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SUBJECT: IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPEAN DEFENCE OF FRANCE'S RETURN TO NATO MILITARY STRUCTURE

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1. Context: NATO´s April Summit in Strasbourg-Kehl (April 3-4)

NATO Summit in Strasbourg-Kehl signals a tipping point for the now 60 year-old Alliance. Besides its being a most symbolic summit, it provides a crucial opportunity for NATO members to agree, even if minimally, on a number of key issues the organization is facing, such as the war in **Afghanistan**, **enlargement** to the post-soviet space, or basis for a future, **new Strategic Concept**. Issues which ultimately boil down to the question of **NATO´s identity and role** –in a nutshell, its future- in this rapidly changing geo-strategic context.

NATO has long been undergoing an **identity crisis** in view of some dilemmas which have come to the fore in Afghanistan and the role of ISAF –a war Allies might lose, as recently reckoned by some American officials.

In this respect, a number of distinctively new key-points regarding the Summit of April 3 and 4 should be emphasized:

- A new **US Administration** more committed to multilateral mechanisms, which should somehow help overcoming rifts within the Alliance.
- An increasing Transatlantic consensus on the need for a **deep strategic shift in Afghanistan – Pakistan** (referred to altogether as “AfPak”), led by President Obama, who will submit to the Allies his recently unveiled new strategy for that conflict, with narrower objectives and calling for military and civilian commitments¹. This consensus on a change of strategy, however, needs to be accompanied by an equivalent burden-sharing among the Allies. Yet, in practice, the Allies do not share the same vision on the purposes of ISAF, the use of force nor the goals to be pursued in Afghanistan.
- Another round of **NATO enlargement** –embodied in the accession of Croatia and Albania-, this time coupled with some new caution as regards admission of countries of the post-soviet space, in view of Georgia-Russia´s war of August 2008 and Russia´s interests. In this respect, Ukraine´s and Georgia´s expectations of being given a Membership Action Plan were de facto put on hold last Fall.
- The launching of works towards the **elaboration of a New Strategic Concept for the Alliance** which eventually should substitute that of 1999. Chances are that, regardless of these necessary efforts and an expected **Declaration on Alliance Security**, the resulting consensus will be even lower, as security concerns and/or the responses to common security threats (such as terrorism) differ enormously among Allied countries.

The summit, inter alia, will mark **France´s official reintegration into NATO´s military structure**. We believe this to be a largely strategic move which could have far-reaching implications, obviously for France, but also as regards the future of NATO and European Defence in general, and even for the Spanish position *vis-à-vis* both security structures .

¹ Notably, the US will commit 21.000 additional troops (the 17.000 already committed by President Obama, plus 4.000 after the summer to train the Afghan army and police); civilian experts to help in reconstruction and tackle the opium trade, together with civilian economic aid to neighbor Pakistan.

2. France returns to NATO´s military structure: what is it about?

The big display of diplomatic activity and public coverage which has followed President Sarkozy´s decision to reintegrate France into NATO´s military structure may blur the fact that France is a top leading contributor, in budgetary and operational terms, to NATO (the fourth, after the US, the UK and Germany)–and a founding member of the Alliance.

However Sarkozy´s decision, announced in different fora (as in the Franco-British bilateral summit last year²), does entail a significant shift in policy for a country traditionally adamant in maintaining its strategic independence. De Gaulle´s decision to withdraw France from such a structure in 1966 was framed in these terms, in a context of political disagreements (for instance, as regard the conditions for the use of the nuclear deterrent) marred by an overwhelming concern for US hegemony in Europe. Such a decision left the country in an awkward position, for, notwithstanding its prominence, it remained aloof from relevant decision-making bodies and command positions (as some NATO experts put it, “half in, half out”).

The reversal of such an entrenched policy, some dubbed as “French Exceptionalism”, already attempted under Chirac, must be seen but as a coherent element within the context of a *broader national reassessment of French foreign and security policy*, reflected in the **White Paper** launched in June 2008³. France reckons that, in the new XXIst century setting, it will be able to better pursue its strategic interests and shape multilateral policies with a deeper involvement in organisations as NATO. Moreover, it is immersed in an ambitious yet politically very delicate process of modernization of its armed forces, moving from Cold War-like structures to highly mobile, deployable units, for overseas multinational operations and asymmetric scenarios -in line of similar changes in the American and British militaries.

Relatedly, the country´s geopolitical priorities are being reshaped, cutting down troop commitments in Africa⁴, putting regions as Asia high on the Agenda, and attempting to strike a balance between a new Atlanticism together with the need to preserve France´s autonomy.

