



Wilfried
Martens Centre
for European Studies

France's European Intervention Initiative

Towards a Culture of Burden Sharing

Niklas Nováky



Policy Brief

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This paper analyses the new European Intervention Initiative (EI2). Proposed by France, the EI2 is an intergovernmental forum outside the EU and NATO for enhancing military interactions between the most able and willing European countries. By seeking to facilitate the development of a European strategic culture, it is an attempt to solve the demand-side problem of European defence cooperation—that is, most European countries' unwillingness to intervene in crises and to use force when necessary. The idea of developing the EI2 was first proposed in September 2017 by French President Emmanuel Macron, who believed that new EU defence initiatives needed to be supplemented with an additional initiative that would help European countries integrate their armed forces better. This paper argues that the development of the EI2 has been driven primarily, though not exclusively, by a French policy predating Macron's election to get France's European partners more involved in various military operations primarily in Africa. Paris has sought this support to alleviate the burden of conducting these operations—a burden it believes France has been unfairly forced to carry. In addition, France has been frustrated for years by the EU's, and especially Germany's, slowness when it comes to launching military operations, and in 2017 it became disappointed in the Union's Permanent Structured Cooperation on account of its over-inclusivity. In the eyes of France, these factors take away from the importance of Europe as a player on the



world stage. Thus, by creating the EI2 outside NATO and the EU, and by admitting only the most interested and motivated European countries into the initiative, France is seeking to overcome institutional rigidity in the deployment of operations, endless force generation conferences, and lowest-common-denominator defence cooperation. However, the paper also seeks to make clear that it is questionable whether the EI2 has a real contribution to make in the ever more crowded space of European defence initiatives. While promoting doctrinal convergence among the participating countries' armed forces and providing the UK with a politically neutral European forum for defence cooperation after Brexit are unquestionably positive, the EI2 also has clearly negative aspects that need addressing.

Keywords European Intervention Initiative – EI2 – Strategic culture – France – Burden sharing – Defence

Introduction

On 25 June 2018, ministers from nine European countries met in Luxembourg to sign a Letter of Intent (LoI) on the development of the new European Intervention Initiative (EI2). The creation of the EI2 had been proposed nine months earlier by French President Emmanuel Macron in his 'Initiative for Europe' speech at Paris's Sorbonne University. According to Macron, recent initiatives to boost the EU's underdeveloped defence dimension needed to be supplemented with the EI2, which would help European countries 'to better integrate' their armed forces 'at every stage'.¹ However, the exact nature of the EI2 remained unclear until its launch, as did its relationship to existing structures and initiatives within the EU and its relationship to NATO. In public, senior French officials described it in vague terms, which raised more questions than answers. In October 2017, for example, French Minister of the Armed Forces Florence Parly said that the EI2 would be a 'quick and operational process' for putting together forces from different European countries if necessary.²

This paper analyses the development and purpose of the EI2, and examines just how valuable the initiative is likely to be. It also seeks to contribute to the embryonic but rapidly growing literature on the initiative, which has been spearheaded primarily

¹ France, Presidency of the Republic, 'Initiative for Europe: A Sovereign, United, Democratic Europe' (26 September 2017), 1.

² Center for Strategic & International Studies, 'Global Leaders Forum: H.E. Florence Parly, Minister for the Armed Forces of France', *YouTube* (20 October 2017).



by think-tankers.³ It argues that the development of the EI2 is an attempt to solve the demand-side problem of European defence cooperation—that is, most European countries’ unwillingness to intervene in crises and to use force when necessary. Its creation was driven by a French policy that predates Macron’s election to office. The goal of this policy has been to get France’s European partners more involved in military operations primarily in the Sahel region and sub-Saharan Africa so as to alleviate the burden of conducting them that Paris believes it has been unfairly forced to carry. In addition, France has been frustrated for years with the slowness both of the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) structures and of Germany when it comes to launching military operations. Moreover, it became disappointed in the Union’s Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) during its setting-up process in 2017 on account of this framework’s over-inclusivity (a feature that was strongly supported by Germany). Thus, by creating the EI2 outside NATO and the EU, and by admitting only the most militarily capable European countries as members, France is seeking to overcome cumbersome EU planning processes, endless force generation conferences and lowest-common-denominator defence cooperation.

The paper is divided into six sections. The first describes the background to Macron’s proposal in September 2017 to develop the EI2. The second provides an overview of the initiative’s development process up to its launch and discusses the main issues shaping and affecting it during that time. The third section analyses the composition, goals, and structure of the EI2 as outlined in the 25 June Lol on its development. Section four evaluates the EI2, looking at its main features, both positive and negative. The section focuses on the question of whether the EI2, standing as it does in the ever more crowded space of European defence initiatives, can actually make a real contribution. The fifth section provides six policy recommendations aimed at improving the EI2’s chances of achieving its goals and at mitigating the negative features discussed in the preceding section. The sixth and concluding section briefly summarises the paper’s argument and main points.

³ See, e.g., A. Pannier, ‘Macron’s “European Intervention Initiative”: More Questions than Answers’, European Leadership Network, Commentary (23 November 2017); C. Major and C. Mölling, ‘France Moves from EU Defense to European Defense’, Carnegie Europe, Judy Dempsey’s Strategic Europe (7 December 2017); C. Major and C. Mölling, ‘Franco-German Differences over Defense Make Europe Vulnerable’, Carnegie Europe, Judy Dempsey’s Strategic Europe (29 March 2018); N. Witney, ‘Macron and the European Intervention Initiative: Erasmus for Soldiers?’, European Council on Foreign Relations, Commentary (22 May 2018); U. E. Franke, ‘Pedantry in Motion: European Intervention Hits the Language Barrier’, European Council on Foreign Relations, Commentary (7 June 2018); C. Mölling and C. Major, ‘Why Joining France’s European Intervention Initiative Is the Right Decision for Germany’, Egmont, Commentary (15 June 2018); N. Koenig, ‘The European Intervention Initiative: A Look Behind the Scenes’, Jacques Delors Institute, Blog Post (27 June 2018).



