

# **A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SUPPORT FOR A COMMON EUROPEAN DEFENCE**

CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE STANCE OF BELGIAN ARMY  
SENIOR RANKS AND FLEMISH FRACTIONS IN THE BELGIAN  
CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES TOWARDS A EUROPEAN  
ARMY

Aantal woorden/ Word count: 27.058

**Laure Vandersmissen**

Studentennummer/ Student number : 01403403

Promotor/ Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Herman Matthijs

Masterproef voorgedragen tot het bekomen van de graad van:  
Master's Dissertation submitted to obtain the degree of:

Master of Science in de Bestuurskunde en het Publiek Management

Academie jaar/ Academic year: 2017 – 2018



# A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SUPPORT FOR A COMMON EUROPEAN DEFENCE

CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE STANCE OF BELGIAN ARMY  
SENIOR RANKS AND FLEMISH FRACTIONS IN THE BELGIAN  
CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES TOWARDS A EUROPEAN  
ARMY

Aantal woorden/ Word count: 27.058

**Laure Vandersmissen**

Studentennummer/ Student number : 01403403

Promotor/ Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Herman Matthijs

Masterproef voorgedragen tot het bekomen van de graad van:  
Master's Dissertation submitted to obtain the degree of:

Master of Science in de Bestuurskunde en het Publiek Management

Academie jaar/ Academic year: 2017 – 2018



Deze pagina is niet beschikbaar omdat ze persoonsgegevens bevat.  
Universiteitsbibliotheek Gent, 2021.

This page is not available because it contains personal information.  
Ghent University, Library, 2021.

## DUTCH SUMMARY

De voorliggende masterproef tot het behalen van de graad van Master of Science in de Bestuurskunde en het Publiek Management betreft een kwalitatieve analyse van de mate waarin de Belgische legertop en de Vlaamse fracties in de Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers voor- of tegenstander van een Europees leger zijn. Hiertoe werden in het totaal twaalf elite-interviews afgenomen. Meer bepaald werd voor elke fractie hetzij een vast lid, hetzij een plaatsvervangend lid van de Kamercommissie Landsverdediging geïnterviewd. Wat betreft de Belgische legertop werden zes generaals en één kolonel bevroegd, waaronder de Chef Defensie en de commandanten van de vier componenten. Daarnaast werd eveneens een grote hoeveelheid aan secundaire bronnen geraadpleegd. De analyse gebeurde deels manueel, deels via NVivo.

Het werk bestaat uit zeven hoofdstukken. Het eerste hoofdstuk behandelt de relevantie, het doel, de onderzoeksopzet en de methodologie van de studie. Daarnaast presenteert het ook een definitie van een 'Europees leger'. Hoofdstuk twee en drie leren ons dat er in het verleden reeds vermeende pogingen zijn geweest tot het oprichten van, maar dat er tot op de dag van vandaag nog steeds geen sprake is van iets dat zelfs maar in de buurt komt van een Europees leger. Er blijken echter wel een aantal initiatieven te zijn die aantonen dat vergaande samenwerking op vlak van defensie niet onmogelijk is. Uit hoofdstuk vier blijkt dat Defensie met heel wat problemen te kampen heeft. Zou een Europees leger een mogelijke oplossing kunnen zijn? Uit de drie laatste hoofdstukken blijkt alvast dat alle vijf de bestudeerde fracties in meer of mindere mate voorstander van een Europees leger zijn. Stuk voor stuk stellen ze echter dat dit slechts een langetermijnvisie is. Een aantal zaken maken de standpunten van de fracties evenwel ongeloofwaardig. Zo kan geen enkele respondent een precieze definitie van het concept 'Europees leger' voorleggen en bestaat er in een aantal partijen onenigheid over hun exacte standpunt. De visie van de fracties staat daarentegen in schril contrast met de mening van de Belgische legertop. Zowat alle officieren stellen dat een Europees leger een utopie is. Talrijke redenen worden hiervoor vernoemd. Vooral hun eigen ervaring met samenwerkingen speelt hierin parten.

Ten slotte dient vermeld te worden dat het onderzoek een aantal beperkingen kent, vooral dan op vlak van representativiteit, generaliseerbaarheid en betrouwbaarheid gegeven het beperkt aantal respondenten.

## PREFACE

Ever since I was a teenager, I had a deep and enduring fascination with everything pertaining to Belgian Defence. This fascination ran so deep that when at one time we had to write a proper research paper in high school, I chose to discuss the possibility of an army amongst the Low Countries. Now, almost five year later, I still have this passion for all matters related to defence. Having to write a master dissertation was subsequently the ideal moment to use the know-how I have gathered during the four years of studying Public Administration and Management to broaden not only my own knowledge on the topic, but also provide some new genuinely interesting insights that can enable both policy makers as well as politicians and army officers to reconsider their standpoint towards an army amongst the Europeans.

In truth, I could not have written this dissertation without the help of several people. My special thanks go to all of the respondents, without whose cooperation I would not have been able to conduct this research. Moreover, I would like to express my gratitude towards my supervisor, prof. dr. Herman Matthijs, who provided me with the opportunity and freedom to explore this deeply interesting field of study. To my fellow students Inge and Emma: I would like to thank you girls for your endless help and advice. Finally, my dad deserves a particular note of thanks as well: because of you I developed an interest in defence in the first place. Your endless support is the only thing that kept me going at times.

There only remains one thing to be said: I sincerely hope you enjoy your reading.

Laure Vandersmissen

May 8, 2018

# **TABLE OF CONTENT**

<b>DUTCH SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>PREFACE .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>VIII</b>

## **CHAPTER 1**

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.2 CONTEXT AND RELEVANCE .....	2
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION .....	3
1.4 SUB QUESTIONS .....	3
1.5 AIM OF THE RESEARCH .....	3
1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN .....	4
1.6.1 <i>Location</i> .....	4
1.6.2 <i>Timeframe</i> .....	5
1.6.3 <i>Units of analysis</i> .....	5
1.7 METHODOLOGY .....	6
1.7.1 <i>Data collection</i> .....	6
1.7.2 <i>Data analysis and reporting</i> .....	10
1.7.3 <i>Quality criteria in a qualitative research</i> .....	12
1.8 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK .....	14
1.8.1 <i>Models for a European army</i> .....	14

## **CHAPTER 2**

<b>THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND DEFENCE .....</b>	<b>16</b>
2.1 THE BEGINNING OF EUROPEAN (DEFENCE) COOPERATION .....	16
2.2 EUROPEAN DEFENCE COMMUNITY .....	17
2.3 COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY .....	18
2.4 EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY .....	19
2.5 TREATY OF LISBON .....	21
2.6 CONCLUSION .....	23

## **CHAPTER 3**

<b>EUROPEAN DEFENCE COOPERATION AT PRESENT .....</b>	<b>24</b>
3.1 MISSIONS AND OPERATIONS .....	24
3.2 PESCO .....	25
3.3 EUROPEAN DEFENCE FUND .....	27
3.4 COORDINATED ANNUAL REVIEW ON DEFENCE .....	28
3.5 OTHER FORMS OF COOPERATION IN PRACTICE .....	28
3.5.1 <i>NATO</i> .....	29
3.5.2 <i>BENESAM</i> .....	29
3.5.3 <i>Eurocorps</i> .....	30
3.5.4 <i>EATC</i> .....	31
3.6 CONCLUSION .....	31



## CHAPTER 4

<b>BELGIAN DEFENCE AT PRESENT .....</b>	<b>32</b>
4.1 BELGIAN DEFENCE STRUCTURE .....	32
4.2 DEFENCE BUDGET.....	33
4.3 DEFENCE'S CHALLENGES .....	33
4.4 THE FUTURE OF BELGIAN DEFENCE.....	35
4.5 CONCLUSION .....	36

## CHAPTER 5

<b>THE POLITICAL DEBATE.....</b>	<b>37</b>
5.1 CD&V .....	37
5.1.1 <i>Stance towards a European army</i> .....	37
5.1.2 <i>Arguments explaining stance</i> .....	38
5.1.3 <i>Opinion on other European defence cooperation projects</i> .....	40
5.1.4 <i>Opinion on Belgian Defence today</i> .....	40
5.1.5 <i>Vision on the future of Belgian Defence</i> .....	41
5.1.6 <i>Conclusion</i> .....	42
5.2 GROEN.....	42
5.2.1 <i>Stance towards a European army</i> .....	42
5.2.2 <i>Arguments explaining stance</i> .....	43
5.2.3 <i>Opinion on other European defence cooperation projects</i> .....	45
5.2.4 <i>Opinion on Belgian Defence today</i> .....	45
5.2.5 <i>Vision on the future of Belgian Defence</i> .....	46
5.2.6 <i>Conclusion</i> .....	46
5.3 N-VA .....	46
5.3.1 <i>Stance towards a European army</i> .....	46
5.3.2 <i>Arguments explaining stance</i> .....	48
5.3.3 <i>Opinion on other European defence cooperation projects</i> .....	49
5.3.4 <i>Opinion on Belgian Defence today</i> .....	50
5.3.5 <i>Vision on the future of Belgian Defence</i> .....	51
5.3.6 <i>Conclusion</i> .....	51
5.4 OPEN VLD .....	52
5.4.1 <i>Stance towards a European army</i> .....	52
5.4.2 <i>Arguments explaining stance</i> .....	53
5.4.3 <i>Opinion on other European defence cooperation projects</i> .....	53
5.4.4 <i>Opinion on Belgian Defence today</i> .....	54
5.4.5 <i>Vision on the future of Belgian Defence</i> .....	54
5.4.6 <i>Conclusion</i> .....	54
5.5 SP.A.....	54
5.5.1 <i>Stance towards a European army</i> .....	54
5.5.2 <i>Arguments explaining stance</i> .....	56
5.5.3 <i>Opinion on other European defence cooperation projects</i> .....	56
5.5.4 <i>Opinion on Belgian Defence today</i> .....	57
5.5.5 <i>Vision on the future of Belgian Defence</i> .....	57
5.5.6 <i>Conclusion</i> .....	58
5.6 CONCLUSION .....	58

## CHAPTER 6

<b>THE MILITARY DEBATE.....</b>	<b>61</b>
6.1 STANCE TOWARDS A EUROPEAN ARMY .....	61
6.2 ARGUMENTS EXPLAINING STANCE .....	65
6.3 OPINION ON OTHER EUROPEAN DEFENCE COOPERATION PROJECTS .....	70
6.4 VISION ON THE FUTURE OF BELGIAN DEFENCE.....	72
6.5 INFLUENCE ON POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING .....	73
6.6 CONCLUSION.....	74

## CHAPTER 7

<b>DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>75</b>
7.1 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTION.....	75
7.2 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS .....	81
7.3 FINAL CONCLUSION .....	82

<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>IX</b>
---------------------------	-----------

<b>ANNEXES .....</b>	<b>XVI</b>
ANNEX I: TOPIC LIST INTERVIEW MP'S.....	XVI
ANNEX II: TOPIC LIST BELGIAN ARMY SENIOR RANKS .....	XVIII

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CARD	Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CHOD	Chief of Defence
CRQ	Central research question
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EDA	European Defence Agency
EDC	European Defence Community
EDF	European Defence Fund
EEAS	European External Action Service
ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy
EU	European Union
EUGS	EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
FTE	Full-time equivalent
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HR	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MOD	Minister of Defence
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
PPS	Purchasing Power Standard
SQ	Sub-question
TEU	Treaty on European Union
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
WEU	Western European Union

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1 – systematic overview of interviews .....	9
Table 2 – systematic overview of methodology.....	12
Table 3 – systematic overview of respondents’ stances towards EU army.....	75

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1 – coding scheme in NVivo.....	11
Figure 2 – structure of Belgian Defence.....	32
Figure 3 – age pyramid of the Belgian armed forces as of January 2018.....	35

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

On December 7, 2017, many heads turned when it was announced that no less than 25 EU Member States had signed a joint notification to participate in the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), exceeding all initial expectations (Council of the European Union, 2017). Some journalists were quick to claim this was the first major step towards a European defence Union in years.

In March 2018, both the political and military world turned upside down once again, this time particularly in Belgium. The so-called F-16 gate made newspaper headlines. Belgian army senior ranks were accused of withholding a report on the lifespan of the F-16, thereby influencing the political decision-making process on the replacement of the multirole fighter aircraft.

From the above can be derived that lately defence has made several important headlines, demonstrating that the last word has not been said on this topic. On the one hand, much has already been written about the possibility of a European defence union. On the other hand, Belgian political parties and Belgian Defence have equally been substantially scrutinised in the past. These two have however scarcely been deliberated together to this day. This dissertation intends to change this. In particular, this qualitative research will study to what extent Belgian army senior ranks and Flemish fractions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives support the creation of a European army.

In order to allow for the most smooth and unambiguous discussion possible, this thesis is divided into seven main chapters. The first chapter tackles the research questions, the relevance, the aim, the research design and the methodology. Moreover, it equally provides a definition of what the concept 'European army' exactly implies. Chapter two will show how many initiatives have already been undertaken in the past to establish a joint EU military. Chapter three discusses the partnerships and cooperation projects Belgian Defence is currently involved in. The fourth chapter provides some background information on Belgian Defence in general.

This way, the first four chapters provide the necessary information before depicting the actual stances of the political fractions in chapter five and the opinions of the Belgian army senior ranks in chapter six. The final chapter answers the research questions and ultimately provides some policy recommendations.

## 1.2 Context and Relevance

Many authors seem to claim that in the field of European defence, everything is suddenly happening at once: the establishment of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the installation of a Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and the creation of a European Defence Fund (EDF) (Biscop, 2017). There seems to be a manifold of rationales behind this sudden acceleration in defence integration. One of those many catalysts is the US' president's recently founded anti globalism and subsequent negative position towards the EU. PESCO and its derivatives should be seen in this light. They can be interpreted as instruments for EU countries to diminish their dependence on the US for military support (Petzinger, 2017; Shalal & Emmott, 2017). As mentioned, this is only one of the many catalysts. An increasingly assertive China, Russia and its annexation of the Crimea and the on-going war and anarchy in the Middle East and Africa, which leads to millions of people fleeing the regions, also pose a threat to the EU (Gray, 2017). The various terrorist attacks that took place all over Europe, e.g. in Spain, Belgium, France and Germany, equally heightened tension in Europe (Rettman, 2017). With these threats borne in mind, the president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, proposed to establish a common army among the Europeans numerous times (Sparrow, 2015).

All of this goes to show that the idea to establish of a full-blown European army is still a subject of debate and consequently is continuing to be relevant today. Profound research has been conducted on this topic already. However, literature research has shown that academic studies mainly focus on either the economic implications or the (European) political feasibility of such a common European defence apparatus. There has been little to no research yet on what the national army officials think of such cooperation. Are they supportive of the idea or do they oppose it? Can their opposition or approval make or break the decision-making process? Or is it mainly

the opinions of the political parties in parliament that matter? This thesis will offer a closer look into this. To be more precise, the focus of this dissertation will be on Belgian army senior ranks and the Flemish fractions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives.

### **1.3 Research Question**

As can be derived from the introduction and the previous section, the research question central to this master dissertation is the following:

“To what extent is the idea to establish a European army supported by the Belgian army senior ranks and the Flemish fractions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives?”

### **1.4 Sub questions**

To be able to formulate a coherent answer to the central research question, the answers to the following sub questions will be sought:

1. What is exactly understood by the concept of a ‘European army’?
2. How and when did the idea of a European army arise?
3. What is the current state of affairs concerning military cooperation within the EU?
4. What is the stance of the Belgian army senior ranks towards the establishment of a European army?
5. Can the opposition to or approval of a European army by the Belgian army senior ranks influence the political decision-making process?
6. What are the opinions of the Flemish fractions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives on the establishment of a European army?

### **1.5 Aim of the research**

The research objective of this master dissertation is partially descriptive, partially exploratory. On the one hand, there already is a great amount of knowledge available on this subject. More exactly, the state of affairs in the domain of defence



cooperation and how cooperation started in the first place has already been profoundly examined. On the other hand, one could argue that the research question indicates that the objective of this dissertation is exploration. "To what extent" is a rather open question. The reason for this is that the opinion of the Belgian army senior ranks has never before been examined. In this way, the aim of this thesis is also to explore the subject and find out whether or not they support the establishment of a European army (Van Thiel, 2010). Ultimately, with this research, I want to contribute to the knowledge on this topic by examining what the opinions of the Belgian army senior ranks are, whether their opinions can have an influence on the political decision-making with respect to establishing such a European army and whether these opinions coincide with those of the Flemish fractions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives (J. Voets, personal communication, November 14, 2017). Based on these findings I hope that the actors involved retain new information to reconsider and/or further develop their stance towards a European army.

## **1.6 Research design**

### **1.6.1 Location**

As time and resources are very sparse, this research is limited to the Kingdom of Belgium. Only the opinions of Belgian army senior ranks and the Flemish fractions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives will be examined and not those of the other 27 EU Member States.

Why exactly focus on Belgium in this thesis? It is such a small country, why would their opinion be of any importance? To understand this, one must look at the history of European integration. With regard to population and surface, it could be argued that Belgium indeed is a relatively small country, which makes it seem as a rather unimportant international actor. Belgium has however been one of the forerunners of the European project. It was one of the founding fathers of the European Union, NATO and the United Nations. Belgium has held important positions in all of these organisations. It is one of the ten most frequent non-permanent members of the UN Security Council; it has held the presidency of the European Council between 2009 and 2014 and was president of the EU Council twelve times now. Not to forget, a lot of the EU's and NATO's institutions are located in the country. Moreover, Belgium is

a member of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in which it also plays a leading role (Flamant, 2014; European Union, 2018a). One can assert that if a country that has supported the EU from the very beginning and that holds relatively important positions in various defence organisations, would back out from a European army, this would send out a monumental, negative signal to the whole European project. Moreover, even the argument tackling the relative international unimportance of Belgium because of its size can be countered. With a population of 11.2 million inhabitants and a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in purchasing power standard (PPS) of 119, the country respectively ranks ninth and eight compared to the other 27 EU member states (Bartels, Kellner & Optenhögel, 2017; European Union, 2018b). Subsequently, Belgium is often called the largest amongst the small EU member states. In other words, Belgium is a force to be reckoned with.

### **1.6.2 Timeframe**

The timeframe of this research largely coincides with the current parliamentary legislature. This implies that stances uttered by the Flemish fractions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives between 2014 to present will be scrutinised. As the Belgian army senior ranks have never before discussed this very topic, their current opinions will be depicted. It must be noted though that in 'Chapter 2: the history of European integration and defence', the road towards a European army since 1947 will be discussed. This implies that this research also takes into account the influence past events can exercise on current positions.

### **1.6.3 Units of analysis**

In the first place, the units of analysis are restricted to the Belgian army senior ranks, and not all Belgian military personnel. As Belgian Defence deploys some 30,800 men and women in uniform today, it would be highly impossible to study them all (Bartels, Kellner & Optenhögel, 2017). Internal documents show that the Belgian Defence's personnel are divided into three categories. First, there are the officers (officieren), second, the petty officers (onderofficieren) and third there are the volunteers. This thesis will focus on the first category. Within this first category, a further distinction is

made between general officers (opperofficieren), senior officers (hoofdofficieren) and junior officers (lagere officieren). This thesis will explicitly focus on the general officers in all four components (the Land Component, Air Component, Marine Component and the Medical Component) and the joint service (Defensie, n.d.-c).

This research also focuses on the Flemish fractions<sup>1</sup> in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, which also makes these units of analysis. To delineate the research population as optimally as possible, it was decided to only study the Flemish (or partly Flemish) fractions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives that have a member in the Commission on National Defence. This means specifically that five fractions will be under study: N-VA, CD&V, Open Vld, sp.a and Ecolo-Groen (De Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers, n.d.).

## **1.7 Methodology**

### **1.7.1 Data collection**

What typifies a qualitative research is that it does not fixate on one method of data collection. Accordingly, Mortelmans (2011) affirms that using multiple techniques to acquire data is the rule, rather than the exception. The author however does pose that in a qualitative research, one method always tends to dominate. This is equally the case in this research, as one will be able to derive from the following paragraphs.

In order to be able to answer the first three sub questions, a literature study was the most important method to collect data. As mentioned earlier, the topic that is ‘a European army’ has been profoundly scrutinised already. As a consequence, a great amount of knowledge on this topic is already available. Therefore, the choice was made to study data already collected. A diverse and broad range of literature has subsequently been consulted and employed, ranging from academic papers to textbooks. Given that the official web pages of the European External Action Service and the European Defence Agency contain a substantial amount of reliable and complete information, which can help to answer the first few sub questions, these two web pages are the main sources for chapter two and three of this dissertation.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘fraction’ and ‘political party’ will be used as synonyms throughout this dissertation.

