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# The Progress of Land Forces Interoperability Through the PESCO Framework

## An account of PESCO first initial phase



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This Food for Thought paper is a document that gives an initial reflection on the theme. The content is not reflecting the positions of the member states but consists of elements that can initiate and feed the discussions and analyses in the domain of the theme. All our studies are available on [www.finabel.org](http://www.finabel.org)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The changing geopolitical landscape, as well as NATO's shifted focus to expeditionary warfare, encouraged EU Member States to address the EU's military capability shortfalls via a more binding and cooperative framework<sup>1</sup>. The European Defence Fund's establishment (EDF) and the United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU finally led France and Germany to take the political initiative and activate PESCO by establishing a legal framework for enhanced defence cooperation and integration. Through the fulfilment of the 20 binding commitments in line with Article 42(6) and 46 of the Treaty on European Union, the 25 participating Member States agreed to establish a "permanent structured cooperation"<sup>2</sup>. This initiative aims at boosting operational readiness by improving armed forces' interoperability, standardising military doctrines and equipment at a higher communitarian level.

Since its establishment on December 11 2017, PESCO has been often defined as an "ambitious"<sup>3</sup> framework for enhancing the EU's resilience and achieving strategic autonomy with reference to both expeditionary operations and territorial defence by "jointly develop[ing] a coherent full-spectrum force package and mak[ing] the capabilities available to Member States for national and multinational missions and operations"<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, three batches of PESCO projects have been launched and adopted by the European Council – the first in 2017, the second in 2018, and the third in 2019 – making a total of 47 projects, which aim at enhancing defence industrial cooperation among participating Member States (pMS) and improving the EU's operational employability "with a view to the most demanding missions and operations"<sup>5</sup>. As a result, to facilitate the development of pMSs' defence capabilities, the PESCO projects cover areas such as training, land, maritime, air, cyber, and joint enablers<sup>6</sup>. On November 20, three years after PESCO's launch, the European Council approved conclusions on the first PESCO Strategic Review (PSR). This review provides an assessment of PESCO's first initial phase (2018-2020) and guidelines for its second initial phase starting from 2021 until 2025. The PSR, commenced in December 2019 and continued throughout 2020, was envisaged to assess "the fulfilment of the PESCO commitments" by participating Member States and to produce a set of commitments to further improve their joint military capabilities following the "Union's Level of Ambition in the area of security and defence"<sup>7</sup>. The review stresses the necessity to achieve "concrete outputs and tangible deliverables"<sup>8</sup> by the end of 2025. It reaffirms that PESCO needs to seek more coherent and

1. Antonio Calcarà, "Cooperation and Non Cooperation in European Defence Procurement," *Journal of European Integration* 42, no. 6 (2020): 799-801.

2. Council of the European Union, "Council Decision (CFSP) 2017/2315 of 11 December 2017 Establishing Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and Determining the List of Participating Member States," December 14, 2017(a): 57. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017D2315&from=DE>.

3. Alice Billon-Galland and Martin Quenez, "Can France and Germany Make PESCO Work as a Process Toward EU Defence?" *The German Marshall Fund of the United States* 33, (October 2017): 1-2.

4. European Defence Agency, "PESCO: More Than Just Projects," accessed October 21, 2020, [https://www.eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/our-current-priorities/permanent-structured-cooperation-\(pesco\)](https://www.eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/our-current-priorities/permanent-structured-cooperation-(pesco)).

5. *ibid.*

6. Council of the European Union, "Background Brief, European Council, 14-15 December 2017," December 12, 2017(b), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32123/h-pecc-risk-summits-171214-15-euco-background-final-euco-brief-factsheet-overview.pdf>.

7. Council of the European Union, "Council Recommendation of 15 June 2020 Assessing the Progress Made by the Participating Member States to Fulfil Commitments Undertaken in the Framework of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)," June 18, 2020(a): 2. <https://pesco.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/2020-06-15-Council-Recommendation-assessing-the-progress-made-to-fulfil-commitments-in-PESCO.pdf>.

8. Council of the European Union, "Council Conclusions on the PESCO Strategic Review 2020," November 20, 2020(c): 6. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13188-2020-INIT/en/pdf>.

coordinated national defence programmes suggesting a more systematic and effective implementation of the EU's defence tools and initiatives, such as the EDF and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD). Moreover, the PSR highlights the importance of joint strategic planning, training and exercises of pMSs' capabilities to enhance their availability and interoperability. It also underlines the PESCO projects' need for a higher degree of transparency and political visibility, through EU tools and initiatives by pMSs concerning the conduct of their national defence reviews and the sharing of reviews data with other pMSs.

Consequently, the PSR represents a cornerstone in checking the progress of pMSs' commitments and substantial efforts in the sector of European Defence and Security. However, many challenges still need to be addressed to improve coordination between States and achieve a satisfactory level of strategic autonomy. The first CARD report, presented on November 20 to the 25 EDA Defence Ministers at the EDA Ministerial Steering Board chaired by the Head of the Agency -High Representative Josep Borrell- revealed a still insufficient level of military coordination between pMSs. CARD's first report identified 55 collaborative capability development opportunities across six domains, advising pMSs to concentrate their capability development efforts on them. Among said domains, land capabilities have been identified as the ones presenting the highest number (seventeen) of collaborative capability development opportunities. CARD underlined how "the overall investment expenditure in Ground Combat including Main Battle Tanks (MBT) is generally increasing throughout short-term plan-

ning horizons and will amount to almost €40 bln, more than doubling in the medium- and long-term [...]"<sup>9</sup>. In particular, the development of infantry fighting vehicles, combat tanks and artillery attracts big portions of pMSs' national defence expenditures.

Such forecast significantly signals the fundamental importance that the 25 PESCO pMSs confer to the development of land capabilities, notwithstanding the progressive increase of cooperation in rising domains such as space, cyberspace and air. Significant multinational initiatives pertaining to ground forces have indeed been approved during PESCO's first years of life. Yet the land domain is still characterised by high fragmentation and lack of coherence, particularly in the sector of armoured vehicles. CARD's first report ascribes the fragmentation of land capabilities across European countries to the lack of harmonisation among different national modernisation and replacement programmes.

Taking stock of the first PSR and CARD report, this study has four purposes: 1) to assess PESCO projects with regard to their contribution to addressing shortfalls in the EU military capability, particularly at the ground forces level; 2) to explore how exactly such projects enhance interoperability of Land Forces and fulfil the EU's military level of ambition; 3) to investigate the controversial issues linked to the concept of European strategic autonomy; 4) to provide recommendations.

This paper is structured as follows: the next section provides an overview of PESCO and the most promising projects in the first and second batches aiming at resolving the existing shortfalls in military capabilities. The third section focuses on the third batch of

9. European Defence Agency, "CARD Fact Sheet. Results of First Coordinated Annual Review on Defence," November 20, 2020: 3. <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-fact-sheets/2020-11-20-card>.



PESCO projects and provides a general analysis of their contribution to interoperability and the EU's level of ambition (LoA). The fourth section analyses the future issues and challenges relating to the EU's achievement of strategic autonomy. Lastly, the fifth section will provide some recommendations from Finabel's perspective.

In this paper, Finabel argues that despite frag-

mentation and de-harmonisation concerning Land Forces, PESCO's first initial phase has contributed to enhancing interoperability of land components among pMSs. Further initiatives could be taken, as it will be argued in the following sections of this paper, to boost the virtuous path that PESCO has proven to be able to draw towards higher standards of interoperability at the EU level.

