

# The real reason Germany is freeloading on defence

Germany's low defence spending is a natural consequence of its leaders' *Weltanschauung* (worldview), which has prioritised the supranational over the national, especially in defence and foreign policy.

Germany has put considerable political capital behind the aggregation of defence policy towards the EU institutions. Many of the component parts of the aggregation plan were conceived in Germany – not least Angela Merkel's CDU party friend and colleague Elmar Brok MEP, who as chairman of the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs is credited with inventing PESCO.

German leaders are happy to keep their forces in a state of dilapidation. The only incentive for maintaining an Armed Forces at all is Germany's interest in asserting a leading position and therefore influence in 'Common Defence' once the EU Council and Commission complete it in five years' time.

'Common Defence' means placing defence as an EU competence, with a central budget within the EU Multiannual Financial Framework. (German budget predictions appear to end at 2023, but that might be a coincidence).

Observers should note the crucial difference between two similar sounding concepts: Common Security and Defence Policy, and Common Defence. In EU jargon, Common Security and Defence Policy is the policy programme or 'journey', whereas Common Defence is the end goal or 'destination'. The Lisbon Treaty describes this as follows:

*'The (European) Union's competence in matters of common foreign and security policy shall cover all areas of foreign policy and all questions relating to the (European)*

*Union's security, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy that might lead to a common defence.'*

Meanwhile, the EU has identified 2025 as a date by which Common Defence could be achieved. Although this was proposed as one of three 'options' in the EU's 2017 Reflection Paper on the Future of EU Defence (the other two being little change from status quo), the mechanisms towards this 'option' are actually already well underway – via (for example) the integration of defence capabilities; defence industrial functions; joint budgets; and a new military HQ. The EU appears not to be entertaining the prospect that the more modest options for CSDP will be applied.

Statements from the Berlaymont (the EU Commission headquarters) and the European External Action Service (EEAS, the EU's diplomatic service and foreign and defence ministry) increasingly reflect this accelerated timetable towards Common Defence, after the EU president initially presented it as a mere 'option' a couple of years ago.

Few defence commentators talk about this as it sounds far-fetched, and they mostly don't take EU Commission planning documents seriously.

Common Defence is however a reality. The EU has used Brexit as cover for rapid manoeuvres in defence integration – in the same way it was seen after 9/11 to push Justice and Home Affairs policies and new competencies which had been formally binned by the Council in the preceding year.

The EU Commission boasts that in the move towards Common Defence, 'more has been achieved in the past 2 years than in the last 60.' The threat is real.