



EU AS AN ACTOR WHICH HAS A WORLDWIDE FOOTPRINT

General Patrick de Rousiers, Chairman of the EU Military Committee, visited the Slovenian Armed Forces between 30 June and 2 July this year. A lot of important topics were discussed during his visit. We talked to him on Tuesday, 1 July, at Hotel Vila Bled. It was a rainy morning, but General De Rousiers, a French pilot with a long and impressive military carrier, shared some of his views on security and military topics with us.

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Photo: Robert Cotič*

Do you consider EU a global security actor and why?

As the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, I represent the 28 Chiefs of Defence; therefore I think your question is for each Member State and each of their Chief of Defence, which retain the ultimate control of their military tools and capabilities.

But I can see a trend for the EU as being an actor which has a worldwide footprint with the European External Action Service, which is, let's say, a very big Foreign Affairs Ministry and Ministry of Defence. Drawing on its 141 delegations, which could be thought of as "embassies", the EU has a good outreach to very different places in the world. It also has information from

those regions, from those countries for a better understanding of their threats, challenges and eagerness to see collectively the 28 Member States being involved. There is in fact the ambition to collectively address all the major issues and yes, the EU is involved cooperatively in all the continents and in all the areas, and that is quite impressive. It is all of course rather new; it is a learning process that is taking place. There's a lot of momentum that takes place.

What is your assessment regarding the complementarity of NATO and EU tasks in the field of defence? Sometimes one has an impression that things are going in two different directions?

This sounds like an old debate. I can testify that nowadays it is not the case at all.

The two – NATO and EU – are profoundly different in nature, in politics as well as when it comes to the armed forces of each nation but it is difficult for me, now, to imagine a political or military representative of the 22, out of 28, Member States taking different positions on the same issue while respectively being at NATO or EU meetings. Let's take for example a Prime Minister who participated to the EU Council in December in 2013, he will support the same stances on the same subject when he attends the NATO Summit later this year in Wales, regardless of the engagements, be it national or under the EU or NATO flag. In Slovenia - for example – your skilled soldiers are engaged in operations in Afghanistan, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They are also engaged in Mali, and they were engaged in the Balkans for the floods; so, as you can see, sometimes they have

been engaged under the national flag, sometimes under the NATO flag and sometimes under the EU flag. In every case there has been a national decision as to the commitment.

I am referring to duplication; because there was a rhetoric trend 15, 20 years ago giving the impression of some eagerness for having military structures and units respectively dedicated to the two organizations. But now, it is more about cooperation. For example, what is currently in the mindset of many is the situation in Eastern Europe – I can tell that there is a very strong tie between EU and NATO on the military assessment of what is occurring in and around Ukraine. So we are not in opposition



between the EU and NATO – we are not competing, we are collaborating.

What does the crisis in Ukraine mean for the European defence policy?

The crisis in Ukraine challenges mainly the nations within Europe who thought that they were in a peaceful environment. So, it serves as a wake-up call for all of us, including the military, that yes, we need to be ready for the whole range of activities going from high intensity and warfighting scenarios to asymmetric threats. This means that we need to be prepared, we need to train.

But it also highlights that there is a limit to the reduction in defence spending. Because if we continue in Europe to reduce the defence spending, if we do not prepare for the future, what legacy are we going to give to our children and grandchildren.

So recently we, nations in Europe, were like a “sleeping beauty”.

Citizens of Europe felt quite safe and when discussing threats, we thought they were somewhere far away.

I get your point. But I do not agree on the “sleeping beauty”, because I think we in the EU were quite active in Europe, collectively as well as individually.

This is your point of view, a point of view of a military professional. But the public felt that we were rather safe and that the defence budget was not that very important. That is why they were cutting mostly on the defence budget.

This is the case in Slovenia and you know that it is an issue for all of us in Europe. Most of the population has similar concerns, realizing that our predecessors and maybe ourselves have managed to create an environment, both from a political and from a military standpoint, which allowed friendly relations with our neighbours within Europe, the 28 of us. All this is first very good and our closest neighbourhood is or was rather safe. Now it has changed. Now in the Southern and Eastern neighbourhood there are issues of different natures which we have to take in due consideration.

These kinds of situations are a sort of a test for NATO and the EU?

I think it also highlights that the first and foremost duty of all the armed forces is to protect the population. I am convinced that if there were asymmetric threats, or more generally speaking a dangerous environment, the first reaction would come from the

country affected by the crisis. Indeed, multinational organizations need time to react. Therefore, Member states are important stakeholders in crisis management as they are the first to suffer from the adverse effects of a crisis and, at the same time, they control their resources and, thus, can make the choices about how to react to threats in a timely manner. This is why the nation needs to be robust itself both in its military forces and in the ability to make decisions.

