



The European Air Transport Command: A Model for Improving European Military Cooperation?

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Abstract

This thesis starts from the consideration that the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is having today increasing difficulties to go beyond the lowest common denominator of the policies of the 28 Member States. Because of that blockage, a debate exists today on whether there are alternative ways to promote military cooperation among European countries, ways that do not necessarily follow the top-down, everyone-at-the-same-speed approach of the CSDP. As part of such debate, this thesis presents the example of the European Air Transport Command (EATC), which was founded by four countries, and has now expanded to include a total of seven Participating Nations, with the aim to improve the use of their military airlift fleets. It then proceeds to ask whether a small, sectoral initiative like the EATC can contribute to the improvement of European defence cooperation, as well as what are the advantages and limitations of such an approach, and in what measure can the EATC be used as a tool to promote cooperation in other areas of the European defence sector.

To answer these questions, the thesis follows three steps. It first describes the history and structure of the EATC, which originated in 1999 from a Franco-German proposal and was officially established in 2010. It then goes on to identify the elements that define the 'EATC model'. These elements are the presence of a permanent peacetime establishment that is in continuous use; a governance system centred around a steering board that decides by consensus and which then appoints a commander who has the authority to issue orders to his subordinate units; a business model that is based on the pooling together of national assets that can be shared among different users, but also returned under national control whenever needed; and the presence of a Functional Division tasked with promoting harmonisation. Having identified the constituting elements of the EATC, the thesis then asks whether there is space to expand its role. It looks therefore at the possibility of enlarging the membership of the EATC or of giving it more responsibilities, before dealing with the question of replicating the EATC model in other domains. Its conclusions are that the EATC is an initiative that does indeed contribute to the improvement of European military cooperation, both directly through its activities and indirectly by promoting socialisation and being the example of a functioning model of cooperation. It does also conclude, however, that the EATC model can only work in a specific set of domains, mostly related to support tasks rather than combat ones, and that its governance system

puts several constraints on the possibility of enlarging its membership beyond its current size.