

THE BERLIN SECURITY CONFERENCE

“Europe – Developing Capabilities for a credible Defence”

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The 20th Congress on European Security and Defence, known as the Berlin Security Conference (BSC), was held on 24-25 November 2021.

The Congress was organised by the *Behörden Spiegel* and supported by an Advisory Board made up of distinguished international people. It is one of Europe's major defence and security discussion forums: since 2001, the conference and exhibition in Berlin have drawn representatives from European and non-European nations, as well as European organisations and NATO. The focus is on presenting and debating real solutions to improve European and transatlantic political, strategic, and tactical collaboration, to find solutions to reduce tensions caused by limited capabilities, poor standardisation, a lack of interoperability, disparities in support levels, and national limits. As a result, transatlantic integration and future arrangements were the primary focus of the meeting.

During the two days, multiple strategy presentations and keynote speeches were made and commented on by distinguished speakers on various topics. The conference's theme was "Europe - Developing Capabilities for a Credible Defence", which aimed to draw attention to measures for increasing military capability development. This is critical in light of multipolar challenges and continuous requests for greater EU independence in defence affairs.

European Capability Building

The most important topic discussed was European Capability Building, in line with the Conference's theme. The current complex geopolitical landscape, characterised by new rising security threats, calls for the development of new strategic skills and essential technologies in critical areas to guarantee appropriate guidance. We share territory, populations, members, boundaries, neighbourhoods, and difficulties. Terrorism, cyber threats, and climate change are global issues that no country or region can address alone.

A competitive high-tech European defence industry foundation is critical to this objective, as is appropriate funding from European Union member countries. Unfortunately, during the last years, EU Member States have not invested sufficiently to improve and expand future capacities. As a result, Member States are less equipped to address emerging capability shortages independently. A multi-level cooperation plan is the only approach to maximise the production and quality of the Member States' defence investments.

Cooperation among nations alone, however, will not be enough. Politics will also be essential to improve collaboration among industry partners. A lack of collaboration has resulted in duplication and divergences, a lack of interoperability and standardisation, and increased expenses. Avoiding collaboration amounts to paying more for less, and this model is no longer a viable option.

According to Vice Admiral Matteo Bisceglia, Director of OCCAR, the Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation, fragmentation and duplication may be avoided by developing "centres of excellence" that can cohabit as allies by operating based on knowledge, abilities, and information sharing. This strategy can create a more connected, creative, and collaborative European defence for the benefit of both nations and industries. In this regard, the OCCAR Convention outlines the political commitment of OCCAR Member States to increase the efficiency and lower the costs of their arms engagement.

General Claudio Graziano, Chairman of the European Military Committee, believes that resilience and interoperability should be strengthened. He also prioritises more common capabilities at the European level. This would lessen reliance while also promoting Europe's technical sovereignty and autonomy. According to Graziano, the EU will require greater flexibility and innovative strength in future military concerns.

Parliamentary State Secretary Thomas Silberhorn MP of the German Federal Ministry of Defence added that, besides the COVID-19 pandemic, which has demonstrated the need to strengthen our resilience, recent developments in Afghanistan have proved again that Europe must boost its capabilities as a credible security and defence supplier. European states require complementary and credible military capabilities to achieve resilience and actionability. All national capacity activities are intended to serve both national aspirations and NATO and/or the EU.

In this difficult context, European leaders have launched a wide variety of major efforts since the inauguration of the European Defence Action Plan (EDAP), with the primary goal of strengthening the European defence sector, improving collaboration, increasing its international competitiveness and closing capacity gaps.

The CARD (Coordinated Annual Review on Defence) is one of the leading new EU defence instruments launched by Member States after the EU Global Strategy evaluation in 2016. Its goal is twofold: it will analyse Member States' defence operations to provide an accurate and up to date portrait of Europe's defence landscape, and it will focus on promoting cooperation in joint defence capability development. According to the CARD, the main issue is that just a few Defence Ministries see transnational capability development as an essential aspect of their national defence strategy. As a result, the data can only lead to one conclusion: a shift in thinking is required to make defence cooperation the centre of the agenda.

At the same time, Europe must fortify its connections with NATO because since both organisations have 21 members and rely on a common set of troops – collaboration between them is essential. Thus, Ambassador Šedivý, Chief Executive of the European Defence Agency, urged Member States to take advantage of the available collaboration opportunities by utilising other EU defence mechanisms, such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defence Fund.

Increased readiness of European Armed Forces

Due to its civilian and military missions and activities, the European Union is one of the most important players in security and defence. It is more directly involved in foreign crisis management than other international organisations.

