as the Civil Protection Mechanism, must be able to start immediately, irrespective of any such political decision. It also points out the fact that the use of military assets to support civil protection operations is already possible on operational level without the activation of the solidarity clause, as evidenced by the successful cooperation between the Commission and the EU Military Staff on past operations in Pakistan or Libya.

Parliament also considers that it is necessary to strengthen the threat assessment component for better management and responsiveness to proven or potential crises. It therefore encourages Member States to share their national risk assessments to enable a joint appraisal to be made of the situation.

Parliament insists on being kept informed of the situation on the ground in the case of a disaster or attack that triggers the solidarity clause, as well as of the origins and possible consequences of these events.

General considerations: Parliament also raised a series of general considerations, particularly on the relations existing between the EU and NATO. It notes the new strategic concept of NATO which, in addition to maintaining its role as a military alliance, aims to build up its capacity to act as a political and security community, working in partnership with the EU. Given the complementarities existing between NATO's goals and those laid down in Article 43 TEU, Parliament warns, therefore, against the costly duplication of effort between the two organisations and the consequent waste of resources. It urges much closer and more regular political collaboration between the EU High Representative and the Secretary-General of NATO.

It urges an increasing political collaboration between the EU High Representative and the Secretary-General of NATO for the purposes of risk assessment, resource management, policy planning and the execution of operations, both civil and military. It also reaffirms that the use of force by the EU or its Member States is only admissible if legally justified on the basis of the UN Charter. In this context, it underlines the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence.

Parliament calls on the Commission and the Vice-President/High Representative, before the end of 2012, to make their joint proposal for a Council Decision defining the arrangements for the implementation of the solidarity clause according to the provisions of Article 222(3) TFEU, clarifying in particular the roles and competences of the different actors.