



HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on the European Union

External Affairs Sub-Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Brexit: Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions

Thursday 8 March 2018

11.05 am

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Members present: Baroness Verma (The Chairman); Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top; Baroness Brown of Cambridge; Lord Dubs; Lord Horam; The Earl of Oxford and Asquith; Lord Risby; Lord Stirrup; Baroness Suttie; Lord Triesman.

Evidence Session No. 7

Heard in Public

Questions 88 - 97

Witness

I: Mr Pierre Vimont, Senior Fellow, Carnegie Europe.

Examination of witness

Mr Pierre Vimont.

Q88 **The Chairman:** Mr Vimont, good morning and welcome to London. Thank you very much for making the journey here this morning. This session will be broadcast live. A transcript will be available to you for correction if there are any errors in it. May I invite you to say a few opening words to settle you in before we go into the questions? You have had sight of them. As I say to everyone who comes to speak to us, colleagues will, if they wish, go off script and put a question of their own.

Mr Pierre Vimont: I will make no introductory remarks, except to apologise for my delay. It was not my fault; it was the French railway network. It is not as good as it used to be, but that is not a political point. I underline that. I am totally at your disposal, and I think it is better to go immediately to the questions and answer as many as I can.

The Chairman: That is very kind of you. What is your assessment of the achievements of Common Security and Defence Policy missions to date, and what do you see as their main advantages and disadvantages?

Mr Pierre Vimont: In a nutshell, European security and defence has made some real achievements, but we should understand where. In other words, if you are looking for fully-fledged European defence with a European army it is certainly not there, and it will not be there for a long time, but CSDP, as we call it in Brussels, has managed to find its own niche. It has been rather successful in the last 20 years with military or civilian missions or operations very slowly building up European military capacity and some other performances and realisations of that sort.

It is important to understand that one should not be overambitious about what the Europeans are trying to do. It is only part of a broader picture in which NATO plays a major role with regard to territorial defence, as we call it in Europe, but in its own little niche, CSDP has managed to do something interesting.

I detect ups and downs with European security and defence. When it was first launched in about 1999, at the end of the previous century, the then High Representative, Javier Solana, gave huge momentum to military and civilian operations. One was launched more or less every other week. I exaggerate a bit, but we had many military people and civilian experts on the ground. That lasted for about 10 years. Then some fatigue set in, and from 2008-09 up to the last few years there were no new military or civilian operations being launched, and Member States were wondering what they should do with the CSDP. It has restarted recently. With all the many crises we have seen, in Libya, Iraq, Syria and Ukraine, there has been an upsurge in our military and civilian operations, if you abide by that yardstick to understand what is going on.

One additional point is that at this precise moment—and it may be interesting to see whether it is connected with the whole Brexit issue—we have recently seen a new momentum on European security and defence:

the idea of a European Defence Fund, new efforts from the European Defence Agency, and, for the first time, Permanent Structured Co-operation being set up, as you all know. This is very familiar to all of you. There is definitely a new upward trend that will be interesting to watch. I do not think we should be overoptimistic. It will be slow, as it was in the past, but it is moving in the right direction.

Q89 Lord Stirrup: Could I turn to the mechanics of CSDP missions? Could you explain to us the process of planning and developing such missions? In particular, I am interested to know how ideas are generated, where they originate, how they are given form and how they are then given authority, and whether those processes are sequential or run in parallel. How does all of that work?

Mr Pierre Vimont: There is a sequential process. I will try to go into the details. Starting with your first question, at the beginning, it is very much an informal process whereby the High Representative, her team and different departments of the External Action Service in Brussels take the temperature of the water. In other words, are Member States interested in moving ahead and developing an operation or mission, be it military or civilian, and will the launch of that process, which I will explain in a minute, be successful or not? There are contacts with some of the main Member States—Britain, as long as it is in the European Union, France, Germany and a few others—and, if they feel there is a need for an operation, the whole process will move ahead. If there was no appetite, I do not think the process would move in any way.