Background

The creation of the EI2 has been driven primarily by three factors: (1) a French policy predating Macron's election to office in May 2017 to get its European partners more involved in military operations—primarily in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa—to alleviate the burden of conducting them that Paris believes it has been unfairly forced to carry; (2) France's frustration with the slowness of the EU's CSDP structures when it comes to launching military operations; and (3) France's disappointment in the direction of PESCO since mid-2017 due to what Paris considers to be its over-inclusivity and lack of an operational dimension. These factors will now be analysed in detail.

First and foremost, France's political leadership has gradually come to accept that the country's armed forces are severely overstretched. In September 2017, for example, the Chief of the French Defence Staff, General François Lecointre, declared that the country's armed forces have been used at '130% of their capabilities and now need time to regenerate'.⁴ The issue of military overstretch became a heated topic in the first months of Macron's presidency. After the administration unexpectedly cut €850 million from the 2017 defence budget to try to comply with EU budget rules, then Chief of Defence Staff General Pierre de Villiers voiced opposition to the plan publicly by arguing that, on account of their operational commitments, French forces were overstretched.⁵ This public spat with the Élysée Palace ultimately led to de Villiers's resignation and replacement with General Lecointre. The overstretch of France's armed forces is primarily due to several military operations, both at home and abroad, that France has been conducting either on its own or in cooperation with its partners. These include Sentinelle in France, launched after the January 2015 Île-de-France attacks, to deal with the domestic terrorist threat and protect sensitive locations; Barkhane in the Sahel, a counter-terrorism operation fighting insurgents in the areas of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger; and Chammal in the Middle East, the French contribution to the international coalition fighting the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

In the preceding years France had tried different ways to get its European partners to share more of the burden of conducting the above-mentioned operations, and still others. Its partners' responses, however, have repeatedly fallen short of

⁴ IISS, *The Military Balance 2018* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 74.

⁵ Ibid.



Paris's expectations. The following two examples illustrate the issue. First, in December 2013 France sought EU financing for Operation Sangaris in the Central African Republic (CAR). This was a French national operation that then President François Hollande had launched to deal with sectarian violence in the troubled country after the EU could not agree on deploying a battlegroup.⁶ However, the request was rejected because France's EU partners, including Germany, held that the Union could not finance a military operation unless it was involved in the operation's decision-making process.⁷ Second, after the 13 November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, France invoked for the first time ever Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union—the 'mutual assistance clause'⁸—to get support from its partners. More specifically, France wanted them to contribute not only to the fight against ISIS itself, but also to various French national and international operations in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa so that France itself could focus more on ISIS.⁹ However, with the exception of several large contributions made almost immediately after Article 42(7) was invoked, most of the assistance that France received was symbolic and operationally barely meaningful. This, among other things, has contributed to the feeling in France that Europe is not doing enough for the security of French citizens, and that 'European solidarity does not exist'.¹⁰

The second factor behind the creation of the E12 is France's longstanding frustration with the EU's wariness and sluggishness when it comes to military intervention. On paper the EU is capable of deploying force rapidly. A battlegroup, for example, can theoretically be deployed at 15 days' notice.¹¹ Moreover, in 2013 the EU revised its CSDP planning procedures and introduced a fast-track process for launching standard operations—that is, those not involving battlegroups. This simplifies the CSDP planning process by cutting certain steps to give the EU the theoretical option to deploy operations at 'very short notice' and launch

⁶ The battlegroups are the EU's flagship crisis management tool. They are approximately 1,500-strong force packages that can theoretically be deployed at 15 days' notice and sustained on the ground for 30 days without rotations and for up to 120 days with rotations. However, despite being fully operational since 2007, the battlegroups have so far never been used.

⁷ N. Nováky, 'From EUFOR to EUMAM: The European Union in the Central African Republic', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 21/1 (2016), 100.

⁸ Article 42(7) does not have a formal name in the Treaty on European Union. However, it is often referred to informally as the EU's 'mutual assistance clause' or 'mutual defence clause'.

⁹ N. Nováky, 'The Invocation of the European Union's Mutual Assistance Clause: A Call for Enforced Solidarity', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 22/3 (2017), 371.

¹⁰ J. P. Maulny, 'France', in H. P. Bartels, A. M. Kellner and U. Optenhögel (eds.), *Strategic Autonomy and the Defence of Europe: On the Road to a European Army?* (Bonn: Dietz 2017), 190.

¹¹ EEAS, 'EU Battlegroups', Factsheet (April 2013), 2.



them ‘within a few days’.¹² However, the battlegroups have never been used since the first ones were put on standby in 2005, and the EU has never launched an operation in a few days. The usual planning process for an EU military operation is slow: characterised by endless force generation conferences, it takes months rather than days or weeks. In 2014, for example, it took the EU three months and five force generation conferences to launch EUFOR RCA, a modest 750-strong operation with the very limited mandate of contributing to the provision of a safe and secure environment in Bangui, the CAR capital. More strikingly, it took three months and four force generation conferences before the EU could launch EUMAM RCA, a tiny 75-strong mission that supported the CAR authorities in security sector reform in 2015–16. As Major and Mölling note, when operations are being organised, France wants to avoid ‘long and complicated institutional decisions and the micro-contribution of some states which is symbolically valuable, but of little military use’.¹³