Nonetheless, regarding the European Army's preparedness, General Eberhard Zorn intervened, affirming that more appropriate resources and quick decision-making systems are needed to respond rapidly and effectively to emerging crises with armed force. To achieve that, Germany supports the creation of an "EU Rapid Reaction Force" that advocates for relevance, credibility, and effectiveness. This necessitates careful planning, trustworthy principles, and a step-by-step deployment, based on the reform of the European Battle Group, the military component available only to the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Further collaboration in international crisis management can bring the EU closer to these objectives. A glance at the Sahel area and the multiple operations performed by various governments and organisations demonstrates that we need to take a much more cohesive strategy to combat cross-border terrorism.

Land Domain

Another topic discussed during the Conference was Land Domain. Lieutenant General Alfons Mais, Chief of the German Army, intervened, saying that, with an eye on the 2030s, German Land Forces must train for modern warfighting against peer competitors. Due to the new geopolitical landscape, NATO's territorial security is called into question.

Consequently, the German Armed Forces, located in the heart of Europe and the transatlantic alliance, are required to solve operational and strategic weaknesses in NATO's defence position to maintain successful and appropriate collective defence and credible intimidation against a peer opponent. As a result, German forces must be "ready and available" in all areas.

An effective division and corps level will make a significant difference in the future because large-scale military confrontations can only be planned and directed at that level. Additionally, divisional and corps forces prepare the battlefield for brigade-level and below brigade-level engagements. The German Army intends to create the first fully equipped and mechanised division-sized force from our present army organisation and the three other divisions that are still required. This "Division 2027" is intended to offer a strong force with a high degree of readiness and availability in response to NATO needs. The goal for this division is not only to be deployable on short notice and equipped and ready to execute full-spectrum operations but also to offer a solid and dependable shoulder to integrate force contributions from European allies.

Cyber and Technological Innovations

In our democratic and free societies, digitalisation provides enormous prospects for governance, economics, and research, as well as for military services. Despite its benefits and successes, digitalisation has resulted in new needs and risks. It creates a vast opportunity for prospective adversaries, posing significant dangers to our civilization. Capabilities in the cyber and information domains must thus be enhanced. Since digitalisation has become a dominant cultural and social element of our life, Vice Admiral Dr Thomas Daum, Chief of the German Cyber and Information Domain Service, during the conference, explained how their tasks also include surveillance and controls in the cyber and information domains. This covers cyber operations such as infiltrating enemy IT networks for intelligence gathering and/or manipulation, cyber warfare, and strategic communication on operations. Geoinformation and military intelligence are two more areas of responsibility. Of considerable relevance are the construction of a Joint Intelligence Centre, the digital revolution of the Bundeswehr, and the creation of research and development centres under the CID Service to emphasise national and collective defence. The idea is to improve the ability to plan and carry out cyber and information domain missions as part of international crisis management and national and collective defence.

"Modern information technologies are the future of the modern battlefield", said Brigadier General Frank Pieper, Chief Digital Officer of the Army. The battleground would become more accessible with computerised armed forces, making choices faster and more precisely. With the advancement of AI and other information technologies, an opponent may be neutralised with high accuracy, with minimal collateral harm. The objective of enterprise, politics, and the military must be to provide the German armed forces with contemporary and responsive information systems that allow troops to make trustworthy judgments.

In addition, through the NATO 2030 initiative, leaders agreed on an important and forward-looking strategy for our future security, which will guarantee that our Alliance is prepared for today's difficulties as well as tomorrow's dangers.

As declared by Ludwig Decamps, General Manager at the NATO Communications and Information (NCI) Agency, this involves strengthening NATO's resilience, strengthening cyber defence, and sharpening our technical advantage. Leaders also decided to create NATO's next Strategic Concept, which would reflect NATO's fundamental principles and mission and the changing security strategy. The 2030 Agenda reflects that, in a world of increasing global competitiveness and complex security concerns, the Alliance must address several threats at once, including advanced cyber and technological innovations. The NCI Agency will help NATO maintain its competitive advantage by investing in innovation and lending knowledge in AI and machine learning implementations.

Major General Jörg See, the Alliance's Deputy Assistant Secretary-General Defence Policy and Planning Division, explained that the Alliance has adopted a 360-degree strategy and established its innovation fund, promising that the North Atlantic Alliance and the EU will work even more closely in the future. As we have seen, many ideas were discussed during this two-day symposium to strengthen European capabilities, interoperability, and cooperation and identify solutions to common challenges.

A huge milestone reached was the German and Dutch land forces agreement to collaborate on acquiring new vehicles for both nations' airborne soldiers. The Army Chiefs and Vice Admirals of both countries signed a Letter of Intent for this purpose. This Letter of Intent should be the first step toward a more binding statement of intent, which should be signed as soon as possible. The acquisition of new air landing platforms increases interoperability and provides synergies. The following phase is to establish common specifications for modern vehicles. The fact that the BSC 2021 was concluded with this optimistic aspect can only serve as a stimulus. The next Berlin Security Conference is scheduled for November 30 and December 1, 2022. Therefore, after one year, we will see if the proposals and the good intentions declared will be implemented and if we will be able to face daily and future challenges.

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