



EUROCORPS

A MILITARY TOOL FOR EUROPE AND NATO

While all of Europe's borders face instability, it is uncertainty and high volatility which are the main features of our current security environment. Given the fact that threats and risks are increasingly interconnected, complementing national and collective efforts has become essential. Consequently, European countries are committed to adopting a common approach to defence and security despite defence budget restrictions.

Against this backdrop, the military must be ready to operate in a more complex, ambiguous, dynamic and restrictive framework, where the human factor becomes a decisive element. A multinational structure is an excellent capability to respond to the mentioned challenges, and trends reveal that European national or multinational forces should become more and more integrated in the medium term. In this endeavour, Eurocorps is ready to become the nucleus of a truly European headquarters.

What is Eurocorps?

Based in Strasbourg, which is known as the capital of Europe and a symbol for European reconciliation, Eurocorps is a permanent land centric multinational Rapid Deployable Headquarters and is certified as such for both NATO and European Union purposes.

The original European roots of Eurocorps remain unchanged since its foundation by France and Germany in 1992. Over time, it has maintained its political and military dimensions and gained broad legitimacy, autonomy, experience, and a unique duality (in NATO and the European Union). From the very beginning, it has hence been the perfect tool for an active involvement in European defence. All those features explain why Eurocorps has often been identified as a potential model of the increasing integration of European military forces.

Currently, the five Framework Nations Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and Spain are responsible for providing resources and sharing the costs. No nation is superior to the other, which creates a truly multinational environment and a strong European legitimacy as every decision is made by consensus and all top command positions are occupied on a rotating basis. In addition, it is expected that Poland will become the sixth framework nation in January 2017, upon completion of the legal adhesion process. It is worth noting that the group of those five nations plus Poland represent more than 50 % of the population of the European Union. Moreover, four countries – Greece, Italy, Romania and Turkey – contribute to the Headquarters as Associated Nations, fostering its multinational quality.

Owing to the military contributions from those ten countries, Eurocorps is now composed of about 1,100 troops used to working together in a demanding environment. With the entry into force of the Treaty of Strasbourg in 2009, Eurocorps was granted its final legal status, which is

unique compared with other similar military organisations. And given the option to integrate the French-German Brigade as subordinate unit, a coherent multinational chain of command, extending from the tactical to the operational level, can be established as desired. Eurocorps maintains excellent links with this brigade.

Operational commitments:

A more balanced approach to European Union institutions

Even though initially created for European defence, in the past, Eurocorps actually deployed four times with NATO. It has outstanding and considerable experience, which is the basis for its credibility as a military tool.

During the second semester of 2015, Eurocorps participated in EUTM Mali, leading a mission intended to train and advise the Malian armed forces. This has been the first step towards developing a more balanced approach to Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) institutions. Eurocorps will also soon assume the role of EU Battle Group Force Headquarters in the second semester of 2016 and the first semester of 2017.

In the meantime, Eurocorps will likely be engaged in other European Union missions in 2016 and 2017, demonstrating its specific commitment to Europe. Generally speaking, it is the only headquarters to build up such an extensive expertise with regard to EU bodies since it is planning and conducting several simultaneous tasks for the Union.

Concept of employment: modularity and flexibility

In compliance with current doctrines, Eurocorps has recently imposed changes to adopt a lighter, more easily adaptable and multi-purpose structure. Its Concept of Employment clearly states that it must be capable of assuming responsibilities at the operational-tactical threshold, and under various flags. Its modular organisation and capabilities provide Eurocorps with the capacity to plan and conduct a wide range of missions without deploying the entire Headquarters. In fact, this modularity makes Eurocorps the most flexible instrument to be engaged for the benefit of European Union operations and missions.

Depending on the scale of troops and capabilities needed, those missions can range from any lower-scale task (cross-border monitoring, capacity building or training missions, among others) to reinforcements of existing European bodies, for example in support of a designated Operational Headquarters (OHQ) after its activation. It is important to note that the always demanding force generation process is not a big issue for Eurocorps as it owns almost all means and capacities required for rapid deployments.

All of those elements, features and opportunities are described in the EU-EC Framework Document aimed at informing CSDP decision-makers about Eurocorps' potential. Simply put, Eurocorps can act as the rapid reaction headquarters that Europe demands – for the whole spectrum of European Union crisis response management.

Strengthening links with the European Union

All these operational commitments and possibilities need to be supported politically and seen as a window of opportunity for Eurocorps to develop closer ties with European Union institutions. In this endeavour, the signing of a Letter of Intent between Eurocorps and the European Union Military Staff on 18 January represented a significant move in this direction. However, in the long run, a strategic agreement, signed with the corresponding European body, should be developed to firmly embed Eurocorps within the CSDP structure and mechanisms.

Post Allocation Conference

The aforementioned reorientation towards European Union missions could be a chance for European countries to participate in Eurocorps, allowing them to share its experience, know-how and political legitimacy. For this reason, an open-door process is currently ongoing and Eurocorps is keen to receive contributions from other countries as new Framework or Associated Nations. In April, a post-allocation conference will take place in Strasbourg, aimed at offering more countries the opportunity to join this unique multinational initiative which forms the nucleus of European military integration.

Conclusions

Due to its vital command and control assets, long operational experience and NATO certified capabilities, Eurocorps can be deployed anywhere on short notice. At the same time, its special legal status, readiness and fully multinational chain of command allow it to intervene for the benefit of its Framework Nations, the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance.

Since Eurocorps is developing special relationships with European institutions, it is ready and willing to play a greater part in the advancement of European defence. The Eurocorps' ambition is nothing other than becoming the European Union's preferred rapid reaction headquarters for the whole spectrum of EU crisis management, thereby keeping its NATO expertise as baseline, and thus being a credible military tool for the European Union.