Africa is a strong area of interest for the EU. This is evident from the number of EU military and civilian operations on this continent. Which military operations could you define as successful and why? Which were less successful and why?

First, we are engaged currently in five military operations. Namely, one in Europe, three in Africa and one in the Indian Ocean. Africa is not our core business. It just happened to be one area where we collectively decided to be engaged. There is one very important engagement in Europe, in which Slovenia takes full part, and that is Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is from the military standpoint a very big success. The link between the armed forces of BIH and EUFOR is very strong; the evolution, the training and the advisory role is of great importance as it has allowed BIH forces to be engaged recently in Afghanistan, in a severe environment, highlighting the high level of skills reached.

In Africa, we are engaged in a very diverse situation. Two of the missions are advisory and training. This is a scenario where we are really effective in the way we manage the issue. But to see if we have had any success, we need time – it will need time. Why are we engaged in Mali and Somalia to do this? To help these states to rebuild their respective defence structures and institutions that can effectively support and win the legitimacy of its people. We are also committed to the security forces from the civilian side. It will take years and years to finalize. We are in the process of having a mission that will be extended to 2016. But currently, there are two ways to analyse the progress. First it is through the advisory, because there is a very strong buy-in by the Malian government, by the Malian Ministry of



Defence and by the Malian leadership of the armed forces which means they agreed that the EU worked alongside their forces and analyzed their structure, made with them some plans and now are implementing them in their laws. That is really a partnership which can be of a great help in improving their performance. Success in the training was highlighted with the way that the forces reacted, those who were trained, when they were engaged. In seven weeks one can achieve some success, but not everything. We did all that going from individual training to collective training. Now the battalions are working effectively. But there are many, many other things to do from logistics, the command structures, so it will take time. So much as Mali. In Somalia is even more difficult, because they are fighting a war. There is also operation Atalanta in the Indian Ocean which is really our flagship in a sense that we have had decisions that allowed to implement first the operation at sea and also to go ashore, if supported by strong evidence, to attack the depots or fuel depots of pirates. We have passed agreements between EU and some Member States to have the ability to prosecute the pirates, to have them go on trial and then to go in prison. For this we needed the agreements and needed the funding and a holistic approach. We were not only stopping the pirates from hijacking. It would go much, much further. The evidence speaks for itself; there has been no successful pirates attack last year. We are in the very positive track. But as far as success is concerned – yes,

this year, we are successful, but everything can flip very quickly. Because in each case, if I go from Bosnia to Mali, to Somalia, or to Central African Republic the security situation can reverse in a few months.

So whatever we do in this area, we can make a big effort, but on the other hand our results are not so huge. But let's say in Mali there might be a great success for the Mali government to recognize the situation and call EU for help?

What is happening in Mali is very important. Mali is an area in the Sahel region where the threats of terrorism is important. Just remember what happened in Algeria where many foreigners were taken hostages by an Al Qaida type organization and where many lost their lives. So we got an area of instability that is there and every little pocket where we can bring stability or we can help is important for the region. So yes, Africa or the Indian Ocean is far away, but if we do not help those nations we might get the boomerang back some time in the future.

Operation in CAR seems like a lost opportunity – first, EUBG was not employed; there were long reaction times, and, what is more, the operation is today still unmanned, which poses difficulties to the Commander who hasn't got sufficient forces for the realisation of the mission. What is your comment to that and where do you see the main reasons for this?

Central African Republic is one of the countries in the world where instability is impressive, where needs are dramatic. This is also the case in Syria and Southern Sudan. I remember in each of the meetings that I chaired in Brussels, and the ones I attended at the Ministries of Defence or Foreign Affairs level, the number of entities which were strongly asking for the security forces to provide help to the population. Some would have hoped for things to go quicker, but one needs to recognize that we are there today. It is not easy. I am not sure that many people in Slovenia, in Ljubljana know where CAR is. Even in Paris some of the population do not know. But this did not prevent the EU member states to deploy more than 700 plus soldiers with “gendarmes” in Bangui. It is the first time we are doing this, we are not only having infantry ready to face difficult situation. We have those robust infantry and also the police force “gendarmierie” which allows to arrest, to gather evidence and to allow for prosecution to take place. They work hand in hand. So we are contributing to stabilizing the country and assisting the transition to a UN force, before the end of the year. It could have gone quicker or could have been larger, but we are there in large number and so we are not shy of committing. We do with what we have as best we can. Any commitment at 28 needs two elements: the agreement by all 28 Member States that having the EU flag in a designated region is worthwhile and consequently accept that the costs are commonly funded and second, see some of our nations commit skilled military forces to the field. This is a challenge every time but we are trying to do the best.