This is why some experts talk of an *evolution, rather than a revolution, in French strategic thinking*. Overall, French defence officials´ reasons for a renewed relation with the Alliance may be roughly split into three related layers⁵:

- **National security interests.** Being out of NATO´s military structure is seen as odd for one of the Alliance´s top contributors. Reversing this would allow France to have more leverage in internal debates and key decisions, in line with its contributions.

² For an analysis of that summit, see “The Franco-British March Summit: The Importance of Bilateral Summits for the Political Agenda of Post-Lisbon EU”, Opex 77/08, Borja Lasheras and Alfonso Egea, March 2008 (at [http://www.falternativas.org/en/opex/opex-s-documents/memorandos/\(offset\)/42/\(search\)/simple](http://www.falternativas.org/en/opex/opex-s-documents/memorandos/(offset)/42/(search)/simple)).

³ *Le Livre Blanc de la Défense et la Sécurité Nationale* (June 2008).

⁴ This is taking place within an overall reorganisation of French military presence there, and a partial, subsequent Europeanisation of its security policies as regards training of African armies through the so-called RECAMP (EURORECAMP for those parts now assumed by the EU). See “The African Union´s Crisis Management Missions and Capabilities: Recommendations for Spain”, Opex 95/08, Manuel de la Rocha and Borja Lasheras, June 2008 (at [http://www.falternativas.org/en/opex/opex-s-documents/memorandos/\(offset\)/22/\(search\)/simple](http://www.falternativas.org/en/opex/opex-s-documents/memorandos/(offset)/22/(search)/simple)).

⁵ For instance, French Secretary of State of Defence and Former Combatants, Jean-Marie Bockel, speech in Paris, March 3, 2009.

- More leverage in decisions regarding operations and the **transformation of the Alliance**. Therefore more responsibilities for the purposes of shaping decisions related i) to the planning and conduct of operations, together with the willingness to play ii) a more proactive role in defining the future of the Alliance' scope, membership and capabilities, *leading its necessary transformation*.

- **Strengthening European Defence**. Taking advantage of the present good will in the US towards a fully capable, autonomous European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), France also wants to allay all remaining fears of ESDP as a competitor to NATO –or a French tool – and give it a significant push on the basis of **complementarity and autonomy**. This, it is argued, should turn the page of the decade-long dilemma of the EU-ESDP and/or NATO as the framework (s) for European security. In a nutshell, *some sort of tit-for-tat: (fully) back to NATO whilst irreversibly boosting European Defence*, one of the priorities of the 2008 EU French Presidency. Parallel to this, it is worth underlining that *France would want for other Europeans to also increase their responsibilities within NATO*. To this respect, the French move could indirectly put some pressure on Spain's behaviour regarding both organizations, as well as the currently insufficient Spanish budget effort (in view of French and British pundits).

This reintegration, as French officials are careful to note, would not affect the country's main principles on its relationship with NATO: the independence of its nuclear deterrent –as it apparently will not re-join Nuclear Planning Committee; the freedom of assessment of the opportunity of missions, as well as the non-automatic engagement of French forces. On the contrary, as President Sarkozy has rhetorically stated, France's "sovereignty" would be in no way harmed by this decision, but reinforced.

Once the Summit in Strasbourg-Kehl gives the blessing to such a decision, France will return to the Defence Planning Committee (DPC) and will increase its staff in military command posts. How France will do this, bearing in mind it is cutting down its military personnel to unprecedented levels, is still unclear. Probably it will be gradual, coupled with decisions to reduce the overall number of Allied officers in these posts –a pending question for NATO some see as necessary on grounds of efficiency and expenses.

As for specific command posts France might get in return, it is probable that it might be able to head the **Allied Command Transformation (ACT)**, in Norfolk, Virginia –which some see as relevant for the transformation process, whilst other believe it will have no influence-, and a regional **NATO Response Force (NRF)** Command in Lisbon.

There is no question that, even if France integration in the military structure may seem more symbolic than real, it is *politically important* for Europe and the ESDP, as well as for the future of the Alliance and transatlantic partnership. Hence some have rightly dubbed it as a "**Grand Bargain**"⁶.

⁶ Alastair Cameron, in "France's NATO reintegration: Fresh Views with the Sarkozy Presidency?", Alastair Cameron and Jean-Pierre Maulny, Royal United Services Institute (February 2009).

