

Vortragsthema von Dr. Joris J. E. Van Bladel
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„Die Europäische Union im Dauerkrisenmodus? ‚Schicksalswahlen‘ 2017 in
einzelnen EU-Mitgliedstaaten und der Beginn des EU-Austrittsprozesses
Großbritanniens“ am 17. November 2017 in Wien:

„Brexit: Challenges and Opportunities for European Security“

Abstract:

Brexit has installed a period of uncertainty, chaos and division both in the United Kingdom (UK) and in the European Union (EU). This uncertainty is also noticeable in the field of security and defence (S&D). Indeed, although the Brexit debate was mainly focused on economic issues, immigration and the British identity, the S&D issue was also discussed on the sidelines of the debate. For example, the following questions have been raised: Which role would UK armed forces obtain in any future EU defence cooperation? What will be the effect of Brexit on the relationship between the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)? What will be the impact of Brexit on intelligence sharing and the future of counter-terrorism efforts? After the referendum, the question about the future of UK's nuclear deterrent force has come on the S&D agenda after it became clear that Scotland voted against Brexit. So far, neither of these questions has received any clear answer. On the contrary, the election of Donald Trump as US president and his ambiguous position related to the EU and the defence umbrella of NATO has added to the state of European uncertainty that has been initiated by Brexit.

Yet, the EU does not seem to have the intention to “waste” another serious crisis without taking appropriate actions. Since the UK has voted in favour of Brexit (and President Trump has occupied the White House), the EU has taken bold steps towards an enhanced cooperation in the S&D field. These steps are significant as, apparently, these steps were not possible to take before the Brexit decision. At least three events may buttress this observation:

1. On 7 June 2017, the European Commission published a reflection paper on the future of European defence in which it stressed the imperative of creating “a fully-fledged European Defence Union” by 2025. Jean-Claude Juncker, the current President of the European Commission, has said on that occasion: “I also believe that we need to work on a stronger Europe when it comes to security and defence matters. Yes, Europe is chiefly a ‘soft power’. But even the strongest soft powers cannot make it in the long run without at least some integrated defence capacities.”
2. On 26 September 2017, the French President Emmanuel Macron gave a notable lecture at the Sorbonne University in Paris, which is referred to as “Macron’s European Defence Doctrine”. Indeed, during his lecture, the French President proposed nothing less than a common European defence budget, as well as common asylum offices, border police, etc.
3. On 13 November 2017, 23 out of 28 ministers of defence and foreign affairs of the EU agreed to support PESCO. PESCO (or “Permanent Structured Cooperation on Defence”) foresees, *inter alia*, “Joint Rapid Reaction Forces” and the development of new materiel such as tanks and drones; the creation of single European logistics and medical support hubs; the development of binding national plans to increase defence spending and military research and development (R&D); the creation of a single hub for overseas

military training missions; and a €5.5 billion fund to help member states to buy high-end weapons. On this occasion, Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, spoke about an “emotional moment” in the history of the EU because the decision, so she claimed, had “dismantled the ghosts of the past” and showed that “the taboo concerning EU defence could be broken”. In the end, she expressed her hope that “PESCO could be an inspiration for other areas of [EU] integration”.

Do these public pronouncements and common declarations really mean that the EU will implement a genuine S&D policy? Only time will tell, especially since Germany does not seem to be able to form a stable government after the parliamentary elections for the Bundestag on 24 September 2017. Be that as it may, it might be clear that despite the fact that Brexit has created a period of uncertainty, if not crisis, it has also created opportunities for the EU to take bold steps in the S&D field. In the end, one thing remains true: “Nothing is eaten as hot as it is cooked.”