However, in order to be able to answer the central research question and the last three sub questions, other methods of collecting data had to be deployed. Whether the Belgian army senior ranks and the Flemish fractions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives do (not) support the idea of a European army has never before been examined. As a result, the available data is rather scarce. A qualitative method, namely conducting interviews, was therefore deployed in order to collect the necessary data as regards to the opinions of the Belgian army senior ranks. With regards to the opinion of the Flemish fractions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, interviews, the fraction's official stances on the topic, as well as official press releases, were used. The official stances and press releases aimed at verifying and complementing the information gathered through the interviews. That way, the reliability of the information collected during the interviews was monitored.

The type of interviews that were conducted can be classified as elite-interviews. The respondents were namely selected on the basis of their position and/or their knowledge of the topic at hand (van Thiel, 2015).

To be more precise, in order to examine the opinion of the fractions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, one Member of Parliament (MP) per fraction who is either a permanent member or a substitute of the Commission on National Defence, was interviewed using a semi-structured approach. The rationale behind this is two-fold. On the one hand, the topic at hand, a European army/defence, is a federal matter and therefore the choice was made to scrutinise the fractions in the federal parliament and not those in the Flemish parliament. On the other hand, it was expected that the MP's who are a member of the Commission on National Defence would have more knowledge of and interest in the topic of a European army than other MP's. The choice to apply a semi-structured method of conducting an interview was also made consciously. By using the same topic list for the interviews with politicians of different fractions, it was expected that some level of standardisation between the different interviews was obtained. This had to facilitate the subsequent analysis and comparison of the data. This method however also allowed posing additional questions, depending on the situation at hand. Furthermore, through this method of collecting data it was believed that only relevant information was to be collected from respondents who have insight in the topic. Besides, it was presumed

that it was a good way to get an understanding of the different opinions of the various political fractions, resulting in valid results. There are however also a considerable amount of downsides to the method, which were identified from the offset. It was known that both the conducting as well as the analysing of the interviews would be highly time-consuming. Moreover, because it would take so much time, only one member per fraction could be interviewed. Reliability could thus form an issue. In order to resolve this as much as possible, questions were explicitly asked about the opinion of the fraction with the emphasis on the fact that it was not about the individual opinions of the MP's. Further, the intention was to resolve this issue by selecting 'experts' in the topic at hand and by backing up the data gathered through the interviews with additional secondary information (van Thiel, 2015).

With regard to the Belgian army senior ranks, semi-structured elite-interviews with the Chief of Defence, the four different component commanders and two other general officers were undertaken. That way, the opinion of the four different components is represented, but also a more overarching and specialized vision is acquired. Here representativeness clearly forms an issue. It was originally intended to conduct a survey, which can target way more respondents and which would have been a better method to obtain the necessary representativeness. However, because of the high-end profile of the respondents and in the light of recent events (cf. the F-16 file) it proved to be unattainable to survey the generals. The questionnaire was planned to be conducted once the interviews shed some light on the possible answer categories. By the time the survey could be send, the political context had changed considerably. Therefore, representativeness of the opinions of the Belgian army senior ranks forms the biggest limitation of this research.

The structure of the semi-structured questionnaires that served as the basis for the interviews was well thought out. Both the interviews with the MP's as well as those with the generals started by asking the actors to clarify what they actually understood by the concept of a European army as this was crucial for the further course of the discussion. Moreover, the more sensitive questions were posed later on in the interview. That way, the responses to other questions were already ensured. An example of a semi-structured questionnaire used in this research can be found in annex I and annex II.

Eventually, twelve elite-interviews were conducted within the framework of this research. The table below gives an overview.

**Table 1 – systematic overview of interviews**

Function	Interviewee	Date	Duration of the interview
MP for CD&V and permanent member Commission on National Defence	Hendrik Bogaert	12/03/2018	25 min
MP for Groen and substitute Commission on National Defence	Wouter De Vriendt	20/02/2018	19 min
Diplomatic Director of the Minister of Defence, Steven Vandepuut (N-VA)	Pascal Heyman	15/12/2017	1h 32 min
Deputy Diplomatic Director of the Minister of Defence	Floris Van den Broeck		
MP for Open Vld and permanent member Commission on National Defence	Dirk Van Mechelen	27/02/2018	33 min
MP for sp.a and permanent member Commission on National Defence	Alain Top	22/02/2018	33 min
Assistant Chief of Staff Strategy	Major-general Philippe Boucké	8/03/2018	29 min
Chief of Defence	General Marc Compagnol	8/03/2018	31 min
Director General of the Directorate General Material Resources	Lieutenant-general Rudy Debaene	8/03/2018	43 min
Commander ad interim of the Air Component	Colonel Frédéric Givron	6/04/2018	34 min
Commander of the Medical Component	Major-general Pierre Neirinckx	8/04/2018	37 min

Commander of the Naval Component	Divisional admiral Wim Robberecht	8/04/2018	27 min
Commander of the Land Component	Major-general Marc Thys	16/04/2018	19 min

### 1.7.2 Data analysis and reporting

As Mortelmans (2009) states, the analysis of qualitative data requires a certain degree of flexibility. After all, the goal of the analysis is to uncover a person's real opinion and views. Moreover, the use of qualitative software programmes such as NVivo is known to be time-consuming and can even lead to alienation of the researcher with his data. Besides, it is only recommended to use programmes such as NVivo when one is no longer capable to do the analyses manually because of the amplitude of the data (Mortelmans, 2011). It is no different in this research either. Accordingly, two different methods to analyse the data collected through the interviews were employed.

Important to note before thoroughly depicting which approach was particularly used, is that all twelve interviews conducted within the framework of this master dissertation have been meticulously transcribed<sup>2</sup> as each interview was recorded.

The data gathered about the opinions of the five fractions under study was manually analysed. It only concerns five interviews and each fraction is discussed separately in chapter five. Subsequently, an overview was easy to keep. Moreover, the use of NVivo would not bring about time savings or better quality (Mortelmans, 2011). To analyse the data, the Grounded Theory approach by Glaser and Strauss (as cited in Mortelmans, 2009), served as a guiding principle. The objective within the Grounded Theory method is not to test hypotheses but to derive your own theory from the information gathered. To ensure the quality of the theory, it is based on information acquired from multiple respondents. More precisely, the analysis started with open coding. The interviews were divided into smaller parts. That way, different parts of information, which are relevant in answering the research question, could easily be

---

<sup>2</sup> Given that some respondents indicated that they did not want their entire interview published, it was decided not to include the transcripts in the annexes.

isolated. Axial coding and selective coding were not performed on the data, as it did not seem to be relevant, given that this research does not study a social phenomenon (Mortelmans, 2009). Once the positions of the different fractions became clear and were all written out, comparisons could be made between the different stances.

By contrast, the interviews conducted with the seven officers were analysed using NVivo. It concerns seven quite lengthy interviews that are simultaneously discussed in chapter 6 of this research. A first step was uploading all transcripts of the interviews in the program. Next, a coding scheme was created on the basis of the components that were to be discussed in the dissertation. This can be considered as a deductive approach. However, each head component was further divided into subcomponents based on what emerged from the interviews themselves. This implies an inductive approach was equally used (K. Verleye, personal communication, December 12, 2018). The latter ensures that the data was analysed in an objective manner and initial expectations were less relevant. Once the data was coded, statements could for example be made about how many respondents made similar remarks. Figure 1 shows the resulting coding scheme.

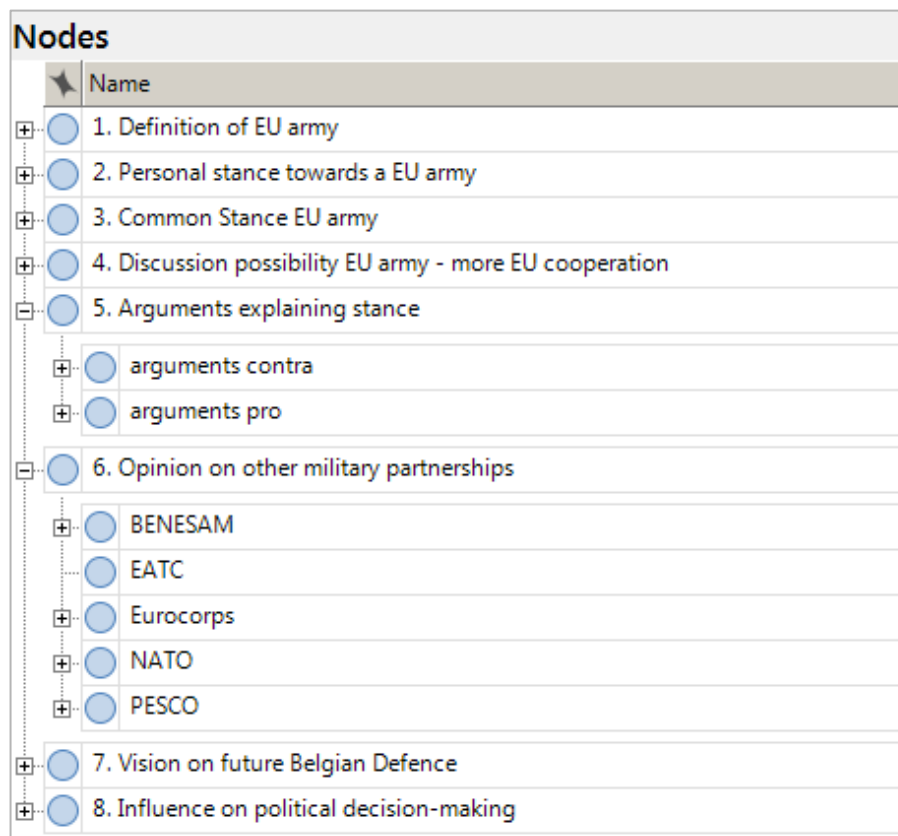


Figure 1 - coding scheme in NVivo



A systematic conduct of the analysis was guaranteed by coding the answers to the same questions in each interview. Interviews were not coded all at once, but question per question. That way, comparisons between interviews could be made more easily.

Finally, the table below gives a clear overview of how the different research questions are answered and how the data was analysed.

**Table 2 – systematic overview of methodology**

Research question	Type of data	Way of analysing data
SQ 1	Secondary data	Manual
SQ 2	Secondary data	Manual
SQ 3	Secondary data	Manual
SQ 4	Primary data - interviews	NVivo
SQ 5	Primary data - interviews	NVivo
SQ 6	Primary data - interviews	Manual
CRQ	Primary data - interviews	Manual - NVivo

### 1.7.3 Quality criteria in a qualitative research

The quality of a qualitative research seems to be the subject of a great debate. One of the heaviest critiques is that a qualitative research simply parrots its respondents, rather than truly analysing the acquired data. Moreover, some say that a qualitative research is nothing more than the subjective impressions of the researcher (Mortelmans, 2009). In what follows, these accusations will be refuted as much as possible.

Mortelmans (2009) poses that quality of a research is all about objectivity. Objectivity implies that the subjectivity of the researcher cannot play a role in acquiring, analysing and reporting data. A few measures were taken in order to ensure the highest level of objectivity possible. First of all, it was ensured that a respondent from each political fraction was heard. Like mentioned earlier, also the vision of officers of each of the four components, but equally an overarching vision represented by the CHOD and two more specialised opinions were represented. A second measure taken to secure objectivity is the use of the same template for the discussion of the

stance of every fraction. Finally, all throughout the analysing and reporting of the data, a critical attitude was adopted. While chapters five and six of this research are quite descriptive, critical remarks were made throughout the text.

Objectivity can be further divided into validity and reliability. Validity in its turn can be broken up into internal and external validity. The former entails that the tool actually measures what it claims to measure. This was equally taken into account, as interviews are the ideal tool to measure opinions in the first place. Moreover, with regard to the stances of the political fractions, experts in the topic at hand were selected and from the beginning of the interviews, it was made clear it was about their party's vision and not their own. During the analysis and in the reporting of the data in chapter 5, it is also made clear when the personal opinion of an MP diverges from their fraction's. External validity refers to being able to transfer the findings to the whole population and other situations and settings. Regarding the officers, this could form an issue (Mortelmans, 2009).

Finally, the level of reliability of this research will be discussed. This criterion concerns both being able to get the same results with the same respondents at a different time, as well as getting the same results with different respondents. The reliability of the opinions of the fractions was ensured by backing up the information acquired through the interviews with external data such as the official positions of the parties, which can be found on their websites. As respondents were selected from different branches of the Belgian army and mostly similar experiences seem to shape personal opinions, the reliability of the Belgian army senior ranks' was also taken into consideration (Mortelmans, 2009).

It can be concluded that this research shows some pitfalls. The biggest limitations are the parroting of respondents because of the descriptive nature of this dissertation and the lack of representativeness pertaining to the general officers, which results in limited reliability and generalisability. This research does give a good indication of the stances of Belgian army senior ranks towards a European army. As far as the stances of the fractions go, there does not seem to be as big an issue.

## 1.8 Conceptual framework

### 1.8.1 Models for a European army

It is highly important to have a clear understanding of what is exactly understood under a 'European army' as perceptions and opinions are crucial in answering the central research question. According to Trybus (2016) three models for a European Army can be discerned.

The first model discerned is what is called the 'European Defence Force' and refers to the 1950 attempt to establish a 'European army', which aimed at replacing the national armed forces of the Member States. This (failed) attempt will be more thoroughly discussed in section 2.2. The 'European Defence Force model' can be viewed as the most ambitious but also the most unlikely to be established type of 'joint-force'. It namely entails a significant transfer of national sovereignty to a supranational body, in this case the European Union. Member States would no longer have a national army at their disposal. The European Commission or a possibly newly established institution would command the armed force from Brussels (Trybus, 2016 ; Debating Europe, 2016). Having only one command chain instead of 28 is the key in this type of joint force. This model for a European army is accordingly often compared to "a kind of army like the United States of America's" (M. Thys, personal communication, March 16, 2018).

The second model discerned by Trybus (2016) is that of the 'European Rapid Reaction Force' as put forward in Saint-Malo and Helsinki (cfr. 2.4). Under this model "a limited yet sizable common force made up of voluntary contributions of the Member States, with common command structures and budgetary arrangements" can be perceived (Trybus, 2016, p. 7). Member states would still have their own national armies, which would mainly be occupied with homeland defence. The co-existent European Rapid Reaction force would then be mostly deployed for peacekeeping operations. It is argued that this option could be possible in the medium-term future.

The third and last model put forward by Trybus (2016) is that of the 'EU Battle Group Force'. A European army as perceived in this model entails that Member States

voluntarily put battle groups of 1,500 soldiers at the disposal of the EU. This model is actually already more or less in place today but has to this day never been activated (cfr. 2.4). Subsequently, this model is arguably the most attainable one, but also the model that brings about the smallest amount of benefits according to Trybus (2016).

Being well aware that there are plenty more variations of definitions of what a European army could possibly encompass, this master dissertation focuses on these three options as it is inconceivable to depict them all. To be more precise, as the first model, the 'European Defence Force model', is the definition of a European army, which is the most commonly used and is the one that describes best what is ultimately perceived by a European army in the long term, this is the definition that will be used throughout the rest of this dissertation.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND DEFENCE**

The question of whether the European Union needs its own armed forces is not plucked out of thin air. The following paragraphs will show that the idea of a common European defence is older than the European Union and its precursors itself.

### **2.1 The beginning of European (defence) cooperation**

The idea of a collective European defence apparatus arose from the ashes of World War II and the threat of the Cold War. It can be argued that the first fundamentals ever laid for European cooperation, in particular for European defence and security cooperation, was the signing of the Dunkirk Treaty in March 1947 by France and Britain (Bailes & Messervy-Whiting, 2011). The treaty namely provided a mutual defence guarantee, which aimed at preventing any possible future German aggression in Europe (European Defence Agency, 2017a).

The following step in European defence and integration was the establishment of the Western Union by the signature of the Brussels Treaty in 1948. The Brussels Treaty created a permanent guaranteed defence relationship between the UK, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The treaty contained provisions for a joint military organisation, which was a first in European history. This was an important step towards the realisation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which was created through the Treaty of Washington signed in 1949. Once NATO's own permanent defence structures started to take shape, the signatories of the Brussels Treaty decided that their joint military activities should be incorporated into the Atlantic Alliance (Bailes & Messervy-Whiting, 2011).

This however did not mean the immediate death of the idea of a separate European defence community (Koutrakos, 2013).

## 2.2 European Defence Community

In 1950, Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom at the time, called for the creation of a European Army under a unified command. Churchill's speech must be seen in a Europe faced with the alarming possibility of having to live under a Communist regime with the outbreak of the Korean War (Koutrakos, 2013). Fearing that the communist wave would reach their territory, West Germany asked the allied forces for reinforcement. The United States provided the FRG assistance but insisted on the rearmament of the country. France, however, was anxious to avoid the rearmament of West Germany at all costs. Influenced by this dilemma and inspired by Winston Churchill, French Prime Minister René Pleven proposed to establish a European army called the "European Defence Forces" by creating a European Defence Community (EDC) (Dehullu, 2013 ; Bailes & Messervy-Whiting, 2011; Trybus, 2016).

The so-called Pleven Plan aiming at integrating the defence of the Member States coincided with the very first step in the creation of what would later be named the European Union. The Schuman declaration proposing to establish a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) had namely just been adopted (Koutrakos, 2013). The forerunner of the European Union was set up with the aim to principally achieve a peace settlement between two major powers within the region, France and Germany. Six countries; Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands therefore gathered and concluded the Treaty of Paris in 1951 (Dinan, 2005). Even though the focus of the ECSC was mainly purely economic, it had a clear security underpinning (Koutrakos, 2013). The idea was that the pooling of coal and steel would make war unthinkable and materially impossible (EUR-Lex, 2010).

What can be gathered is that the proposal for the EDC emerged against a background of considerable global insecurity and that economic integration was the appropriate means of tackling security issues. Accordingly, Pleven drew upon the ECSC model. The idea was to establish a supranational European Defence Community, which had common institutions, common armed forces and a common budget (Koutrakos, 2013). The Member States could no longer recruit or even maintain their own armed forces. In other words, the European Defence Force would

replace the Member States' national armies (Trybus, 2016). This kind of intended transfer of sovereignty from the Member States to an independent and autonomous authority was unheard of (Koutrakos, 2013).

The EDC Treaty was actually signed by the six founding Member States in Paris in 1952. However, after the signature of the Treaty, the plan was put aside since the very architects of the plan, in particular the National Assembly of France, rejected the Treaty's ratification in 1954 (NATO, n.d.-a; Trybus, 2016). The reasons for the rejection were linked to controversy around the remilitarization of Germany and France's concern of retaining sovereignty over its armed forces (NATO, n.d.-a).

Despite the substantial set-back in European defence cooperation due to this negative decision of the French parliament, a solution was eventually found for the rearmament of West Germany by modifying the earlier mentioned Treaty of Brussels. This led to the creation of the Western European Union (WEU), which now also included West-Germany and Italy. This paved the way for the accession of the FRG to NATO in 1955 (Wessel, 2003; The European Institute, 2009).

One can conclude that after the failure of the European Defence Community, European defence became an exclusive competence of NATO for the next 38 years (Trybus, 2016).

### **2.3 Common Foreign and Security Policy**

It took until 1992 for security to be put back on the EU's agenda and for defence to be briefly mentioned again. With the Treaty of Maastricht, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was created. The Treaty of Maastricht, a first version of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), stated in its article 17 that the CFSP would encompass all security questions in relation to the Union. Moreover, it recognized a common defence policy and a common defence as a possible future step. An actual common defence policy was however not created, a common defence even less. Moreover, the CFSP must be outlined in an intergovernmental setting, which meant that the Member States retained a veto on all the decisions made within the policy

domain (Trybus, 2016). The CFSP had, and still has, a strong intergovernmental character (Dehullu, 2013).

In 1999, the Amsterdam Treaty introduced the function of a High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (HR). The aim of the creation of this function was to remedy the difficulty the Union already encountered with speaking with one voice concerning the CFSP. Besides aligning the Member States, the HR also had to make the Common Foreign and Security Policy more visible to the outside world (Dehullu, 2013). Additionally, the Treaty of Amsterdam determined that the EU would “avail itself of WEU to elaborate and implement decisions and actions of the Union which have defence implications” (Treaty of Amsterdam, 1997, art. 17). Previously, all decisions on defence issues had been transferred to the Western European Union (Wessel, 2003).