3. Implications for the ESDP?

Regarding the question on whether this decision or *rapprochement* will strengthen ESDP and the long-term project of European Defence, the truth is that the jury is still out. In practice, many doubts remain. The key question is twofold: on a general level, how will the French move give a political impetus to ESDP? And secondly, how will it affect actual policies and development of the ESDP?

Thus far, although it has been welcomed both by the US and several NATO officials (above all, its current Secretary General), reactions on the side of other Allies remain overall positive yet cautious. It will probably be still too early to do away with the reputation of France as a maverick.

However, what would seem worrying is *Great Britain's lack of solid political support to Sarkozy's decision*. If the problem was European Defence "only in NATO" and "only NATO", now that the other proponent of Saint Malo has arguably advanced towards assuaging fears of ESDP –risking a lot of domestic political capital⁷–, the absence of corresponding British leadership has disappointed French officials. Some reputed British policymakers state that this will not improve British perspective on ESDP and European Defence –even less if a Conservative government takes over next year. As for certain European countries, traditionally reluctant to the European Defence idea, possible reactions to the French move are still to be assessed.

Although it may be a little early to make assumptions, in general, we could think of a **positive scenario** for the ESDP, a **status quo scenario** (bad for Europeans and NATO) and a third, more realistic scenario.

a) Significant NATO transformation +more European Defence

Under this scenario, French return to NATO would help to further the goal of **NATO transformation**, clarifying the scope of the Alliance purpose, objectives, and capabilities (a pressing question), whilst significantly improving the EU-NATO strategic partnership. This, of course, should be accompanied by corresponding efforts from other European countries for, in any event, *neither NATO nor the ESDP will overcome similar structural problems if participating member states, first of all, do not coordinate their current actions at improving their capabilities, modernize their Armed Forces to XXIst century challenges –and commit them for operations, demanding as they may be.*

In this scenario, some of the misgivings of certain European countries regarding ESDP might be overcome. **NATO reform process** would advance with the added French input, as would an autonomous European Defence –arguably, first with the core support of those EU countries most committed to the goal. Advances in the ESDP, particularly at the level of capabilities, would enhance European operational capabilities for Alliance operations –for if the EU lacks helicopters in Chad, the same applies to ISAF in Afghanistan. The reverse is also true, thus the need to proceed with the transformation process. Therefore, synergies between the European Defence Agency and NATO agencies are crucial.

⁷ The initiative has received criticism not only by the opposition in Parliament, but also by some members of the majority UMP, the party of President Sarkozy. Last March 17, the government of Prime Minister Fillon won a parliamentary confidence vote on this issue.

b) Status quo: Dissolution of ESDP in NATO+ NATO paralysis + European pioneer groups

The second, status-quo scenario is less optimistic. The so-called tit-for-tat attempt would fail, as the United Kingdom might not show more commitment –if only less- to the ESDP, or might reinforce the case for completely subsuming EU-ESDP institutions within the NATO framework (which, if not accompanied by corresponding changes in NATO, might jeopardize the EU's long sought-after autonomy). This attitude, in turn, might weaken any pro-ESDP initiative from certain Eastern European countries as Poland.

As some EU officials fear, France would devote less resources to ESDP operations and objectives, faced with the need to increase its presence in NATO structures and operations; this might be the case, further, in a context of soaring demands for rationalisation and financial constraints.

NATO would remain an **asymmetric organization**, some sort of collective security platform, with an ever minimal consensus on its nature and purposes, and lacking a **strategy**, as it is presently the case. The tendency for a number of countries of taking the lead –and the burdens- would go on (Afghanistan being an example), making the institutional framework de facto more irrelevant (be it NATO or EU-ESDP), which might result in duplications or even rivalries.

c) More convergence ESDP- NATO + European pioneer groups

Of course, elements of the former scenarios will also be present here. Accordingly, a third scenario might be conceived whereby France's return fosters a certain *convergence of strategic objectives between EU-ESDP and NATO*, which might be translated into a bigger cooperation between these organisations, both at the political, capabilities and at the field level. If other European countries such as Spain or Germany follow suit (with clear commitments, in terms of joint capabilities programs, more operational efforts, etc.), NATO would witness an increasing role for Europeans. US support here would be most positive, particularly to convince reluctant countries.

Some European countries will make progress in adapting their defence systems to modern operational needs -others will not. This would need significant advances in the consolidation of **European Defence industry** –and more reciprocity for market conditions with the US counterparts.