## **2. THE EVOLUTION OF PESCO PROJECTS**

Today PESCO, having 47 projects in total, aims at developing joint EU defence capabilities that would tackle pMSs' "strategic capability gaps" and allow them to "arrive at a coherent full spectrum of defence"<sup>10</sup>. PESCO is expected to harmonise, synchronise, and standardise pMSs' defence capabilities and military needs, which implies a far-reaching operational defence cooperation between them. This, in turn, is expected to improve pMSs' capability to act much faster, coherently and independently by "tak[ing] concrete measures to enhance the availability, interoperability, flexibility and deployability of their forces"<sup>11</sup>. By assessing the Permanent Structured Cooperation's (2018-2020) first initial phase -i.e., the progress of pMSs' commitments- the first PESCO Strategic Review (PSR) identified 26 PESCO projects planned to

deliver concrete results and full operational capability before the end of the next PESCO phase in 2025. , Land forces will mostly benefit from the expected full operability of the following seven projects: "EU Beyond Line Of Sight (BLOS) Land Battlefield Missile Systems", the "Indirect Fire Support (Euro-Artillery)", "EUFOR Crisis Response Operation Core" (EUFOR CROC), the "Integrat-



10. Council of the European Union, "Background Brief, European Council, 14-15 December 2017," December 12, 2017(b): 62-70 .<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32123/h-peco-rusk-summits-171214-15-euco-background-final-euco-brief-factsheet-overview.pdf>.

11. *Ibid.*, 60.

ed Unmanned Ground System” (iMUGS), and “Military Mobility”, among which only BLOS will be operable by 2025<sup>12</sup>. Consequently, this section aims to assess PESCO projects’ contribution to making European defence more efficient by focusing specifically on how they reinforce the interoperability between pMSs’ national forces in the framework of joint military operations.

## 2.1 The First Set of 17 PESCO Projects

The activation of PESCO and its initial projects has been widely welcomed as it set a significant milestone for European defence and security, largely due to the 20 binding commitments which pMSs agreed to fulfil and demonstrate via the submission of National Implementation Plans and voluntary participation in output-oriented projects<sup>13</sup>. On March 6 2018, the first batch of PESCO projects was set out and targeted logistical training and joint capability development on sea, land, cyber, and space<sup>14</sup>. However, the present paper will focus on assessing the projects aiming at increasing interoperability of land forces among pMSs. Interoperability is a broadly defined concept. Yet, given this paper’s purpose, we find the definition proposed in the NATO Glossary (2006) as the most fitting one due to its focus on multinational forces and unspecified tools for achieving interoperability. Accordingly, interoperability is generally understood as:

*“The ability of the (...) forces of two or more*

*nations to train, exercise, and operate effectively together in the execution of assigned missions and tasks [in order to] coherently, effectively and efficiently to achieve Allied tactical, operational, and strategic objectives”<sup>15</sup>.*

Consistent with this definition, this paper examines tactical, operational, and strategic levels of interoperability and focuses on projects that ought to increase interoperability of land forces on those specific levels. Among the first batch’s 17 projects of, five are of particular interest to this paper, namely the *Military Mobility* (MM), the *EUFOR Crisis Response Operation Core* (EUFOR CROC), the *Indirect Fire Support* (EuroArtillery), the *European Union Training Mission Competence Centre* (EU TMCC), and the *European Training Certification Centre for European Armies*. Military Mobility is the most inclusive project within the PESCO framework, with 24 out of 25 Member States participating. The MM’s purpose is to develop standardised “administrative, regulatory, and procedural practices concerning the transport of military goods, equipment, and troops”<sup>16</sup> as those vary to a great extent from country to country. In a sense, the MM seeks to create a “military Schengen”<sup>17</sup> which ought to overcome cross-border movement obstacles and tackle infrastructural challenges. As a result, it could considerably improve land forces’ interoperability on the operational and tactical levels as simplified, standardised, and harmonised cross-border procedures can significantly speed up the movement and deployment of

12. Council of the European Union, “Council Conclusions on The PESCO Strategic Review 2020,” November 10, 2020(c): 16. <https://pesco.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Council-Conclusions-on-PESCO-Strategic-Review-2020.pdf>.

13. Council of the European Union, “Council Decision (CFSP) 2017/2315 of 11 December 2017 Establishing Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and Determining the List of Participating Member States,” December 14, 2017(a), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017D2315&from=DE>.

14. Ibid.

15. NATO Glossary, “Backgrounder: Interoperability for Joint Operations,” *North Atlantic Organization*, (July 2006): 2. [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_publications/2012/01/16\\_interoperability-en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/2012/01/16_interoperability-en.pdf).

16. Elena Lazarou and Tania Lajčić, “PESCO: Ahead of the Strategic Review,” *European Parliament Research Service*, (September 2020): 5. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/652051/EPRS\\_BRI\(2020\)652051\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/652051/EPRS_BRI(2020)652051_EN.pdf).

17. Margriet Drent, Kimberley Kruijver, and Dick Zandee, “Military Mobility and the EU-NATO Conundrum,” *Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations*, (July 2019): 2. [https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/Military\\_Mobility\\_and\\_the\\_EU\\_NATO\\_Conundrum.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/Military_Mobility_and_the_EU_NATO_Conundrum.pdf).

military forces and equipment within the EU. As it facilitates land forces' mobility in collective defence actions, it simultaneously promotes strategic autonomy by reducing the EU's military dependence on NATO troops. As a result, a more rapid deployment would positively impact the pMSSs' credibility for deterrence and defence on a strategic level. Being a flagship project within EU's defence initiatives and EU-NATO cooperation, the MM is essential to facilitate the movement of military troops and equipment in all domains - air, sea, and land<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, the CARD review suggests increasing the participation of pMSSs in programs optimising the MM "through the digitalisation of processes and procedures, improving cyber and infrastructure resilience as well as developing the necessary sea and air transport/airlift capabilities"<sup>19</sup>. In line with the pMSSs' commitment to facilitate greater mobility, two logistics projects within the PESCO framework were adopted – the EU TMCC and the European Training Certification Centre for European Armies. Both projects aim to reinforce operational interoperability of military personnel by synchronising their collective knowledge, i.e., building up practical experiences and professional skills. Accordingly, the EU TMCC provides joint training missions, whereas the *European Training Certification Centre for European Armies stands for the "standardisation of procedures among European Armies and enable[s] the staff (...) to practice the entire spectrum of the command and control (C2) functions at land, joint and interagency levels"*<sup>20</sup>. Both projects are vital for enhanced

mobility, as they enable national forces to operate cohesively based on shared regulations, cooperation in education, and integration via joint training missions.

Another promising project within the first set of PESCO projects is EuroArtillery, which aims at land forces' capability development of, i.e., enabling pMSSs' ground combat capabilities. A new "mobile precision artillery platform" is to be developed, which would deliver "land battle decisive ammunition, non-lethal ammunition, and a common fire control system"<sup>21</sup>. Another project that falls into the land, formations, systems category and seeks to address operational and tactical shortfalls of European defence is the EUFOR CROC. The EUFOR CROC is a project led by Germany, which strives to commit towards the "creation of a coherent full spectrum force package, which could accelerate the provision of forces"<sup>22</sup>. Biscop<sup>23</sup> suggests putting the EUFOR CROC at the core of the PESCO. It will decisively contribute to integrated operational defence cooperation and development of the power projection capability in crisis response operations. Thus, the EUFOR CROC can potentially resolve operational and tactical challenges to interoperability as it seeks to facilitate national forces' deployability and interoperability for expeditionary operations. To promote the project's success, however, Biscop<sup>24</sup> argues that it is essential to 1) increase military contingent to units of brigade-size and integrate them within the framework of a permanent multinational force formation; 2) harmonise national doctrines and military equipment; 3) build up an

18. Elena Lazarou and Tania Lațici, "PESCO: Ahead of the Strategic Review," *European Parliament Research Service*, (September 2020): 5.

19. Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, "Results of First Coordinated Annual Review on Defence 2020," November 20, 2020: 5. <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-factsheets/2020-11-20-ardj>.

20. Council of the European Union, "European Council, 14-15 December 2017," December 12, 2017(b): 3. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32123/h-pec-nusk-summits-171214-15-enco-background-final-enco-bric-factsheet-overview.pdf>.

21. *Ibid.*, 6.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Sven Biscop, "European Defence and PESCO: Don't Waste the Chance," *EU Integration and Differentiation for Effectiveness and Accountability* 1, (2020a): 3.

24. Sven Biscop, "Battalions to Brigades: The Future of European Defence," *Survival* 62, no. 5 (2020b): 2-3.

arsenal of strategic enablers. This would make land forces interoperable on all three levels – strategic, operational, and tactical, due to the shortened planning time as a result of strategic preparedness and unified doctrines.

## 2.2 The Second Set of 17 PESCO Projects

Following the first set, the second set of projects was adopted by the European Council on November 19 2018. Like the first one, it comprised 17 additional initiatives which cover pMSs' operational shortfalls, especially in air defence, a sector that was not previously addressed. Overall, the second set of projects displays a higher level of ambition and is mostly concerned with the development of enabling capabilities, joint training programmes, and land systems<sup>25</sup>. The 'land, formations, systems' section implemented two additional projects – The Integrated Unmanned Ground System (iMUGS) and the EU Beyond Line Of Sight (BLOS). The iMUGS is coordinated by Estonia and consists of 6 further participating countries (Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Spain, and Latvia) whose defence ministers and industry companies work collectively towards the creation of a multi-mission unmanned ground system, which would contribute to land forces' additional autonomy and increase ground systems' resilience<sup>26</sup>. Consequently, the project would provide pMSs with a tool to achieve European strategic autonomy, as according to Kuldar Väarsi<sup>27</sup>, CEO of Milrem Robotics – an Estonian unmanned ground vehicle manufacturer-. The iMUGS will consider-

ably increase European military capabilities through extensive defence cooperation and production of high-tech equipment. Therefore, the iMUGS seeks to standardise European ground systems and aims to:

*“Develop a Modular Unmanned Ground System, [which is capable to] carry different payloads (transport, ISR, tethered UAV etc.) and sensors [to build up] cyber secure autonomous navigation capability for route and mission planning with different options for manned-unmanned teaming (...) EW resilient Command & Control interface capable of swarming and interoperable with existing C4 systems”<sup>28</sup>.*

On the other hand, the EU BLOS is coordinated by France, i.e., the MBDA – a French manufacturer of missiles- and is supported by Belgium and Cyprus. It seeks to generate:

*“A new generation medium range BLOS Land Battlefield missile systems family, [which is] intended to be integrated on an extensive variety of platforms and is envisioned to develop a common European doctrine on BLOS firing”<sup>29</sup>.*

In this sense, the project seeks to: 1) enhance the EU's land forces doctrinal interoperability via a joint training and a common doctrine on BLOS firing; 2) introduce an operational concept of the European BLOS firing capacity based on medium-range missile systems, which are expected to be integrated on ground-to-ground and air-to-ground platforms, and establish an integrated autonomous target designation capability through drones<sup>30</sup>. According to Eric Béranger, CEO

25. Steven Blockmans and Dylan Macchiarini Crosnon, “Differentiated Integration Within PESCO – Clusters and Convergence in EU Defence,” *Centre for European Policy Studies* 4, (December 2019): 6.

26. PESCO, “Integrated Unmanned Ground System (UGS)”, accessed October 21, 2020(a). <https://pesco.europa.eu/project/integrated-unmanned-ground-system-ugs/>.

27. Army Technology, “Milrem Robotics Leads Development of European Standardised UGS,” *Army Technology*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.army-technology.com/news/milrem-robotics-leads-development-of-european-standardised-ugs/>.

28. PESCO, “Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)’s projects - Overview,” accessed October 21, 2020(b): 5. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39348/table-pesco-projects.pdf>.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

of MBDA, it is the “first cooperative project in the missile systems, [which represents pMSs’] commitment to serve European strategic autonomy and technological sovereignty ambitions”<sup>31</sup>. As a result, these two additional projects within the PESCO framework further promote commitments to operational interoperability by: 1) standardising European land battle systems, doctrines, and weapons; 2) accelerating mission planning; 3) providing economic incentives for defence cooperation, as the projects are expected to be co-financed by the EDF; 4) positively affecting the EU’s strategic autonomy on the political level<sup>32</sup>. There are three additional projects within the second set of 17 PESCO projects that specifically target interoperability among the pMSs through the establishment of joint military

bases, i.e., the French-led Co-basing project, as well as the establishment of a Joint EU Intelligence School (JEIS) and development of a EU Test and Evaluation Centre (ETEC). The ETEC is led by France and Sweden, which are cooperating to boost “European test capabilities and capacities”<sup>33</sup> by evaluating European military systems. The JEIS, on the other hand, is led by Greece in cooperation with NATO and the pMSs’ national intelligence agencies to “provide education and training in intelligence disciplines and other specific fields to EU member states intelligence personnel”<sup>34</sup>. This, in turn, would further strengthen intelligence cooperation between intelligence agencies and will potentially help mitigate the divergences in their military practices and strategic cultures.

### **3. THE THIRD SET OF PESCO PROJECTS**

On November 12, 2019, the European Council adopted a third batch of projects to be undertaken through PESCO with Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/1909. The batch is the last one adopted before PESCO’s second phase (2021-2025). It comprises 13 projects which focus on training, development of facilities relating to cyber, medical, diving, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) domains; development of capabilities at sea, air, and space, while relevantly enhancing the number of initiatives strengthening enablers and joint collaborative actions. Adopting this last generation of PESCO projects has been saluted as further meaningful progress to-

wards a coherent and comprehensive use of European defence mechanisms. Strengthening operational and doctrinal interoperability among European military forces is one of the sine qua non prerequisites to deliver tangible results and mitigate existing shortfalls in the development of European defence capabilities, in the CSDP missions and operations and to reach the EU’s Level of Ambition. Assessing the potential impact of the new projects adopted by PESCO’s pMSs, Mr Alessandro Cignoni -Head of the EDA’s PESCO Unit- highlighted how these new collective initiatives importantly contribute to the concrete realisation of the 11 EU Capabil-

31. MBDA, “MMP Missile Selected to Fulfill European Beyond-Line-of-Sight Battlefield Engagement Capability,” July 1, 2020, <https://www.mbda-systems.com/press-releases/mbdas-mmp-missile-selected-to-fulfill-the-european-beyond-line-of-sight-battlefield-engagement-capability/>.

32. Antonio Calcara, “Cooperation and Non Cooperation in European Defence Procurement,” *Journal of European Integration* 42, no. 6 (2020): 800.

33. Anke Schmidt-Felzmann, “PESCO: The Swedish Perspective,” *Armament Industry European Research Group* 38, (March 2019): 17-18.