Third, when PESCO was being set up in 2017, France became disappointed in the direction it was taking. Paris initially pushed for an ‘ambitious’ PESCO that would have consisted of a small vanguard of only the most committed and militarily capable EU member states. Germany, however, preferred an ‘inclusive’ PESCO that would include as many member states as possible to prevent the emergence of a ‘two-speed’ Europe in defence. Officially, the PESCO that was established is both ‘inclusive and ambitious’, but it has essentially become ‘Germanised’ in the sense that the emphasis is on having the broadest possible number of EU member states involved.¹⁴ The reason for this is that many of the criteria that interested member states have to fulfil to participate in PESCO are formulated in such vague terms that virtually any of them can participate if it so desires.¹⁵ In fact, the only member states that do not currently participate in PESCO are the UK, which is leaving the EU by the end of March 2019; Denmark, which since 1992 has had an opt-out from EU cooperation involving defence or military operations; and Malta, which is constitutionally neutral. Furthermore, PESCO’s main focus is on capability development projects. Although nothing prevents it from having an operational dimension, it has developed in a way that does not help France address its military overstretch, at least in the short term.

¹² Council of the EU, ‘Suggestions for Crisis Management Procedures for CSDP Crisis Management Operations’, 7660/2/13 (18 June 2013), 28.

¹³ C. Major and C. Mölling, *Pragmatic and European: France Sets New Goals for a European Defence Policy*, German Council on Foreign Relations, DGAPstandpunkt no. 14 (Berlin, 2017), 2.

¹⁴ C. Major and C. Mölling, ‘Franco-German Differences over Defense’, 2.

¹⁵ See, e.g., N. Nováky, ‘The EU’s Permanent Structured Cooperation in Defence: Keeping Sleeping Beauty from Snoozing’, *European View* 17/1 (2018), 101.



Development

The EI2 was first proposed by Macron in his ‘Initiative for Europe’ speech at the Sorbonne University in September 2017. When discussing European security and defence, he noted that ‘Europe needs to establish a common intervention force, a common defence budget and a common doctrine for action’.¹⁶ Macron wanted the EI2 to supplement the new EU defence initiatives that had begun to take shape in 2017, that is, the European Defence Fund and PESCO. This, he believed, would enable Europe ‘to better integrate’ its armed forces ‘at every stage’.¹⁷ The proposal was vague and raised more questions than it answered. Furthermore, given that the establishment of PESCO was gaining momentum at the same time, many mistakenly assumed that Macron was referring to the EUFOR Crisis Response Operation Core¹⁸ project within PESCO.¹⁹

The aims of the EI2 became clearer the following month, although questions remained over its purpose and structure. France’s *Defence and National Security Review 2017*, published in October, stated that the EI2 would be ‘an ambitious, demanding framework for operation cooperation’ between able and willing European countries, and that it would ‘facilitate the convergence of strategic cultures and interoperability’.²⁰ The document went on to say that France must offer ‘ambitious defence partnerships to its partners based on a differentiated approach’.²¹ When offering such partnerships, Paris would give the highest priority to ‘the more willing and able European nations’—which in practice means that it would support various initiatives ‘both within and outside’ the EU and NATO that strengthen ‘strategic convergence among European nations regarding their shared security’.²² Thus, the EI2 would exist outside the framework of the EU’s CSDP and PESCO, and it would focus primarily on operational cooperation to promote convergence and interoperability among

¹⁶ France, Presidency of the Republic. ‘Initiative for Europe’, 1.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ EUFOR CROC is a German-led flagship PESCO project that seeks to contribute ‘to the creation of a coherent full spectrum force package, which could accelerate the provision of forces’ for EU crisis management operations (Council of the EU, ‘Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) First Collaborative PESCO Projects: Overview’ (2018)).

¹⁹ S. Biscop, ‘European Defence: Give PESCO a Chance’, *Survival* 60/3 (2018), 170.

²⁰ France, Ministry of the Armed Forces. *Defence and National Security Strategic Review 2017*, (October 2017), 86.

²¹ Ibid., 60.

²² Ibid.



the participants' armed forces 'in all scenarios' in which they might be used.²³ However, the nature of such operational cooperation was not specified further. The document also made it clear that France wants Europe to develop a 'common strategic culture' and to have in place by the beginning of the 2020s 'a shared doctrinal corpus, a credible joint military intervention capability, and appropriate common budget tools'. France believes that reaching both of these goals will result in Europe's 'strategic autonomy'²⁴ being increased.

Despite limited information and many open questions, the EI2 began to gain traction in early 2018. At their Sandhurst summit on 18 January, British Prime Minister Theresa May and Macron agreed that the UK would work with France and other European countries 'to support the development of the proposed' EI2.²⁵ Paris considered the UK's participation in the EI2 important not only because the UK has 'the most capable, rapidly deployable armed forces' in Europe along with France itself, but also because it shares with France 'the same strategic culture and history of projecting force outside Europe'.²⁶ Despite London's usual wariness about European defence cooperation outside NATO, it decided to participate in the EI2. It did so because it saw the initiative as a pragmatic idea to get European countries more prepared to deploy forces abroad and to develop 'doctrines, policy and strategic thinking'.²⁷ In other words, it was not 'a new [European] force' that could undermine NATO.²⁸ Furthermore, Earl Howe, Britain's Minister of State for Defence, explained that the EI2 would also help the UK achieve the government's goal of 'a deep and special partnership'²⁹ with its European partners in foreign, security and defence policy after Brexit.³⁰ The reason for this is that it provides the UK with a politically neutral European forum in which it can cooperate with its European

²³ Ibid., 61.

²⁴ The goal of strategic autonomy was set for the EU by its Global Strategy. However, the document that sets forth this strategy nowhere defines the term 'strategic autonomy', but it describes this autonomy as being 'important for Europe's ability to foster peace and safeguard security within and beyond its borders' (EEAS, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy* (June 2016), 19).

²⁵ UK, Prime Minister's Office, 'UK and France Commit to New Defence Cooperation', Press release (18 January 2018).