The following year, the CFSP got even more strengthened, this time by the European Council agreement to establish a Political and Security Committee (PSC), a EU Military Committee (EUMC), and a EU Military Staff (EUMS) (European Defence Agency, 2017b). The three bodies are respectively composed of national diplomats, the Chiefs of Defence represented by their delegates, and a EU military staff. The PSC is responsible for dealing with all aspects of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, while the EUMC gives advice and makes recommendations to the PSC. The latter body also provides the EU military staff with military direction. The EUMS in its turn provides military expertise and support to the ESDP, including support for the EU-led missions and operations (Wessel, 2003).

## **2.4 European Security and Defence Policy**

After the Treaty of Maastricht, it however took another ten years for defence to be put fully back on the Union’s agenda with the signing of the Treaty of Nice in 2001. The Treaty removed the references to the WEU and as a consequence, the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) became a genuine part of the CFSP. In paragraph 2.5 it will be discussed what the ESDP precisely implies. Besides the establishment of the ESDP, the Treaty of Nice also gave the Union the competence to operate within the full range of the so-called ‘Petersberg Tasks’. These tasks were



meant to outline the objectives of the ESDP. To be more precise, the tasks included humanitarian, rescue and peacekeeping tasks and tasks performed by combat forces in crisis management (Trybus, 2016; Wessel, 2003). Important to note here is that these Petersberg tasks were first created and implemented by the WEU, as early as 1992 (The European Institute, 2009). A last important provision incorporated in the Treaty of Nice, relevant for this dissertation, is the provision establishing the possibility for enhanced cooperation within the CFSP domain. Enhanced cooperation could however still not relate to matters with military or defence implications (Dehullu, 2013; EUR-Lex, n.d.).

The ESDP came after the Saint-Malo summit held in December 1998. During this summit, the former President of France, Jacques Chirac, and the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, agreed on a Joint Declaration on European Defence. In their Joint Declaration the two leaders stressed the importance for the Union to have its own capacity to undertake autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces (Trybus, 2016). The summit must be seen in the light of the Kosovo War and the leading role the USA took in the armed conflict. It showed that Europe needed its own military capacity, outside of NATO, and should no longer be fully dependent on the US for military support (C. Dehullu, personal communication, March 22, 2017).

As Trybus (2016) puts it, Saint-Malo 'triggered' some important developments in the field of CFSP. The European Council summits in 1999 'Europeanised' the Saint-Malo declaration and set among other things, the ambitious 'Helsinki Headline Goal'. The headline goal entailed the establishment of a European Rapid Reaction Force, which was to be able to be deployed within 60 days and was to be comprised of up to 60.000 soldiers by 2003. Moreover, this force had to be able to sustain itself for up to a year to perform the previously mentioned Petersberg tasks (Taylor, 2017). The European Rapid Reaction Force was however not established as foreseen by 2003 and eventually remained a dead letter (Trybus, 2016).

Next up was the Berlin-Plus agreement negotiated between the EU and NATO in 2002. The agreement envisaged secured access to NATO assets for Europeans when the US would opt out of operations. The Berlin-Plus agreement was however not a big success. The reason for this can be found in the disagreement on the US-

led invasion of Iraq in 2003 that dominated Europe at the time. While the UK sided with the US and even joined them, France and Germany publicly opposed the military invasion (Taylor, 2017).

Linked to this is the attempt to create a European military headquarter separate from NATO. In 2004 the European Defence Agency (EDA) was established. As the UK strongly opposed the idea of a separate military headquarter, it made sure the Agency was kept as minimal as possible. The EDA eventually grew out to be a centre for developing crisis management capabilities, promoting armaments cooperation and developing the European defence industrial and technological base (Taylor, 2017).

Javier Solana, the EU's first High Representative, tried to overcome the division created by the Iraq war through the drafting of the first European Security Strategy in 2003. The European Security Strategy forms the conceptual framework for the ESDP by identifying the common security challenges and building consensus for providing the resources and capabilities to address the issues (Taylor, 2017; C. Dehullu, personal communication, March 22, 2017). Solana's successor-but-one, Federica Mogherini, updated the strategy in 2016 and rebranded it as the European Global Strategy (EUGS) (Taylor, 2017).

A last effort in this list of developments triggered by Saint-Malo is the Battlegroup concept. The Battlegroup concept was called into existence in 2005. The concept implies a rotation system in which at all times two Battlegroups are available to the EU Council to undertake military operations. A EU Battlegroup consists of at least 1,500 men and women. While the Battlegroups have been fully operational since 2007, they have never been called into action (Taylor, 2017).

## **2.5 Treaty of Lisbon**

The EU's most recent treaty, the Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force in 2009, brought about some important implications for the CFSP and the ESDP. In what follows, these implications will be shortly discussed.

First, the ESDP was renamed the Common Security and Defence Policy or CSDP. The CSDP forms an integral part of the CFSP and provides the EU with the operational capacity to undertake both civilian missions and military operations outside the Union (Quille, 2008; European External Action Service; 2017c). These missions include peacekeeping and conflict prevention operations and operations strengthening international security (Quille, 2008).

Second, enhanced cooperation is now also possible within the scope of CSDP. There are however still strict requirements for enhanced cooperation within the field of CFSP (Quille, 2008).

Third, the position of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy has been upgraded. The HR is now responsible for conducting the CFSP, chairs the Council of Foreign Affairs and is one of the Vice-Presidents of the Commission. The upgrade had to create greater consistency and coordination within the EU. Moreover, a European External Action Service (EEAS) supports the HR from now on (Quille, 2008).

Fourth, the Treaty of Lisbon brings about an extension of the scope of the Petersberg tasks. The tasks now also include among other things: joint disarmament operations, military advice and assistance tasks and tasks combatting terrorism (Quille, 2008).

A fifth and sixth immediately notable change are the introduction of a mutual assistance and a mutual solidarity clause. Remarkable is that the mutual assistance article strongly resembles a mutual defence clause like NATO's (Quille, 2008).

A last important implication for the CFSP is the first-time introduction of the term 'Permanent Structured Cooperation' (Quille, 2008). This term allows willing Member States to pursue greater cooperation in defence and security (European Commission, 2017). The recent application of this provision will be discussed in section 3.2.

## 2.6 Conclusion

What can be deducted from this chapter and should be taken into consideration when answering the research question, is that the idea to establish a European army has faced a lot of set-backs in the past. History can by all means influence current opinions and should therefore not be overlooked when scrutinising the current support for an army amongst the Europeans.

## **CHAPTER 3**

# **EUROPEAN DEFENCE COOPERATION AT PRESENT**

This chapter tries to answer the following sub-question: 'What is the current state of affairs concerning military cooperation within the EU?'. This chapter is relevant and indispensable as the respondents often refer to the partnerships and projects discussed in this section.

### **3.1 Missions and operations**

Since the beginning of this century, more than 30 missions and operations within the framework of the CSDP have been launched. It all started in 2003 with a policing mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina and a military peacekeeping operation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Since then, the EU has launched 22 civilian missions, 11 military operations and one mixed operation, taking place in various parts of Europe, Africa and the Middle East. 16 CSDP operations are currently on-going (European External Action Service, 2017c; Trybus, 2016).

One of the most successful operations undertaken within the framework of the CSDP is Operation ATALANTA or EU NAVFOR, which was launched in 2008 and is still running. The objective of this operation is inter alia to protect vessels, deter and disrupt piracy and monitor fishing activities off the Horn of Africa and the Western Indian Ocean (EUNAVFOR, 2017). Belgium actually took part in the operation with its frigate *Louise Marie* (FOD Buitenlandse Zaken, Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, 2016).

The civilian missions can count on financial means from the CFSP budget. Personnel and running costs of military operations on the other hand are not covered by the EU budget and thus must be met by the individual member states themselves (European External Action Service, 2017c). For common costs, such as communication costs or costs of medical evacuation, the so-called Athena Mechanism is used (EUNAVFOR, 2017).

For the specific topic of this master dissertation, it is also interesting to look at the used planning and conduct procedures in terms of decision-making, force generation and command and control structures. In the first place, the decision to launch a mission or operation is taken at the level of the Council and requires the approval of all Member States. Secondly, as can be gathered from what is described above, the Member States themselves provide the majority of assets and personnel required. This applies to both missions as well as operations. Finally, command and control is in the hands of the Political and Security Committee. The PSC “exercises political control and provides strategic direction of both civilian and military crisis management missions and operations, under the authority of the Council and the High Representative” (European External Action Service, 2017c, p. 2). The location of the operational headquarters depends on which Member State takes the role as framework nation. As agreed under the earlier discussed Berlin-Plus agreement, the EU can also make use of the NATO command structures. The Member States can however also decide to activate the EU Operations Centre (European External Action Service, 2017c).

It must be noted though that so far, these missions and operations have been relatively small-scaled, were most of the times initiated by NATO or the UN and can be located at the low end of the security spectrum (Trybus, 2016).

### **3.2 PESCO**

On November 13, 2017, 23 European Union Member States signed a historic pact to ‘integrate’ their national armies to a certain extent. This tighter defence collaboration, covering troops and weapons, is called the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) (Petzinger, 2017; Shalal & Emmott, 2017). In sections 1.2 and 2.5, the concept of PESCO has already been touched upon briefly. In this paragraph, the joint defence pact will be more thoroughly discussed.

Rather unexpectedly, by December 2017, traditionally non-aligned/neutral Ireland and NATO-minded Portugal also decided to join in on PESCO, which leaves the final count on 25 Member States. The only EU Member States that do not have the intention to participate are the United Kingdom, Malta and Denmark (Bielenberg,

2017; Council of the European Union, 2017). The three countries that have chosen not to take the first steps towards the creation of a full-blown permanent structured cooperation in the field of defence are respectively either leaving the EU, have a particularly small army or opted out from the CDSP in the first place (Blockmans, 2017).

The pioneers of the project are on the one hand, once military adversaries, France and Germany, and on the other hand the European Commission (Biscop, 2017).

As already stated, the Permanent Structured Cooperation in the area of CSDP was introduced back in 2009, with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. The main objective is to “allow willing and able member states to develop jointly defence capabilities, invest in shared projects, and enhance the operational readiness and contribution of their armed forces.” (Council of the European Union, 2017).

The difference between PESCO and other forms of defence cooperation is the fact that it has a Treaty-based framework and consequently that the commitments made by the participating Member States are legally binding. Important to stress here once more is that it concerns cooperation between EU Member States who are capable *and* willing to jointly develop defence capabilities and make them accessible for EU military led operations. In other words, participation is strictly voluntary. Moreover, decision-making is ensured to remain in the hands of the participating members (European External Action Service, 2017d).

Concretely, it is expected from every participating Member State that they provide a plan containing the national contributions and efforts they have agreed to make within the framework for closer defence cooperation. These plans will be subject to regular assessment to determine whether the Member States are fulfilling their commitments. The assessment will be undertaken at the Council level. The assessment mechanism is a first remarkable difference from the voluntary approach, which is the current rule within the CSDP domain (European External Action Service, 2017d).

So far, a list of 17 collaborative PESCO projects has been drawn up. The projects can be found in the area of capability development and in the operational dimension. The projects range from “the establishment of a European Medical Command, an EU Training Mission Competence Centre, Cyber Rapid Response Teams and Mutual Assistance in Cyber Security, to Military Disaster Relief and an upgrade of Maritime Surveillance.” (European External Action Service, 2017d).

While some media claim that PESCO is the closest step taken towards establishing a defence union in years, which makes opponents fear that it is the first step on the road towards a European army, others seem to be disappointed with the actual content of the pact (Bielenberg, 2017; Deutsche Welle, 2017).

With the latter, mostly France is alluded. The country aimed at a greater level of ambition and had a smaller, more exclusive, group of states in mind. The country is so much as already preparing for tighter defence integration outside of the PESCO framework (Blockmans, 2017).

Finally, it is worth noting that PESCO does not have any intention to duplicate or compete with NATO (Blockmans, 2017). Instead, PESCO should be viewed as complimentary to the Atlantic Alliance. It should strengthen the European pillar within the organisation (Biscop, 2017).

### **3.3 European Defence Fund**

The above-mentioned Permanent Structured Cooperation between 25 EU Member States is closely linked to the establishment of a European Defence Fund (EDF) (European External Action Service, 2017d). The objective of the EDF is to foster cooperation and cost savings among all 28 EU Member States in the production of defence technology and equipment. The idea is that by pooling resources and increased collaboration, an output is created which would not be feasible for the individual member states to reach on their own. Moreover, standardisation of equipment, reduction of duplication of costs, innovation of the defence industry and a better interoperability between the 28 European national armies should be generated (European External Action Service, 2017b).



Specifically, collaborative research on defence technologies and products, joint development and the joint acquirement of capability (e.g. bulk buying of helicopters) will respectively be funded by the EU budget, incentivised by the EU and provided with practical support from the European Commission (European External Action Service, 2017b).

The fund, partly financed by the EU budget and partly by the individual Member States' budget, is set to generate an investment of €5,5 billion per year for research and development ends (European External Action Service, 2017b).

As previously mentioned, PESCO and EDF are closely connected. Projects realized within the framework of PESCO will for example be able to benefit from a 10% bonus (European External Action Service, 2017b).

### **3.4 Coordinated Annual Review on Defence**

Besides the firm link between PESCO and the EDF, a complementary and mutually reinforcing relationship between PESCO and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) equally exists (European External Action Service, 2017d). The idea behind CARD, which is to be run by the EDA, seems to be almost exactly the same as the other two recent initiatives in the field of defence. It is namely also aimed at deepening defence cooperation by addressing capability development. Through the annual monitoring of member states' national defence spending plans, shortfalls in military capabilities will be identified and highlighted and more coherence in the spending plans will be promoted (European External Action Service, 2017d; European External Action Service, 2017a).

### **3.5 Other forms of cooperation in practice**

In this section, other forms of military cooperation in which Belgium partakes will be deliberated. Firstly NATO, secondly BENESAM, thirdly Eurocorps and finally EATC will be briefly examined. Other forms of military cooperation, which take place between other EU member states, are beyond the scope of this dissertation as the main focus is on Belgium.

### 3.5.1 NATO

As mentioned in paragraph 2.1, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was founded as early as in 1949 and presently counts 29 member states from both Europe and North America. Through the use of military as well as political means, NATO's objective is to provide its members freedom and security (NATO, n.d.-b). "The Alliance is founded on the principle of 'collective defence,' meaning that if one NATO Ally is attacked, then all NATO Allies are attacked." (NATO, 2017a). This principle of 'collective defence' is enshrined in article 5 of the Treaty of Washington, also known as the 'collective defence clause' (NATO, n.d.-b).

NATO actively manages crises around the globe and helps fighting terrorism. To do so, individual member states place troops and equipment under a unified NATO command. Moreover, every member state has to contribute to the budget of the organisation to finance its staff and facilities. Their largest contribution to the organisation however forms their provision of troops or equipment (NATO, 2017a). While there is such thing as the often talked about 2% defence spending target, which implies that 2% of the GDP has to be spent on national defence, this threshold is not actually legally binding as it is self-imposed. As a consequence, only five of the 29 alliance members meet the threshold, which was agreed upon in 2006 (Bremmer, 2017).

As stated earlier, the European Union often takes over or assists NATO led missions and operations. NATO is after all a crisis management organisation with a large military capacity at its disposal (NATO, 2016).

### 3.5.2 BENESAM

The collaboration between the Belgian and the Dutch navy is said to be one of the most far-reaching, most intensive forms of military cooperation for both countries. (Royal Netherlands Navy, n.d.-a).

Under the heading of a military agreement called 'BENESAM', which was established in 1948, the close cooperation between the neighbouring countries started to take

shape. The idea behind BENESAM was to establish a joint staff, which was to be deployed during wartime (Rubbens, 2017).

Presently, the two countries' navies work together in the area of training, the purchase of ships, fleet maintenance and logistic organisation. The cooperation is so extensive that the two national navy staffs were even combined into one single command structure, the Admiralty Benelux (Royal Netherlands Navy, n.d.-a). The Admiralty Benelux is lead by an 'Admiral Benelux' who is responsible for the supervising of the close cooperation. The commander of the Royal Netherlands Navy holds this position. The position of deputy Admiral Benelux is held by the Commander of the Belgian navy, Divisional admiral Wim Robberecht (Defensie, n.d.-a; Royal Netherlands Navy, n.d.-b).

Notwithstanding the fact that the two national navies seem to be completely intertwined, the countries retain the right of sovereignty with regard to the political decision to deploy their fleet (Rubbens, 2017).

### **3.5.3 Eurocorps**

Eurocorps, also known as 'a force for the EU and NATO' is a Strasbourg based multinational rapid deployable and highly autonomous headquarters, which was established in 1992 by France and Germany. Today, the Headquarters counts five Framework Nations: Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and Spain and five Associated Nations: Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania and Turkey. Eurocorps can be deployed to plan and/or conduct a wide range of military operations and missions on the condition that all Framework Nations unanimously agree to do so. Remarkable is that the soldiers all wear the same beret and each cell, section, platoon, company, branch or division is made up of soldiers of different nationalities. This clearly shows the European spirit of the cooperation. Only the branch chiefs represent their specific nation. While Eurocorps is an autonomous force, agreements were signed putting the Corps at the disposal of both NATO and the European Union. Recently there even have been attempts to embed the force within the CSDP structures and mechanisms. So far, Eurocorps has been involved in two operations of the EU: EUTM Mali and EUTM RCA (Eurocorps, 2017 ; Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, 2016).

### 3.5.4 EATC

The last form of military cooperation that is going to be discussed in this section is the in 2010 established European Air Transport Command, also known as EATC. EATC forms an integral part of the CSDP and entails a high level of European defence cooperation (EATC, 2018). The multinational command, which is based in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, pools and shares national military assets in the domains of military air transport, air-to-air fuelling and aeromedical evacuation (EATC, 2017). The organisation counts seven member nations: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Spain.

Through the EATC, the partaking nation states do not only have access to their own military assets, but also to the fleet of the other member states. However, yet again the member states can revoke at any time their transfer of authority (EATC, 2017).

The command, which has as an objective “to manage the scarce resource air transport as effectively and efficiently as possible”, has a staff composed of experts from the seven member nations (EATC, 2018).

### 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has taught us that while there are plenty of initiatives currently on-going in the field of defence, none of them comes near the definition of a European army as applied in this research and as conceptualized in section 1.8.1. All initiatives still seem to be very state-centred and concerned with national sovereignty. No real military decision-making power is transferred to supranational organs. It leads us to believe that there is still a long way to go on the road towards the creation of a full-blown army amongst the Europeans. It could be argued however that the extensive partnership between the Belgian and Dutch navies is a step in the right direction, which shows that intensive defence collaboration is not unattainable.

## CHAPTER 4

### BELGIAN DEFENCE AT PRESENT

Before we can go on to depict the actual stance of the Flemish political parties and the Belgian army senior ranks towards a European army, a little background information on Belgian Defence should first be provided.

#### 4.1 Belgian Defence structure

As can be derived from figure 2, the Belgian force structure is managed by the Minister of Defence (MOD). For this legislature, this is N-VA minister Steven Vandepuut. Directly under the MOD resorts the Chief of Defence (CHOD) (Defensie, n.d.-b). Since 2016, General Marc Compernel holds this position (Verboven, 2016). The green line in figure 1 delineates the centralised joint staff structure responsible for inter alia HR, the budget, material acquisition, the strategy and so on. This joint staff is structured around the four branches: the Land Component, the Air Component, the Maritime Component and the Medical Component (Defensie, n.d.-b ; Bartels, Kellner & Optenhögel, 2017).