34. PESCO, “Joint EU Intelligence School (JEIS),” accessed October 21, 2020(c), <https://pesco.europa.eu/project/joint-eu-intelligence-school/>.



ities Development Priorities (CDP) approved by the European Defence Agency (EDA) in 2018<sup>35</sup>. As the CDPs are intended to identify the capability priorities Member States should focus on, these specific eleven priorities are meant to address existing European shortfalls in a practical and output-oriented manner “to ensure they produce a more coherent set of usable, deployable, interoperable and sustainable capabilities and forces available to EU Member States for national and multinational (EU CSDP, NATO, UN etc.) missions and operations”<sup>36</sup>. From an operational perspective, – the last wave of PESCO projects, in addition to the first and second batches, has indeed the potential to constitute a purposeful step towards the achievement of strategic goals. While the number of land projects ap-

proved was not significant, this last batch of PESCO projects registered the presence of multinational initiatives to establish common doctrines, harmonisation of procedures and creation of hubs for research and training. From a doctrinal standpoint – and in line with Finabel’s mission - such efforts constitute a virtuous path towards effective interoperability and cooperation among armies in Europe, allowing the development of a shared vision of force-engagement, which is key to reach the EU’s Level of Ambition and strategic autonomy. More specifically, thanks to these new ambitious projects - which have seen a rise in fundamental sectors such as air, sea, space and cyber - the European Union could build an autonomous defence strategy and targets. This last batch of PESCO proj-



35. European Defence Agency, “Inside the Engine Room. Checking the EU’s Defence Mechanics,” *EDA Magazine* 18 (November 2019), <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-magazine/cdm18-magazine>.

36. European Defence Agency, “2018 CDP Revision. The EU Capability Development Priorities,” (2018): 3. <https://www.eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-publications/eda-brochure-cdp>.

ects stressed the importance of training, joint facilities, cyber and space, as well as joint strategic and operational enablers to achieve the EU's Level of Ambition, to confront the current unstable security environment and to be adequately equipped to face unconventional and hybrid threats.

### 3.1 The Impact on Land Forces

Relating to ground combat capabilities, only two of the 13 multinational initiatives undertaken by PESCO in 2019 specifically fall in this area, both at the operational and logistical levels. The CBRN Defence Training Range (CBRNDTR), a three-lateral initiative coordinated by Romania, is intended to:

*“(...) further develop the existing facilities to accommodate a full spectrum of practical training, including live chemical agents training for CBRN specialists and small units, up to company level”<sup>37</sup>.*

The project is conceived to contribute to the CDP priority area concerned with “the enhancement of force protection in the domains of C-IED CBRNe capability and Personnel Recovery techniques”<sup>38</sup>. The initiative presents an opportunity to harmonise training and to standardise procedures, hence fostering a higher degree of integration among European land units and CBRN capabilities, which certainly constitute a positive step towards interoperability.

Thanks to the projects approved in 2019, land forces' interoperability enjoys a meaningful contribution to the CDP priority domain of enhanced logistic and medical support capabilities. As already argued, one of the main

obstacles to the full operability of multinational forces is the lack of interoperable logistical support and the gap in the nature and availability of enabling systems at the pMSs' national level. In this respect, the projects adopted in 2019 contribute to filling portions of such logistical gaps by establishing the Special Operations Force Medical Training Centre (SMTC). Targeting the upgrade of medical capabilities supporting the Special Operational Forces (SOF) missions and operations, the initiative will enhance readiness, capability, and coordination through an interoperable approach, starting from training personnel and harmonising procedures. The last projects undertaken through the PESCO framework do not feature land-specific initiatives, as it happened with the first and second batch of projects. However, land forces coordination, integration and harmonisation have been improved via multinational initiatives related to different land force activities, both at the operational and tactical levels. The CBRNDTR and SMTC are examples of such progress.

Initially, land forces were not at the centre of these renewed European initiatives. However, the adoption of several initiatives in enabling systems and joint training and education in different sectors do bear high potential in coming closer to the realisation of the EU's Level of Ambition and European ground forces' interoperability. In this respect, the last wave of multinational projects meaningfully contributes through three different multinational initiatives. Among them, the EU Collaborative Warfare Capabilities (ECoWAR), through a collective and efficiency-based approach, aims at providing the EU's armed forces with the ability to:

*“engage together in actions requiring close in-*

37. PESCO, “Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)’s projects - Overview,” accessed October 21, 2020(b): 20. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39348/table-pesco-projects.pdf>.

38. European Defence Agency, “2018 CDP Revision. The EU Capability Development Priorities”, 2018: 11. <https://www.eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-publications/eda-brochure-cdp>.

*teractions and interconnections between diverse current and future warfare platforms (...) in order to foster their efficiency, interoperability, complementarity, responsiveness and their resilience*<sup>39</sup>.

Provided that a certain degree of standardisation of different warfare platforms is reached, this project aims to foster cooperation and coordination in the domain of collective deployment of forces to enhance European strategic autonomy. The same effort will be made via the Materials and Components for technological EU Competitiveness (MAC-EU) on a more technical level. Recognising the limitations of off-the-shelf purchase and development of military capabilities, this initiative will enhance the creation of a European Defence and Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) in the material and technological components sector. The European Defence Industrial Base's integration is long recognised as a fundamental sector through which European countries may enhance their collective development efforts, while avoiding duplication of systems and gaps in their interoperability potential. In this respect, CARD highlighted how the land domain suffers from a high degree of fragmentation, particularly in the sector of armoured vehicles and Main Battle Tanks. While PESCO's pMSs operate several different armoured vehicles models, they also move at a different pace in the process of modernisation and replacement programmes, impacting the effective operability of multinational ground forces. An initiative such as MAC-EU holds the potential of lessening such fragmentation in the short-term, by harmonising the procurement of components and materials to upgrade MBTs and other armoured vehicles, which according to the

CARD report, remain fundamental components in high intensity and crisis management operations.

### 3.2 The Contribution to Strategic European interoperability

As highlighted in the previous sections, the establishment of PESCO has enabled the implementation of valuable initiatives pertaining to European Land Forces. Progress has also been made in filling the gaps between European needs in terms of capabilities development towards implementing strategic objectives. Newly dominating domains such as cyber and space have received attention and commitment, while more traditional domains such as air and sea have also been given a more European footprint. Thus, interoperability has seen a positive increase at operational, tactical and technological levels in relevant armed sectors, creating some promising bases from which PESCO's second phase could start and upgrade European defence capabilities.

A more important and relevant aspect emerging from the nature of the projects adopted in 2019 is the high number of initiatives and objectives aiming at conducting training through harmonised procedures and at creating centralised hubs where to develop joint education and common doctrines pertaining to different sectors. Such initiatives suggest that PESCO's pMSs may have embraced the quest for interoperability and the development of European defence capabilities at a deeper strategic level. Finabel Member States will surely benefit from the progress made through PESCO's framework. Operational and strategic interoperability go hand in hand and rely on the collective and cooperative development of military capabilities. Hence,

<sup>39</sup>. Ibid., 20.

the projects mentioned until now bear the concrete potential of strengthening both aspects of interoperability, through coherence and coordination. In this regard, PESCO has proven to be set on the strategic path of building centralised and collective training, education, logistics and communication. Finabel's goal towards full European interopera-

bility couples the elements of collectivity and interconnectivity: the centres and strategic centralised hubs initiated within the PESCO framework will allow the fundamental standardisation of doctrines and procedures, and may have a positive long-term impact in the field of transferal and processing of data and information.