What is the process? It is sequential, and to a large extent similar to what you can see in NATO, which means that you start with a political assessment, called a political framework for crisis analysis, which is a sort of strategic assessment of the situation, to explain the need and opportunity for a European operation. Usually, it goes through the Political and Security Committee where ambassadors are in attendance. Needless to say, the whole process is closely watched and monitored by Member States step by step, and, having looked at and discussed the political framework, they decide whether it should go ahead.

The second stage is what is called the crisis management concept. The process is already becoming more of a military nature, so a paper is drafted in one of the military departments in the EEAS¹—the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate. Again, it goes to the PSC, which has to say whether it agrees and gives the green light to go ahead.

The Crisis Management Concept is very important. To some extent, it contains the whole strategic vision and environment of what the operation could be as it moves ahead. Further on, it details what will go with the operation; the kind of assistance, co-operation or follow-up that could come after the operation; the deadline for the operation; and the kind of review that should be done on a regular basis. It already encompasses a lot of details that will be very important for the follow-up.

¹ The European External Action Service

Lord Stirrup: I understand that it has to be approved at senior level, but who are the staff who actually generate the concept?

Mr Pierre Vimont: It is a department of the External Action Service called CMPD, which is composed of military and civilian experts. The Crisis Management Concept can be used for both a military and civilian operation. At that stage, it remains a rather broad view, but it is already moving into the details.

If the ambassadors agree, having received instructions from their Member States, there is a decision to establish the operation. A very firm political decision has to be taken at the Council of Ministers. The commander of the operation and where the headquarters should be will already have been identified. That is a focal point for the whole operation.

Once that has been done, there are two other stages. One is the Concept of Operations, which will be decided by services inside the External Action Service. If it is a civilian operation, that will be done by the service that specialises in civilian operations. If it is a military one, it will be done by the military department inside EEAS. Again, it has to be approved at political level—ambassadors and Ministers. The last stage is operational planning. These two last stages have a lot of input from the commander of the operation as it becomes detailed. It is a rather long process.

The last but maybe the most important stage is that, after the operational planning has been adopted, there is the process of force generation; in other words, you ask Member States for their contribution. You may also start asking third countries for their eventual contribution, if you think that could be necessary because of the type of expertise or equipment you may need. That is the way it goes.

Once there are enough forces for the operation and it has been launched, there is usually a six-month strategic review to see how it is going. At regular stages, which are already in the documents that have been adopted, there are moments when you can decide whether to stop the operation, or extend or prolong it.

To put it in a nutshell, it can take between eight and nine months before a military operation can be launched properly with all the necessary forces. A civilian operation can take even longer; it can be a year. There are examples of the process moving much more quickly, for political reasons. For instance, our observer mission to Georgia was set up in about a month. We had to do it very quickly because of the situation on the ground.

Lord Stirrup: To be clear, at the moment, you approach third countries for their participation only towards the end of the force generation process, at which stage the Crisis Management Concept and the operational concept have already been established.

Mr Pierre Vimont: Absolutely.

Q90 **Lord Dubs:** Previous witnesses have told us that the UK has assumed

the role of 'manager' rather than 'player' in CSDP missions, providing intellectual and strategic leadership. Do you agree with that assessment? What do you say of the UK's contribution? Does it differ between military and civilian missions?

Mr Pierre Vimont: To a large extent, it is more a manager than a player, with one or two exceptions. The best example is the UK's direct involvement in Operation Atalanta against piracy in the Indian Ocean. Britain provided the headquarters in Northwood and put a lot of expertise into that operation. Operation Atalanta is an important exception, because it is certainly one of the great successes of CSDP, but in most other operations Britain has not played a major role. When the whole process started, at the end of the previous century, and leading nations, or what they call in Brussels framework nations, decided to take the lead and be front-runners in operations, it was mostly left to France. Sometimes, it was Germany but very rarely the UK, except in the case of the Horn of Africa and I would add Bosnia Herzegovina.

It is true that Britain has not been a major contributor. In military operations, Britain represents about 3% of the total staff, mostly dedicated to Northwood and the Atalanta operation. With regard to civilian operations, if I remember rightly, on average about 5% of the experts are British. There is one exception. The figure is a bit higher for contracted staff, those in charge of security in the field. There, Britain has put in a lot of expertise, and the British contracted staff contribution is about 9% or 10% at the moment.