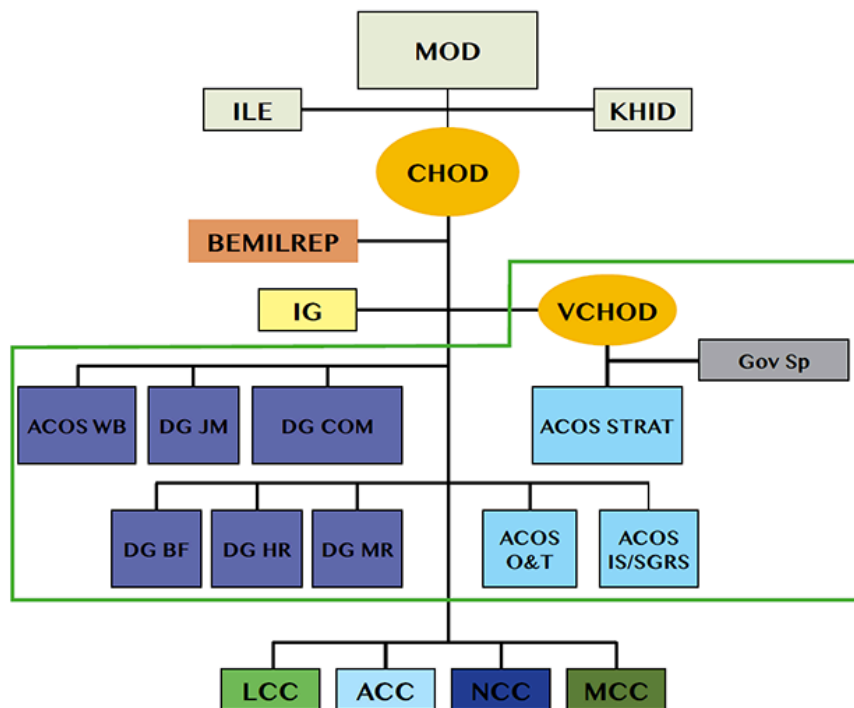


Figure 2 – structure of Belgian Defence

Source: Defensie, n.d.-b

## 4.2 Defence budget

For more than three decades, the Defence budget has been under restraint. Consequently, the organisation has downsized considerably (Mattelaer, 2018). The most recent numbers show that the level of defence expenditure in the country has declined to 0.91 per cent of the GDP (Bartels, Kellner & Optenhögel, 2017). Compared to its NATO allies, only Spain and Luxembourg perform worse (NATO, 2017b). It comes as no surprise then that Belgium endures sharp criticism about its defence spending from its international partners (Bartels, Kellner & Optenhögel, 2017).

Also notable is the distribution of defence expenditure in Belgium. At least 77% of the total defence expenditure is spent on personnel (including pensions), while 4,65% goes to equipment and only 0,95% to infrastructure. Of the 29 NATO member states only Portugal spends more money on personnel than Belgium (NATO, 2017b). As far as investments in major equipment are concerned, it can be gathered that Belgian Defence is at the back of the NATO pack (Andries, 2014). The remaining 17,31% of the total budget of Belgian Defence goes to other expenditures, which include operations, maintenance and certain R&D projects. (NATO, 2017b). One can conclude from the above that there is a serious imbalance between personnel costs and force modernisation in the composition of the defence budget (Bartels, Kellner & Optenhögel, 2017).

Lastly, it is important to point out the burden pensions pose on the Belgian Defence budget. In 2013, 9% of the budget went to pensions (Cabinet of Defence and Civil Service, n.d.).

## 4.3 Defence's challenges

A first challenge that Belgian Defence is facing, which can already be derived from the passage above, is the share that personnel costs take up in the budget. So far, attempts at reforming the personnel structure were primarily focusing on reducing recruitment levels, rather than considering dismissing staff. As a result of the large number of personnel retiring and because of voluntary layoffs, the work force has shrunk anyway from 47.200 in 1995 to some 30.800 in 2016. Nonetheless,

personnel costs including pensions have crept towards almost 80% of the total Defence spending (Bartels, Kellner & Optenhögel, 2017). The reallocation of its budget and the acquirement of a more even distribution of resources over the different categories (think 50% personnel, 25% operations and 25% equipment) is clearly one of Belgian Defence's working points for the coming years.

As the budget has been reduced repeatedly since the early 1980s, the savings had to come from somewhere, if not from the reform of the personnel structure. By postponing modernisation and reducing equipment, costs could be cut. Accordingly, the equipment budget is far below the ideal 20-25 per cent. As a result of the postponing of modernisation over the past decades, all major platforms such as the F-16 fleet, the C-130 fleet, the entire navy fleet and so on, will all reach the end of their scheduled service life in the coming fifteen years (Bartels, Kellner & Optenhögel, 2017). Replacing these major platforms poses a lot of pressure both on politicians as well as on the Defence staff, which results in heated (political) debates, perfectly exemplified by the one surrounding the replacement of the F-16 fleet.

Another personnel related issue is the fact that over the next decade, approximately half of the current work force will reach the retirement age. Correspondingly, it is expected that the number of employees will continue to decrease towards 25.000 or below (Bartels, Kellner & Optenhögel, 2017). This also points out the skewed age pyramid of the Belgian armed forces, as shown in figure 3.

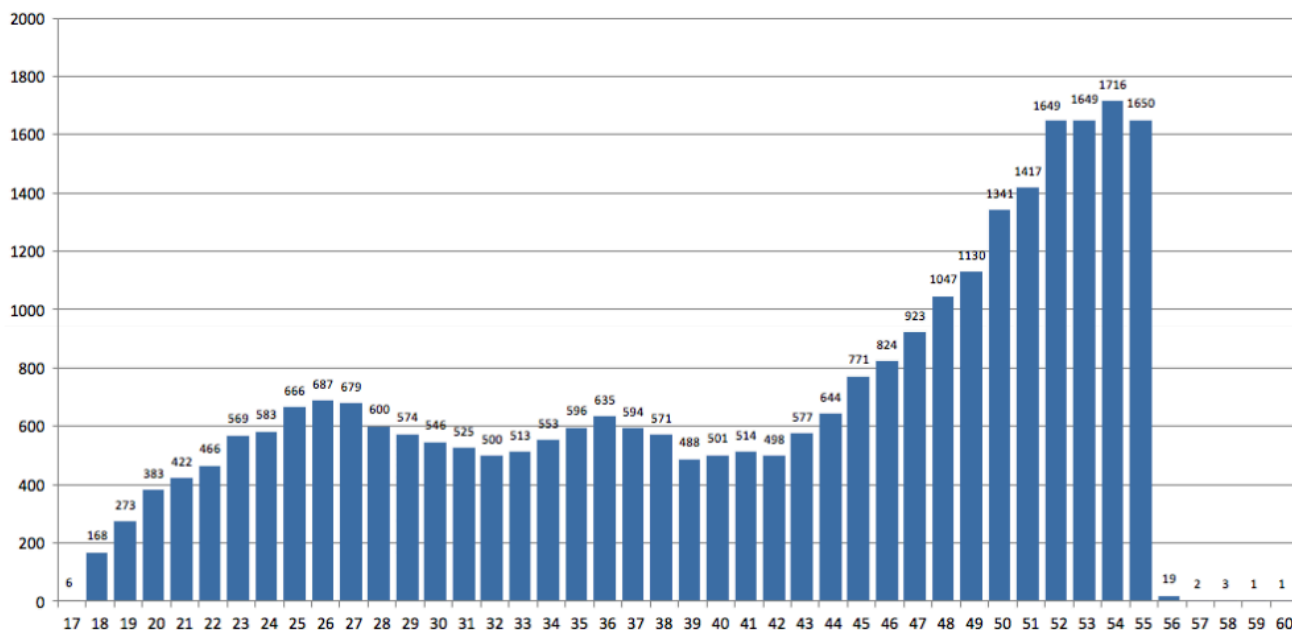


Figure 3 – age pyramid of the Belgian armed forces as of January 2018

Source: Mattelaer, 2018

Recruiting a younger workforce and undertaking efforts to retain young employees is equally a working point for the coming years.

#### 4.4 The future of Belgian Defence

The future of Belgian Defence is outlined in the Strategic Vision for Defence published by the Minister of Defence, Steven Vandeput, in 2016. The Strategic Vision provides a guideline for the defence policy until 2030 (Defensie, 2017). The document envisages a smaller but completely modernised force structure built around four dimensions. One dimension would be focusing on military intelligence and cyber defence and is ought to be principally built around drones. A second dimension can be located in the air domain and would have new multirole fighter jets and one multirole tanker transport aircraft at its disposal. The third dimension, the maritime dimension, would take a leading role in locating and destroying naval mines with its six mine countermeasure vessels. The land component, which is the fourth domain, is to be reorganised into five Battlegroups and a special operations command (Bartels, Kellner & Optenhögel, 2017). Concretely, Belgian Defence would have 25.000 full-time equivalents (FTE) and a budget of 9.4 billion euros for major equipment investments. A last remark worth making about the Strategic Vision is that



throughout the paper, the importance and need for (more) military cooperation primarily within the framework of NATO and the EU is highlighted (Flamant & Parrein, 2016).

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

From what is described above, it is crystal clear that Belgian Defence is facing a multitude of challenges. It is obvious that these should be taken into account when discussing the creation of a single European army as they (can) influence the attitude of both the Belgian army senior ranks as well as that of the politicians.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE POLITICAL DEBATE**

Based on the official positions of the political parties, official press releases and the conducted interviews with one member of the party who also is a permanent member or a substitute of the Commission on National Defence, the extent to which a European army is supported by the given fractions, will be examined. As mentioned in 1.6.3, five fractions are under study. The opinion of each fraction will be discussed in alphabetical order. This has to ensure that no fraction is seemingly being favoured. To allow an optimal comparison and discussion of the different fractions' attitude towards a common European defence apparatus, the same template for every fraction is followed.

#### **5.1 CD&V**

##### **5.1.1 Stance towards a European army**

As stated in 1.8.1 there are plenty of definitions and interpretations of the concept that is a 'European army'. Therefore, it is important to delineate first of all what the fractions believe a European army implies. CD&V for example explicitly mentions its support for the creation of a European army in its official positions on its website, but fails to explain precisely what they understand by the concept.

In the interview with Hendrik Bogaert, MP for CD&V and permanent member of the Commission on National Defence, it becomes apparent that there is no clear or shared understanding within the fraction of the concept. Bogaert does point out this is a crucial question. The MP believes there are two options for the elaboration of a European army. Both options have in common that one political unit within a EU framework takes collective decisions about the deployment of the army. Within the first option, the army would be stationed all over Europe and replace the national armies. The second option is clearly more intergovernmental as the national armies would keep on existing, but would be placed under a centralised European command once they partake in an intervention. CD&V seems to lean towards the second option according to Bogaert. The party does not seem to want that the entire Belgian army gets dissolved. In the vision for a European army as the MP believes his fraction supports, Belgian Defence would be placed under a European military and political

command once they undertake a joint mission, comparable to the way NATO currently works when in operation (H. Bogaert, personal communication, March 12, 2018). In that way, it can be derived that CD&V does not support the definition of a European army as outlined in this dissertation.

As to how big a supporter of a common European defence the fraction is, Bogaert believes his party is the most in favour compared to the other majority parties. The MP states: 'We are not like some other parties, which strictly say keep defence separate, keep it Belgian. We are in favour of integration.' (H. Bogaert, personal communication, March 12, 2018). This stance can also be verified by the official position of the party on defence, which can be found on its website. There they explicitly state defence is a European top policy priority. While the fraction does seem to strongly support a European army, it believes it is only a project in the long run. A first concrete step towards the creation of a European army would be the creation of a EU military headquarters and the activation of the EU Battlegroups (CD&V, 2017b).

Also important to mention here is that the fraction stresses the importance of NATO in all of this. European military integration and the eventual creation of a European army have to be established in close consultation and coordination with the Alliance (CD&V, 2017b).

As for now, the party is a supporter of some kind of cascade system when looking for cooperation in the field of defence. In first instance, partnerships within the UN-framework are the most desirable. When cooperation with the UN is not possible, NATO becomes the most preferred partner. If that is also not attainable, they will try to establish a partnership within the EU framework. The 'last resort' would then be a coalition of the willing (H. Bogaert, personal communication, March 12, 2018).

### **5.1.2 Arguments explaining stance**

Why exactly is CD&V in favour of the creation of a European army? According to the party, there are three main advantages. A first benefit would be increased combat effectiveness. Bogaert points out the fact that the Belgian Defence's budget is too limited to be credible as an armed force in all domains nowadays. What one can do

with such a tight budget is to specialize. Specializing however means that some responsibilities would no longer be fulfilled. A solution for this could be to merge into a larger entity, such as a European army, where as a result of cooperation and solidarity, all responsibilities still get covered (H. Bogaert, personal communication, March 12, 2018).

Secondly, a EU army would create a political advantage. The MP illustrates this with the observation that ever since it has gained independence in 1830, Belgium has not single-handedly started a war or operated fully alone. When the Belgian military does operate, it is always in a multilateral framework. One namely needs political allies when undertaking a military operation or mission (H. Bogaert, personal communication, March 12, 2018).

A third advantage according to the fraction is an efficiency gain. Forming a common European defence would imply the joint purchase of equipment. As you would represent 28 nations instead of a single one, you would negotiate from a position of strength vis-à-vis the supplier. Bogaert points out that this is something, which is currently missing in the replacement of the F-16 fleet. No-one seems to know how many fighter jets are actually needed. If they would cooperate in a European framework, they would maybe only need half of the current number of jets they currently plan on purchasing (H. Bogaert, personal communication, March 12, 2018).

The party however also recognizes the potential downsides to a European army. Losing autonomy is one of those recognized disadvantages. A consequence of this could be that while the Belgian political majority does not want to participate in an operation and risk Belgian human lives, there is a European consensus to engage and you unwillingly get sucked into an operation. The exact opposite could also be the case. Opinions can diverge. Bogaert however points out this is not only the case with decisions on defence, but applies to other policy dimensions as well. For example, within the field of social affairs, Belgium is often more progressive than Europe, but gets slowed down by the unwillingness of other member states (H. Bogaert, personal communication, March 12, 2018).

### 5.1.3 Opinion on other European defence cooperation projects

The purpose of this paragraph is to get an idea whether the opinions on other European defence cooperation projects influences the fraction's stance towards a EU army. If they already have reservations towards other projects, it could be that they show an equal reluctance towards a common defence.

The Christian Democratic party openly supports various forms of cooperation in the field of defence and security. In its official positions, the party calls the European Union the driving force for international security. They believe the EU has great potential in the field of defence. To activate that potential, CD&V pushes to make use of certain defence cooperation projects, which are already possible today owing to certain provisions in the EU treaties. They *inter alia* include PESCO, the earlier mentioned EU Battlegroups and the operational headquarters (CD&V, 2017a).

As can already be partially derived from previous paragraphs, Bogaert asserts his fraction is equally a fond supporter of current defence cooperation projects such as NATO, BENESAM and EATC. When asked how the fraction looks at the current developments concerning PESCO, the MP did not seem to remember what the permanent structured cooperation exactly implies. After jogging his memory, Bogaert expresses that CD&V has a supportive view of the project. He contends that PESCO seems to be compatible with the idea of still having a national army and autonomy, but being able to purchase equipment jointly (H. Bogaert, personal communication, March 12, 2018). It must be noted though that the fact that a permanent member of the Commission on National Defence does not seem to remember what PESCO stands for, is quite disconcerting.

### 5.1.4 Opinion on Belgian Defence today

The purpose of this section is similar to the one above. It looks whether the opinion on Belgian Defence today can be linked to their support or opposition towards a joint European military.

For CD&V, an official position on Belgian Defence was nowhere to be found. Therefore this paragraph solely relies on information gathered during the interview

with Hendirk Bogaert. It could therefore be that it is more of a personal reflection of the MP than the actual stance of the fraction as a whole towards Belgian Defence.

The MP starts off with asserting there is still a great deal of work to do. Belgian Defence seems to be facing a very slippery slope. First there is the age pyramid that is increasingly becoming top heavy, which has already been pointed out in section 4.3. Given the large number of people who are set to retire within the next five years, it will be a challenge to retain a force with the capacity of 25.0000 FTE according to Bogaert (personal communication, March 12, 2018).

A second problem identified by Bogaert is the non-decisions about the infrastructure. Because of this, resources are wasted on infrastructure that is completely run down and not used anymore (personal communication, March 12, 2018).

A final problem can be situated in the domain of equipment. Important decisions have to be made within this field, especially concerning the replacement of the F-16 fighters. Postponing decisions about these kind of operational affairs severely affects employees' morale according to the MP (H. Bogaert, personal communication, March 12, 2018).

The permanent member of the Commission on National Defence concludes that there is still a lot of ground to cover. The previous government has principally cut down expenses, which he believes was necessary, but now a balance has to be found in what to do and what not within this more restricted financial framework (H. Bogaert, personal communication, March 12, 2018).

### **5.1.5 Vision on the future of Belgian Defence**

Bogaert and his fraction do have a specific vision on the future of the Belgian armed forces. A relatively small but better equipped army seems to be the ideal. In other words, less infrastructure, fewer and younger personnel, but better equipped and specialised so that it regains its credibility. A second wave of professionalisation has to hit Belgian Defence as it were; similar to what happened when conscription was abolished in the 1990s (H. Bogaert, personal communication, March 12, 2018).

Striking here is that when explicitly asked about the future of Belgian Defence, military cooperation within the EU framework is not mentioned.

### **5.1.6 Conclusion**

It can be concluded that the CD&V fraction is to a large extent a supporter of the establishment of a European army. They believe the creation of such an army will bring about increased effectiveness, political benefits and efficiency gains. They do recognize it also brings about a loss of autonomy. However, it seems that the party views the creation of a European defence union as a prospect for the future and not something that will and can be created in the short term. As for now, they are strong supporters of all kinds of international cooperation in the field of defence and security.

## **5.2 Groen**

### **5.2.1 Stance towards a European army**

Just like the Christian Democratic party, Groen explicitly mentions in its positions that the future of the Belgian armed forces lies in a European defence. Except for mentioning that cooperation is important and that international interventions should take place within the UN framework, no other words are wasted on this topic (Groen, 2018). One could argue that defence is not a top policy priority for the party. This however also means that Groen, just like CD&V, fails to mention what they exactly mean by 'a European defence'.

Wouter De Vriendt, MP for Groen and substitute member of the Commission on National Defence for the fraction Ecolo-Groen<sup>3</sup>, explained in an interview what is meant by 'a European defence'. The concept implies the integration of the different military components and capacities of the EU Member States so that a unified command, joint deployment, a joint procurement policy and even an integrated defence industry can be established. A EU army is however not necessarily the same as a European defence. De Vriendt states that the main difference between the two concepts is that a European army entails a joint deployment at all times, which is

---

<sup>3</sup> The term 'fraction' refers according to Van Dale (2018) to a group of MP's that belong to the same political party. Accordingly, this dissertation only focuses on Groen and not on Ecolo. De Vriendt equally only spoke on behalf of Groen.

currently only a far future prospect. The MP does believe the Union can evolve towards that point. Right now there are however too many problems. Military capabilities within the EU are too dispersed. On top of that, each state uses its own specific types of military equipment, which equally negatively affects effective cooperation. Not to be all negative, De Vriendt points out that there are also good examples of defence cooperation within the Union. He uses BENESAM as an illustration. That kind of partnerships where joint command structures are installed, which is quite rare, should be expanded to other capabilities as well according to the MP (W. De Vriendt, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

As already mentioned, Groen is in favour of a European army as it would bring about more integration. Nonetheless, the party does have some reservations. De Vriendt states it is useless to establish a joint military force without having a European foreign policy (W. De Vriendt, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

The green party is known for its anti-militarism (Bartels, Kellner & Optenhögel, 2017). This anti-militarist stance is shown to a certain extent in the statement of De Vriendt that an army is not the true solution and should not be the first tool to resolve a conflict. Having a European army should not be equal to having a military and deploying it whenever and wherever. There is no such thing as a military quick fix for complex political problems according to the MP. Having a well-functioning CFSP is therefore a fundamental prerequisite for the EU in order to be able to deploy its own armed forces (W. De Vriendt, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

Just like the Christian-Democratic party, the meaning Groen allocates to a 'European army' or a 'European defence' does not accord with the first definition given by Trybus (2016).

### **5.2.2 Arguments explaining stance**

De Vriendt names three reasons why exactly his fraction is in favour of a common European defence. Firstly, the green party believes that the EU should be able to have significant influence as a global political actor. Having a joint military capacity to back up their politics would generate more credibility and international prominence.