#### **4. FUTURE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES: PESCO AND THE EU STRATEGIC AUTONOMY**

The concept of “strategic autonomy” was firstly introduced as an objective for the European Union in June 2016, when former High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini highlighted the need for the EU to act as global security provider. Strategic autonomy can be defined as “the ability to set one’s priorities and make one’s own decisions in matters of foreign policy and security, together with the institutional, political and material wherewithal to carry these through – in cooperation with third parties, or if need be alone”<sup>40</sup>. In other words, the Union must take responsibility in all conflicts that could destabilise its interests. PESCO’s projects must precisely aim at this: facilitating the achievement of the EU’s strategic autonomy. Despite the progress made at the EU level in fostering collective development and deployability of forces and capabilities, PESCO is still exposed to several challenges that, in turn, hinder the realisation of the EU LoA and the development of a clear-cut European strategic autonomy. Firstly, the issue of third State participation has long posed serious hurdles to the imple-

mentation of projects that could benefit from the participation of a third-party and -especially after Brexit- this has become central in the debate on European security and defence. Only on November 5, the Council of the European Union finally established general conditions and procedures to allow non-EU States to participate in PESCO projects. Defence cooperation with partners is this decision’s main purpose, to consolidate the EU’s role as a security provider. The second issue is represented by the existence of military cooperative initiatives outside the EU framework, which may further fragment PESCO’s progress and potentially diminish its role. In this regard, PESCO should incorporate such initiatives and preserve its leading role in European defence. Finally, coordination between EU and NATO requires a specific focus as well. It is essential to resolve these issues to increase the impact of PESCO’s projects, to preserve their paramouncy and further strengthen the Union’s strategic autonomy.

40. Barbara Lippert, Nicolai von Ondarza, and Volker Perthes, “European Strategic Autonomy: Actors, Issues, Conflicts of Interests,” *SWP Research Paper 4* (2019): 5.



#### 4.1 Participation of Third States

The issue of third State participation into PESCO projects has been central in the debate on European Security and Defence. Although prior to this decision the potential value of involving non-EU countries in PESCO projects was recognised, the lack of clearly defined regulation raised several concerns, especially regarding European funding and how and which States could access the European Defence Fund. On November 5, the Council of the European Union adopted a set of general conditions under which non-EU States “could exceptionally be invited to participate in individual PESCO projects”<sup>41</sup>. This decision is extremely important for PESCO’s transition into its second initial phase. It represents a step forward for a greater and more ambitious strategic collaboration between the EU and its partners. With this decision, Member States demonstrate that they want the European Union to be perceived as a security provider for its partners and neighbours by significantly strengthening the EU’s strategic autonomy. The Council’s decision also de-

fines the procedures for the participation and the political, substantive and legal conditions which a third State country should meet.

#### Invitation process

Article 2 of the Council’s decision defines the procedure that a third State must follow to present his candidacy for participation in PESCO projects. As a first step, the interested country has to submit a request to a PESCO project’s coordinator States providing the reasons, purpose and form of its potential participation. After submitting this request, the 25 PESCO Member States need to evaluate whether such third State meets the general conditions and if its participation can be an added value to the project and agree by unanimity. Once the project’s members agree on the country’s participation, they will notify the Council and the High Representative, who will take the final decision. If the Council’s decision is positive, i.e., the third country meets all the requirements, the PESCO project’s members can officially invite the third State to participate and start negotiations to

41. Council of the European Union, “Council Decision Establishing the General Conditions Under Which Third States Could Exceptionally be Invited to Participate in Individual PESCO Projects,” 27 October 2020: 1. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15529-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.



define the necessary administrative arrangements. This very detailed procedure allows controlling third countries' participation on a project-by-project basis. Thus, each project maintains its specificity and validity, ensuring that the means and systems used are as consistent as possible with the project's purpose.

## General Conditions

### 1. Political conditions

A third State can participate in PESCO projects if it “shares the values on which the Union is founded”<sup>42</sup>. The Council's decision refers to the values expressed in the Article 2 of the TEU, namely the “respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities”<sup>43</sup>. It also refers to the principles highlighted in Article 21 of the TEU, such as “equality and solidarity, and the respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law”<sup>44</sup>.

### 2. Substantive conditions

Article 2(b) determines that the invited third country provides a “substantial added value to the projects and contributes to achieving its objectives”<sup>45</sup>. Therefore, the third State must have the means and knowledge to effectively contribute to the achievement of the purpose of the specific PESCO project in which it intends to participate. Its participation must add value to the project but “must not lead to dependencies on that third-States”<sup>46</sup>. Its participation must contribute to the devel-

opment and strengthening of the CSDP to achieve the Union's Level of Ambition and the greater European strategic autonomy. Moreover, the participation must “contribute to fulfilling priorities derived from the Capability Development Plan and CARD, have a positive impact on the European Defence Technological Industrial Base (EDTIB), and make the European defence industry more competitive”<sup>47</sup>.

### 3. Legal conditions

The third State needs to sign a Security of Information Agreement with the EU and, if the PESCO project is implemented with the support of the European Defence Agency (EDA), it has to stipulate an Administrative Arrangement with the EDA<sup>48</sup>. The Council's decision also regulates other fundamental aspects of the participation of non-EU countries. Article 4 defines rights and obligations: the State can take part in the decision-making process for the project's implementation according to a previous administrative arrangement (as referred in Article 2) negotiated immediately after the third State's participation has been accepted by the project members. In case the third State's situation changes, that is, if it no longer complies with the general requirements and conditions, its participation can be reviewed and suspended or terminated, always after the Council's approval.

With this clear and defined set of rules regarding third States' participation into PESCO projects, Member States have shown their willingness to give the PESCO framework a more adamant European identity in goals and

42. *Ibid.*, 10.

43. Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union [2008] OJ C115/13: 17.

44. *Ibid.*, 28.

45. Council of the European Union, “Council Decision Establishing the General Conditions Under Which Third States Could Exceptionally be Invited to Participate in Individual PESCO Projects,” 27 October 2020: 10. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15529-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.

46. *Ibid.*, 11.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Council of the European Union, “Council Decision Establishing the General Conditions Under Which Third States Could Exceptionally be Invited to Participate in Individual PESCO Projects,” 27 October 2020: 21. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15529-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.

principles.

## 4.2 Initiatives outside EU framework

Several initiatives conducted outside the EU framework, while proving a willingness to practically cooperate towards standardisation of armaments and deployability of forces among certain countries, stem from a degree of dissatisfaction with PESCO's hitherto achievements and could hinder and diminish its role as a collective European defence framework. Not being framed in an EU communitarian initiative and being often structured in bilateral or mini-lateral agreement, these separate initiatives are perceived as being less bounding and more easily accessible, as their Member States are granted more action autonomy and flexibility, while also being more independent from NATO and avoiding the EU's heavy bureaucracy necessary for implementing projects at the European level. Moreover, these initiatives could entail two negative effects: an escalation of tensions on the transatlantic front and a greater division within Europe itself, as systems and capabilities across Europe further stray from a communitarian path of development, resulting in higher military fragmentation.

To avoid such fallouts, PESCO has the potential to be the ideal EU framework which, if used to encompass and lead all these initiatives while maximising their benefits, could meaningfully augment the EU's independent strategic readiness and deployability of forces. The Eurodrone MALE RPAS programme is an example of existing projects with the participation of PESCO MSs which was subse-

quently incorporated into the PESCO framework. Established by OCCAR in 2015, it saw the initial involvement of Germany, France, Italy and Spain and the Czech Republic's subsequent participation when the project was announced to be included in the PESCO framework<sup>49</sup>.

