

Conference on 100th Anniversary of World War I

Instead of a Great War, there are Little Wars everywhere!

In February 2013, I visited Old and New Delhi, India. I went to see several important places such as the Red Fort (Lal Qila) and the Raj Ghat - which is the memorial of Mahatma Gandhi (Gandhi was cremated at Raj Ghat on 31 January 1948). I also visited the India Gate¹ which commemorates the more than 70.000 Indian soldiers who lost their lives fighting for the British Army during the First World War. I was impressed seeing all the names of Indian soldiers who gave their lives during WWI. I immediately made the comparison with the Menen Gate² in Ypres, Flanders where 54.389 names of persons from the United Kingdom and Commonwealth Countries are written on the walls.³ More names, and unknown soldiers, are mentioned on the thousands and thousands of graves in the different cemeteries in Flanders Fields. The main reaction after WWI was: No more war ever again! Several initiatives were launched right after WWI working for stronger international solidarity and disarmament. What does this mean for the European Union? What lessons can be learned by the international community at large?

“There are acts to commemorate the centenary of some Great War, millions dead. And everyone is scandalized! But today it is the same! Instead of a great war, there are little wars everywhere, divided people. And to preserve one's interest they kill, they kill each other.” Pope Francis I, 25 February 2014.⁴

Growing militarisation inside the European Union

The European Union is continuing to develop its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). It is stated that today's changing world calls for Europe to take on a greater role in ensuring international peace and security. The EU contributes to international crisis management through its CSDP. People within Europe believe that the EU should have capabilities at its disposal that meet the needs of the future. At the same time, current financial

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India_Gate

² http://www.ww1cemeteries.com/othercemeteries/menin_gate_memorial.htm

³ <http://www.greatwar.co.uk/ypres-salient/memorial-menin-gate.htm>

⁴ [http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-francis-war-](http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-francis-war-destroys?utm_campaign=dailyhtml&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dispatch)

[destroys?utm_campaign=dailyhtml&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dispatch](http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-francis-war-destroys?utm_campaign=dailyhtml&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dispatch)

constraints make it more difficult to develop the defence and security obligations.

Lobbying is hard business!

Several Brussels' based think tanks, such as Carnegie Europe and the European Policy Center, regularly organise sessions and lobby events discussing European defence matters, partly because of the lack of national debates. The defence debate in the "Euro village" has never really taken off – a true indication that the real decision-making powers in this field reside elsewhere. Several think tanks are pushing the EU decision-makers to make defence a regular topic at the EU summits every year. They also want to see the EU defence ministers have a stronger role in the debate.

At the same time, lobbyists of the military defence industry have been very active in influencing decision making.⁵ The number of lobbyists at the EU in general has been increasing very rapidly over the last couple of decades. Some figures speak of more than 15.000 lobbyists in Brussels, mainly representing business interests.⁶

Ban Ki-moon's quote from last year: "Our world is over-armed and peace is underfunded" remains relevant in this debate as well.⁷ It is clear that the "peace movement lobby" has little impact. Some Brussels' based civil society coalitions or platforms, such as the European Peace Building Liaison Office⁸ (EPLO), are working on peace building and prevention of violent conflicts.

Towards an EU Nuclear Umbrella?

Some political parties have been highlighting, even recently, the importance of a robust, European military. Some liberal parties, for instance in Belgium, have been pleading for a stronger EU arms export and a strengthening of the weapon industry. They are in favour of the development of an EU nuclear weapon policy, bringing the nuclear arsenals of the United Kingdom and France under an EU umbrella, a common EU nuclear deterrent and an EU Nuclear Planning Group. My sense is that both the UK and France will not give up their nuclear capabilities and independence.

Toward an EU market on drones?

⁵ <http://www.vredesactie.be/en/campagnes/ctrl-alt-eu/ctrlaltea> - <http://www.mo.be/lobbytour>

⁶

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/bibliotheque/briefing/2013/130558/LDM_BRI%282013%29130558_REV1_EN.pdf

⁷ <http://www.un.org/disarmament/over-armed/>

⁸ <http://www.eplo.org/> - Pax Christi International is a co-founding NGO of EPLO : www.paxchristi.net

Recent papers by the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) push hard, for instance, for the development of drones (unmanned aircraft) and for air-to-air refuelling capabilities. In the defence community, drones are viewed as the essential eyes and ears of any future operations.

A critical voice on the development of drones is urgently needed in this debate. The increased use of drones has inaugurated a new phase in modern warfare and is raising grave moral and legal questions that deserve immediate attention. Pax Christi International⁹ has given serious consideration to the different perspectives of this issue and is persuaded that the use of these armed unmanned vehicles as weapons should be prohibited.