Why have we not seen more buy-in from the UK? I guess it is because, as you know much better than I do, Britain has always shown scepticism towards security and defence in the European Union, and for a long time the British thought it was a bit of a duplication with NATO. They were never in favour of headquarters; they have always pushed back every time we tried to extend the notion of common cost for military and civilian operations. Therefore, it is no surprise that Britain, to some extent, has stayed a bit on the sidelines of many of the operations.

Lord Dubs: Is there any difference between military and civilian missions in that respect?

Mr Pierre Vimont: A little bit. There has been a greater UK contribution in many civilian operations because, as you know, we need civilian experts of high quality when dealing with judicial reform in Iraq, border control in Libya or elsewhere, or governance in the Sahel. We are looking for experts who have strong experience in those fields. We find a lot of them in Britain, so we are very eager to go for them. There has therefore been a greater contribution by the UK to those operations than to military operations, but not all that much. As I said, it is about 5% of total staff, which is not all that much.

Q91 **Lord Risby:** Looking ahead to the post-Brexit stage, the British Government have announced that they want a "deep level of co-operation" and have talked about how that manifests itself. In

particular, it has been described as being at managerial level rather than what you were describing, where the amount of participation has been quite limited on many levels.

In the context of our experience of CSDP from a British point of view, what appetite do you think other EU members have about fulfilling the ambition announced by the Prime Minister of having a deep level of co-operation? There seems to be something of a mismatch.

Mr Pierre Vimont: We are facing a bit of a contradiction. To pick up your words, there is a lot of appetite to keep close links and partnership with Britain, if only for all the major assets Britain brings in the field of security and defence, starting with intelligence. Britain has been sharing intelligence with its European counterparts, and that has been very helpful. With Britain's forces and their strong assets in maritime surveillance, state-of-the-art technologies and so forth, there is real eagerness on the EU 27 side to find a way of keeping close links with Britain.

The problem is that at the same time Europeans want to retain their autonomy in all things linked with the decision-making process, and they do not want to create a precedent in the kind of relationship and partnership they have with third countries. A lot of third countries are knocking at the door; for instance, the United States, Norway and Georgia. When I was in the EAS, even Russia was interested and wanted a framework partnership arrangement with the EU. If we create a special status for the UK, others will say, 'Why the UK and not us?' Of course, we could say that it is because the UK is a former member and we need to deal with it in a different way from others, but we all know how diplomacy goes. That is not an argument that will go down easily with the United States, for instance.

At the end of the day, it is about how to keep the right balance between the real appetite for working with Britain and the need to stick to principles such as autonomy in decision-making. There is an upsurge of new ambition in CSDP, the European defence fund and PESCO. The High Representative is talking about a European peace facility that could be set up. Before allowing third partners, and Britain in particular, to be part of this innovation, we want to be sure that we all, the EU 27, agree among ourselves. That is the kind of difficulty we face at the moment.

We have all read very carefully what the UK Prime Minister said recently about building up a strategic and special partnership. A more convenient way of building up the kind of special partnership the UK is looking for might be to go more for informal agreements as a way of moving around the contradiction I spoke about. If Britain intends to put pressure on its former European partners in order to have a seat at the table during all the decision-making processes, be it the PSC or the different departments I was talking about earlier, I think you will see a lot of resistance on the part of the Europeans.

Perhaps you can find other means and go for more flexible arrangements. At the moment, the French President is talking about an initiative that could be outside the realm of the treaty, a European Intervention Initiative. It could be the Letter Of Intent on industrial capacities that we have at the moment between five or six member states. There, you have much more room for manoeuvre, because you do not have the formality of the treaty and all the institutional framework. That could be a way of finding a solution and a compromise.

Q92 The Earl of Oxford and Asquith: I think you have answered most of the questions, Mr Vimont. We have a very clear understanding that the EU will always insist on the autonomy of EU decision-making, and that third countries will not participate in mandate development, as you confirmed in what you said to Lord Risby and Lord Stirrup. Picking up the points you made in answer to Lord Risby, what do you think is the workable option for co-operation with the UK? Do you think it will first require an initiative from the UK to become part of a CSDP mission at an early stage, irrespective of whether it is involved in mandate development?