The French-led European Intervention Initiative (EI2), with the participation of 13 States, is one of the projects that would be most beneficial to incorporate within PESCO. This initiative was announced by President Macron in 2017, underlining France's disappointment in PESCO<sup>50</sup> and that "France has given up on CSDP becoming anything other than a humanitarian crisis management instrument, making only a marginal contribution to defence, and remaining a largely civilian-oriented endeavour"<sup>51</sup>. The EI2's aim is not to create a new standby force but to create a shared strategic culture, in order to allow willing European countries to prepare themselves for future crisis interventions<sup>52</sup>.

Another example is the 2020 joint Franco-German tactical air transport squadron. Aiming to enhance cooperation between the two countries and provide an example for European cooperation, this joint military unit project further demonstrates MS's willingness to build a stronger and united Europe, able to move autonomously. Another French-German initiative is the new Main Ground Combat System (MGCS), a project signed in Paris in 2017 which envisages that the two States develop a new model of Main Ground Combat System. Considering the recent PESCO Strategic Review and CARD report, the Fran-

49. Alice Billon-Galland and Yvonna-Stefania Efstathiou, "Are PESCO Projects Fit for Purpose?" *European Defence Policy Brief* (February 2019): 1-12.

50. Dick Zandee and Kimberley Kruijver, "The European Intervention Initiative: Developing a Shared Strategic Culture for European Defence," *Clingendael, Netherlands Institute of International Relations* (2019): 1-29.

51. Simon Sweeney and Neil Winn, "EU Security and Defence Cooperation in Times of Dissent: Analysing PESCO, the European Defence Fund and the European Intervention Initiative (EI2) in The Shadow of Brexit," *Defence Studies* 20, no. 3 (2020): 227.

52. Dick Zandee and Kimberley Kruijver, "The European Intervention Initiative: Developing a Shared Strategic Culture for European Defence," *Clingendael, Netherlands Institute of International Relations* (2019): 1-29.

co-German cooperation targeting one of the most fragmented and un-coherent sectors could set a central pillar to align modernisation programmes in the field of ground armaments across the EU. In political terms, this bilateral cooperation is especially important as it represents the two countries' will to converge on arms export policies and become pivotal driving forces on European defence. The same potential in terms of joint development of ground forces is held by the 2018 Capacités Motorisée (CaMo) project, which established a strategic partnership between France and Belgium. Through this contract, the French industry delivered 382 Griffon multi-role armoured vehicles and 60 Jaguar reconnaissance and combat armoured vehicles to the Belgian Army<sup>53</sup>. This project represents a crucial stage for the Belgian Army's modernisation while setting a great example of integration and cooperation. Incorporating CaMo within PESCO could expand the projects and boost the realisation of coherent and modern European ground forces<sup>54</sup>. Finally, the 2010 Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF) envisages Franco-British land, air and maritime military forces to jointly plan and execute military activities and to rapidly undertake actions in conflict zones<sup>55</sup>. This bilateral collaboration can potentially facilitate interoperability between the two countries' military capabilities by harmonising their military doctrines and equipment via joint military exercises and training. Hence, to maintain a high degree of homogeneity and coherence in MSS' coordination of defence policies and in the development of

effective military capabilities, the best option for European States would be to stimulate cooperative projects within the same European framework. PESCO must be considered as an "institutional anchor"<sup>56</sup> that consistently encompasses all projects. Fragmentation in the field of military cooperation at the EU level, which is higher within the land domain, still hinders the concrete realisation of the results and goals envisaged through different PESCO projects<sup>57</sup>. Incorporating the above-mentioned initiatives within PESCO could potentially spoil the progress made there to fill the gaps that still exist in the operability of its 47 multinational projects.

Good practices and the joint development of armaments and capabilities that characterise such bilateral and multilateral cooperative initiatives among European States could all further enrich PESCO's scope, while boosting the effectiveness of the projects adopted so far, which - as highlighted in this study - do demonstrate a certain degree of meaningful progress in the European land forces' interoperability and armed forces in general. Moreover, through PESCO and the different mechanisms connected to it i.e., the EDF and CARD, the merger of these independent initiatives could further integrate various European countries' security and defence sectors, providing them with long-term common goals and coherence, while leading them to a level of integration comparable to that of other EU sectors. The legally binding nature of the PESCO framework would ultimately bind States into keeping their commitments, without ever overlooking their political will<sup>58</sup>.

53. DGA, "Partenariat Stratégique Franco-Belge CaMo : Entrée en Vigueur de L'accord Intergouvernemental et Notification du Contrat d'acquisition des Véhicules Blindés," Ministère des Armées, July 5, 2019, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/dga/actualite/partenariat-strategique-franco-belge-camo-entree-en-vigueur-de-l'accord-intergouvernemental-et-notification-du-contrat-d-acquisition-des-vehicules-blindes>.

54. Ibid.

55. UK Ministry of Defence and Michael Fallon, "Defence Secretary Welcomes Deployable UK-France Joint Force", GOV.UK, April 21, 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secretary-welcomes-deployable-uk-france-joint-force-2>.

56. Olivier de France, Claudia Major and Paola Sartori, "How to Make PESCO a Success," *Armament Industry European Research Group (Ares Group) Policy Paper 21* (2017): 3.

57. Olivier de France, Claudia Major and Paola Sartori, "How to Make PESCO a Success," *Armament Industry European Research Group (Ares Group) Policy Paper 21* (2017): 1-12.

58. Ibid.

### 4.3 PESCO's Contribution to Strategic Autonomy and EU-NATO Cooperation

The concept of “strategic autonomy” can be analysed from different perspectives. Yet, this paper puts special emphasis on its three central dimensions: operational, technical, and political<sup>59</sup>. These three dimensions are mutually dependent, meaning that strategic autonomy’s political component, i.e., the capacity to define foreign and security policy goals, is of essential importance to the operational planning and conduct of military missions, while it simultaneously requires industrial autonomy to build and develop the necessary capabilities. Nevertheless, pMSs often have different perceptions of what strategic autonomy means. Currently, only France has officially defined the notion of strategic autonomy, actively promoting it. This provides France with freedom of decision and action, resulting in a double positive effect: it preserves national sovereignty regarding defence and security issues and enhances France’s major authority on actions led with allies<sup>60</sup>. The French case exemplifies how, by stressing a particular dimension in accordance with the country’s policy needs and national interests, the meaning of strategic autonomy varies from country to country, altering its approach to European defence and security policy.

However, the shared understanding of strategic autonomy is vital to PESCO as any inter-governmental structure in which all decisions require unanimity. Yet, to contribute to the achievement of strategic autonomy, PESCO should address two further problems at the political level: the “lack of purpose” and the

“culture of noncompliance”<sup>61</sup>. The lack of purpose is hampered by the pMSs’ hesitancy to define it, as they are not confident about the project results. The culture of non-compliance is problematic due to the pMSs’ focus and their attempts to use PESCO to pursue national interests, while just a few of them consider PESCO as a tool to achieve and enhance a common European policy in the security and defence fields. Likewise, despite the commitment to give new emphasis to European security and defence issues, Member States are still reluctant to define specific requirements, goals and consequent deadlines for PESCO’s projects, which affects the reaching of a satisfying level of strategic autonomy in the military dimension.