Likewise, the Holy See,¹⁰ as well as the World Council of Churches¹¹ reflects on the ethical dimensions of the use of drones. Most critical is the lack of ability for pre-programmed, automated technical systems to make moral judgments over life and death, to respect human rights, and to comply with the principle of humanity.

“Usually in front of a conflict, we find ourselves in a curious situation: to solve it, arguing, with the language of war. The language of peace doesn't come first! And the consequences? Think of the starving children in the refugee camps. Think only of this: this is the fruit of the war! And if you want, think of the big banquet halls, of the feasts that are done by the owners of the arms industries, who manufacture weapons, the weapons end there. The child that is sick, starving, in a refugee camp and the great feasts, the good life of those who manufacture weapons.” Pope Francis I, 25 February 2014.¹²

EU as a Defence Unit or Peace Building Unit

The ongoing question is if indeed the EU should become a stronger defence unit. The USA says it cannot continue covering 75% of NATO's costs. The United

⁹ Read the statement of Pax Christi International on Drones, 28 November 2012: <http://archive.paxchristi.net/2012/2012-0429-en-gl-SD.pdf>

¹⁰ Read letter of Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, Permanent Representative of the Holy See to the United Nations, 14 November 2013: http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/ccw/MSP-2013/Statements/14Nov_HolySee.pdf

¹¹ <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/use-of-drones-condemned-by-wcc>

¹² http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-francis-war-destroys?utm_campaign=dailyhtml&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dispatc

Nations wants Europe to provide troops for its peace missions. Some of the European governments want to keep the foreign and defence policies on the national level. France is the best example of this behaviour. Without asking for support of the EU's battle-group,¹³ France intervened in Mali in 2013 and in the Central African Republic in 2013/2014. As long as it remains a short term intervention, France is able to manage a military operation of this kind. It is clear that France and Great Britain are focused on retaining their own traditional power status.

London, Paris and Berlin: not on same page!

London opposes a review of the decade-old European Security Strategy, is firmly against an independent EU military headquarters (no European Pentagon) and is determined to prevent permanent structured cooperation, an instrument allowing willing EU members to go further on defence than others. As long as London, Paris and Berlin are not on the same page, no real EU defence policy will be developed. The gap over defence and security matters between Paris and Berlin is even widening. In France, approval for missions rests with the President. In Germany, it rests with parliament. The two countries cannot agree on the most fundamental military decision: the use of force.

A lot has to do with national ambitions. For instance, Canadians want to be seen as world-class peacekeepers. Germans want to be a force for good through mantra-like multilateralism. The French revel in the idea of national glory through military leadership. The British fiercely defend their strategic independence – just as long as the Americans are on board. The other reality is that several Eastern European countries and members of the EU still see NATO as an American security umbrella.

The additional political question is what the absolute minimum is for a military force needed by a sovereign nation in Europe today. Just three of the EU's twenty-eight member states – the UK, France and Greece – meet NATO's target that 2% of gross domestic product should be spent on defence.

Mandates of NATO and the EU

The development of the EU defence policies cannot be fully articulate without looking at its relationship or context with NATO. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, NATO lost its threat from the East. The body became less visible and public scepticism was growing. A strong fragment of public

⁵ Battle groups are quick reaction forces set up at short notice and at the beginning of a violent crisis.

opinion said that NATO no longer had a reason to exist. NATO lost its narrative and lacked a clear vision for the future. NATO had to look for other challenges outside of the East-West context.

Since 1989, one crisis after another has started, most unexpectedly. We learned to live with an asymmetric world perspective and multiple centres of power or influence. Threat perception became diverse. The threat landscape changes rapidly. It is unclear what threats NATO protects member states against.

NATO started with “out of area” operations (for instance in Afghanistan) and felt challenged by all different types of terrorist threats worldwide, especially in the MENA region.¹⁴ Cyber-security is becoming a major challenge and there is also concern about debris in the Earth's orbit and the militarisation of space, so space is a growing priority as well. The other forthcoming challenges for European security are failed states, piracy, tensions in the region, scarce resources and proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

No public or political debate

There is little public or political interest in security and defence matters of both NATO and the EU. For instance, parliamentarians have their foreign and defence matters at the end of their priority list. There is a lack of strategic debate. The result is that in the end very little political and parliamentary control is given over the decision making process. That is where the think tanks and defence industry fill in the gaps. More transparency is needed.

Stronger EU civil peace building policy needed

So far, the EU has been involved in ten military and nineteen civilian missions operating abroad. The EU today deploys more than 7000 staff in twelve civilian missions and four military operations. The basic question remains if the EU needs to do more for strengthening the military instead of putting more energy in civilian peace building. The EU has a good record of humanitarian aid which is less political. That remains an important task to do.