²⁶ P. Taylor, 'Emmanuel Macron's Coalition of the Willing', *POLITICO*, 2 May 2018.

²⁷ H. Samuel, 'Nine EU States to Launch Joint Military Force as Paris Pushes for Post-Brexit Crisis Defence Group', *The Telegraph*, 25 June 2018.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ According to a British government paper on the future UK–EU partnership in foreign policy, defence and development, London is seeking 'to develop a deep and special partnership with the EU that goes beyond existing third country arrangements' in these policy areas (UK, Department for Exiting the EU, *Foreign Policy, Defence and Development: A Future Partnership Paper*, Policy paper (12 September 2017), 2).

³⁰ H. Samuel, 'Nine EU States to Launch Joint Military Force'.



partners on security and defence issues, regardless of how London's post-Brexit relationship to the EU's CSDP and PESCO eventually turns out.

However, the biggest challenge during the development of the EI2 was not agreeing on the modalities of the UK's involvement, but convincing Germany to participate. The reasons for this were threefold. First, Germany saw the EI2 as divisive and worried that it might undermine flagship EU defence initiatives, especially PESCO, that had been launched in 2017. Berlin had put great effort into convincing Paris to agree to a PESCO that would be inclusive rather than restricted to only the most capable and interested EU member states. Given that PESCO focuses on capability development, Germany believed that it would be beneficial to have as many EU member states as possible involved in the projects that would be set up in its framework. The EI2, however, can be seen as 'the opposite of PESCO' in the sense that it is 'flexible, linked to operational readiness, and exclusive, as it is supposed to be comprised only of states that are truly interested in defense'.³¹ Second, the EI2 has a strong—although still unspecified—operational dimension, and Germany is generally cautious about military operations. In 2011, for example, Germany abstained from a UN Security Council vote on a resolution authorising air strikes against the regime of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. And in April 2018 Germany stayed out of the US-led retaliatory air strikes on Syria after the regime of Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons against its own population. In fact, Germany initially rejected the EI2 plan on the grounds that 'every nation has to decide itself whether it sends soldiers on missions'.³² Third, until it was established, there was a lack of clarity about the EI2's aims and structure. Some European countries, including Germany, saw the EI2 as nothing more than a French vehicle to realise French goals.³³ Furthermore, it was not clear how—if at all—the EI2 would be related to other initiatives, such as PESCO, and what it would actually do. The fact that it is called the 'European *Intervention Initiative*' also made it unnecessarily complicated for the intervention-wary Germans to agree to the EI2.³⁴ All the same, it can be argued that, in contrast to the names of other initiatives, 'European Intervention Initiative' is refreshingly honest about the one area in which the EU may realistically achieve strategic autonomy in the foreseeable future—that is, intervention abroad, not territorial defence.

³¹ C. Major and C. Mölling, 'France Moves from EU Defense to European Defense'.

³² E. Lazarou and A. Friede, 'Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO): Beyond Establishment', European Parliamentary Research Service, Briefing (March 2018), 8.

³³ C. Mölling and C. Major, 'Why Joining France's European Intervention Initiative'.

³⁴ U. E. Franke, 'Pedantry in Motion'.



The launch of the EI2 took place in the margins of the EU's Foreign Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 25 June 2018, when France and eight of its European partners—Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the UK—signed a Lol to develop the initiative. Although certain other countries, such as Poland and Lithuania, might have been interested in becoming founding members, they were not invited by Paris.³⁵ Still others, such as Italy, had not yet made up their mind about joining the EI2 and were awaiting further information.³⁶ In early autumn, Finland became the first non-founding country to announce that it would join the initiative. The decision to join was taken due to the strategic importance of making it clear that Europe will stay united, and also because the country wants to be involved in building a safer Europe.³⁷ The preamble of the Lol painted a gloomy picture of Europe's strategic environment, describing it as being 'highly unstable and uncertain' and 'subject to sweeping changes'.³⁸ It emphasised that, although progress on EU defence cooperation 'has been significant' and would help address the challenges Europe is facing, 'further steps need to be taken' and that the EI2 would be a way to enhance Europe's 'collective strategic response'.³⁹ According to Armed Forces Minister Parly, the EI2 would eventually make Europe 'ready to anticipate crises and respond quickly and effectively'.⁴⁰

Goals and structure

The run-up to the launch of the EI2 was characterised by confusion over its purpose and goals because France had provided very little information on these matters publicly. The media described the initiative using creative terms such as a 'joint European defense force',⁴¹ a 'European military force'⁴² and a 'joint European military intervention force'.⁴³ Even experts used colourful terms such as a 'Euro-

³⁵ N. Koenig, 'The European Intervention Initiative', 3.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *Yle uutiset*, 'Finland Agrees to Join France-Led Defence Coalition', 31 August 2018.

³⁸ Germany, Federal Ministry of Defence, 'Letter of Intent Concerning the Development of the European Intervention Initiative (EI2)' (25 June 2018).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Y. Salam, 'Nine EU States, Including UK, Sign Off on Joint Military Intervention Force', *POLITICO*, 25 June 2018.

⁴¹ J. Hanke, 'Merkel Endorses Macron's EU Military Plan', *POLITICO*, 3 June 2018.

⁴² D. Boffey, 'Nine EU States Sign Off on Joint Military Intervention Force', *The Guardian*, 25 June 2018.

⁴³ Y. Salam, 'Nine EU States, Including UK'.



pean intervention force⁴⁴ and a ‘sort of military Erasmus’.⁴⁵ This shows that there was an expectation that France was setting up some kind of new military rapid reaction force in the style of the EU’s battlegroups or the NATO Response Force, which could eventually be used for crisis management in Africa and elsewhere where European interests might come under threat. However, these expectations turned out to be wrong. The 25 June Lol states explicitly that ‘EI2 does not entail the creation of a new rapid reaction force’.⁴⁶ The initiative would instead ‘rely on existing standing rapid reaction/intervention forces’ without having to ‘ earmark national forces for its own response purposes’.⁴⁷ In other words, the EI2 does not add quantitatively to the existing pool of European rapid reaction forces, and nor will it have a permanent standby element like the EU’s battlegroups.