Mr Pierre Vimont: There are different ways of doing it, and they already exist with third countries. At PSC level, we have regular meetings with our American partners. Political directors from the United States come in and out; they have formal and informal meetings. It should not be too difficult to set up something of the same kind for the UK, all the more so as we had natural co-operation when the UK was a European Union member.

The problem is still decision-making. We can exchange ideas and try to have the same mindset about a crisis we are facing; the same goes for foreign policy, general development assistance, security and defence. The problem is when you go into the detail of the decision-making. That is a totally different issue, because if you are not at the table it is much more difficult to understand what is going on inside and how people react to some ideas, why they come out at the end with such and such a decision and have not done what seems obvious. If you are not in the room, you miss it all. On that point, it will be much more difficult to get a temporary seat or something like that, even for one individual operation.

As I said, when there are third country partners in a military or civilian operation, they usually come in at the end of the decision-making process. You can play a part as, for instance, European Economic Area members do at the moment. We have what we call a decision-shaping process. They come and give their opinion and we exchange ideas, but at the end of the day they leave the room and the EU 28—to date—are left on their own and work on their own. Not being there is of course a bit of a problem.

Could I add another point that is very important when you may have to look at more politically sensitive issues in relation to security and defence? The most sensitive operations are usually, one way or another, discussed and decided at the level of the European Council itself, be it a

European operation or, in the end, an operation directed and led by Member States individually—for example, the Libyan operation led by the UK and France in 2011.

One must never forget that the whole political assessment and framework was built up and set up at the time of the European Council, with Prime Minister Cameron and President Sarkozy leading the way, convincing their other partners that, even if it was not going to be an EU operation, they should give the green light to an operation led by some EU Member States.

Discussions at that level bring up the whole issue of whether the UK Prime Minister should be allowed from time to time inside the European Council to discuss such matters. It is not easy to find the right answer because of the political considerations.

The Earl of Oxford and Asquith: I think you have given us the best answer you can.

Q93 **Lord Horam:** You have given us a very accurate and helpful assessment of the UK contribution to CSDP missions, with some very interesting statistics about the number of personnel and so forth, and described it as being relatively small, certainly in recent times. It was higher at some stages, but in recent times it has been quite small, possibly apart from Operation Atalanta, which is a bit of an exception.

If we assume for the moment that Britain plays no further part after Brexit, or even less of a part than it does now, how would that gap be filled? You mentioned the fluctuating fortunes of CSDP. It started off ambitiously, then went into a fallow period and is now perhaps entering a more ambitious phase. Is there a disconnect between the ambitions the European Union might legitimately have for CSDP and the gap, small though it is, which the exit of Britain might leave behind? How would it be filled?

Mr Pierre Vimont: You are absolutely right. Could I add one point about the figures I gave you earlier? To be totally honest and transparent, I am not sure that the figures for France are much higher, for the simple reason that more and more, as France is taking the lead in military operations in Mali and Sahel, and taking its part in the coalition in Iraq and elsewhere, it is doing so on the basis of a national operation.

Lord Horam: Not CSDP.

Mr Pierre Vimont: Not CSDP. That is precisely the point I want to come to. More and more, we find great difficulty in getting the attention of Member States on force generation for some of these missions. I would not say that they are reluctant, but sometimes they are a bit uneasy and prefer to abstain. More and more, the idea is that maybe we should go for a more flexible process. In other words, some of the operations could start outside the treaty, outside CSDP, and then we should look for ways in which CSDP can bring added value by other means.

The best example at the moment is what started in Mali in 2013 with the French military intervention totally on its own. Once it had launched that operation, France went to Brussels and tried to see what added value could be provided by the EU. That is how the EUTM Mali or EUTM Niger training operations, to train the national military of Mali or Niger, slowly set in. They are a complement, in addition to what the French are doing on their own. Why is that working? Because many EU Member States are more comfortable with training missions than with peacekeeping missions; there is less tension.

Lord Horam: You might still need other European Union nations to make a bigger contribution if the UK is making less.