Secondly, an army amongst the Europeans is believed to counteract capability fragmentation. Thirdly, they presume that it is beneficial in a budgetary manner, especially in the long run. The MP strongly emphasizes the importance of the first assumed advantage. With a common defence, the EU should be able to weigh more on international politics and be a geopolitical force to be actually reckoned with (W. De Vriendt, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

As mentioned in the previous section, the party believes more in a European defence than in a European army as such. Again there are three arguments defending their stance. Firstly, Groen believes there is no point in a European army without an actual common foreign policy. Also the lack of democratic control of that joint army seems to raise concerns. Finally, there is the risk that within the framework of a EU army, one might revert to the use of military power too quickly (W. De Vriendt, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

The party does not identify any genuine possible negative downsides to the creation of a common defence. Groen does however believe three things are currently still standing in the way of the project: sovereignty, the interests of the national defence industries and the overall politics in the EU. Sovereignty forms a first stumbling block because nations still like to decide themselves about the deployment of their troops and/or the launch of a military operation. This however also depends on the way decisions about the deployment of the armed forces or the launch of an operation would be taken. If an actual supranational construction is set up, meaning decisions are made with a qualified majority, this could mean a nation's troops could be deployed without that nation's necessary approval. For some member states, this is a bridge too far. Providing the possibility to opt-out could possibly resolve this issue. The green party itself would not mind the loss of sovereignty to a certain extent, if the possibility of an opt-out were to be provided. Next, there is the own defence industry, which especially plays a role in some bigger EU member states such as France. As countries have their own defence industries, they all have different types of equipment, which creates fragmentation and inefficiency. Finally, De Vriendt believes the EU is still in the middle of a political crisis. The inability to make grand decisions with unanimity illustrates this. The MP therefore believes that a coalition of the willing

is the only solution to realise a European defence (W. De Vriendt, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

### **5.2.3 Opinion on other European defence cooperation projects**

Groen equally seems to be a strong proponent of NATO as well as PESCO. Just like Bogaert, De Vriendt highlights that a common European defence should not be opposed to NATO, but could be perfectly integrated within the Alliance. Developing a strong European pillar within the Treaty Organisation is considered as a necessity. Security independence and full operational autonomy without the aid of non-EU member states such as the US is desired. The MP moves on to say that PESCO is a first step along the right road towards the creation of a European defence. The speed, with which the project is moving, does raise some questions, but is also viewed as something positive. Moreover the binding character and the target demanding that 20% of the defence budget is spent on investments, is met with a good response (W. De Vriendt, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

### **5.2.4 Opinion on Belgian Defence today**

Groen believes the Belgian army is currently not specialized enough. Even the Strategic Vision and the accompanying investment plan are not well received for the reason that all components are maintained. The fraction believes this is a very conservative stance. Responsibilities should instead be divided amongst European nations. De Vriendt expects the Minister of Defence to take a more proactive stand in all of this. Although bottom-up initiatives are a good thing, a top down approach is equally important and crucial for the success of a European defence. This requires political visionaries, a Minister of Defence who dares to launch proposals on a European level and tries to convince colleagues to pool and share. The MP says this is something that is missing in the current Belgian defence policy (W. De Vriendt, personal communication, February 20, 2018). From this paragraph can be derived that the opposition party is clearly unhappy with the current policies pursued by the majority.

### **5.2.5 Vision on the future of Belgian Defence**

Unlike CD&V, the green party explicitly mentions that the future of Belgian Defence is European. Besides European, the future of the Defence also lays in specialization. To be more precise, Belgium should specialize in transport, Special Forces and demining because these are the capabilities in which the Belgian army stands out according to Groen. Special attention has to be paid to risk and burden sharing while discussing specialization though (W. De Vriendt, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

### **5.2.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be postulated that Groen strongly believes the future of Belgian Defence is European. To be more precise, the party is a fierce supporter of the creation of a European defence, which should not be confused with a European army. The fraction does also support the idea of such joint armed forces, but just like the Christian Democratic party, it believes this is something that is not possible in the short term. One of the reasons given for this is the fact that there is a lack of political ambition amongst the current federal government. Moreover, it should be mentioned that the party strongly seems to oppose the policy pursued by the Minister of Defence presently in office.

## **5.3 N-VA**

### **5.3.1 Stance towards a European army**

The following findings are based on N-VA's official position on defence, some articles and an interview with Pascal Heyman and Floris Van den Broeck, the Diplomatic Director and Deputy Diplomatic Director of the Minister of Defence. An interview was also planned with Karolien Grosemans, N-VA MP and president of the Commission on National Defence. The interview<sup>4</sup> however could not take place as the uproar about the presumably withheld information on the lifespan of the F-16s threw a spanner in the works.

---

<sup>4</sup> A written answer by Karolien Grosemans to the interview questions was eventually obtained in May. The answers did however not have any added value as they mostly referred to earlier interviews that were already incorporated in this dissertation. As a result, the 'interview' with Grosemans is not explicitly used or 'quoted'.

What is clear from the start is that within the N-VA fraction, opinions strongly diverge on the topic of a European army. The Minister of Defence clearly has a different view to other members of the party such as Grosemans. This is quite interesting as both have an important position related to defence within the current administration. While the minister calls a European army something only dreamers believe in, his fellow party members make a passionate plea for the creation of such structure (Zuallaert & Vandersmissen, 2016; Grosemans & Buysrogge, 2017).

A second important thing to articulate besides the diverging opinions within the party is that N-VA is one of the only fractions studied in this dissertation that has a fully-fledged position completely devoted to defence. A possible explanation for this is undoubtedly the fact that the party provides the Minister of Defence.

Now, what does the official position exactly say regarding a European army? The party considers both NATO and the EU to be the cornerstones of Europe's security structure. They however assert that the EU does not have sufficient capacity to perform exhaustive military operations. Accordingly, N-VA states that the creation of a EU army or a European defence only seems to be a remote prospect. For now, they propose to expand the cooperation between the Dutch and Belgian navies to the other military components to eventually establish an 'army amongst the Low Countries'. The final objective of the fraction however remains a EU army within the NATO framework (N-VA, 2018a). Just like the previous fractions, N-VA fails to clarify what they exactly mean by the concept.

As just mentioned, MP's for N-VA, Karolien Grosemans and Peter Buysrogge, have made passionate pleas to establish such a European defence union. The kind of European army they have in mind is one partly shaped like the EATC. This implies that every member state contributes what they can and want to. The foundation of the defence union is ought to be composed of the best military components of each nation. Each country would still have own capabilities that could be used for internal affairs. Moreover, the two MP's envision that the structure would be overseen by a European Minister of Defence. A European political unification is however not necessary. In their plea, the N-VA members do recognize the failed attempts made in the past to establish a similar plan (Grosemans & Buysrogge, 2017).

At the same time, the Minister of Defence and his cabinet have a fairly different point of view. This can be both deduced from the interview with the minister's diplomatic Director and Deputy Diplomatic Director as well as from several statements the minister himself has made. Minister Vandeput has, inter alia, in an interview with Knack in 2016 explicitly mentioned that he does not believe in a European army. The Minister went on to state that the Brexit would have been a disaster if the joint army were already in place. It would have meant the loss of its most important partner. The MOD even called people who believe in a EU army 'wandering dreamers'. Vandeput however does believe in partnerships such as BENESAM (Zuallaert & Vandersmissen, 2016). The minister's staff, Heyman and Van den Broeck, reaffirmed this stance. The two even strongly lashed out at CD&V and Open Vld, saying that the two factions often lead the way in the debate around a common European defence but when push comes to shove, and things have to become more concrete such as what exactly is understood by the concept or what consequences will it bring about, they are unable to give an answer. The Diplomatic Director severely questions the liberal party's call for a European army, as it is the same party that wanted to abolish the Belgian marine component some time ago (P. Heyman & F. Van den Broeck, personal communication, December 15, 2017).

The reason why the stances of the MOD and the president of the Commission on National Defence have also been depicted is because of the two N-VA members' importance and influence in the policy domain at hand.

### **5.3.2 Arguments explaining stance**

A critical finding is that while N-VA makes an explicit plea for a European Army, nowhere in its positions it can be found why exactly it calls for such a structure.

Grosemans and Buysrogge do shortly explain why they are proponents. The two MP's state that when the defence budgets of the 28 member states are combined, Europe spends as much as Russia and China together on their armed forces. Joined, the EU member states however do not have the same capabilities as these two major powers for the reason that three-quarters of the resources go to personnel and infrastructure expenses. A EU army is believed to be more effective and efficient as the sum is greater than its parts (Grosemans & Buysrogge, 2017).

Heyman and Van den Broeck in their turn give a more comprehensive explanation for their and the MOD's position. First of all, Heyman highlights that the idea that a European army leads to significant savings is an illusion. Some believe that it would save a considerable amount of money, as certain capabilities would no longer have to be nationally fulfilled. This however requires clear agreements regarding which nation fulfils which responsibilities so that not all nations disinvest in the same services. Secondly, there has to be a genuine degree of trust and certainty that when you need specific resources as a nation, you can actually make use of your partners' capabilities. That's exactly where the problem lies. How will you ensure that when a crisis arises in multiple countries at the same time, you can also count on adequate help? Thirdly, the Diplomatic Director vocalizes that if you cooperate with others, you have to contribute more instead of less, especially in the initial phase of the project. No one is keen on cooperating with a country that states from the offset that they have no financial means and are just interested in saving resources by handing over responsibilities. Van den Broeck goes on to say that Belgium currently already takes advantage from investments done by its allies. Moreover, the MOD's cabinet does not believe in more European cooperation purely because of the sake that it would bring about more 'Europeanization'. They only partake in European projects if it truly brings about tangible benefits. Finally, they assert that as long as there is no supremacy of the EU's foreign policy over the national policies and as long as they do not move away from intergovernmental cooperation, there will be no steps in the direction of more European military cooperation (P. Heyman & F. Van den Broeck, personal communication, December 15, 2017).

### **5.3.3 Opinion on other European defence cooperation projects**

From the party's positions can be derived they clearly are supporters of NATO and cooperation with neighbouring countries. Especially BENESAM gets praised. The partnership between the Dutch and Belgian navy consequently serves as a prime example and basis for more European cooperation (N-VA, 2018a).

Heyman is equally full of praise for the above-mentioned partnership. The Diplomatic Director remarks that it is a clear example of how two countries that were both struggling with some issues, got back on top because of far-reaching integration.

Heyman even asserts that Belgium would not longer have a marine if it were not for BENESAM (P. Heyman, personal communication, December 15, 2017).

As Diplomatic Director of the MOD, Heyman is well acquainted with PESCO. The Director warns that the project risks stalling if they turn it into a political spin job and do not yield concrete results in the near future. As for now, the cabinet is waiting for the projects to fully develop before making a final judgement. The question will be whether the outcomes are better than when PESCO had not been there. Investments were going to be made anyway and European cooperation was equally already on the table. What is the exact added value of PESCO then, given that it also brings about a considerable amount of administration as commitments made within its framework are binding? PESCO is set to give access to better and more funding through the EDF, which is however not completely operational yet. Finally, Heyman also points out that PESCO should and cannot be seen as an embryo of a European army (P. Heyman, personal communication, December 15, 2017).

### **5.3.4 Opinion on Belgian Defence today**

In its official positions, N-VA recognizes the multitude of challenges Belgian Defence encounters today. In the first instance, the party acknowledges the downwards-budgetary spiral the organisation has been caught in for the past few decades. The fraction states there is a clear lack of financial stability and a clear vision. Secondly, the Flemish nationalists pose that no army among the NATO member states performs worse than Belgian Defence when it comes to investments in equipment and infrastructure. This in its turn negatively affects the security and appeal of the military profession. Third and lastly, N-VA mentions the personnel issues. The party states that Defence is having hard times with attracting and retaining qualified employees (N-VA, 2018b).

When discussing to what extent the N-VA Minister has consulted the Belgian senior ranks in inter alia the PESCO file, the MOD's cabinet's judgement about Belgian Defence today shimmered through. Heyman expressed he had an extremely difficult time the past year to gather a coordinated statement from the military staff on those files. The Diplomatic Director asserted that some departments or individuals did have an opinion, but a coordinated vision of the staff on this topic has to this day never

been uttered. Heyman does recognize this has to do with the very structure of the organisation. Everything has to be formally channelled through the CHOD, which obviously slows down the process. By the time there would be a common stance, the facts would already be outdated. Moreover, Heyman alleges there is an absence of real visionary ideas. Van den Broeck poses that the CHOD and his staff are preoccupied with other matters such as pensions, HR, operations and the acquirement of equipment. They are clearly focussed on day-to-day operations. The MOD's staff was also asked whether it would be taken into account when the Belgian army senior ranks explicitly state they are proponents of a European army. While Heyman asserts that they would never express this in the first place, Van den Broeck believes the officers are way more Europhile and voluntaristic than the cabinet. They are often pro European cooperation without even knowing why. It has happened in the past that the staff urged for certain European projects, but in the end, they had to back down as they did not have the personnel for it (P. Heyman & F. Van den Broeck, personal communication, December 15, 2017).

### **5.3.5 Vision on the future of Belgian Defence**

N-VA's vision on the future of Belgian Defence can already be derived from the previous paragraphs and even chapter, therefore this paragraph will be kept brief.

In the short term, the fraction clearly wants more financial stability, a clear vision and a well-conceived investment and personnel policy (N-VA, 2018b). What can be derived from Vandepuut's Strategic Vision is that more multilateral cooperation is equally a goal for the immediate future. In the medium-term, N-VA puts forward an 'army amongst the Low Countries'. The end goal however is the establishment of a full-blown European army (N-VA, 2018a).

### **5.3.6 Conclusion**

The passages above have shed a light on the division that exists within the N-VA fraction on the establishment of a European army. While the official common stance of the party expresses their support for a European army in the long run and an army amongst the 'Low Countries' in the medium term, one of the fraction's key figures, the Minister of Defence Steven Vandepuut, clearly opposes this.



## 5.4 Open Vld

### 5.4.1 Stance towards a European army

Even though Open Vld does not have an official position on its website tackling defence, again displaying that defence is not perceived as a policy priority or a hot election topic to gain votes, the party is known for its support for a European army. This mostly has to do with the party's pro-European stance and the central position Guy Verhofstadt takes in this debate. The liberal party's support for an army amongst the Europeans was reaffirmed in an interview with Open Vld MP and permanent member of the Commission on National Defence, Dirk Van Mechelen. He highlights that both Guy Verhofstadt as well as Hilde Vautmans have called numerous times for the establishment of a European army. The party supports the stance of the two MEPs, but also believes it is a vision for the future. Van Mechelen goes on to tell that the creation of joint European armed forces is an incremental process. The MP poses that within the next fifty years, a European army will not be established, at least not a single European army as defined in this dissertation. As for now, the party believes in a maximum of synergies, with the cooperation between the Belgian and Dutch navy as a prime example. Bilateral and trilateral partnerships, which are set to create economies of scale and synergies, will incrementally build up a European defence community. Especially joint training, joint procurement and maintenance programmes play a crucial role here. Note this is quite similar to what De Vriendt put forward. Eventually, Van Mechelen believes everything comes down to the integration of equipment. A European army composed of the national armies of all the EU member states is something the party believes is impossible. Instead, the liberals envision the European joint armed forces as a coalition of the willing. In this light, a comparison with the creation of the Schengen Area is made. The MP points out that the ultimate dream of the EU was and still is to form one Schengen Area but that not all member states think the same way and move forward that quickly. Therefore the Schengen Area was established with only a few member states, an example the EU should follow for the integration in the domain of defence as well (D. Van Mechelen, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

It can be derived from both the interview with the MP, as well as from some press releases, that the party does not have a clear and more importantly, shared

understanding of what they exactly mean by 'a European army'. The only thing that is unambiguous is the support of the fraction for the creation of an army amongst the Europeans, although there is disagreement within the party about the time frame. While some believe it is only desirable and possible in the long term, others rather have a European army as of tomorrow.

#### **5.4.2 Arguments explaining stance**

Open Vld believes in a European army as it would benefit both the EU's as well as Belgium's security policy. A European defence is viewed as a *conditio sine qua non* to have a strong CFSP (D. Van Mechelen, personal communication, February 27, 2018). Moreover, financial means would be used more efficiently and the European pillar within NATO would finally be reinforced (Open Vld, 2017). A part of the fraction however believes it is a project in the long run as history has shown that operating top-down and at a fast pace does not work, hereby referring to the failed attempt at establishing the EDC in 1950. This shows that the assumption put forward in section 2.6 is accurate. History does clearly influence current opinions. Moreover, as for now, nationalism and chauvinism still stand in the way to actually renounce their national armies (D. Van Mechelen, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

Just like CD&V, Open Vld also dares to recognize a potential downside to the creation of such an army. Waiving certain sovereign rights in return for an integrated approach is the price that has to be paid (D. Van Mechelen, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

#### **5.4.3 Opinion on other European defence cooperation projects**

The liberal party has historically been a staunch supporter of NATO. As the Alliance has fostered peace for almost 70 years now, the MP states it would be foolish to 'change a winning team'. Van Mechelen again underlines the need for the European allies to step up their game. The European states' armed forces namely pale in comparison to the US army. When asked what the fraction's stance is towards PESCO, the permanent member of the Commission on National Defence for Open Vld also did not know what the Permanent Structured Cooperation stands for (D. Van Mechelen, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

#### **5.4.4 Opinion on Belgian Defence today**

Van Mechelen believes Belgian Defence has hit rock bottom. Again, one of the first things mentioned is the worrying shape of the age pyramid, but also the skewed distribution of the resources. The MP does believe that some improvement is in the making ever since the Strategic Vision and the accompanying investment plan have been approved (D. Van Mechelen, personal communication, February 27, 2018). Here the difference between a majority party (Open Vld) and an opposition party (Groen) becomes apparent.

#### **5.4.5 Vision on the future of Belgian Defence**

The two key words in the vision of Open Vld as put forward by Van Mechelen is 'mean' and 'lean'. The vision on the future of Belgian Defence is very similar to the one put forward by CD&V's Hendrik Bogaert. They also propose a small, performant, well-trained and well-equipped army specialized in certain branches. Similar to Groen, Open Vld proposes to specialize in transport, de-mining and combat aircrafts. Van Mechelen believes it is important that the army's personnel regains pride in working for Belgian Defence. This requires not only new equipment, but also a better remuneration, reformed statutes, better training and so on (D. Van Mechelen, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

#### **5.4.6 Conclusion**

It can be summarized that Open Vld is a proponent of a European army. It must be noted though that there is some disagreement within the fraction about the specifics. The exact timeframe in which they want to see such joint European forces to be established and whether the party actually supposes the abolishment of the national armies remains unclear.

### **5.5 sp.a**

#### **5.5.1 Stance towards a European army**

Two remarks should be made from the offset: first, there is no mention made about a European Army or European defence in the official positions on the website of the socialist party. Defence is only shortly mentioned under the heading 'foreign policy'.

Second, in the interview with Alain Top, MP for sp.a and permanent member of the Commission on National Defence, the MP indicates that the party is in the middle of developing its position on the theme (A. Top, personal communication, February 22, 2018). This obviously complicates the discussion of sp.a's stance towards a European army. Because of the lack of other information on the position of the fraction on the topic of this dissertation, the following paragraphs will essentially be solely based on the information provided by Top during the interview. This causes some validity issues.

Top starts the conversation with explaining why he believes not only his fraction, but also other political parties and actors consider the discussion about a EU army topical. The MP for sp.a asserts that four things are at play. Firstly, Top believes the election of Trump has partly sparked the discussion about the establishment of a European defence. Secondly, the Brexit is quoted. Thirdly, he cites the situation in the Middle East. Finally, the changing behaviour of Russia and Putin is raised as a cause of concern (A. Top, personal communication, February 22, 2018). Many share the idea that these events recently renewed the dialogue about a European army. Accordingly, in section 1.2 of this dissertation, this was already brought up.

As previously stated, the stance of the socialist fraction is momentarily still being developed and thus remains relatively unclear at the moment. One can however assume that the party is (still) in favour of a European army as they already made a call for an integrated European army in an article published on their website in 2015. In the same article, sp.a called the then newly published Strategic Vision populist and unaffordable. They challenged the Minister of Defence to take the road towards a common European defence (sp.a nationaal, 2015). In addition, during the interview with Top, the MP shared his own opinion on the topic. He personally is a proponent of a European army. Ideally, this European army has a single command and the national armies are abolished. Top does highlight that there is a difference between aspiration and reality. Moreover, he believes the joint European armed forces will be a coalition of the willing. He poses that EU member states each move at their own speed. If one has to wait for everyone to move forward at the same pace, too much time will have passed (A. Top, personal communication, February 22, 2018).

What can and should be mentioned when talking about the stance of sp.a towards (European) defence is just like Groen, its anti-militarist attitude and criticism of defence spending (Bartels, Kellner & Optenhögel, 2017). This attitude can be derived both from the interview with Alain Top, as well as from the party's official stance towards foreign policy. According to Biscop and Mattelaer (as cited in Bartels, Kellner & Optenhögel, 2017), this affects the credibility of proposals coming from these parties to establish a European army.