Nevertheless, the EU could achieve greater and better integration in the field of defence and security only if it is successful in overcoming these two problems. A greater integration would also lead to greater consolidation and development of the European defence industry. PESCO projects are of concrete value in achieving such goals as they should allow, or at least encourage, an alignment of the pMSs’ Ministries of Defence with a consequent configuration at the industrial level<sup>62</sup>. To facilitate cooperation among pMSs, the CARD (2020) suggests focusing on “six next-generation capabilities”<sup>63</sup> — new battle tanks (MBT), patrol vessels, defence in space, soldier systems, counter-drone technology (C-UAS), area denial weapons (A2/AD), and enhanced military mobility. Philippe Leopold, the Head of Unit for Cooperation Planning at the EDA, argues that “if the member states go for a collaborative approach in these areas, it will have

59. Ronja Kempin and Barbara Kunz, “France, Germany, and the Quest for European Strategic Autonomy,” *SWP and IFRI* (2017): 6-30.

60. *Ibid.*

61. Sven Biscep, “European Defence and PESCO: Don’t Waste the Chance,” *EU Integration and Differentiation for Effectiveness and Accountability 1*, May 5, 2020(a): 1-16.

62. Sven Biscep, “Differentiated Integration in Defence: A Plea for PESCO,” *Istituto Affari Internazionali* (February 2017): 1-11.

63. Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, “Results of First Coordinated Annual Review on Defence 2020,” November 20, 2020: 2. <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-factsheets/2020-11-20-card/>.

a structuring effect at the EU level<sup>64</sup>, thus enhancing pMSs' operational readiness and simultaneously reducing costly duplications and fragmentation of defence industries. Accordingly, the achievement of strategic autonomy heavily relies on defence industries' co-operation and on "an even understanding of the concept of strategic autonomy"<sup>65</sup>, which the pMSs do not currently possess according to the conclusions made in the CARD review.

As mentioned above, the meaning of strategic autonomy varies from State to State depending on national interests. The CARD<sup>66</sup> highlights the fact that EU Member States put national interests above NATO interests, which take priority over European ones. Therefore, the debate over strategic autonomy has largely been influenced by those who see it as a tool towards being autonomous vis-à-vis great powers like the United States, and those who fear to ruin the EU-NATO relationship.<sup>67</sup> Thus, from a military point of view, strategic autonomy means that Europe should be able to conduct military operations independently, i.e., without heavily relying on the U.S.'s military support to act in scenarios which the EU deems to be strategic for its defence and security interests<sup>68</sup>. Such necessity is greatly related to the issue of NATO/U.S.—EU cooperation, and is extremely important for the European neighbourhood. If the Union is not able to reach a deeper level of consensus regarding the EU's strategic autonomy

and better integrate its crisis management capacity, neighbouring countries could start seeking the protection of other power competitors<sup>69</sup>. For instance, China is currently the main actor able to challenge American global predominance, as well as Russia, which challenges Euro-Atlantic security. Therefore, it is fundamental for the EU to be present and ready to intervene, especially when American concerns are not at stake<sup>70</sup>.

Yet, as Kellner<sup>71</sup> argues, the EU's increased level of commitment to deeper and closer co-operation will also benefit NATO as it would simultaneously reinforce NATO's collective defence and address the long-discussed issue of European NATO members' decreased defence expenditure. The EU's commitment to broadening the scope of its defence cooperation and increasing its joint military capabilities under the auspices of PESCO was initially seen with scepticism by the United States, as it could potentially "[pull] requirements or forces away (...) from NATO and into the EU"<sup>72</sup>. Therefore, it is important to reassure the U.S. that there is no competition between EU and NATO and to highlight that both organisations can potentially strengthen each other's military capability development<sup>73</sup>.

Since the NATO Warsaw Summit in 2016, the U.S. have repeatedly called for higher EU contribution to NATO by stressing the EU's "free-rider problem"<sup>74</sup> and the U.S. bearing the disproportionate burden of NATO defence spending. For this reason, the projects

64. Alexandra Brzozowski, "EU Lacks Defence Capabilities to Meet 'Strategic Autonomy' Goals", *Euractiv*, November 23, 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/eu-lacks-defence-capabilities-to-meet-strategic-autonomy-goals/>.

65. *Ibid.*

66. Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, "Results of First Coordinated Annual Review on Defence 2020", November 20, 2020, <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-fact-sheets/2020-11-20-card>.

67. European Union External Action Service, "Why European Strategic Autonomy Matters", December 3, 2020, [https://ecas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89865/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters\\_en](https://ecas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89865/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters_en).

68. Sven Biscep, "Fighting For Europe. European Strategic Autonomy and the Use of Force," *Egmont Paper 103* (January 2019): 1-19.

69. *Ibid.*

70. Jo Coelmont, "European Strategic Autonomy: Which Military Level of Ambition?" *Egmont Institute* (March 2019): 1-5.

71. Anna Maria Kellner (2018) "Zum Erfolg Verdammte? Die Gemeinsame Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik der EU ein Jahr nach der Globalen Strategie," *Zeitschrift für Sicherheits- und Außenpolitik* 11, no. 1 (January 2018): 1.

72. Katrina Manson and Michael Peel, M. "US Fears Closer EU Defence Ties Could Undermine Nato," *The Financial Times*, February 12, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/70aaf9c-1018-11e8-8cb6-b9ccc4d4bb>.

73. Dick Zandee, "PESCO Implementation: The Next Challenge," *Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations*, (September 2018): 6.

74. Simond de Galbert, "Are European Countries Really 'Free Riders,'" *The Atlantic*, March 24, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/70aaf9c-1018-11e8-8cb6-b9ccc4d4bb>.



to be implemented within the PESCO framework could be of great use to NATO as they would considerably foster the EU's integration in defence, which will have a positive impact on EU-NATO cooperation. Thus, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has welcomed PESCO beginning from its launch, yet highlighting the complementary role of PESCO projects to NATO, meaning it does not duplicate NATO's Defence Planning Process<sup>75</sup>. Furthermore, he emphasised the fact that PESCO projects can provide a positive impact on the European defence market's fragmentation because a closer defence industrial cooperation would promote the synergy among European defence companies and reduce costly duplications of national military capabilities<sup>76</sup>. Therefore, an enhanced industrial integration will considerably increase the European military forces' interoperability within NATO as it implies the harmonisation of military capabilities, including strategic enablers.

According to the 5th EU-NATO *progress report on the implementation of the common set of proposals*, "38 out of the current 47 PESCO projects also broadly respond to NATO priorities"<sup>77</sup>. Such projects include the EU CROC, Military Mobility, and the Strategic Command and Control (C2) System for CSDP Missions and Operations, which are great

examples of mutually reinforcing cooperation between EU and NATO as the organisations complement each other's tactical shortfalls<sup>78</sup>. Military Mobility, for instance, has become one of the highly anticipated projects within the PESCO framework. It is perceived as a "flagship of the EU-NATO cooperation"<sup>79</sup> because on the one hand, it addresses NATO's military need for rapid transport movement in case of Article 5 being invoked and, on the other hand, it enables a quicker movement of EU military personnel and equipment for CSDP operations taking place within the EU or at its borders<sup>80</sup>.

NATO and EU are closely cooperating by sharing relevant information regarding "military requirements for military mobility, (...) cross-border movement permissions and customs"<sup>81</sup>. Despite the considerations of PESCO developing an autonomous "EU Army"<sup>82</sup>, PESCO as a cooperation framework rather "represents an effort to enhance interoperability"<sup>83</sup> of forces. It does indeed emphasise the EU Member States being strategically autonomous from the American military forces. But to accomplish this, the pMSs need first and foremost to generate such military capabilities.

