

**Interparliamentary Conference for  
the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)  
and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)**

*Senate of the Republic, 5 - 7 November 2014*

**BREAKOUT SESSION - The future of the EU's Battlegroups**

In December 2013, the European Council, in outlining priority lines of action for the development of a credible and effective Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), underscored the importance of increasing the EU's rapid-response capabilities by, among other things, setting up more flexible and readily deployable Battlegroups (BGs).

**EU BATTLEGROUPS: THE EUROPEAN DEBATE**

The EU Battlegroup (BG) is a rapid-response military unit designed for a whole spectrum of crisis-management operations, known as "expanded Petersberg tasks", under the terms of article 43 of the Treaty on European Union<sup>1</sup>. The BGs are made up of military units capable of operating at distances of up to 6,000 km from Brussels within a short period of time (5-10 days after a decision of the Council). They can continue to operate for at least 30 and up to a maximum of 120 days from initial deployment. The EU expects the BGs to be able to intervene in two theatres at the same time, which implies that each semester two BGs must be ready for action. Each BG is supplied by a Member State on a rotating basis, and is made up of 1500 men. The European Battlegroup (EUBG) concept was first mooted in 2006 in a document that set out the conceptual underpinnings and regulations for the preparation and deployment of Battlegroups in crisis-management operations requiring a rapid response.

In recent years, many Member States have debated the need to use the BGs in EU operations, an eventuality that has not yet come to pass. In particular, the discussion has focused on the possibility of using them to remedy shortcomings in the preparation of forces for EU operations, to function as a reserve force for ongoing operations, and as a vanguard for more complex actions. Owing to their size and capability, it is widely believed that the BGs are not, in fact, able to cover the broad spectrum of the "Petersberg tasks" assigned to them. The model that has been selected does not allow for the individual or prolonged deployment of BGs in high-intensity operations. Furthermore, the planning timetable, which looks forward at least five years, makes it difficult for Member States to appreciate the value of taking part in crisis-management operations that may, possibly, occur in the remote future.

In 2011-2012, the crisis response planning division of the European External Action Service (EEAS) undertook a joint study with Member States to identify the difficulties behind the non-deployment of BGs, and produced a series of findings that met with broad agreement.

The failed deployment was linked to three factors:

- **Divergent concepts of national strategy, and a lack of a common political will at the European level** (it was noted, for instance, that the launch of an operation involving the rapid deployment of forces requires a unanimous decision of the Council);
- **Considerable discrepancies in the decision-making processes** and timetables of the different nations: in some Member States, the Government can directly order the deployment of forces, while in others, Parliament has to be involved at various levels;

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<sup>1</sup> Joint disarmament operations; humanitarian and rescue tasks; military advice and assistance tasks; conflict prevention and peace-keeping tasks; tasks of combat forces in crisis-management, including peace-making and post-conflict stabilisation.

- **Costs**, which, apart from the few exceptions where the ATHENA mechanism comes into play, are borne individually by Member States according to the principle of "costs lie where they fall," instead of being shared at a European level.

Member States have unanimously declared their support for the EU BGs and affirmed that they have no binding political, military or national security issues preventing them from contributing. One third of them ascribe the non-deployment of BGs to a lack of political will, and ten States said they were capable of taking on the role of a "Framework Nation". A significant number also believe that financial constraints have prevented them from providing a Battlegroup. Meanwhile, some Member States suggest that the current system of joint funding, the so-called ATHENA mechanism, needs to be amended and improved by broadening reimbursable costs, in particular those relating to strategic transport.

Taking its cue from the debate and the contributions of the various Member States, the EEAS released a document in October of last year outlining a range of mainly technical solutions that would broaden the scope of application of the BGs and make the system more flexible and easier to use in conjunction with other instruments. The EEAS proposed the following:

- **maintaining the current scope of ambition**, also by enhancing the role of the Framework Nations;
- **making better use of pooling and sharing** to remedy capacity deficits;
- the development of a **modular approach** in which a basic garrison would be supplied with extra capabilities as they become necessary, so that the BGs are tailored to specific crises;
- the start of an **advance planning** process referring to actual situations where the BGs may need to be stationed, enabling Member States to contribute their specific skills and operate according to their mutual strategic interests;
- the development of a **training dimension** to enhance the interoperability, readiness and efficiency of the BGs, and to increase the efficiency of the evaluation and certification process;
- a **substantial change in the ATHENA mechanism** (a review is scheduled for the end of 2014) to ensure that shared costs also cover the preparation of the BGs, their participation in EU exercises and strategic transport;
- the development of new **military crisis-response instruments**, including a strong civilian component, that can be moved quickly to areas of possible crisis and can support, co-operate with or anticipate the arrival of BGs. At the same time, an analysis and planning capacity for actual and potential crises needs to be developed with reference, where necessary, to the provisions of article 44 of the TEU, which states that the Council may assign a task to a group of willing Member States that dispose of the necessary capabilities.