### **5.5.2 Arguments explaining stance**

Top indicated being a supporter of a joint European military force because the establishment of the EU has led to more than 65 years of peace between its member states. The socialist believes that by cooperating, having the will to coordinate national security policies, having the same level of efficiency, having the same level of investments and deploying a single command, more peace will be fostered, even beyond the EU's borders (A. Top, personal communication, February 22, 2018).

If a European army like defined in this dissertation and what seems to be supported by Top, is established, member states would be giving up their nation's sovereignty. The MP recognizes this as a potential 'disadvantage' but believes once countries actually overcome this, virtually no downsides would still exist. The biggest obstacles are on the road towards the creation. In this light, Top makes exactly the same comparison as Van Mechelen. Top namely also compares the situation to the establishment of the Schengen Area (A. Top, personal communication, February 22, 2018).

### **5.5.3 Opinion on other European defence cooperation projects**

When asked whether the sp.a fraction supports other European partnerships in the area of defence such as BENESAM, PESCO or NATO, Top asserts his party does. They are particularly proponents of purely European projects. Sp.a is to a lesser extent in favour of the North Atlantic Alliance. This has to do with the earlier mentioned changing position of the US towards the EU. The US is now increasingly aiming its arrows at the east. As a consequence Europe has to be able to operate independently from the US according to the MP. Top goes on to say that his party

does not support the purchase of the F-35 as a replacement for the F16 for the same reason. The socialist party believes that buying American fighter jets will involuntarily tie Belgium to the US for several decades. This would entail a certain loss of sovereignty for the country. While Top states his fraction would be willing to let go of Belgium's sovereignty to establish a European army, they are unwilling to do the same for the US. Moreover, the type of aircraft the F-35 resembles does also not suit the anti-militarist position of the fraction. Specifically concerning PESCO, the MP voices concerns about the far-reaching support of the project for the European defence industry. Top and his party believe that through PESCO, nations want to do military investments, which are not accounted for in the member states' national budgets (A. Top, personal communication, February 22, 2018).

#### **5.5.4 Opinion on Belgian Defence today**

Sp.a's opinion on Belgian Defence today as presented by Alain Top is that the army is innovating and changing too slowly. Defence should already be far more advanced in the area of cyber security. The challenge for the future lies way more in artificial intelligence than in the purchase of 30-something combat aircrafts according to the MP. Top does pose this is irrespective of his and his fraction's support for the ideas of the current majority. He postulates that because of the unequal distribution of resources, it is impossible for Belgian Defence to actually invest in things as cyber security. Moreover, Top believes the Belgian army is too hierarchical. The socialist however also points out that Belgian Defence still provides a reasonable output with the resources they possess (A. Top, personal communication, February 22, 2018).

#### **5.5.5 Vision on the future of Belgian Defence**

Central in the vision of the Flemish socialist fraction on the future of Belgian Defence is specialization in cooperation with other nations in the EU framework. Top refers to the kind of specialization like the one achieved through BENESAM. The Belgian army should also specialize in air transport and cyber security because that is the future according to the MP. Moreover, the party does believe that Belgium should be able to defend the air space. They however propose to replace the old F-16 fleet with new F-16's instead of buying a new type of aircraft like the F-35. The fraction even considers leasing a possible option while waiting for a project to develop a tailor-

made European combat aircraft (A. Top, personal communication, February 22, 2018).

### **5.5.6 Conclusion**

While the sp.a fraction currently does not have a common official stance towards a European army, it can be derived from both the interview with Alain Top and an article on the party's website, that the fraction is a proponent. They believe a European defence will make the EU less dependent from the US and that it will foster peace even far beyond the continent. Throughout the interview and even the article, it becomes apparent though that the party is not a supporter of the current defence investment plans and government.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

From the discussion of the five fraction's stances towards a EU army, multiple interesting findings can be identified.

Firstly, each and every fraction under study supports the establishment of a joint European military in some way. Nonetheless, they all believe it is a long-term project. What is meant exactly by 'long-term' however remains unclear. As for now, they all seem to be in favour of more intergovernmental European cooperation in the field of defence.

Secondly, as each party supports the creation of such military structure and some even explicitly mention their support for it in their official positions, one would expect that they are able to define the concept. However, not a single respondent could provide with 100% certainty a definition of the kind of European army their fraction supports. In other words, even though there is plenty of discussion about a European army, there is no clear understanding of what the concept actually means or stands for, which is quite problematic. It namely makes the call for a European army largely incredible, as it seems that the fractions have not really given it a lot of thought.

Linked to the previous observation is the finding that seemingly no actor seems to support the definition of a EU army as proposed in 1.8.1, with the exception of Alain Top, who speaks in his own name, rather than that of his fraction.

Fourthly, the knowledge of the Commission members on current European military projects seems to be quite restricted. This can be illustrated by the fact that two out of the four MP's did not know what PESCO was.

Fifthly, throughout the discussion of the fraction's stances, it became clear that their official positions concerning defence, which can be found on their website, were either non-existent or remarkably limited. It leads us to believe that defence is not a policy priority or something they can score with during the elections. This could also partly explain the limited knowledge (and maybe interest) of the MP's in the topic.

Sixthly, while in some way or another all fractions support a European army, the exact reasons why are not always very elaborated. This could be derived both from the interviews, as well as from the external sources. Put differently, the fraction's stances do not seem to be based on solid argumentation.

Although their support is not always well-founded, increasing efficiency, effectiveness and the creation of political advantage are three shared arguments why the fractions support a common EU military. The loss of sovereignty on the other hand, is recognized as a potential disadvantage by most respondents.

Eighthly, CD&V's Hendrik Bogaert claims that his fraction is the biggest supporter of a European army. The MP could however not provide a description of the concept to explain the agreed meaning on what a joint EU army implies for CD&V. Again, this makes their call for a European army rather questionable.

Ninthly, of all fractions under study, N-VA seems to be the least in favour as its central figure, the MOD, calls a European army something only dreamers believe in.



A tenth observation is that in two of the five fractions under study, there are clear disagreements between its leading figures about their stance towards an army amongst the Europeans.

It remains unclear whether the political parties' view towards Belgian Defence today has an influence on their support for a European army. It can be derived though that all fractions are relatively negative towards the current state of the Belgian army and that they all support the creation of a common EU defence. Whether there is a causal relationship between these two variables is however uncertain. The same goes for the possible link between their support for current initiatives and the creation of a EU army. All fractions are seemingly in favour of already existing military partnerships, but whether they therefore also believe a EU army is possible, cannot be validated.

Finally, the antimilitarist stance of the green and socialist party could be confirmed throughout the interviews. As they are not proponents of an army in the first place, could their support for a European army just be a way to get rid of that national army? This question remains unsolved.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **THE MILITARY DEBATE**

As the Belgian army senior ranks have never before openly discussed their stance towards a European army, the findings presented hereunder are solely based on the seven interviews conducted in the framework of this dissertation. Interviews were conducted with the Chief of Defence, General Marc Compagnol; the Commander of the Naval Component, Divisional admiral Wim Robberecht; the Commander of the Medical Component, Major-general Pierre Neirinckx; the Commander of the Land Component, Major-general Marc Thys; the Director General of the Directorate General Material Resources, Lieutenant-general Rudy Debaene and the Assistant Chief of Staff Strategy, Major-general Philippe Boucké. Moreover, an interview was planned with the Air Component Commander, Major-general Frederik Vansina. However, because of political uproar with regard to the replacement of the F-16, the interview did not take place as planned. In order for the research to be representative to some extent, the view of the Air Component had to be represented in some other way. Therefore, an interview was conducted with the Commander ad interim of the Air Component, Colonel Frédéric Givron. While Colonel Givron does not hold the title of general and thus technically does not belong to the study population of this research, it was assured that the opinion held by the Colonel is very similar to General Vansina's as he is the General's Chief of Staff and second in command.

As the opinions of the colonel and six generals largely overlap, the seven positions will be discussed simultaneously.

#### **6.1 Stance towards a European army**

A first thing that becomes apparent is that there is equally no shared or single definition of a European army amongst the Belgian army senior ranks. Both the CHOD as well as Major-general Neirinckx indicate that there is no correct delineation of the concept (M. Compagnol, personal communication, March 8, 2018; P. Neirinckx, personal communication, March 8, 2018). Most of the respondents do make a distinction between two kinds of definitions, one being the farthest-reaching but undesired, the other one being less ambitious but supported. Divisional admiral

Robberecht for instance asserts that one extreme definition of a European army implies an organisation with a single command. This definition coincides with the delineation of the concept made in this dissertation. Another conception provided by the Divisional admiral is a European army as an efficient European military capacity, which is the result of structured cooperation between different EU member states that put national resources at the disposal of the organisation (W. Robberecht, personal communication, March 8, 2018). All definitions of the other officers largely coincide with at least one of the two conceptions uttered by Divisional admiral Robberecht.

Now, what is the actual stance of the Belgian army senior ranks towards the creation of a European army? All seven respondents indicate that a European army as denoted in this dissertation is an unattainable utopia today. Each and every one of them is however a proponent of European defence cooperation in some way.

Major-general Boucké for example declares to be a supporter of European army when this term implies partnerships between the national armies of three to six states within a EU framework. These partners are assumed to use the same standards. The prime example is a partnership like the one between the BENELUX countries. From experience, Boucké once was a force commander of a EU Battle Group, the Major-general highlights that six countries is the maximum (P. Boucké, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

The CHOD's opinion is very similar to the one just spelled out above. General Comperol first of all clarifies that he does not believe in a European army comparable to that of the US. The General does believe that over time, collaborations, which are already slowly coming into existence today, will thrive and grow bigger. He explicitly refers to the partnership between the Dutch and Belgian navies as a prime example. Structured cooperation to a greater or lesser extent between EU member states is the definition of a European army that the CHOD does support (M. Comperol, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

Lieutenant-general Debaene in turn approves European cooperation in the field of defence like there are already plenty of examples today. The Lieutenant-general however also believes that when politicians decide to actually establish a European

army, which he considers to be very unlikely, this could only work provided that every participating nation is considered to be equal. On top of that, the Lieutenant-general has a specific interpretation of that European army. It should be shaped like the American system, which makes a distinction between ‘the Active Army’ and ‘the National Guard’. The National Guard would still ensure the safety of the nation’s own territory, for example in the case a natural disaster strikes. The Active Army would completely be at the disposal of the EU (R. Debaene, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

While Divisional admiral Robberecht does seem to support the second definition of a European army he provided, he is very cautious and hesitant about the ‘up-scaling’ of certain current partnerships. As the Commander of the Navy, he namely knows first hand how challenging cooperation can be. Robberecht asserts that after seeing how difficult it is for two neighbouring European countries, that are relatively small in size, to get to where they are today, he is not up for bringing this project to a European level any time soon (W. Robberecht, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

Unlike the other officers, Major-general Neirinckx originally was a strong supporter of a European army. This however all changed after being deployed in the Eurocorps. The Medical Component Commander came to the realization there that a European army in the strict sense is purely a dream. The reason for this will be explained in the next section. Neirinckx does state a EU army is attainable in some aspects, especially in the military medical domain as there are already an abundance of examples. He reckons a gradual evolution is in the works but that a single command will never be established (P. Neirinckx, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

As for Major-general Thys, he believes a European army as the armed forces of the federal state of Europe is a massive illusion. The Commander of the Land Component does believe there is an existential urgency for more European cooperation (M. Thys, personal communication, March 16, 2018).

Finally, Colonel Givron asserts that he is a proponent of a European defence given the current context. Just like Groen’s Wouter De Vriendt, the Colonel makes a distinction between a European army and a European defence. While he believes a

European army truly is a single army composed of the different EU member states, he delineates a European defence as an organisation which can be set up ad hoc, in function of the type of intervention or mission (F. Givron, personal communication, April 6, 2018).

Throughout the seven interviews, it became clear that there is no official joint vision of the Belgian army senior ranks on Belgian Defence's support for a European army. Divisional admiral Robberecht goes as far as saying that the staff is not prompted to adopt a common position. Linked to this is the reality that an army is only an executor of political decisions. The only thing they can and are allowed to do is give military-technical advice to the CHOD, who then bundles all the information and subsequently hands this over to the Minister of Defence (W. Robberecht, personal communication, March 8, 2018). Lieutenant-general Debaene upholds this by saying that the staff can only do their job and provide advice, but that it eventually is a political decision. Once that political decision is made, Defence becomes an implementation tool. The Lieutenant-general even calls a soldier the most 'loyal creature' as they accept and recognize that they only serve to execute the foreign policy of their nation. It is not a coincidence that the military does not have the right to strike (R. Debaene, personal communication, March 8, 2018). Six of the seven officers do believe that among the staff, the same ideas are shared. Four of the generals explicitly state that they believe none of their colleagues are a proponent of a single European army. Four respondents do however also believe that the staff is pro European cooperation. As can be derived from what is described above, the assertions of the officers can be verified. There certainly is a common thread in the different opinions and they do all seem to be in favour of (more) European partnerships.

A final remark that should be made concerning the stance of the Belgian army senior ranks is the fact that all officers declare that European cooperation, not a European army in the strict sense, is quasi continuously being discussed within the organisation. Most also refer to the Strategic Vision in this light. The Strategic Vision namely states that for the development of future capabilities, cooperation with European partners should be sought as much as possible (M. Compagnol, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

## 6.2 Arguments explaining stance

Plenty of reasons are given why a 'true' European army is believed to be an illusion and why they do or do not believe in certain forms of cooperation. Firstly, the arguments as to why all the officers presume a joint European military force is unattainable will be discussed.

The most reoccurring explanation, which is shared by five of the seven respondents, is the loss of sovereignty, independence and national decision-making power. Major-general Neirinckx links this loss of national decision-making power to his own experiences in Rwanda in 1994. The stance of Belgium in the conflict was quite different to that of France. The commander of the Medical component asks himself whose interests would have been defended if these countries had shared a single army back then (P. Neirinckx, personal communication, March 8, 2018). General Compernel associates the loss of sovereignty, just like Hendrik Bogaert, with unwillingly being dragged into an operation you preferred to stay out of (M. Compernel, personal communication, March 8, 2018). Lieutenant-general Debaene wonders in the light of the loss of sovereignty brought about by a European army, whether that common European force would have reacted the same way Belgian Defence did immediately after the terrorist attacks on March 22, 2016 (R. Debaene, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

The second most popular reason why officers consider a single European army as a utopia is that they believe there is no political will and a lack of real political visionaries. One officer goes as far as saying that politicians often use the term 'European army' as a declaration of intent but in fact, it is just an empty phrase. The same person believes its not this generation of politicians that will establish a European army. He also stated that politicians often do not even see the pros and cons to the whole idea as they are far from specialists in the area, but do not refrain from proposing to establish such a common defence (Anonymous, personal communication, 2018). Moreover, several generals state that politicians are also not ready to adopt a single European Foreign Policy and a single command that would manage the army.

Multiple respondents also believe that different cultures, values, languages and ways of working stand in the way of an army amongst the Europeans. Both Major-general Boucké as well as Major-general Neirinckx have personally experienced the obstacles this brings about. As mentioned earlier, Major-general Boucké was employed as a force commander in a EU Battle Group in 2014. Together with the Netherlands, Belgium formed a binational battalion. While the Belgian delegation was completely comprised of Dutch speaking soldiers, meaning that both nations technically spoke the same language, there still were many communication issues during the trainings. Given that two countries with almost the same culture and language still encounter such problems, the Major-general asserts this speaks volumes what would happen if a force composed of soldiers speaking 24 different languages would be established (P. Boucké, personal communication, March 8, 2018). Major-general Neirinckx in his turn talks about his experience working for the Eurocorps. The four different doctors he shared an office with in Strasbourg all had a different policy concerning the vaccination against malaria. While the soldiers were all exposed to the same kind of mosquitos, the prophylaxes were different. That moment, the Major-general started to question his dream of a single European army (P. Neirinckx, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

Moreover, two generals pose that they and their colleagues are not proponents because it would bring about uncertainty about their function within the bigger picture. They ask themselves simple but critical questions such as 'where am I going to work?' and 'How much am I going to earn?' Major-general Thys jokingly said that if they would say that everyone would become a EU civil servant employed in Brussels, earning the same amount of money as regular EU civil servants, there would be no problem. This is however very unlikely to happen. The Land Component Commander also asks himself questions about how budgets and personnel would be managed and how the annual contributions of the nation states would be calculated. Suppose they impose a contribution of 1,5% of the GDP, this would almost be a twofold increase of the current defence budget (R. Debaene, personal communication, March 8, 2018; M. Thys, personal communication, March 16, 2018).

A fifth reason that is cited by at least three generals is the fact that many nations still have their own weapon systems and military equipment, which stand in the way of

interoperability. Major-general Neirinckx illustrated this painful reality with his own experience as a doctor in a field hospital during the conflict in Kabul. The Belgian oxygen concentrators were not compatible with the German or Italian's oxygen tanks, so an interface had to be sought to be able to actually use each others supplies. This made the Major-general realize that there still is a lot of work to be done on the road towards a single European army (P. Neirinckx, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

The previous argument also has to do with the protection of the national defence industry, which is a sixth justification for the stance of at least three officers. They believe that as long as nations keep on protecting their own economy and defence industry, a unified European military force remains a dream, rather than an actual possibility (R. Debaene, personal communication, March 8, 2018; F. Givron, personal communication, april 6, 2018; W. Robberecht, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

Lieutenant-general Debaene believes that partaking in a European army requires all the soldiers to distance themselves from their own nationality. They should be able to adopt a European identity. Again from experience, he knows Belgians are more willing and able to do that, than for example the French. This however also raises questions about how the national duties Defence currently fulfils, would still be guaranteed (R. Debaene, personal communication, March 8, 2018). Major-general Neirinckx poses that in current partnerships, whenever something critical happens, national interests and procedures still take over (P. Neirinckx, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

Nextly, the CHOD and the Commander of the Medical Component are not proponents of a European army as it most likely would require the nation states to specialize in a certain military branch. According to General Compernel this would in its turn bring about the risk that you are the only nation that has a certain capacity at its disposal and you therefore get dragged unwillingly into an operation or that you are the 'party pooper' that prevents the intervention from happening (M. Compernel, personal communication, March 8, 2018; P. Neirinckx, personal communication, March 8, 2018).



Finally, the last issue raised is the idea that bigger member states have a hard time accepting that smaller member states can also have a say in important decisions. For Lieutenant-general Debaene, Belgium and the Netherlands are a great example. While the Netherlands views itself as the smallest among the biggest nations in Europe, Belgium considers itself the largest one among the smallest. According to Debaene, this generates a completely different mindset. The Netherlands, which is 'marine-nation', has for example currently a hard time accepting the fact that Belgium is taking the lead in a marine-project within the PESCO-framework. Dutch soldiers are asking themselves why they as specialists in the field are left out of the decision-making process while 'les petits Belges' can call the shots. Discussions like this would only be aggravated within a European army (R. Debaene, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

As mentioned earlier, all respondents however do believe in (more) European cooperation to a certain extent. In what follows, the reasoning behind their support will be explained.

A first advantage to cooperation according to Colonel Givron and Major-general Thys is cost sharing. Especially Major-general Thys highlights the importance of this. He states that particularly in Belgium people realize that through working together, public resources can be better spent. Thys believes this is the case because especially in Belgium, the defence budget is under a lot of constraint. The Land Commander even declares that without cooperation, Belgium Defence would be non-existent by now (F. Givron, personal communication, April 6, 2018; M. Thys, personal communication, March 16, 2018).

Secondly, strategic partnerships are the fastest way to give Belgian Defence some relevance again today according to the Land Component Commander (M. Thys, personal communication, March 16, 2018).

Thirdly, Colonel Givron argues that given the current context, namely the common threats EU member states are faced with, powers should be bundled (F. Givron, personal communication, April 6, 2018).

Fourthly, three generals profess that Belgian Defence is currently too small to operate on its own and therefore is in need of partnerships (P. Boucké, personal communication, March 8, 2018 ; R. Debaene, personal communication, March 8, 2018; M.Thys, personal communication, March 16, 2018).

Finally, numerous officers declare that examples such as BENESAM show that cooperation can work.

Important to note is that the Belgian army senior ranks also have a considerable amount of reservations about more European military cooperation in general.

First of all, four generals highlight that in order for cooperation to work, you have to go above and beyond. The Divisional admiral was particularly honest about his experience with BENESAM. The Marine Component Commander indicates it is very complicated and hard to come to such far-reaching integration (W. Robberecht, personal communication, March 8, 2018). Major-general Neirinckx said that while the partnership within the naval domain is a great example, he was sure that the Admiral had been honest to admit that the cooperation can be compared to a marriage, meaning that not everything goes well from the first until the last day (P. Neirinckx, personal communication, March 8, 2018). The Major-general was right, the Divisional admiral did admit to that.

