European summit in Portugal

European Union proceeds with plans for independent military entity

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The meeting of European Union (EU) heads of government began last week with an interim report on the status of work on a Charter of Fundamental Human Rights. Tough negotiations followed over the introduction of a European withholding tax, which received much attention in the media.

However, the focal point of the two-day meeting in Portugal's Santa Maria da Feira was the further development of the European Safety and Defence Policy (ESVP). Six months ago, the heads of government meeting at the EU summit in Helsinki decided to establish a 50,000 to 60,000-strong European strike force by 2003. The force, under independent European command, was to be capable of mobilisation within 60 days and have the capacity to remain operational for at least one year. No other European project has since been pushed forward so intensively.

Former NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana prepared for last week's summit in his new capacity as high representative for EU foreign and security policy. He told journalists that progress in this area “had been at the speed of light compared with the usual yardsticks”.

Solana reported that an “interim committee for political security questions, a military committee and an EU military staff” have begun their work. By the next summit, which will take place at the year's end in Nice, the military and political organisation of the common security and defence policy will emerge from these “germ cells”.

Solana concentrated his report on two questions: EU cooperation with NATO and the inclusion of those European NATO members that do not belong to the EU. He emphasised that the relationship between the EU and NATO had to reflect the fact that the two organisations dealt on equal terms with one another.

His choice of words, expressing the “equal rights” of the two organisations, implies two things: a deepening split within NATO, where the US has traditionally set the tone, and a new understanding of the EU as a military, as well as economic and political alliance.

The EU-NATO relationship had been under much discussion in the run-up to the summit. Agreement was finally achieved based on the following formulation: consultations and cooperation between the EU and NATO would have to take place with “complete regard for the autonomy of the EU's decision-making processes”.

This is formulated even more clearly in the summit's final report. Under the heading of security, the “Conclusions of the President” declare, “Absolute priority will be given to the efforts of the EU to shape its own security regulations, concerning physical and personal security as well as the development of an EU security agreement. On this basis, the EU will commence a dialogue with NATO.”

In the language of diplomacy this is strong talk indeed. Despite increasing European independence, European interests had not previously been described as taking absolute priority over those of the Atlantic alliance.

The present strain in transatlantic relations was revealed in an article in the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* dealing with the divergent concepts of European security and defence policy. The paper writes that the question of whether the Europeans should place their increasing and independent weight in the service of common transatlantic concerns, or further loosen their ties with America in the future, is not yet decided, and is an extraordinarily explosive issue. An “Atlantic” and a “Gaullist” form of European policy confront one another.

The newspaper writes that in support of the Atlantic view, the US and NATO Secretary-General George

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Robertson have posed the “Three I's” as basic criteria: "Improvement, Inclusiveness, Indivisibility".

“Improvement” means that European efforts concerning armaments should be designed to benefit the military capabilities of NATO. The “Defence Capabilities Initiative” (DCI) formulated by NATO is proposed as a measuring stick. DCI should ensure and improve the technical cooperation of the allies.

“Inclusiveness” stands for the full participation of European NATO members that are not members of the EU (Turkey, Norway, Iceland, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic).

Finally, “Indivisibility” means that European missions are conceivable only in those cases where NATO as a whole will not participate.

To the “Three I's,” US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright added the “Three D's”. The construction of any military capacity to be used in a crisis under the name of the EU must not exclude the participation of other allies (“discriminate”), must not lead to Europe loosening its ties with America on security policy matters (“decouple”), and existing structures must not be replicated (“duplicate”).

According to Albright, there can be no objections to Europe having its own bodies and formalising the EU-NATO relationship, but the new EU security structures have to be established in close transatlantic collaboration and in the context of NATO.

In contrast, the “Gaullist version” of European security policy is directed towards developing Europe as an independent global power, which regards itself as a counterweight to America.

“This links up with old French ambitions,” writes the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, “which aim to reduce American influence in Europe to a security guarantee of last resort. EU political and military independence vis-à-vis NATO and America play an outstanding role here. Apart from considerations of prestige, the fear predominates that isolationist or unilateralist forces in the United States could win the upper hand, and would not be willing to help in a European crisis as the Europeans would like. Increasing doubts about the Atlantic reliability of the United States might also account for the fact that the traditionally Atlantic-oriented Germans and British are increasingly open to this French option.”

According to French conceptions, in order to rely on America as little as possible the EU should not only construct effective independent decision making bodies and command structures, but also invest in satellite-based intelligence. Non-EU members should, if necessary, be consulted, but not regarding decisions about military operations, “to prevent America exerting its influence by the back door”.

It was against this type of argument that Turkey protested prior to the summit in a sharply formulated diplomatic note. As a European NATO member and candidate for EU membership, Ankara raised a claim to direct and unlimited participation in consultation and decision-making mechanisms regarding European security and defence policy. On a visit two weeks earlier, Solana had been unable to change the mind of the Turkish government, where his calls for multilateralism and greater flexibility fell on deaf ears.

In its note, the Turkish Foreign Ministry pointed to the communiqué of the NATO anniversary summit in Washington last year, which maintained that in any EU-led crisis operation, it was of “greatest importance” that the fullest possible participation of non-EU NATO members be ensured. It is generally assumed that the rejectionist attitude of the Turkish government was agreed upon with Washington.

Whilst in theoretical debates the divergent points of view are discussed as opposing options, in reality they form a complex mix of interests and interpenetrate one another. In Feira, there was much talk of close cooperation and joint decision making with NATO, but the agreements made point towards greater European independence.

Since US dominance in NATO is based upon its military superiority and a not insignificant technological lead, equality for the EU requires an extremely expensive modernisation of the European armed forces. The agreements made at Feira point, therefore, in the direction of an accelerated armaments program in all EU states.

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