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## THE EU AND NATO'S NEW STRATEGIC CONCEPT \*

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In November of this year, NATO meeting in Lisbon will adopt a new Strategic Concept. The previous concept, adopted in 1999, bore the imprint of the war in Kosovo. The new one has to define a post 9/11 world, marked in particular by terrorism and by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, by the debates over whether to globalize NATO or not and whether to expand or even re-invent its missions. It also belongs to a world where the Alliance has both extended its membership and partnerships while at the same time being superseded by “coalitions of the willing”. In other words, NATO has both been a success and a failure, running the risk of extinction for its lack of adaptation. Let us hope that the new Strategic Concept to be adopted in Lisbon will meet the challenge of adapting the most innovative alliance in history and not undergo the same fate as other “Lisbon ventures” – the Lisbon strategy set out in March 2000 to turn the European union into a competitive area, which it has not, and the Lisbon treaty, the success of which was overshadowed by a paltry start.

Yet, to be successful the Lisbon Strategic Concept will have to avoid pitfalls and square circles, and eventually it may fail to avoid deepening cleavages in Europe and conceal Europe's lack of relevance worldwide. From the Europeans' point of view, three major issues stand out, two of which are very much interrelated: the question of where Russia stands and the question of the role of nuclear weapons; two questions for which both Germany and France play a defining role. The last issue at stake pertains to NATO's global role: is it to be pursued and can it be pursued in a world where the West is gradually losing ground?

### **Germany vs. the new members:**

In their coalition agreement, the German political parties that came to build the current government, professed their craving for a nuclear-free Germany. In a way, there is nothing new about it: this is something that many Germans have called for, ever since the 1950s and the first deployment of TNW (Trans National Weapons) on their soil. The renewed emphasis may however be a way to deflect public anger at the Bundeswehr's involvement in the war in Afghanistan and at their government's persistent lie over the reality of this war, at least up to recently. This is a point that Lord Robertson, NATO's former general secretary, made in a recent criticism of Germany's move. Certainly Germany is not isolated in its quest, followed by Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and Norway. It is also supposed to echo Barack Obama's call for nuclear disarmament. Yet it is not exactly coordinated with other governments – nor supported by all members of the German coalition, as the Defense Minister, Karl Theodor von Guttenberg himself stressed in his talk at the Munich Security Conference in February. In any case, an asymmetrical call for the dislocation of TNW from European soil might spoil a trump card, that of inducing the Russians to dismantle part or all of their own stock of tactical nuclear weapons, which is approximately ten times bigger than the stock stationed in NATO countries.

As a number of observers underline, starting with Lord Robertson himself, the German move may stir concern in the Alliance, among the new members in particular – at a time when the Russians unnecessarily beat an unpleasant drum, issuing on February 5 a somewhat vindictive doctrine, holding maneuvers in the Kaliningrad area staging a nuclear attack against Poland, etc. Though a majority of German public opinion expresses its concern over Russia, it seems that a majority of politicians prefer to downplay it and to consider that ties of all sorts, commercial ones in particular, with the objective of helping Russia to modernize, will tame the bear.

## **France vs. others**

A withdrawal of American TNW from the territory of Germany, Belgium and others might however tip the balance in Europe and trigger a rush to zero in other countries where NW (Nuclear Weapons) are stationed, such as Italy or even Turkey. It might raise concern over NW in countries, which either harbor opposition to military operations or have developed strong anti-American currents, and in any case have a history of opposing these weapons.

The denuclearization of the continent would leave France as the odd country out, as Bruno Tertrais (expert of nuclear weapons at the Fondation pour la recherche stratégique) recently put it, as the one country, which feels very much uncomfortable with nuclear disarmament. It would point not only at the difference between a nuclear country and denuclearized ones, but would also underline the fact that France is clinging to its (past) status – even if it may be right to possess some kind of re-insurance policy in a de-nuclearizing world – while Germany is a driving force in Europe by the virtue (?) of example. Certainly France has, in the past, offered to open its nuclear umbrella yet without going as far as to offer sharing it. Neighboring countries have never been convinced by these half-hearted proposals, nor by the strength or the breadth of the umbrella.

In any case, none of these two countries, France and Germany, is really consulting with all others. While a doctrinal review is being done, concluding maybe that the tactical nuclear weapons stationed in Europe may have a political, rather than a military value<sup>1</sup>, facts are being created – or may be created – by default, due to the national policies of two major European states. Though Article 5 is – still – supposed to be the very cement of the Alliance, it may be further weakened by the differences in status, roles and, last but not least, political cultures – while the European Security Strategy, agreed upon in 2003 and supposedly reviewed in 2009, called for a common European strategic culture...

## **NATO, the EU (?) and the world.**

As forceful as the fight against a global role for NATO may be, those opposed to it do not need to do much. Facts, money, and time are probably working against a global role. First, the Europeans themselves are undermining NATO's global role in so far as an increasing number of them is hesitating to send troops to Afghanistan – or at least troops who will engage in combats. Actually, some, as the Dutch, do not hesitate to withdraw them.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to NATO's conventional superiority while they can be considered as a bargaining chip vis-à-vis Russia

Strangely enough in the time of globalization, European societies are more than ever inward looking. Work matters more than weapons, internal security more than external security. The prevailing mood, even in France, which used to be on the forefront of external interventions, is to avoid Afghanistan – or a repeat of it. In Germany, in France, in the Netherlands, public opinions shy away from sending troops abroad. Money is certainly not helping at a time when the budgetary crunch which results from the bail outs and money pumped into badly damaged economies, justifies at last the enduring choice between “butter or cannon”: to that extent Greece is the epitome of what will follow. With the highest rate of military expenses of all NATO economies, Athens will certainly have to review its priorities. Demography is not helping either. Retirees do not send troops abroad.

There is however another aspect to the twin economic and demographic argument: the economic and demographic crunch which affects Europe – and the Western world –, will influence NATO’s standing in the world. The new strategic concept is being devised at a time which could not be more different from 1999 when the previous concept was devised: the US was still the “hyper-power”. The West now is declining. In the future it is far from sure that NATO will have the legitimacy – endowed by the UN e.g. – and the means to act. To that extent it is necessary to solve such trivialities as NATO-EU cooperation (in the Horn of Africa for instance): whether they like it or not, the Europeans will have to pull their forces – and their spending – together.

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