Secondly, Givron, Robberecht and Boucké all stress that the scope of the cooperation should be kept as narrow as possible. Three to six countries, which are preferably similar in size and close in distance, seem to be ideal. The larger the group, the harder it is to make fast and qualitative decisions. Moreover, differences in size also complicate cooperation. All three officers speak from experience (P. Boucké, personal communication, March 8, 2018; F. Givron, personal communication, April 6, 2018; W. Robberecht, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

Finally, Major-general Neirinckx asserts that cooperation requires a trusting relationship and clear agreements. Even then, orders can still be ignored on the implementation level. The Major-general cites another incident that took place in

Kabul. Clear agreements were in place concerning blood transfusions. Nonetheless, when there was a shortage of blood, agreements seemed to be quickly put aside as an officer at implementation level claimed that '*Deutsches Blut ist nur für Deutsche Soldaten*' (P. Neirinckx, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

### 6.3 Opinion on other European defence cooperation projects

Throughout the two previous sections, the opinions of the officers on other European cooperation projects in the area of defence already shimmered through. In what follows, their impressions will be more thoroughly discussed.

When asked about his opinion on current military partnerships, Colonel Givron proclaims that the lack of clearly defined ambition stands in the way of a higher level of European military cooperation. The Colonel is hopeful though given the recent initiatives in the light of PESCO and the new EUGS. Givron does stress that as long as nations keep clinging onto their sovereignty, projects will keep on failing. The Commander a.i. goes on to tell that a few years ago, the Air Component tried to establish a joint training programme for pilots. This project however failed because different nation states wanted to protect their own defence industry (F. Givron, personal communication, April 6, 2018).

When particularly asked about their opinion of PESCO, three respondents indicated that they believe in the project and appraise the new dynamism that it brings about. Four officers are waiting for the project to develop further, before making a final judgment. As for now, it seems to remain quite vague. The Divisional admiral belongs to the latter group of officers and stated that "the proof of the pudding is in the eating". Robberecht believes the intent of the project is right though (W. Robberecht, personal communication, March 8, 2018). Major-general Boucké also belongs to the second group, claiming that PESCO is very ambitious but initially moved forward too quickly. This resulted in rather hollow agreements, hidden behind a mask of rhetorics. Subsequently, many governance rules still have to be set out. PESCO served primarily as a tool to show that the ball is rolling again in the Defence domain, but now things have to become more specific (P. Boucké, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

Both the CHOD as well as Colonel Givron view EATC as a success story. The Colonel asserts that the strength of the partnership lies in the high level of ambition and the standardisation of the processes. The implication that troops can be withdrawn at any moment to be deployed in national operation is however indicated as the weakness of the command centre (M. Compagnol, personal communication, March 8, 2018; F. Givron, personal communication, April 6, 2018).

BENESAM has already been amply discussed throughout this dissertation. As stated earlier, the Divisional admiral admitted that it was not an easy ride getting to where they stand today with the partnership. Many other officers however do view it as the perfect example of a successful cooperation. General Compagnol is one of those officers. The CHOD assumes just like Heyman that without BENESAM, the Maritime Component would no longer have existed today (M. Compagnol, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

Furthermore, there are differences of opinion concerning NATO. While Divisional admiral Robberecht and Major-general Boucké respectively believe that NATO is responsible for defence budgets to finally increase again and for rapid decisions on operations to be undertaken, the CHOD seems to be less positive. According to General Compagnol, countries such as the UK seem to want that the Alliance positions itself as the only organisation capable of using hard power. The EU is subsequently condemned to solely use soft power. The advantage NATO has because of the role the US plays in the Alliance is at least equalled by the ability of the EU to exercise coercion through the use of economic and diplomatic means, something NATO cannot do (P. Boucké, personal communication, March 8, 2018; M. Compagnol, personal communication, March 8, 2018; W. Robberecht, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

Finally, Eurocorps is the last defence cooperation project to be discussed in this section. General Compagnol finds it hard to express his opinion about the project because he believes the corps is in the midst of an existential crisis. While Eurocorps seems to be a strong symbol of European cooperation, in practice it is never used. One of the reasons for this is that nations such as France, Germany and Spain seem to want their own headquarters used by organisations such as NATO or the EU,

rather than the corps' headquarters. This once more shows that the European idea often is no match for the national interests (M. Compernel, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

#### **6.4 Vision on the future of Belgian Defence**

Five of the six officers that talked about the future of Belgian Defence, directly or indirectly mentioned that the future of the Belgian armed forces lies in European cooperation. This is quite a contrast to the MP's, where two out of five did not even slightly mention collaboration. Two generals indirectly expressed their support for strategic partnerships through stating that their vision for the future is based on the Strategic Vision. The four others were more explicit about their support for a more internationally embedded defence. The CHOD is one of those four officers. The general however does not have an idea yet about how exactly this cooperation should be shaped (M. Compernel, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

When discussing their vision of the future, the way the generals look at Belgian Defence today shimmers through. Major-general Thys and General Compernel both recognize that the earlier discussed personnel issue requires some serious reforms in the future (M. Compernel, personal communication, March 8, 2018; M. Thys, personal communication, March 16, 2018). Divisional admiral Robberecht argues that in the light of the recent sense of insecurity, it becomes apparent that the armed forces all over Europe have been neglected ever since the end of the Cold War. As a consequence, Defence has to work on its organisation and image so that the population realizes again that there is a power to ensure their welfare and well-being (W. Robberecht, personal communication, March 8, 2018). Lieutenant-general Debaene seems to have a more positive view, stating that the reputation Belgian soldiers have now, should be maintained in the future (R. Debaene, personal communication, March 8, 2018). It must be noted though that all respondents seem to have a quite positive stance towards the current organisation of the Belgian army.

## 6.5 Influence on political decision-making

In this section, the self-perceived influence the officers have on political decision-making in the field of defence in general and in the specific area of European cooperation, will be depicted.

First of all, it is important to remark that the CHOD explicitly states that he is not consulted by politicians in general. Accordingly, General Compernel has little contact with the Commission on National Defence (M. Compernel, personal communication, March 8, 2018). From the interviews with the six other officers, it could be derived that they also do not seem to be consulted by for example the members of the Commission. Four of the six respondents that answered the questions regarding their political influence did indicate that they give military technical advice concerning the feasibility of certain ideas to the MOD through General Compernel. Hereto, the General and Minister meet at least once every two weeks (M. Compernel, personal communication, March 8, 2018). The staff's advice also reaches the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister. Divisional admiral Robberecht states there clearly is an interaction between the armed forces and politics. The interaction is limited though, given that the CHOD always occupies the position of final advisor (W. Robberecht, March 8, 2018). As Assistant Chief of Staff Strategy, Major-general Boucké is however also often consulted. The Major-general calls himself lucky because of this, since he recognizes that his colleagues do not get to give advice as much (P. Boucké, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

When asked about the actual impact they have, three out of six feel like their advice is usually followed. The CHOD highlights that especially in the area of European defence, the staff and the government are on the same wavelength and are subsequently not being sidelined (M. Compernel, March 8, 2018). While Major-general Thys also believes that most of the times the ideas of the staff are pursued, he acknowledges that both actors have their own agenda (M. Thys, personal communication, March 8, 2018). Lieutenant-general Debaene and Major-general Boucké in their turn believe that sometimes politicians do and sometimes do not take into account the vision and/or opinion of the officers. It seems to depend on the domain and the mindset of the Minister of Defence in office. Again the generals are

well aware of the fact that they are just a tool for implementing the foreign policy of their country (P. Boucké, personal communication, March 8, 2018; R. Debaene, personal communication, March 8, 2018). Finally, the Divisional admiral is the only one to state that he strongly believes that the advice provided by the staff influences the final political decision given that their experts in their field and therefore impossible to be ignored (W. Robberecht, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

## 6.6 Conclusion

The most important conclusion that can be drawn from chapter six is the observation that while there is no such thing as a common position of the staff towards a European army, not a single respondent is a supporter of the concept as defined in this dissertation. Plenty of reasons are given explaining why they believe a EU army is an illusion. The loss of sovereignty, the lack of political willingness, differences in culture, language and ways of working, protection of national defence industries, the use of different equipment but also the uncertainty it brings about for their own position, are all arguments used in defending their stance. At the same time, all officers are proponents to some extent of (more) European partnerships in the field of defence, as they realize that Defence's budget and size is currently too limited to perform all the tasks it should carry out. When both talking about a European army, but also about up-scaling certain partnerships, the experiences the officers already had with working in multinational settings have quite a big influence. Even what seems to be a prime example of successful cooperation between EU member states from the outside, is experienced in a complete different way from the inside. Accordingly, it can be perceived that the officers are more realistic and pragmatic than politicians when talking about a EU army or more cooperation. A second matter that results from this is that opinions diverge on the success of cooperation projects depending on whether they were personally involved or not. Despite all of this, most respondents do recognize that the future of Belgian Defence lies in multilateral partnerships. Finally, chapter six has taught us that while the advice given by the staff is limited to the MOD, the Prime Minister and the department of Foreign Affairs and is canalized primarily through the CHOD, it does get taken into account regularly. An important lesson learned in this light is that the officers do strongly recognize they are just an implementation tool of political decisions.

## CHAPTER 7

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Chapter 7, the last chapter of this dissertation, discusses the overall findings of the research by answering the research question and concludes by providing some policy recommendations.

#### 7.1 Answering the research question

On the basis of the table below, the question to what extent Belgian army senior ranks and the Flemish fractions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives support the idea to establish a European army, will be answered.

**Table 3 – systematic overview of respondents' stances towards EU army**

Fraction/Officer	Supporter of a EU army?	To what extent?	Arguments explaining stance	Remarks
CD&V	Yes	Long term project	+ Increased combat effectiveness + Political advantages + Efficiency gain	
Groen	Yes	common European defence - not a EU army as such	+ Political advantages + Counteracting capability fragmentation + Budgetary benefits	Anti-militarist party
N-VA	Partly	Army amongst the Low Countries - Long term project	+ Efficiency gain + Effectiveness gain - Does not lead to budgetary benefits	Disagreement between MOD and other party members
Open Vld	Yes	Long term project	+ Political advantages + Efficiency gain	Disagreement between party members on time frame
sp.a	Yes	Exact stance still being developed	+ Fosters peace	Anti-militarist party
Maj.-Gen. Boucké	Partly	EU army as partnerships between national	- Lack of interoperability - Different languages	Experience with EU Battle Group plays important role



		armies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cooperation requires hard work</li> <li>+ Too small to do it all themselves</li> </ul>	
Gen. Comperol	Partly	<p>EU army as partnerships between national armies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- not an army like the US</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Would bring about unwanted specialization</li> <li>- Loss of sovereignty</li> <li>+ Too small to do it all themselves</li> </ul>	
Lt.-Gen. Debaene	Partly	<p>EU army as partnerships between national armies</p> <p>or shaped like US system (National Guard vs. Standing army)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loss of sovereignty</li> <li>- What about own function within bigger whole</li> <li>- Requires distancing from own nationality</li> <li>- Each has own equipment, economy</li> <li>- Different languages, culture, history</li> <li>- Disagreements between bigger and smaller MS</li> </ul>	Personal experience influences stance
Col. Givron	Partly	<p>EU army as ad hoc organisation comparable to EATC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- true EU army is utopian</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loss of sovereignty</li> <li>- Protection of national economy and defence industry</li> <li>- Different cultures and ways of working</li> <li>- Level of political ambition too low</li> <li>+ Burden sharing</li> <li>+ Cost sharing</li> </ul>	Commander a.i.
Maj.-Gen. Neirinckx	Partly	<p>EU army with one commando is impossible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- gradual evolution in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loss of sovereignty</li> <li>- Different ways of working, different culture, different language</li> <li>- Level of political</li> </ul>	Experience with Eurocorps and various international operations influences

		some aspects is in the works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ambition is too low</li> <li>- Requires clear agreements and preparation</li> <li>- Cooperation requires hard work, even in a small group it is not evident</li> <li>- Would require specialization but what with certain national tasks</li> </ul>	stance
Adm. Robberecht	No	<p>True EU army is a utopia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- even up-scaling</li> </ul> <p>BENESAM is not desirable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Only works with small number of (neighbouring) countries</li> <li>- Cooperation requires hard work</li> <li>- Protection own economy and defence industry</li> <li>- Political structure not ready</li> </ul>	Experience with BENESAM influences stance
Maj.-Gen. Thys	Partly	<p>True EU army is an illusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Existential need for European cooperation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loss of sovereignty</li> <li>- Lack of political willingness</li> <li>- Cooperation requires hard work</li> <li>+ Without cooperation, there's no longer a Belgian army</li> <li>+ Cost sharing</li> </ul>	

This table immediately shows the major differences between the individual stances of the Belgian army senior ranks and those of the fractions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives. Both from the table as well as from the previous sections, it can be derived that all political parties seem to be a proponent of a European army to some extent, in contrast to the officers. CD&V calls itself the strongest supporter of a joint EU military amongst the majority parties. This can be verified by multiple findings. Firstly, it is the only majority party without internal disputes about their exact stance. Secondly, CD&V is one of the only parties to have a comprehensive section on a EU army in their official positions. Thirdly, Bogaert gave the most elaborate answer as to

why his fraction supports a common defence. It must encore be noted though that even the most 'supporting' party could not exactly define what they understand by a European army. From the opposition parties, sp.a seems to be the most in favour, as it truly seems to support a EU army, rather than a common defence such as the green party. The credibility of their call is however affected by the fact that they are an antimilitarist party in the first place. Moreover, it should be noted that their exact stance towards the topic is still being developed. As can be derived from the table above, N-VA is considered to be the least in favour. Even though one can read on their website that the party is a proponent of an army amongst the Low Countries in the medium term and a European army in the long run, the likelihood the Flemish nationalists would formally sign a letter of intent concerning a EU army, is currently relatively small. The party's leading figure in defence, Steven Vandeput, namely strongly opposes this idea. The MOD's cabinet clarified in an interview the reasoning behind Vandeput's opinion. They asserted that a EU army would bring about more costs instead of less, as investments initially have to be made. As of now, there are simply no financial resources for that. Finally, a few words should be said about the liberal fraction's stance. One would assume, given that Open Vld is known to be a staunch supporter of everything European, that they would be the biggest proponents. This is however not the case as there are differences of opinion amongst its members with regard to the exact timeframe. Practically all parties believe a European army is a project for the long run though. The biggest hurdle, which has to be overcome first, is the will to renounce national sovereignty in the area of foreign and security policy.

The Deputy Diplomatic Director of the Minister of Defence hypothesized that the Belgian army senior ranks would be bigger supporters of a European army than the political fractions, for the reason that it is believed that they are staunch supporters of more European integration, purely for the sake of it. This can be disputed. Even though there is no official common position, there is a clear common thread in the opinions of the seven officers that were consulted. The loss of sovereignty, the lack of genuine political willingness, differences in culture, language and ways of working, protection of national defence industries, the use of different equipment but also the uncertainty it brings about for their own position are only a few of the several reasons why not a single officer supports a EU army as defined in this dissertation.

Furthermore, their experience at first hand with working within a European framework also strongly influences their views. They see that it requires a lot of effort. The fact that none of the six generals and the colonel are a proponent of 'true' European army, does not prevent them from supporting other forms of military partnerships. Although, they are again more critical and sceptical (read, more pragmatic) about the shape these partnerships should take on. They have clear preferences for cooperation between a limited number of nations that are similar in size. As can be inferred from the above table, the Divisional admiral is the strongest opponent of a joint military amongst the Europeans. Not only did the Admiral call it a utopia, he equally is not fond of up-scaling already existing successful cooperation projects such as BENESAM. From all the respondents, Robberecht is the one most frequently involved in one of the furthest reaching partnerships, as can be derived from section 3.5.2. This clearly leaves its marks. Bearing in mind the large amount of objections made against a EU army, Major-general Neirinckx and Lieutenant-general Debaene are considered to be stronger opponents than Colonel Givron, Major-general Boucké and Major-general Thys. No officer stands notably out as being the most in favour.

The final question, which has yet to be answered is: 'Can the opposition to or approval of a European army by the Belgian army senior ranks influence the political decision-making process?' Three reasons lead us to believe this is not the case. Firstly, the officers are not directly consulted by politicians in general. Secondly, they are only indirectly asked for advice by the MOD through the CHOD and finally, as of now, there is still no coordinated and shared vision towards a European army. On the other hand, the officers have indicated that their advice is relatively often followed, given that they are experts in their field.

Now that all research questions have been answered, a few other findings can be discussed.

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that the Belgian army senior ranks have more knowledge and expertise than the politicians in the topic at hand. This is both logical but equally disconcerting as it is the politicians' job to make decisions concerning the military, given that the army is only an executor of political decisions

and policies. This observation is based on the scarcity of the fundamentals underlying the politicians' arguments and their limited knowledge of projects such as PESCO.

While for some politicians history and the current state of Belgian Defence clearly influences their opinions, for the Belgian army senior ranks personal experiences seem to influence their stance towards a EU army quite strongly. This also justifies the existence of chapter 2, 3 and 4. History seems to play a role as multiple politicians have stated that they believe a EU army is only a future prospect given the long road travelled so far. Others seem to be influenced by the precarious situation Defence is currently finding itself in. As mentioned in 5.6, the causal relationship between their support and view towards Defence today has not been proven though. The influence of personal experiences on the opinions of the officers has been established throughout chapter 6.

A third finding is that Belgian army senior ranks seem to have a more positive view towards Belgian Defence today than the MP's and their fractions do. While they do reckon that Defence struggles with certain issues, it all seems to lead back to the lack of financial resources. Politicians on the contrary seem to be more negative and seem to want to resolve this by 'simply' installing a European army. From this observation it could be suggested that the stance towards the national army today, influences actors' stances towards a European army. Again, it must be noted that this cannot be verified with 100% certainty.

Furthermore, while all four MP's interviewed claimed that their fractions are supporters of a European army to a certain extent, when specifically asked about their vision on the future of Defence, a European army is often not mentioned. For the Belgian army senior ranks, this is the complete opposite. While the officers are not supportive of a EU army, they do mention that the future lies in cooperation.

Withal, multiple reasons make the politician's call for a European army incredible. Firstly, there is the fact that not a single respondent can provide a definition of the concept. Secondly, there is the anti-militarist stance of the two minority parties. Thirdly, they could only provide limited arguments as to why they are proponents and lastly, various remarks made by certain officers have backed the lack of credibility.

Finally, the discussion around the replacement of the F-16 fleet seems to overshadow the topic of this very dissertation, given that multiple respondents have raised the issue and two respondents had to cancel the interview.

## 7.2 Policy recommendations

This would not be a master dissertation to obtain a degree in Public Administration and Management if there were not at least some policy recommendations made.

First of all, a clear, coherent and shared vision amongst the Belgian army senior ranks should be created. This vision should not only tackle their stance towards a European army but also towards European military cooperation in general. Such shared point of view is to this day not available and has been indicated by Pascal Heyman, the Diplomatic Director of the MOD, as something that is truly missing.

Secondly, to expand the knowledge of members of the Commission on National Defence, they should be informed in a systematic manner about the different ongoing initiatives in the field of (European) defence. That way, it can be avoided in the future that the MP's are not up-to-date on the military projects Belgium is currently involved in.

Thirdly, the Belgian army senior ranks should brief the politicians about the difficulty they and their men encounter with partnerships. Even though these partnerships seem very successful and self-evident from the outside, it takes a lot of hard work and compromises. The officers have indicated that only under certain conditions these partnerships can truly function (small group of countries, shared values, shared equipment....) If the politicians get a grip of how it works in real life, they will more likely be more considerate when promoting and calling for more cooperation in the future.

Fourthly, the term 'European army' should be more clearly defined by the political parties. Not only should they internally agree on the term they support, this should also be explained in their positions.

A final recommendation is that political parties should work out their official position towards a European army/Belgian Defence more thoroughly or create one in the first place. As was discussed in section 1.2, national security is more than ever a hot topic and as the hot discussion around the replacement of the F-16 fleet illustrated, people do still care about defence.