The Lol defines the EI2 as ‘a flexible, non-binding forum of European participating states which are able and willing to engage their military capabilities and forces when and where necessary to protect European security interests, without prejudice to the chosen institutional framework (the EU, NATO, the UN or *ad hoc* coalitions)’.⁴⁸ Three points should be noted about this definition. First, the EI2 is a ‘forum’ rather than an ‘instrument’ or ‘framework’. A *forum* is a ‘meeting or medium where ideas and views on a particular issue can be exchanged’.⁴⁹ An *instrument*, on the other hand, is a tool for precise work: the EU refers to its battlegroup concept, for example, as an ‘instrument’ because it represents a very specific type of crisis management tool designed to be used in very specific situations.⁵⁰ And a *framework* is an essential supporting structure. The choice of the term ‘forum’ suggests that the EI2 is to have a loose structure and few specific aims, and that it is to focus on deliberation and information sharing, as opposed to action. Therefore, the EI2 seems rather similar to European Political Cooperation (EPC), the predecessor of the EU’s much more institutionalised Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which was introduced by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. Originally proposed by France, EPC was set up in 1970 outside the then European Community to coordinate the member states’ foreign policies. At its inception it was little more than a ‘discussion club’.⁵¹ Thus, it may be possible to think of the EI2 as a ‘sort of military Erasmus’ that brings European defence

⁴⁴ C. Major and C. Mölling, *Pragmatic and European*, 2.

⁴⁵ N. Witney, ‘Macron and the European Intervention Initiative’.

⁴⁶ Germany, Federal Ministry of Defence, ‘Letter of Intent’.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Oxford Living Dictionaries: English*, s.v. ‘Forum’.

⁵⁰ EEAS, ‘EU Battlegroups’, 1.

⁵¹ S. J. Nuttall, *European Political Co-Operation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 11.



practitioners together in order to ‘promote convergence of national attitudes and approaches’.⁵²

Second, the EI2 is meant to be open only to countries that are ‘able and willing’ to undertake military intervention whenever and wherever. This point is emphasised in Article 15 of the Lol, which states that ‘EI2 will be open to other European states, willing to share the strategic objectives of the Initiative, and showing proper commitment and adequate level of operational capabilities’.⁵³ However, the most significant membership criterion is clearly that the participating countries are ‘European’. The reasons for this are twofold. First, with the exception of France and the UK, no European country is able to engage militarily whenever and wherever. This is because no European country other than France and the UK maintains anything close to a full-spectrum warfare and power-projection capability.⁵⁴ Second, serious questions can be asked about some of the participants’ willingness to use force under *any* circumstances. A case in point is Germany. Due to its difficult twentieth-century history, the country continues to have deep-rooted cultural reservations about the use of force. It has clearly become more open to taking an active role in international security in accordance with its economic and political weight and to overcoming its ‘culture of military restraint’.⁵⁵ But as shown by its abstention from a UN Security Council vote authorising air strikes against the Gaddafi regime in Libya in 2011 and its refusal to participate in the US-led retaliatory air strikes against the Syrian regime in 2018, Berlin continues to be uneasy about showing military muscle—even if the target is something as universally deplorable as a regime using chemical weapons against its own people. However, if the EI2’s aim is to make currently intervention-wary European countries more willing to intervene militarily, excluding Germany would make no sense. Therefore, in addition to being ‘European’, a more accurate second criterion for EI2 participants would be that they must be *willing to become more capable and willing* in the area of military intervention.

Third, the EI2 is meant to improve Europe’s general intervention ability, not just that of the EU. This point is emphasised in Article 12 of the Lol, which states that the initiative ‘will reinforce participating states’ ability to be better prepared for missions and operations conducted in the framework of the EU, NATO, UN

⁵² N. Witney, ‘Macron and the European Intervention Initiative’.

⁵³ Germany, Federal Ministry of Defence, ‘Letter of Intent’.

⁵⁴ IISS, *The Military Balance 2018*, 65–168.

⁵⁵ C. Major and C. Mölling, ‘Germany’, in H. P. Bartels, A. M. Kellner and U. Optenhögel (eds.), *Strategic Autonomy and the Defence of Europe: On the Road to a European Army?* (Bonn: Dietz, 2017), 201.



or other *ad hoc* coalitions'.⁵⁶ France sees the EI2 as a means to boost Europe's strategic autonomy. However, the initiative is designed to also benefit NATO, the UN and various coalitions-of-the-willing where European forces are involved, by making the participating countries more willing to intervene and use force when necessary. The US seems to appreciate that the EI2 could eventually facilitate increased European contributions to various NATO and other US-led operations. This is why Washington has signalled cautious support for the initiative. Ambassador Kay Bailey Hutchison, the US Permanent Representative to NATO, noted a week after the EI2's launch that the US sees the initiative as 'positive' and hopes it will contribute to Europe's ability to deliver military capabilities.⁵⁷ Former Commanding General of US Army Europe, Lieutenant General Benjamin Hodges, has stated that the EI2 is 'a terrific idea to address security issues [in areas] where maybe the US doesn't have the same sense of urgency' to act as Europe does, such as North Africa and the Sahel.⁵⁸

The Lol on the development of the EI2 suggests that the initiative has one long-term and one short-term objective. As regards the former, Article 6 states, 'The ultimate objective of EI2 is to develop a shared strategic culture, which will enhance our ability, as European states, to carry out military missions and operations under the framework of the EU, NATO, the UN and/or an *ad hoc* coalition'.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the document does not define what it means by 'strategic culture', noting only that this should enhance the participating states' ability to conduct military operations in different frameworks. Although many definitions exist for the term, 'strategic culture' is commonly understood as a type of 'compass that helps countries chart their long-term path in security and defense policy, but also helps them to make choices at various junctures of uncertainty'.⁶⁰ Without this, it would be impossible for states and other actors to set and pursue strategic objectives. In other words, the EI2 aims to facilitate the development of a shared compass that would facilitate joint decision-making and action in the event of a crisis. Concerning the short-term objective, Article 6 also speaks about '[i]ntensifying and deepening contacts between EI2 participating states', which will help facilitate future military engagements.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Germany, Federal Ministry of Defence, 'Letter of Intent'.