The EU should not decide to increase its military defence spending. Security is more than just the political-military dimension. The economic and environmental security, as well as the human dimension needs to be respected to allow for human dignity and prosperity. It is clear that social issues such as the impact of the financial crisis on the daily lives of citizens,

¹⁴ MENA is Middle East and North Africa.

unemployment, eradicating poverty, education, climate change and health care, are seen as more pressing.

A new, proactive approach to conflict management is urgently needed and EU countries could make a major difference by taking the lead in strengthening the EU's and the UN's capacity for civilian conflict management, mediation (on a nuclear agreement with Iran for instance) and humanitarian measures in conflict prevention. The EU should make use of its network and do more regarding preventive diplomacy. This would not only help to reduce the need to use military force, but it would also allow countries, such as Germany for instance, to pull their weight in the management of international peace and security in a way that it is keeping with its strategic culture and the pacifist leanings of its population.

Policies for the near future:

1. In a multipolar world, where geopolitical influence is undergoing rapid configuration, the call (ever since 1990) for the reform of the UN Security Council is one that must be addressed with a sense of urgency if we do not want to risk the erosion of the system which – in spite of its failings – has limited the damage of conflict and ensured a measure of international cooperation for peace. The Security Council must be operational at all times!
2. All EU policy should contribute toward increasing human well-being. A policy of defence industry growth is inconsistent with the notion of the EU as a peace project. The EU should focus on the root causes of conflict and on civilian peace-building. Peace building capabilities includes transitional justice, police reform and mediation programmes.
3. Greater priority must be attributed to conflict prevention. Protection of civilians will be better served inasmuch as brewing crises do not escalate into open conflict. Two recent examples, South Sudan and the Central African Republic, show that early warning should be integrated deeply in conflict prevention. The most effective way to protect civilians is to prevent armed conflict and, should it arise, display a true commitment to its resolution by peaceful means. In the end this means that tensions on the ground need to be detected more seriously in order to prevent the outbreak of conflicts.
4. Many people decry the practice anywhere of placing barriers to entry or forcibly returning asylum-seekers, including people who have fled the conflict in Syria. Nine million Syrians are driven from their homes. We call all EU member states and other nations to facilitate and improve conditions for the reception of Syrian refugees. Refugees should be

given a safe way into Europe. Refugees arriving at Europe's borders should be protected and families torn apart by this crisis should be reunited.

5. Historically, it is the militaries of the most advanced countries that have wrought destruction on the widest scale. Today, threats to global peace and security continue to derive from the proliferation and possession of weapons of mass destruction – in particular nuclear weapons – and the notion that the most powerful may selectively place themselves above international law.
6. Dealing with the past after a violent conflict is a major challenge. Writing and teaching of an objective history is crucial. Too many times history is manipulated for narrow political ends. Examples in Europe are Northern Ireland and countries in the Balkans. In post-conflict situations, especially when forging the foundations for stable societies, the importance of understanding the other cannot be overstated.
7. The EU is having parliamentary elections in May 2014. The EU today is confronted with, next to the ongoing economic and financial crisis, at least three major problems: corruption, the emergence of xenophobic political groups and the lack of freedom in media:

(1) The media suffered a lot partly as a result of the economic crisis, with journalists shifting to new online outlets and bloggers closely scrutinizing the activities of the political class. Lack of freedom in the media seems to be a reality. Nevertheless, media has an important watchdog role to play.

(2) On corruption, for instance, the prime minister of Luxembourg and Czech Republic had to resign over scandals involving corruption and abuses by intelligence services. In other countries, anticorruption legislation have been enforced, such as in Italy for instance.

(3) Right-wing factions promote unorthodox agendas and are on the rise in many of the EU countries. These groups range from Euro skepticism and greater curbs on immigration to extreme nationalism and outright racism. These ultranationalist tendencies and “our own people first” populist approach threaten the peace project of the European Union. In Central and Eastern European countries, Roma and Jews are, again, the minority groups of being guilty of the so called failures and problems in those countries. In other countries, the Muslim minority communities as well as refugees from Syria are targeted as the scapegoats of society. All these challenges are a test for the quality and the credibility of the European Union.

The peace movement in Europe should make use of the coming European elections to boost the EU's role in peace building, civil conflict management and prevention of violent conflicts. The European Council will assess concrete progress on CSDP in June 2015.

European Parliament, Brussels, 4 March 2014

Fr. Paul Lansu. Vice President - International Peace Bureau; and Senior Policy Advisor for Advocacy on Security and Human Rights - Pax Christi International