### **7.3 Final conclusion**

As early as 1947, the fundamentals for a European army were laid down. Today, in 2018, such a EU army still does not exist. Many researches have been conducted and articles have been written about this long road towards a joint military. Most of them tackle the different initiatives that have been undertaken, so did this dissertation. The focus of this qualitative study was however on finding out to what extent Belgian army senior ranks and Flemish fractions in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives support the idea to establish such European army. A clear difference between the two units of analyses was found. While not a single officer believes in a European army, all fractions more or less do. This sharp difference can be explained by the lack of knowledge and/or interest and the stance towards Belgian Defence on the side of the politicians and by the personal experiences with cooperation on the side of the officers. However, even the positive stance of the fractions should be downplayed. Firstly, within Open Vld and N-VA there are discussions between members about their party's exact stance. Secondly, sp.a and Groen are both known for being anti-militarist, implying that their call for a European army is not as credible. Finally, CD&V, who proclaims to be the biggest proponent, could still not provide a definition of the concept.

It must be noted that this research does have some flaws. These shortcomings pertain to the representativeness, reliability and generalizability of the research, given that most of the findings are based on information acquired through twelve interviews conducted within the framework of this dissertation.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andries, G. (2014). *The value of the Belgian Defence*. Retrieved on April 1, 2018, from [https://mil.be/sites/mil.be/files/files\\_library/waarde\\_belgische\\_defensie\\_-\\_uk.pdf](https://mil.be/sites/mil.be/files/files_library/waarde_belgische_defensie_-_uk.pdf)
- Bailes, A., & Messervy-Whiting, G. (2011). *Death of an institution*. Gent: Academia Press.
- Bartels, H., Kellner, A. & Optenhögel, U. (2017). *Strategic autonomy and the defence of Europe*. Bonn: Dietz.
- Bielenberg, K. (2017, 17 December). Explainer: Ireland joins PESCO... is it the start of an EU army? *Independent.ie*. Retrieved on December 25, 2017, from <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/explainer-ireland-joins-pesco-is-it-the-start-of-an-eu-army-36409443.html>
- Biscop, S. (2017). *European Defence: What's in the CARDS for PESCO?* Retrieved on December 25, 2017, from <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2017/10/SPB91-Biscop.pdf?type=pdf>
- Blockmans, S. (2017). *Europe's defence train has left the station – speed and destination unknown*. Retrieved on January 16, 2018, from <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/europe%E2%80%99s-defence-train-has-left-station-%E2%80%93-speed-and-destination-unknown>
- Bremmer, I. (2017, 24 February). The Only 5 Countries That Meet NATO's Defense Spending Requirements. *Time*. Retrieved on February 1, 2018, from <http://time.com/4680885/nato-defense-spending-budget-trump/>
- Cabinet of Defence and Civil Service. (n.d.). *De toekomst van Defensie: horizon 2030*. Retrieved on April 1, 2018, from [http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2015/02/Papers\\_Wise\\_Pen.pdf?type=pdf](http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2015/02/Papers_Wise_Pen.pdf?type=pdf)
- CD&V. (2017a). *Europa een hefboom voor internationale veiligheid*. Retrieved on April 3, 2018, from <https://www.cdenv.be/standpunten/internationale-veiligheid-europa-als-hefboom/>
- CD&V. (2017b). *Een Europees leger op lange termijn*. Retrieved on April 2, 2018, from <https://www.cdenv.be/standpunten/een-europees-leger-op-lange-termijn/>
- Council of the European Union. (2017). *Defence cooperation: Council establishes Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), with 25 member states participating*



[Press release]. Retrieved on December 25, 2017, from <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/12/11/defence-cooperation-pesco-25-member-states-participating/>

De Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers. (n.d.). *Samenstelling van de commissie Landsverdediging*. Retrieved on March 18, 2018, from <https://www.dekamer.be/kvvcr/showpage.cfm?section=/comm&language=nl&cfm=/site/wwwcfm/comm/com.cfm?com=9297>

Debating Europe. (2016). *Is it time for a joint European army?* Retrieved on March 17, 2018, from <http://www.debatingeurope.eu/2016/08/26/is-it-time-for-a-joint-european-army/#.Wq0OTpPwaMB>

Defensie. (2017). *De strategische visie*. Retrieved April 1, 2018, from <https://www.mil.be/nl/artikel/de-strategische-visie>

Defensie. (n.d.-a). *Admiraliteit Benelux*. Retrieved on January 16, 2018, from <https://www.mil.be/nl/eenheden/admiraliteit-benelux>

Defensie. (n.d.-b). *Defensie (MOD-CHOD)*. Retrieved on March 24, 2018, from <https://mil.be/nl/defensie-mod-chod>

Defensie. (n.d.-c). *Kaders – Categorieën – Graden – Ambt*. Unpublished internal document.

Dehullu, C. (2013). *Van Europese Gemeenschappen tot Europese Unie*. Leuven/Den Haag: Acco.

Dinan, D. (2005). *Ever Closer Union: An Introduction to European Integration*. Retrieved on October 29, 2017, from <https://www.rienner.com/uploads/47e029fe2f724.pdf>

EATC. (2017). *EATC Factsheet*. Retrieved on February 1, 2018, from [http://eatc-mil.com/user\\_uploads/page\\_contents/Factsheet%20-%20NOV%20-%202017.pdf](http://eatc-mil.com/user_uploads/page_contents/Factsheet%20-%20NOV%20-%202017.pdf)

EATC. (2018). *About us*. Retrieved on February 1, 2018, from <http://eatc-mil.com/8/About-us>

EUNAVFOR. (2017). *Mission*. Retrieved on December 24, 2017, from <http://eunavfor.eu/mission/>

EUR-Lex. (2010). *Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, ECSC Treaty*. Retrieved on October 29, 2017, from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:xy0022>

- EUR-Lex. (n.d.). *Enhanced cooperation*. Retrieved on December 23, 2017, from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:xy0015>
- Eurocorps. (2017). *A force for the EU and NATO*. Retrieved on March 18, 2018, from <https://www.eurocorps.org/>
- European Commission. (2017). *European Commission welcomes first operational steps towards a European Defence Union*. Retrieved on December 23, 2017, from [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-17-5205\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-5205_en.htm)
- European Defence Agency. (2017a). *Inception*. Retrieved on October 28, 2017, from <https://www.eda.europa.eu/Aboutus/our-history/inception>
- European Defence Agency. (2017b). *The creation of CSDP*. Retrieved on December 10, 2017, from <https://www.eda.europa.eu/Aboutus/our-history/inception>
- European External Action Service. (2017a). *Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD)*. Retrieved on January 16, 2018, from [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/coordinated\\_annual\\_review\\_on\\_defence\\_card\\_factsheet.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/coordinated_annual_review_on_defence_card_factsheet.pdf)
- European External Action Service. (2017b). *Defending Europe: European Defence Fund*. Retrieved on January 16, 2018, from [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/defence\\_fund\\_factsheet\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/defence_fund_factsheet_0.pdf)
- European External Action Service. (2017c). *EU Missions and Operations As part of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)*. Retrieved on December 23, 2017, from [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/csdp\\_missions\\_and\\_operations\\_factsheet.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/csdp_missions_and_operations_factsheet.pdf)
- European External Action Service. (2017d). *Permanent Structured Cooperation – PESCO*. Retrieved on January 16, 2018, from [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/pesco\\_factsheet\\_13-12-2017\\_final.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/pesco_factsheet_13-12-2017_final.pdf)
- European Union. (2018a). *Belgium*. Retrieved on May 11, 2018, from [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries/member-countries/belgium\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries/member-countries/belgium_en)
- European Union. (2018b). *Living in the EU*. Retrieved on April 1, 2018, from [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/figures/living\\_en#population](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/figures/living_en#population)
- Flamant, R. (2014). *The Value of the Belgian Defence*. Brussels: Belgian Defence. Retrieved on October 29, 2017, from [https://www.mil.be/sites/mil.be/files/files\\_library/waarde\\_belgische\\_defensie\\_-\\_uk.pdf](https://www.mil.be/sites/mil.be/files/files_library/waarde_belgische_defensie_-_uk.pdf)

Flamant, R. & Parrein, P. J. (2016). *De strategische visie voor Defensie*. Brussels: Steven Vandeput. Retrieved on April 2, 2018, from <https://www.mil.be/sites/mil.be/files/pdf/strategic-vision-belgian-defense-nl.pdf>

FOD Buitenlandse Zaken, Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking. (2016). *Militaire operaties*. Retrieved on January 16, 2018, from [https://diplomatie.belgium.be/nl/Beleid/beleidsthemas/vrede\\_en\\_veiligheid/vredesoperaties/met\\_belgische\\_deelname/evdb/militaire\\_operaties](https://diplomatie.belgium.be/nl/Beleid/beleidsthemas/vrede_en_veiligheid/vredesoperaties/met_belgische_deelname/evdb/militaire_operaties)

Gray, A. (2017, 3 February). The 3 biggest threats to the EU, according to President Tusk. *World Economic Forum*. Retrieved on November 19, 2017, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/02/the-3-biggest-threats-to-the-eu-according-to-president-tusk/>

Groen. (2018). *Internationaal*. Retrieved on April 3, 2018, from <https://www.groen.be/internationaal>

Grosemans, K. & Buysrogge, P. (2017, 17 May). N-VA wil Europees leger: 'Terug naar ieder voor zich is geen optie, toch?' *Knack*. Retrieved on April 24, 2018, from <http://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/n-va-wil-europees-leger-terug-naar-ieder-voor-zich-is-geen-optie-toch/article-opinion-853589.html>

IISS. (2016). *The military balance 2016*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos. (2016). *Eurocorps, a military tool for Europe and NATO*. Retrieved on March 18, 2018, from [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Eurocorps\\_A\\_military\\_tool\\_for\\_EU\\_and\\_NATO.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Eurocorps_A_military_tool_for_EU_and_NATO.pdf)

Koutrakos, P. (2013). *The EU common security and defence policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mattelaer, A. (2018). *Belgian Defence in 2018: Regeneration Time?* Retrieved on April 1, 2018, from <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2018/02/SPB95.pdf?type=pdf>

Mortelmans, D. (2009). *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*. Leuven/Den Haag: Acco.

Mortelmans, D. (2011). *Kwalitatieve analyse met Nvivo*. Leuven/Den Haag: Acco.

N-VA. (2018a). *Benelux-defensie*. Retrieved on April 24, 2018, from <https://www.n-va.be/standpunten/benelux-defensie>

- N-VA. (2018b). *Leger*. Retrieved on April 27, 2018, from <https://www.n-va.be/standpunten/leger>
- NATO. (2016). *Operations and missions: past and present*. Retrieved on January 16, 2018, from [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_52060.htm?](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52060.htm?)
- NATO. (2017a). *10 things you need to know about NATO*. Retrieved on January 16, 2018, from [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2017\\_10/20171020\\_1710-10things-eng.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_10/20171020_1710-10things-eng.pdf)
- NATO. (2017b). *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2009-2016)*. Retrieved on April 1, 2018, from [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2017\\_03/20170313\\_170313-pr2017-045.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_03/20170313_170313-pr2017-045.pdf)
- NATO. (n.d.-a). *The French proposal*. Retrieved on October 29, 2017, from [http://www.nato.int/ebookshop/video/declassified/#/en/encyclopedia/accession\\_of\\_greece\\_turkey\\_and\\_germany/ways\\_of\\_integrating\\_germany/the\\_french\\_proposal/](http://www.nato.int/ebookshop/video/declassified/#/en/encyclopedia/accession_of_greece_turkey_and_germany/ways_of_integrating_germany/the_french_proposal/)
- NATO. (n.d.-b). *What is NATO?* Retrieved on January 16, 2018, from <https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/>
- Open Vld. (2017). *Dewael: "NAVO zal wel varen bij Europees leger"*. Retrieved on April 5, 2018, from <http://www.openvld.be/?type=nieuws&id=1&pageid=92595>
- Petzinger, J. (2017, 13 November). The EU signed a "historic" deal to integrate 23 armies to shake off its US dependence. *Quartz*. Retrieved on November 19, 2017, from <https://qz.com/1127984/eu-army-bloc-forging-ahead-with-its-military-integration-to-shake-off-us-dependence/>
- Quille, G. (2008). *The Lisbon Treaty and its implications for CFSP/ESDP*. Brussels: European Parliament. Retrieved on December 23, 2017, from <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/200805/20080513ATT28796/20080513ATT28796EN.pdf>
- Rettman, A. (2017, 3 January). Ceci n'est pas une EU army. *Euobserver*. Retrieved on November 19, 2017, from <https://euobserver.com/europe-in-review/136134>
- Royal Netherlands Navy. (n.d.-a). *Admiralty Benelux*. Retrieved on January 16, 2018, from <https://english.defensie.nl/organisation/navy/navy-units/admiralty-benelux>
- Royal Netherlands Navy. (n.d.-b). *Commander of the Royal Netherlands Navy*. Retrieved on January 16, 2018, from

<https://english.defensie.nl/organisation/navy/commander-of-the-royal-netherlands-navy>

Rubbens, H. (2017). *69 jaar BENESAM-akkoorden*. Retrieved on February 1, 2018, from <https://www.mil.be/nl/artikel/69-jaar-benesam-akkoorden>

Shalal, A., & Emmott, R. (2017, 8 November). EU to sign joint defense pact in show of post-Brexit unity. *Reuters*. Retrieved on November 19, 2017, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-defence/eu-to-sign-joint-defense-pact-in-show-of-post-brexit-unity-idUSKBN1D81CT>

sp.a nationaal. (2015). *Toekomstplan Defensie: een visie graag, geen onbetaalbare jongensdroom*. Retrieved on April 7, 2018, from <https://www.s-p-a.be/artikel/toekomstplan-defensie-een-visie-graag-geen-onbetaal>

Sparrow, A. (2015, 8 March). Jean-Claude Juncker calls for EU army. *The Guardian*. Retrieved on November 19, 2017, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/08/jean-claude-juncker-calls-for-eu-army-european-commission-military>

Taylor, P. (2017). *Jumping over its shadow Germany and the future of European Defence*. Brussels: Friends of Europe.

The European Institute. (2009). *European Defence Timeline*. Retrieved on December 23, 2017, from <https://www.europeaninstitute.org/index.php/eu-facts/897-european-defence-timeline>

Treaty of Amsterdam Amending the Treaty on European Union, The Treaties Establishing the European Communities and Related Acts, Nov. 10, 1997, retrieved on December 23, 2017, from <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/treaty/pdf/amst-en.pdf>

Trybus, M. (2016). *The legal foundations of a European army*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham.

Twenty-five EU states sign PESCO defense pact. (2017, 11 December). *Deutsche Welle*. Retrieved on December 25, 2017, from <http://www.dw.com/en/twenty-five-eu-states-sign-pesco-defense-pact/a-41741828>

Van Dale. (2018). *Betekenis 'fractie'*. Retrieved on May 23, 2018, from <https://www.vandale.nl/gratis-woordenboek/nederlands/betekenis/fractie#.WwWzV1OFMzU>

Van Thiel, S. (2010). *Bestuurskundig onderzoek: een methodologische inleiding*. Second edition, Bussum: Coutinho.

Verboven, S. (2016). *Luitenant-generaal Compernel wordt nieuwe Chef Defensie*. Retrieved April 1, 2018, from <https://www.mil.be/nl/artikel/luitenant-generaal-compernel-wordt-nieuwe-chef-defensie>

Wessel, R. A. (2003). The state of affairs in EU Security and Defence Policy: the breakthrough in the Treaty of Nice. *Journal of Conflict & Security Law*, 8(2), 265–288.

Zullaert, J. & Vandersmissen, M. (2016, 13 July). Minister Steven Vandeput verhoogt de uitgaven voor Defensie. *Knack*.

# ANNEXES

## **Annex I: Topic list interview MP's**

### INLEIDING

Vooreerst zou ik u willen bedanken voor het verlenen van uw medewerking aan dit interview. Dit interview kadert in het onderzoek voor mijn masterproef naar de gedragenheid van een Europees leger door de Belgische legertop en de Nederlandstalige fracties in de Belgische Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers. De informatie die ik tijdens dit interview verzamel, hoop ik dan ook te kunnen gebruiken voor mijn thesis. Ik hoop dat dit geen probleem is? Ik zal hoofdzakelijk vragen naar de mening van uw partij omtrent het onderwerp en in mindere mate naar uw persoonlijke mening. Ik zal tijdens het interview notities nemen en zal het gesprek ook opnemen. Ik hoop dat dit voor u geen probleem vormt. De geluidopnames zullen enkel gebruikt worden om het interview te transcriberen.

### ONDERZOEKSVRAAG

“To what extent is the idea to establish a European army supported by the Belgian army senior ranks and the Flemish fractions in the Belgian Chamber of representatives?”

### INTERVIEWVRAGEN

1. a) Een eerste belangrijke vraag, wat wordt door u en uw fractie verstaan onder een Europees leger? Met andere woorden, welke invulling wordt er aan een Europees leger gegeven? (Een volledige eenmaking of onder eenzelfde noemer te werk gaan?)  
  
b) Hoe zou dit Europees leger er concreet uitzien? Bevat het volgens u alle lidstaten van de EU? Of eerder een *coalition of the willing*?
2. Wat is het standpunt van uw fractie met betrekking tot een Europees leger?
3. Waarom is uw fractie precies voorstander/tegenstander van een Europees leger?

4. Erkent u/uw fractie eveneens de nadelen/voordelen van een Europees leger?
5. Zijn er volgens u/uw fractie hinderpalen voor een Europees leger, zo ja dewelke?
6. Is uw fractie voorstander van andere samenwerkingsverbanden in het domein van defensie, zo ja, dewelke? (Denk NAVO, BENESAM, EATC)
7. Hoe staat uw partij tegenover het hele PESCO-verhaal?
8. Wat is uw kijk/ de kijk van uw fractie op het huidige Belgische leger?
9. Heeft uw partij een specifieke visie op de toekomst van het Belgische leger?
10. Wat is de rol van de Kamercommissie Landsverdediging in dit hele verhaal? Kan de Kamercommissie of het parlement in het algemeen, enige invloed uitoefenen op de beslissingen omtrent een Europees leger?
11. Welke invloed kan de Belgische legertop volgens u hebben op de politieke besluitvorming omtrent een Europees leger?



## **Annex II: Topic list Belgian army senior ranks**

### **INLEIDING**

Vooreerst zou ik u willen bedanken voor het verlenen van uw medewerking aan dit interview. Dit interview kadert in het onderzoek voor mijn masterproef naar de steun voor een Europees leger door de Belgische legertop en de Nederlandstalige fracties in de Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers. De informatie die ik tijdens dit interview verzamel, hoop ik dan ook te kunnen gebruiken voor mijn thesis. Ik hoop dat dit geen probleem is? Ik zal zowel vragen naar uw persoonlijke mening, alsook naar de mening van Defensie/uw component als een geheel. Ik zal tijdens het interview notities nemen en zal het gesprek ook opnemen. Ik hoop dat dit voor u geen probleem vormt. De geluidopnames zullen enkel gebruikt worden om het interview te transcriberen. Heeft u verder nog vragen voor we aanvangen?

### **ONDERZOEKSVRAAG**

“To what extent is the idea to establish a European army supported by the Belgian army senior ranks and the Flemish fractions in the Belgian Chamber of representatives?”

### **INTERVIEWVRAGEN**

1. Wat wordt door u persoonlijk precies verstaan onder een Europees leger?
2. Wat is uw persoonlijke mening met betrekking tot een Europees leger? Bent u eerder voorstander of tegenstander?
3. Waarom bent u deze mening toegedaan?
4. Heeft Defensie een algemeen en gezamenlijk standpunt met betrekking tot een Europees leger?
5. Heeft uw component, x, een specifiek standpunt met betrekking tot een Europees leger?

6. Waarom is Defensie/uw component precies een voorstander/tegenstander?
7. Wordt de mogelijkheid van een Europees leger/meer Europese samenwerking intern besproken?
8. Denkt u dat een samenwerking zoals deze tussen de Nederlandse en Belgische marine uitgebreid kan worden naar andere domeinen en met andere Europese lidstaten?
9. Wat is uw mening omtrent de huidige Europese samenwerkingsverbanden in het domein van defensie?
10. Wat is uw standpunt ten opzichte van PESCO?
11. In welke mate wordt u/Defensie geconsulteerd door politici omtrent keuzes rond Defensie in het algemeen en Europese defensiesamenwerking specifiek?
12. Wordt er naar uw aanvoelen ook effectief rekening gehouden door politici met de visie/meningen van Defensie?
13. Denkt u dat de voltallige staf bereid zou zijn mee te stappen in zo een Europees defensie verhaal?
14. Heeft u een specifieke toekomstvisie voor Defensie?