Mr Pierre Vimont: Yes.

Lord Horam: Would you expect that to happen?

Mr Pierre Vimont: Yes, it has happened already. There is no doubt that many Member States have brought a greater contribution than the UK to the operations we have had so far. Before we launch an operation, we set the threshold for the number of military people or civilian experts we need. At the end of the force generation process, we often find that we have not reached that threshold, and then the whole question is, 'Do we still go ahead or not?'

Usually, we have gone ahead, because there is a lot of political visibility and credibility, but we have to reduce the mission and the ambition of the operation. The difficulties we have faced so far were there already, even with the UK being a member. I am not sure that the UK no longer being present will make much difference. The problem will still be there, and we will still have to deal with it.

Q94 **Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** In this country, the Government are talking quite a lot about the need for a transition period. The European Union has made it clear that we have to behave in the same way as we do now, although we will technically be outside the European Union. What effect will that have on the operation of the CSDP and the UK's participation? Will we be outside the room but expected to take part? How do you see the transition period for the CSDP?

Mr Pierre Vimont: There are different problems with the transition period. Some are particularly important because they will have immediate consequences as Britain becomes a third country. I am not even talking about partnership. It has to do with some of the actions and initiatives that have been taken in recent years in which Britain has played a major part and which suddenly, because of the implementation of Brexit, Britain will have to leave.

In cybersecurity, Britain is leading a consortium at the moment, with Germany, Netherlands and a few others. Of course, a lot of intelligence and secret information is being dispatched and released among the members of the consortium. Being a third country, you will need either to leave entirely or to set up a security of information agreement, which is

what we may be looking at, whereby we get all the references and guarantees that we can keep Britain on board.

There is Galileo, in which at the moment Britain is very much involved. For some public procurement of state-of-the-art security equipment of high value, we can tender only with EU Member States. We cannot even find a way of creating partnerships with third countries. It is not allowed by the regulation. Of course, we could change the Regulation, but to do that we have to adopt a new Regulation, and that takes time.

There are those kinds of very concrete details. I could go on: sanctions, for instance. From the beginning of the post-Brexit period, Britain would not be on board but for the time being would have the same set of sanctions as EU Member States. How are we going to work together afterwards? We will need to find special provisions and arrangements. There are all these details that you have to look at.

With regard to missions and operations, what will happen immediately is that we will no longer have British intelligence to prepare our political assessments. We will not have UK staff in the military department, and we will not have the possibility of looking for UK headquarters if we want to, and so on. By the way, with the transition period we will have to find a new headquarters for the Atalanta operation; it cannot be in Northwood any more.

These are the kinds of issues we will face, and we cannot just decide that we keep Britain as a fully-fledged member. It will no longer be one from a legal point of view. We will have to reinvent totally new types of arrangements. It can be done. We have Framework Partnership Agreements with a few third countries, but I understand that Britain would want more than that. I think many EU partners would agree. Britain is not a partner of the same nature as Georgia, or even Turkey, which at the moment are some of the third country partners we have on CSDP. We need to do more, but, once again, we need to invent it. As regards transition, not only do we have to invent it but it has to be ready to be implemented by March 2019, which is a very short period. It will not be easy, because to some extent everybody is playing tactics in the whole of the Brexit negotiations.

Baroness Suttie: You said categorically that you believe that new headquarters would have to be found for Operation Atalanta. Do you think that is absolutely decided already?

Mr Pierre Vimont: Yes. As far as I know, Spain has proposed to take over from Britain. Britain is preparing to transfer the experience and expertise to wherever is decided as the new headquarters. Discussions are going on; they are moving very rapidly, because there are so many details to be discussed and agreed between the EU 27 that we should not lose too much time.

Q95 **Baroness Suttie:** What do you think would happen as regards UK involvement if a new CSDP mission was under discussion during the

transition period?

Mr Pierre Vimont: From a procedural and legal point of view, it would be for the EU27 to discuss among themselves the different stages I mentioned. I guess that if Britain was interested in taking part in that operation, it should very early on make it known to the EU 27 that it would like to be involved and would be ready to help.

