European defence union

2016/2052(INI) - 22/11/2016 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 359 votes to 255, with 70 abstentions, a resolution on the European Defence Union (EDU).

Background: Members recalled that in recent years the security situation in and around Europe has worsened significantly, due to challenges, like terrorism, hybrid threats or cyber and energy insecurity, organised crime and climate change, as well as other threats that no single country or organisation is able to face alone. Solidarity and resilience require the EU to stand and to act together and systematically, and to do so in concert with our allies and partners and third countries. Prevention, the sharing of sensitive security information, ending armed conflict, overcoming widespread human rights abuses, the spread of democracy and the rule of law and the fight against terrorism are priorities for the EU and its citizens and should be the subject of engagement within as well as outside the EUs borders.

According to Members, the current financial and security context requires European armed forces to collaborate closer and military personnel to train and work more and better together. According to a Eurobarometer study, approximately two thirds of EU citizens would like to see greater EU engagement in matters of security and defence policy.

Call for a European Defence Union (EDU): Parliament encouraged the European Council to lead the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy and to provide additional financial resources to ensure its implementation, with a view to its establishment under the next multiannual political and financial framework of the EU (MFF). It recalled that the creation of the common Union defence policy is a development and implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy under the Lisbon Treaty, which is bound by international law and is actually indispensable to enable the EU to promote the rule of law, peace and security globally.

Members considered that the way to an EDU needs to start from a thoroughly revised CSDP, based on a strong defence principle, efficient financing and coordination with NATO. They also highlighted the need for the establishment of a Council format of Defence Ministers to provide sustained political leadership and coordinate the framing of a European Defence Union.

Member States are urged to make more binding commitments to one another by establishing permanent structured cooperation within the Union framework. Members also encouraged the setting-up of an EU Operational Headquarters as a precondition for effective planning, command and control of common operations.

The European Council is invited to take concrete steps towards the harmonisation and standardisation of the European armed forces, in order to facilitate the cooperation of armed forces personnel under the umbrella of a new European Defence Union.

The Parliament is called upon to establish a full-fledged Committee on Security and Defence to monitor the implementation of permanent structured cooperation.

Funding: Members stated that the Union should dedicate own means to fostering greater and more systematic European defence cooperation among its Member States. They are convinced that the use of EU funds would be a clear expression of cohesion and solidarity, and that this would allow all Member States to improve their military capabilities in a more common effort. They believe that strengthening the EUs capabilities through joint procurement and other forms of pooling and sharing could provide a much-needed boost to Europes defence industry, SMEs included. Members supported targeted measures to incentivise such projects, in order to reach the EDA benchmark of 35 % of total spending in collaborative procurement.

Noting the ongoing work on setting up a preparatory action for a future EU defence research programme, Parliament urged its effective launch as soon as possible. The preparatory action should be provided with a sufficient budget, of at least EUR 90 million for the next three years (2017-2020). The preparatory action should be followed by a major dedicated EU-funded research programme as part of the next MFF starting in 2021.

The European Defence Research Programme will need a total budget of at least EUR 500 million per year over that period in order to be credible and make a substantial difference.

Launch initiatives: Members considered that the following initiatives should be launched immediately:

- the preparatory action on CSDP research starting in 2017, which will be continued until 2019;
- a more ambitious and strategic defence research programme;
- a European defence semester to assess the progress made in the Member States defence-related budgetary efforts;
- a strategy outlining the steps to take to realise the establishment and implementation of the European Defence Union;
- consideration of the creation of a permanent Council of defence ministers;
- development of the regular White Book process, for a first application in the framework of the planning of the next MFF;
- reform of the EU battlegroups concept, aiming at the establishment of permanent units which would be independent of any lead nation and subject to systematic joint training;
- creation of the military start-up fund, which would help launch military CSDP operations much faster;
- an action plan to provide more Community funds for EU missions (Athena mechanism);
- bring together major companies and stakeholders of the European defence industry with the aim of developing a European drone industry;
- an EU-wide system for the coordination of the rapid movement of defence forces personnel, equipment and supplies. Member States are called upon to aim for the target of 2 % of GDP for defence spending, and to spend 20 % of their defence budgets on equipment identified as necessary through the EDA;
- strengthen EU-NATO relations, including stepping up cooperation, in particular to counter hybrid and cyber threats, and to avoid wasteful competition.

Lastly, the resolution proposed that the European Defence Union be launched as a matter of urgency, in two stages and on the basis of a

system of differentiated integration:

- activation of permanent structured cooperation, which has already been approved by Parliament and included in the Commission Presidents New Start programme;
- implementation of the action plan for the VP/HRs global foreign policy and security strategy.