## THE DEBATE AT THE CFSP-CSDP CONFERENCE

The Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CFSP-CSDP) of Athens of 3 and 4 April 2014 included, thanks to an initiative of the Netherlands, a special Workshop on EU Battlegroups. The Workshop looked at national parliamentary procedures and their compatibility with the current system for the deployment of BGs on short notice (5-10 days after a decision of the Council). In its Conclusions, the Workshop undertook to ensure that the timetables of deployment would be respected, and looked forward to "a further exchange of views on the subject to explore possible ways to increase the effectiveness and readiness of the EU BGs" at the coming Inter-Parliamentary CFSP-CSDP Conference in Rome.

Taking the recommendations on board, on 25 June the Chairpersons of the Defence Committees of the Italian Chamber of Deputies and of the Senate sent a letter to their counterparts in the national parliaments of the EU and the European Parliament asking them to supply materials and documents relating to BGs (fact-finding inquiries, motions, questions, best practices, case studies, white papers etc.). The responses, which were rather limited in number, are available on the website of the Italian Presidency ([ue2014.parlamento.it](http://ue2014.parlamento.it)).



The Dutch Parliament made a particularly important contribution by including with its reply a Discussion Paper (dated 16 July) setting out the four factors that have led to the non-deployment of the BGs:

- **Divergent security and defence strategies, and a lack of will at the EU level;**
- **Limited national defence budgets**, which have made it necessary for states to pool their military capabilities, including through bilateral and multilateral arrangements;
- **Different constitutional procedures** among the various Member States for approving the deployment of BGs;
- **The associated outlay of resources, which is largely related to the principle that “costs lie where they fall”.**

The Dutch Discussion Paper contains a detailed examination of national procedures for approving the use of BGs, the diversity of which has led to a failure of rapid deployment within the requisite timeframe of 5 to 10 days from the relevant decision by the Council. In view of the Inter-Parliamentary Conference on the CFSP and CSDP, the paper sets out four different possible scenarios for the future of the BGs for further discussion:

- **Structured and permanent cooperation with prior authorization.** The Member States could voluntarily declare their current readiness for the use of their armed forces in urgent cases and on the basis of a decision of the Council of the EU. A solidarity fund could be made available to cover operating costs, and to share and therefore reduce the financial burden.
- **Using the BGs as models for training** that also offer the opportunity to enhance cooperation and certification. According to this proposal, the BGs would be redesigned as training and certification groups for testing joint operations. The standardization and certification of the BGs would be the responsibility of an independent body. In case of international crisis, group training could form the basis for the formation of a coalition of the willing.
- **Keeping the existing arrangements.** The Member States could continue honing their training capacities without any intention of actually deploying the BGs.
- **Abolishing the BGs altogether.** As far as the need for a rapid-response force is concerned, the EU and its Member States would remain dependent on other international organizations such as NATO.

## TALKING POINTS

The points and ideas to be discussed with a view to ensuring a greater effectiveness and "deployability" of the BGs can be summed up by the following questions:

- **Should greater emphasis be given to the preventative functions inherent in the concept of "rapid response"?** This concept can usefully serve as part of an integrated strategy that both encompasses a set of measures for addressing the root (political, economic and social) causes of a crisis and provides for the subsequent activation of several civilian instruments to be made available before, during and after military operations.
- **Is it helpful to pursue the debate over the decision-making processes of individual Member States with the aim of making sure that each of them makes a realistic commitment to achieving approval times that are compatible with the rapid deployment of the BGs** with reference to best practices and, in particular, the Nordic Battlegroup and UK-Netherlands cooperation?
- **Does it make sense to act upon the European Parliament's recommendations in its Resolution of 12 September 2013 relating to military facilities in the European Union and therefore review the criteria for the composition of the BGs**, bearing in mind that neighbouring Member States will more easily reach agreement in identifying the potential threats to the stability of their region, and should therefore be able to rally behind a common strategy of prevention?



- **Could better use be made of the legal principles of the Treaty on European Union? More specifically, should limitations be set on the range of actions envisaged by article 43 of the TEU (the so-called "Petersberg tasks") that are potentially assigned to the BGs? What do we think of the possibility of using the appeals procedure as provided for by article 44 of the TEU, which enables the Council to assign a mission to a group of Member States that is willing and has the necessary capabilities?**
- **Are we favourable to the idea of reconfiguring the BGs to become a pool for training and certification**, in which the focus would be on joint training and the testing of operational capabilities with a view to laying the foundations for a fully functional system of standardization and certification (to be entrusted to an independent body such as the European Defence Agency)?