At that stage, I guess there would be political discussions, with the help of military expertise and experts, about what Britain's contribution could be: financial, military staff, intelligence or whatever. The decision-making process would be with the EU27 on one side, and there would be discussion and contact with the UK on the other side, but outside the Union treaty and the CSDP.

If at some point, we reached political agreement, we would see how it could fit in, and at what stage which kind of agreement should embody all the different dimensions of the contribution. I am not sure that it would be easy to have Britain moving into the process right at the beginning. It seems to me that it would be rather difficult.

Q96 **Baroness Brown of Cambridge:** Do you think that Anglo-French bilateral co-operation might, slightly perversely, increase? If so, in what areas? Might our co-operation with the French be some kind of conduit for our collaboration in EU missions and in defence and security issues more broadly?

Mr Pierre Vimont: I agree. We have already seen some signs of that. The most recent bilateral summit between the UK Prime Minister and the French President has given new momentum to the Lancaster House agreement, with new efforts to work together in order to set up the operational force they would like to set up together, and to work on other issues related to maritime operational capacities. Britain has provided assistance to the French in Mali, with helicopters and other equipment. This is a trend of which we could see more as we move ahead.

If you want a comprehensive picture of what may happen as we move along, in my opinion there will be three different trends. One will be the traditional CSDP operation with the EU 27. On the other side, there could be bilateral agreements and co-operation like the ones currently between France and Britain, Germany and the Netherlands, Italy and France and so forth. In between, there could be what I would call European co-operation but outside CSDP, which comes back to some of the ideas we have heard about, such as President Macron looking for more flexible operations. At this stage, it is difficult to give any clear indication as to how this is going to unfold and how it will go, but it would certainly be a field where it could be very useful to have a stronger UK partnership with some of its former EU partners.

Q97 **Lord Horam:** You have answered the question I was going to ask, which was about the future of the CSDP. You see three different possibilities. One is the formal CSDP, one is bilateral, and in between there is what President Macron has talked about. I hesitate to mention the phrase

'three baskets', but that is a way of looking at it, if that was a fair description of what you were saying. If that is the way you see it, there is a role for CSDP as one leg of a tripartite thing, if that is the correct way to describe it.

There is quite a lot of Anglo-French joint work not only on defence but on defence equipment and procurement co-operation. Quite a lot of thought and activity has gone into that, and it is very important for our defence industries. Perhaps you could comment on how you see the future of that as well.

Mr Pierre Vimont: That was exactly the point I was going to raise when you asked the question. CSDP will remain important for some operations, but, more than anything else, for increasing European capacities in the industrial field. As you know, there is an ongoing discussion about a special European Defence Fund dedicated to enhancing European military capacities—about €3 billion in the future. It will depend very much on the ongoing negotiation on the multiannual financial framework: where are you going to find the money when you still need to provide the necessary resources for agriculture, structural funds, migration, the fight against terrorism and so on? None the less, at the European Council, leaders underlined the fact that defence procurement and industrial military industries should be a main priority for the next financial framework, so we are going to see more of that.

It will be very important in the years ahead, not only to increase our military capacity, which is certainly needed, but for the simple fact that, as we all know, military technology usually opens the way to civilian technology. At a time when competition is very rough in the international market, and Europe seems to be backtracking somewhat, it is certainly an area where our leaders will want to improve their act and do more. At the end of the day, to go back to the question about where Britain could sit in, this may be easier than with the decision-making process for operations.

In the European Defence Agency, which is more or less leading the thinking on the issue, we already have partnerships with third countries. Norway, for instance, steps in when we discuss matters in the European Defence Agency where it has decided to finance an individual project. In that case, the Norwegians are part of the whole process because they are putting money into it. That could also be the case for Britain. It would be on a case-by-case basis, depending on the kind of project the British wanted to be involved in. The figures for UK participation in EU research dedicated to defence or security matters—I do not have them here—show that its contribution is far more important than we have seen for missions and operations, and much more interesting for UK potential in the future.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr Vimont. It has been really important for us to have your insight. I hope your journey back will be seamless on the UK train side. Thank you very much for coming this morning. As I said earlier, the transcript will be sent to you. If there are any corrections, please make them and send the transcript back to us.