Both within the EU and NATO a number of countries will identify common strategies and commitments among them, independently of the framework –thus, some sort of **pioneer groups** or **“European Directorates”**. They will strengthen cooperation among them and with the US, resorting to the ESDP or NATO depending on the circumstances. Furthermore, this might lead to a *de facto* greater *Europeanisation of NATO* -even if formal, ambitious institutional changes remain difficult due to the opposition of some countries- and a *stronger ESDP*. European and Euro-Atlantic security will rest upon both NATO and the EU.

4. General proposals and guidelines for the future

In sum, the French decision to return to NATO's military structure should be a significant step towards clarifying the still unsolved dilemma of why a strong, autonomous ESDP is essential for both the security of both the EU and that of the Transatlantic alliance, as well as potentially for turning the page on looming political disagreements as regards ESDP and NATO. Potentially, we insist, if it is coupled with actual, pragmatic advances, together with corresponding steps on the side of other European allies, above all, the United Kingdom. Without British leadership European efforts to converge in this subject will be even more difficult. And with American support, some of the political hurdles might be overcome.

In this respect, in our view it is essential engaging with reluctant NATO members on the benefits stemming from an increasing EU capacity for the management of not only civil, but also military, missions. This would be mutually beneficial for NATO and the EU.

a. From the EU membership perspective:

- European leaders should openly support the French decision, advancing, on the one hand, their own proposals as regards **NATO transformation**, and, on the other, **improving their capabilities** –for neither NATO nor ESDP will really enhance Europe as a global actor if it lacks the tools to support its interests/principles. And certainly the transatlantic partnership will not be strengthened if the current *statu quo* situation goes on, as the US is mostly concerned with effective partners.
- In terms of capabilities, parallel to advances at the strategic level, Europeans should align their defence planning systems in line of the **EDA's Capability Development Plan** (of July 2008), even if the benchmarks are not mandatory, and advance, as is now the overall agreement, towards pooling and specializing their capabilities.
- A number of willing countries (independently of whether we call them Directorates of pioneer groups) must coordinate among themselves in an ever closer manner, both within the EU and NATO, to advance **Europe's strategic interests** as well as to increasingly integrate their defence capabilities, in order to meet NATO and EDA's thresholds⁸. Thus works towards a new Strategic Concept for NATO should reflect this potential convergence, and the relevance of the **European Security Strategy**.
- **EU countries** member of both organisations should open an internal, frank dialogue to reach a consensus among the scope of ESDP and that of NATO, admitting that neither NATO can be a "global policeman" (the so-called "global NATO") as its Secretary General makes adamant, nor the ESDP must always or only be the civilian tool of NATO.
- Relatedly, EU members of NATO should advocate the reinforcement of **institutions for global governance** for managing the different aspects of a comprehensive security: energy security, nuclear proliferation, or climate change. Europeans should assume that NATO is not anymore the "essential forum for security consultations between Europe and North America" (as the

⁸ See "A Future Agenda for the European Security and Defence Policy -ESDP" (Fundación Alternativas, IRIS, Egmont Institute and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung), February 2009, at <http://www.falternativas.org/en/opex/opex-s-documents/documentos-de-trabajo>.

Bucharest Summit Declaration states). Thus a suitable **forum for US-EU dialogue** is needed, involving the whole of European external action (thus, the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the Neighborhood policy, ESDP, etc.).

- In the coming months, EU members should speed up implementation mechanisms of the European Security Strategy (regarding partnerships, etc.) in coordination with NATO's work for a New Strategic Concept.

b. From Spain's perspective: more commitments

- On the one hand, the French bold step can be seen as providing Spain with a kind of umbrella where to reaffirm its pro-European credentials and its emphasis on ESDP. *Spain should therefore support the French decision, particularly if it really strengthens the ESDP.*
- But, on the other hand, the cost for Spain of giving "false steps" in its NATO policy will become greater than before. Therefore, from now onwards, *Spain should act more carefully, in a more comprehensive, coherent way regarding its compromises with the US, the EU and NATO.* Needless to say, *it must accompany political objectives with more operational commitments in both the EU and NATO, bridging the gap between rethoric and responsibilities.* Spain must therefore go ahead with the process of transformation of its Armed Forces, meeting NATO and EDA's objectives, etc. This is a pending task.
- As a desirable horizon, in the coming years, British skepticism regarding the ESDP should be adressed, and gradually reversed through a cooperative **coalition of European- members, "willing and able"**. For this task, Spain is well positioned, due to its linkage to the UK in broader frameworks of cooperation involving also global security policies (e.g. the G-20). A concerted action among pioneer EU members should trigger a process for a pragmatic, result-oriented **"Saint-Malo II"**, for European Defence will come through actual developments of the kind argued for here.

April 1st 2009, Madrid

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