⁵⁷ US, Department of State, 'Telephonic Press Briefing with Kay Bailey Hutchison, U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO' (10 July 2018).

⁵⁸ AtlanticCouncil, 'NATO Engages: (In)Stability in NATO's Neighborhood with Lt. Gen. Hodges', *YouTube* (13 July 2018), 39:00–40:15.

⁵⁹ Germany, Federal Ministry of Defence, 'Letter of Intent'.

⁶⁰ C. O. Meyer, *The Quest for a European Strategic Culture: Changing Norms on Security and Defence in the European Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 2.

⁶¹ Germany, Federal Ministry of Defence, 'Letter of Intent'.



The exact fields in which the EI2 seeks to intensify contact between the participating states are listed in Article 7. These are (1) strategic foresight and intelligence sharing, (2) scenario development and planning, (3) support to operations and (4) lessons learned and doctrine.⁶²

As regards its structure, the EI2 will have a light institutional footprint but a footprint nonetheless. Article 13 of the Lol explains that the EI2 ‘will be resource-neutral’ and that it will ‘rely on existing structures and a network of liaison officers in the various military structures of the participating states’.⁶³ Still, Article 17 notes that there will be ‘a light EI2 Permanent Secretariat in Paris based on French personnel and on the existing network of national liaison officers in the various military structures of the French MoD [i.e. Ministry of Defence] (possibly complemented by national voluntary contributions), to oversee policy and objectives, and to coordinate actions along the different lines of cooperation’.⁶⁴ The exact size of this French secretariat is left unspecified, however. The Lol also suggests that the EI2 will not acquire its own resources, such as a dedicated budget or staff. According to Article 13, the ‘EI2 will be resource-neutral’ and ‘will rely on existing structures and a network of liaison officers in the various military structures of the participating states’.⁶⁵ This suggests that the EI2 will be a type of semi-informal network run primarily by the participating states’ liaison officers, who are usually skilled in forming working relationships between different organisations.

Added value?

Despite the hype surrounding its creation, especially in France, it is debatable whether the EI2 can contribute anything of significant value. It is true that the initiative has certain very positive features, which should be welcomed. However, these risk being outweighed by its drawbacks, especially if they are not addressed. I will now discuss both its strong and weak points.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.



Strengths

The first positive feature is that the EI2 aims to facilitate the development of a European strategic culture that would make European countries more comfortable with military intervention and the use of force. This is badly needed because recent events, such as Libya in 2011 and Syria in 2014, have made it clear that most European countries continue to be extremely cautious about intervening in crises and using force to stop bloodshed in Europe's own neighbourhood unless the US decides to get involved. However, the goal of developing a European strategic culture is not new. In the context of the EU, for example, it was already mentioned in the 2003 *European Security Strategy*. According to this document, the EU needs 'to develop a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid, and when necessary, robust intervention'.⁶⁶ This is essentially what the EI2 seeks to accomplish. However, the EU has had few projects with the potential to explicitly contribute to the development of a strategic culture. The main exception here is the European Security and Defence College (ESDC).⁶⁷ One of the aims of the training the ESDC provides to civil servants, diplomats, police officers and military personnel is to facilitate the development of what it describes as a 'European security culture'.⁶⁸ All the same, the EI2 differs from the ESDC in the sense that it seeks to develop a European strategic culture through, not education and training, but operational cooperation and enhanced interactions between the participating countries' armed forces. This type of practical cooperation should be welcomed.

The second positive feature is that, since the EI2 is outside the EU, both the UK and Denmark are able to participate in it. The UK is one of Europe's two most capable countries militarily, France being the other. Over the past decades it has demonstrated many times that, when necessary, it is willing to use its armed forces even in high-intensity operations, as it did most recently in April 2018 as part of the US-led air strikes on Syria. Given that the UK is expected to leave the EU by the end of March 2019, the EI2 is beneficial because it provides London with a politically neutral European forum, in addition to NATO, where it can cooperate with its European partners on European security and defence issues after Brexit. It is true that third countries can participate—and

⁶⁶ European Council, *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy* (Brussels, 12 December 2003), 11.

⁶⁷ Founded in 2005, the ESDC is a network college that provides strategic-level training on the EU's CSDP to civil servants, diplomats, police officers and military personnel from the EU member states and institutions.

⁶⁸ ESDC, *What We Are – What We Do: A Manual of the European Security and Defence College* (February–July 2018), 9.



indeed, have participated—in the EU’s CSDP operations and missions, and that modalities are currently being discussed for involving them in PESCO as well. However, it is likely to be politically difficult for the UK to participate in these EU structures for years to come due to the criticism that post-Brexit British governments would probably receive from hard-line Brexiteer MPs and the Eurosceptic press as a result. Denmark’s involvement in the EI2 is also positive because Copenhagen has been a strong contributor to various coalitions of the willing and to NATO operations. However, since 1992 it has had an opt-out from EU cooperation involving military or defence matters. This has prevented Denmark from participating in CSDP activities since the policy was created. Thus, due to the Danish CSDP opt-out, having the EI2 outside the EU makes sense.

