

# EU finally comes clean on future UK-EU military objectives, but risks remain

*By David Banks. This piece first appeared on the Veterans for Britain website and is reproduced with permission.*

In a speech in Berlin today, Michel Barnier (the EU's Brexit negotiator) for the first time explicitly spells out some interpretations over future UK-EU military relations under Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the new EU policy ambition in this field. The text can be found [here](#).

Some of these comments are welcome. In particular, in saying "Any voluntary participation of the United Kingdom in European defence will confer rights and obligations in proportion to the level of this participation," Mr Barnier is indicating that UK participation on an *ad hoc* basis in missions can generate corresponding engagement at the political level. Clarity is needed on this point, but it does seem that the approach is heading towards a flexible structure rather than seeking to tie the UK down in fixed EU treaty obligations.

Again, Mr Barnier acknowledges that there are several existing models of cooperation and not just the Norway one, a model which is tied into membership of the Single Market. That requirement appears to have been dropped by the Commission. More widely, this may even be the first admission that a special FTA deal is achievable, since several such models do already exist lying between WTO Status and EEA membership.

However, there are also clear remaining issues. While UK membership of the European Defence Agency is ruled out, some sort of structured affiliation is not. Yet the EDA is core to

future EU defence integration and formal UK adhesion beyond observer status carries budgetary obligations and political risks.

Also, the EU recognises the UK will continue to play a bilateral and multilateral role, especially through NATO. But PESCO has identified non-NATO multilaterals as targets to come increasingly under the PESCO banner. We also note the cheeky attempt to appropriate the St Mâlo agreement at the very end. The EU has wide eyes and a big appetite in agreements that are not part of the menu.

Tellingly, Barnier is tacitly admitting, in saying that “The British have never wanted to turn the Union into a military power”, that the EU now seeks to do just that.

**Major-General Julian Thompson**, chairman of Veterans for Britain, said:

*“M. Barnier offers a backhanded compliment to the importance of the UK to European Defence – a term which of course is not the same thing as the EU’s precocious military appetite.”*

*“It is not in the UK’s interest to institutionally weld itself to this ‘Security ERM’. Post Brexit, the UK should cooperate in missions and projects of clear joint interest. It is a positive sign that the Commission’s chief Brexit negotiator recognises this prospect.”*

**Colonel Richard Kemp** also of Veterans for Britain said:

*“EU defence integration clearly remains a threat to NATO, and to UK multilateralism inside Europe but outside the EU. EU ambitions are extensive and dangerous.”*

Referring to the outrageous opening inference of the Brexit vote as a betrayal of the fight against terror, Col Kemp added:

*"This is an insult to the electorate of the first order. But then, the European Commission has never understood either democracy or adverse votes.*

*"The EU has brought a lot of its terror-related problems on itself. In contrast, the UK has been the most capable in defence and security and has been the bulwark of anti-terrorism in Europe."*