European Defence and Security Policies vs. Brexit: National Governments as Actors of Differentiated Integration

Laura Chappell, Jocelyn Mawdsley and Petar Petrov, (eds.), The EU, Strategy and Security Policy

Cornelia-Adriana Baciu and John Doyle (eds.), Peace, Security and Defence Cooperation in Post-Brexit Europe: Risks and Opportunities

Daniel Fiott, Defence Industrial Cooperation in the European Union. The State, the Firm and Europe

Petros Violakis, Europeanisation and the Transformation of EU Security Policy. Post-cold war developments in the Common Security and Defence Policy

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Since 2016, the possible effects that Brexit may engender throughout Europe have given rise to a plethora of commentaries. The questions raised have been particularly widely discussed as regards the domain of defence and security, and this in particular because of the ambiguous attitude adopted by the United Kingdom (UK) as regards European initiatives in this issue area (Howarth, 2018). But, of course, the density of these debates also stems from the specific status of this country as regards military matters: it is a permanent member of the Security Council of the UN, possesses nuclear weapons, has sizeable armed forces and strong operational experience. Indeed, for all these reasons the UK is one of the main military actors in Europe.
Consequently, its departure from the European Union (EU) could potentially empty the latter’s defence and security policies of their content, and even of their dynamic, given the important role British actors have played in the very development of key initiatives in this sector over the past few decades.

How specialist academics have responded to this uncertain situation depends largely upon how they conceive of what has driven European security and defence policies during the recent past. The four books reviewed here, recently published on this subject, treat different aspects of this question, and illustrate this uncertainty. They all stress the role of governments in the differentiated forms of integration to which these policies have given rise. Indeed, they have all sought to respond to two major questions in particular. The first concerns the relationship between Brexit and the actual workings of European co-operation in this issue area. The second is centred upon the very status of the EU as a military power.

*European military co-operation without the UK?*

As regards the first of those two questions, these books make very different predictions depending upon whether each author gives analytical priority to the role played by the Saint-Malo agreement in the development of a Europe of defence, or whether they give more importance to the UK avoiding any commitment that might be construed as challenging its ‘special relationship’ with the US. Two of the books in particular highlight this difference in analysis.

Written by Daniel Fiott, the first of these frames European defence co-operation within a context he considers to be wider: that of co-operation over armaments. Indeed, his aim is to understand how a sector of activity that is so closely linked to sovereignty has nevertheless come to generate a concern over which states have pooled their resources at the European scale. From this perspective, he has studied three decisions which he considers have deeply impacted on the EU’s policy on the defence industry since the beginning of the 2000s: the creation of the European Defence Agency (EDA) in 2004 and the adoption of two key texts within the ‘defence package’ of 2009.\(^1\) In each case, he focuses upon the way in which the preferences of the different actors involved in producing these legislative acts or texts were shaped, and how they evolved over the course of negotiations leading to each final result.

To do so, he generated original qualitative and quantitative data which includes 84 interviews with EU civil servants or other representatives, national government officials, and the representatives of industry and think tanks, together with analysis of official texts and reports, and statistics on the European arms industry. This data enabled him to reconstitute the manner through which the positions of different governments were forged throughout each decision-making process. Based on this evidence, his central claim is that these initiatives are not simply the result of structural changes in the economic and industrial environment, of the influence developed by the Commission or the European Parliament, or of the transnational spreading of new ideas about co-operation. Instead, Fiott revises Andrew Moravcsik’s liberal intergovernmental model to consider that these initiatives all stem from strategies

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1 | the directive 2009/43/EC which simplifies the conditions for technology transfers for defence-linked products within the EU and the directive 2009/81/EC on public procurement of defence materials