Weaknesses

There are five points that speak against the EI2. The first is that the initiative’s primary objective of developing a shared strategic culture among the participating countries is purely aspirational. Despite almost 70 years’ cooperation in the framework of NATO, almost 50 years in EPC/CFSP and 20 years in CSDP, nothing even remotely close to a genuinely common strategic culture has emerged among European countries. The simple and often overlooked reason for this is geography. Each European country exists on its own plot of land and is affected by a set of geopolitical challenges that are unique to its own neighbourhood. If the Baltic countries are concerned about energy security and hostile interference operations undertaken by Russia much more than Spain or Italy are, it is because Russia is their next-door neighbour. Similarly, Spain and Italy are much more concerned about developments in North Africa and migration across the Mediterranean because they are Mediterranean littoral states and separated from turbulence in the Middle East and North Africa only by a relatively narrow stretch of saltwater. The same applies to sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel, which seem to be priority areas for the EI2. Although France has a strong interest in managing crises in these regions, they are of peripheral importance to other EI2 participants such as Estonia and Germany. Thus, the chances of the EI2 succeeding where even NATO, the most successful military alliance in history, has failed are virtually zero.

The second negative point is that, despite France’s insistence that the EI2 will be ambitious, in the end it—like PESCO—places a premium on inclusivity. As already mentioned, serious questions can be asked about certain EI2 participants’ ability and willingness to undertake full-spectrum military operations



whenever and wherever necessary. In particular, given Germany's participation, the initiative is unlikely to be transformed into a military vanguard from which the participants for future European military operations would primarily be drawn. However, if the primary aim of the EI2 is to facilitate doctrinal convergence and the development of a European strategic culture among the participating states, there is no reason why it should not be inclusive. This is because the point of such an endeavour is to make countries with a cautious or even pacifist strategic culture, such as Germany, more comfortable with using force when necessary—in other words, to make them more like the UK and like France itself. In a sense, the composition of the EI2 is currently what the make-up of PESCO should have been (i.e. exclusive with few a highly motivated members), and the composition of PESCO is what that of the EI2 should have been (i.e. inclusive with as many members as possible).

The third is that the EI2 risks being too focused on crises in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa. According to France, the initiative will help Europe act rapidly when faced with crises such as the one in Mali in 2012 or in CAR in 2013.⁶⁹ But serious questions can be asked about the desirability of developing a European strategic culture centred around crisis management in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa. Taking care of crises in countries like Mali and CAR is unquestionably important because there tend to be spillover effects (e.g. refugee flows, organised crime and economic stagnation) that may end up affecting even faraway countries and regions. The importance of such crises became clear to Europeans especially after the 2015 migration crisis and its aftermath showed that crisis-ridden countries in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa act as points of origin and transit for large numbers of migrants and asylum seekers hoping to reach Europe. But crisis management in Africa is what the EU's CSDP has primarily focused on since becoming operational in 2003. Furthermore, it seems unwise to facilitate the development of a European strategic culture primarily for the purpose of conducting crisis management operations in Africa. European defence needs to be more than this, especially in today's volatile geopolitical environment. Therefore, a European strategic culture should also be developed to help European countries to take more responsibility for their own security and to be more united as they face a revisionist Russia, an increasingly powerful China, and a Jacksonian US primarily interested in the 'physical security and economic well-being of the American people in their national home'.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Mixcloud, 'ECFR18 Keynote – Florence Parly, French Minister for Armed Forces – European Intervention Initiative', ECFR (European Council on Foreign Relations) (28 May 2018).

⁷⁰ W. J. Mead, 'The Jacksonian Revolt: American Populism and the Liberal Order', *Foreign Affairs* 96/2 (March/April 2017), 4.



The fourth weakness of the EI2 is that the people dealing with it seem to be primarily military staff officers. The Lol says that the initiative ‘will rely on existing structures and a network of liaison officers in the various military structures of the participating states’.⁷¹ Its Paris-based staff will be composed of French personnel and rely on the French Ministry of the Armed Forces’ existing network of national liaison officers. There will also be military staff talks on issues related to the EI2. These discussions will provide ‘regular assessments and recommendations in line with common security interests and possible actions’.⁷² However, the value of such a heavy focus and reliance on military personnel is questionable. The reason for this is that the source of Europe’s intervention wariness is not the military, but decision-makers at the political level and the electorates. The military has been trained to act when and where necessary, and it will follow the orders given to it. Europe’s main problem, however, is that the political leadership in many countries is reluctant to spend political capital to get domestic backing for a crisis management operation in a country most Europeans cannot even point out on the map. Furthermore, the electorates are generally unenthusiastic about their governments spending resources on dangerous missions and sending young men and women into situations where they could lose their lives. Thus, a common European strategic culture is more urgently needed among Europe’s political leaders and electorates than it is among its militaries.

The fifth and final negative feature is that the EI2 places yet another demand on the attention of Europe’s political leaders and takes away from the attention that other initiatives, such as PESCO, will receive. Senior political leaders, especially ministers, have very busy schedules, and they do not have the luxury of spending a lot of time on any single item. Their time is essentially a common pool resource whose supply is limited and whose quality diminishes the more it is used. This means that the more new initiatives there are in the area of European defence, the less attention any one of them will receive from the political leaders. This is problematic because the success of initiatives such as PESCO, especially in their early stages, often depends on clear political direction and the willingness of political leaders to invest scarce resources, including time and money. The fate of the EU’s battlegroups illustrates this problem well: while they first became operational in 2005, they have never actually been used.

⁷¹ Germany, Federal Ministry of Defence, ‘Letter of Intent’.

⁷² Ibid.