Overall, it goes without saying that the PESCO framework facilitates the development of more coherent strategies in defence and for-

75. NATO, "Doorstep by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Start of the European Union Foreign Affairs Council in Defence Format," November 13, 2017, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_148840.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_148840.htm).

76. *Ibid.*

77. NATO, "Fifth Progress Report on the Implementation of the Common Set of Proposals Endorsed by EU and NATO Councils on 6 December 2016 and 5 December 2017," June 16, 2020: 7. [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/6/pdf/200615-progress-report-nr5-EU-NATO-eng.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/6/pdf/200615-progress-report-nr5-EU-NATO-eng.pdf)

78. Anna Maria Kellner (2018) "Zum Erfolg Verdammt? Die Gemeinsame Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik der EU ein Jahr nach der Globalen Strategie," *Zeitschrift für Sicherheits- und Außenpolitik* 11, no. 1 (January 2018): 8.

79. European Commission, "Joint Report to the European Parliament and the Council on the Implementation of the Action Plan on Military Mobility from June 2019 to September 2020", October 19, 2020: 1. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/military-mobility-report\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/military-mobility-report_en.pdf).

80. Dick Zandee, "PESCO Implementation: The Next Challenge," *Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations*, (September 2018): 8.

81. NATO, "Fifth Progress Report on the Implementation of the Common Set of Proposals Endorsed by EU and NATO Councils on 6 December 2016 and 5 December 2017," June 16, 2020: 9. [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/6/pdf/200615-progress-report-nr5-EU-NATO-eng.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/6/pdf/200615-progress-report-nr5-EU-NATO-eng.pdf)

82. Alice Billon-Galland and Yvonna-Stefania Efstathiou, "Are PESCO Projects Fit for Purpose?" *European Defence Policy Brief* (February 2019): 2.

83. Benjamin Marill and Monika Sus, "Post-Brexit EU/UK Security Cooperation: NATO, CSDP+, or 'French Connection'?" *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 20, no. 4 (2018): 854.

eign affairs. Its general impact on EU strategic autonomy, however, remains short-term limited and is even momentarily jeopardised by insufficient investment in Defence Research and Technology (R&T)<sup>84</sup>. In a long-term perspective, however, PESCO has the potential to become a “game-changer” mainly due to the European Commission’s greater involvement in defence<sup>85</sup>. Nevertheless, Bis-

cop<sup>86</sup> argues that PESCO is likely to achieve strategic autonomy, limited to expeditionary operations, whereas NATO will stay a key security provider for European territorial defence. To disprove this hypothesis, all PESCO projects have to be successfully implemented and practically tested; as well as strategic autonomy becoming “not a magic wand but a process, a long-term one”<sup>87</sup>.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper analysed PESCO projects with a specific focus on Land Forces. The conducted research has brought to light the complex nature of PESCO initiatives by analysing each set of projects within the PESCO framework and assessing how those projects aim to improve the European Land Forces’ interoperability. Our investigations have shown that the EU’s military Level of Ambition has significantly increased from the first to the last set of projects as the EU has been launching initiatives that strategically address interoperability shortfalls at several operational, tactical, and technological levels, and cover all domains of military warfare. Accordingly, our paper’s findings imply that PESCO is not just ambitious but has indeed great potential at considerably improving the European Land Forces’ interoperability, which will, in turn, ensure the overall success of CSDP operations and missions. Nevertheless, this paper concludes that the development of the EU’s military capabilities requires long-term



84. Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, “Results of First Coordinated Annual Review on Defence 2020,” November 20, 2020: 2. <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-factsheets/2020-11-20-carj>.

85. Sven Sakkov, Pauli Järvenpää, and Claudia Major, “A Considerable Increase in Defence Investment Is Required if European Strategic Autonomy Is to Become a Reality,” *International Centre for Defence and Security*, November 13, 2019. <https://icds.ce/en/a-considerable-increase-in-defence-investment-is-required-if-european-strategic-autonomy-is-to-become-a-reality/>.

86. Sven Biscep, “European Defence: Give PESCO a Chance,” *Survival* 60, no. 3 (June 2018): 172.

87. European Union External Action Service, “Why European Strategic Autonomy Matters,” December 3, 2020. [https://ecas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89865/why-eu-ropean-strategic-autonomy-matters\\_en](https://ecas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89865/why-eu-ropean-strategic-autonomy-matters_en)

efforts and depends on the joint commitments of the pMSs and their defence industries, as well as the EDF, and the European Commission. Yet, these long-term prospects can be mainly hindered by political factors affecting the pMSs' compliance with commitments made and their overall willingness to improve EU defence procurement and develop participation with other military initiatives.

Finabel proposes the following recommendations to delivering a positive impact on the interoperability of Land Forces among participating Member States:

- To improve the use of EU military tools, such as CARD and PESCO, to define common EU geostrategic priorities, which are necessary to further develop the implementation of specific multilateral training and exercises of Member States' land forces. Multilateral training and exercises can provide better coordination of capabilities availability and readiness in joint missions, enhancing the convergence of pMSs' strategic cultures.
- To improve the integration of local, bilateral or multilateral military initiatives between EU countries in the PESCO framework. The integration of such initiatives can add value to the PESCO system, paving the way for a coherent security and defence strategy between European countries and strengthening European strategic autonomy.
- To further focus on standardisation. Among all the 47 projects, only ten aim to develop standardised instruments. Thus, the land domain's standardisation issue is central to only four projects: Military Mobility, the integrated Modular Unmanned Ground System (iMUGS), the European Union Training Mission Competence Centre (EU TMCC), and the European Training Certification Centre for European Armies. In particular, pMSs need to pay further attention to the standardisation of armament and military equipment.
- To increase investment spending in defence R&T to upgrade the ageing armoured vehicles and facilitate their modernisation programmes in a standardised and coordinated way to decrease market fragmentation and jointly procure next-generation armoured platforms.
- To increase the usage of online platforms, such as the EU Army Innovation Platform which aims to facilitate the common understanding of innovations and their impacts on Land Forces by spreading the knowledge, skills and projects at the operational and tactical level, while sharing data with the participating Member States.
- To promote the exchange of military data and information among participating Member States and increase transparency and mutual trust in the security and defence planning process.

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Created in 1953, the Finabel committee is the oldest military organisation for cooperation between European Armies: it was conceived as a forum for reflections, exchange studies, and proposals on common interest topics for the future of its members. Finabel, the only organisation at this level, strives at:

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- Contributing to a common European understanding of land defence issues. Finabel focuses on doctrines, trainings, and the joint environment.

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Finabel contributes to reinforce interoperability among its member states in the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the EU, and *ad hoc* coalition; Finabel neither competes nor duplicates NATO or EU military structures but contributes to these organisations in its unique way. Initially focused on cooperation in armament's programmes, Finabel quickly shifted to the harmonisation of land doctrines. Consequently, before hoping to reach a shared capability approach and common equipment, a shared vision of force-engagement on the terrain should be obtained.

In the current setting, Finabel allows its member states to form Expert Task Groups for situations that require short-term solutions. In addition, Finabel is also a think tank that elaborates on current events concerning the operations of the land forces and provides comments by creating "Food for Thought papers" to address the topics. Finabel studies and Food for Thoughts are recommendations freely applied by its member, whose aim is to facilitate interoperability and improve the daily tasks of preparation, training, exercises, and engagement.



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