Policy recommendations

Based on the above analysis and discussion, six policy recommendations can be made in the interest of improving the EI2's chances of achieving its goals. If implemented, they will also help mitigate some of the initiative's negative aspects.

- *Define 'strategic culture'*. Given that the goal of the EI2 is to facilitate the development of a European strategic culture, the participating countries should develop and agree on a common definition of 'strategic culture'. If the nature of that goal is not clear, or if different participating countries have different conceptions of what this culture is, unexpected problems might emerge down the road. To help define 'strategic culture', outside experts on European defence from both academia and think tanks could be consulted.
- *Involve non-military civil servants*. Both civil servants from outside the military and political appointees should be involved in the EI2 because the main source of Europe's intervention wariness is not the military, but political decision-makers and European electorates. Furthermore, it is the political level and civilians, and not the military, that decide whether or not their country will participate in military intervention abroad. Thus, it is important to involve civilians in the process of developing a European strategic culture.
- *Involve the ESDC*. Given that both the EI2 and the ESDC share the goal of facilitating the development of a European strategic culture, it would make sense to involve the ESDC in the initiative. This could be done by, for example, organising tailored ESDC-run courses for military staff officers, civil servants and political appointees from countries participating in the EI2. The aim of these courses should be to provide the participants with a shared understanding of Europe's strategic environment, the threats that may arise and the instruments Europe has at its disposal to deal with them.
- *Avoid over-focusing on Africa*. Although dealing with crises in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa is important, the EI2 should avoid making them the only focus of its intelligence sharing, scenario development, operational support and lessons-learned activities.



Crisis management in Africa is what the EU's CSDP has focused on almost exclusively since becoming operational in 2003. However, Africa is not the only challenge Europe has to deal with. And for many European countries, it is far from the most important challenge on the horizon. Thus, the activities that the EI2 engages in to develop a strategic culture should also help European countries to take more responsibility for their own security and to stand united as they face a revisionist Russia, an increasingly powerful China and a Jacksonian US.

- *Consider merging the EI2 with other existing initiatives.* Given that political leaders have limited time available to focus on individual items on their schedule, it would make sense to consider eventually bringing the EI2 within the framework of the EU by turning it into a PESCO project. There is currently nothing about the EI2 that would prevent it from becoming such a project. The UK could continue to participate in the initiative within PESCO because the modalities of involving third countries in PESCO projects are currently being discussed—on the other hand, this is likely to be politically difficult for London. The main downside of this recommendation is that Denmark would no longer be able to participate in the EI2 due to its opt-out from EU cooperation involving military operations or defence. The alternative and politically more neutral option would be to merge the EI2 with other existing initiatives outside the EU and NATO, such as the German-led Framework Nation Concept.
- *Clarify the operational dimension.* It is not yet clear what the EI2's operational dimension will look like in practice. This should be clarified to provide certainty and to avoid misunderstandings. The Lol notes that the initiative seeks to enhance interaction among the participants inter alia through 'support to operations'.⁷³ But the document nowhere explains what such support to operations would mean in practice, or how it would be decided and organised. Nor does it specify what type of operations this support would be provided for: only relatively low-intensity ones such as those in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa, or also higher-intensity ones such as the operations in Afghanistan and Syria?

⁷³ Ibid.



Conclusion

This paper has analysed the EI2, a forum proposed by France for enhancing interaction between the armed forces of the most able and willing European countries and for facilitating the development of a European strategic culture. It has argued that the development of the initiative has been driven primarily by a French policy predating Macron's election to office. The aim of this policy has been to get France's European partners more involved in various military operations in Africa and thus to alleviate the burden of conducting them that, Paris believes, it has been unfairly forced to carry. In addition, France has been frustrated for years with the EU's slowness when it comes to launching military operations. More specifically, it became disappointed in the perceived over-inclusivity of PESCO in 2017. Thus, by creating the EI2 outside NATO and the EU, and by admitting only the most militarily capable European countries as members, France has sought to overcome, in situations where troops have to be deployed, institutional rigidity, endless force generation conferences and lowest-common-denominator defence cooperation.

The paper has also discussed whether the EI2 has anything substantial to contribute. In approaching this question, two positive features of the initiative were identified, along with five weaknesses. With regard to the positive features, the EI2 is a project created explicitly around the goal of developing a European strategic culture, which is something that is badly needed. By being outside the EU, it also makes possible the participation of both the UK, which is expected to leave the Union by the end of March 2019, and Denmark, which has an opt-out from EU cooperation involving military operations or defence. As concerns the negative aspects of the EI2, the initiative's primary goal of developing a common strategic culture among the participating countries is purely aspirational. Furthermore, serious questions can be asked about the ability and willingness of some of the EI2 participants, and especially Germany, to participate in military operations even near the low end of the operational spectrum. The EI2 also seems to be overly focused on developing a strategic culture that would facilitate—first and foremost—intervention in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa, areas that have already received significant attention from the EU since its CSDP became operational in 2003. Another negative aspect is that the initiative appears to involve mainly military staff officers, while the source of Europe's intervention wariness is the political level and the electorate, not the military. Finally, the EI2 creates another competing demand on the



attention of Europe's political leaders and takes away from the attention that other initiatives, such as PESCO, will receive. The paper has also provided six policy recommendations to help improve the EI2's chances of achieving its goals and to mitigate its negative aspects.

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About the author

Niklas Nováky, Ph.D., is a Research Officer at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies. He focuses on foreign, security and defence policy. He is also the Assistant Editor-in-Chief of the European View, the Martens Centre's biannual policy journal. He is author of the book *European Union Military Operations: A Collective Action Perspective* (Routledge 2018). Dr Nováky has also published peer-reviewed articles on different aspects of EU defence cooperation in some of the most respected academic journals in the field.



Credits

Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies
Rue du Commerce 20
Brussels, BE 1000

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