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EUROPEAN UNION BATTLEGROUPS – A DILLUSION CORNERSTONE OF THE EU MILITARY CAPABILITIES

**Grupy Bojowe Unii Europejskiej – kamień węgielny rozczarowania
zdolnościami wojskowymi UE**

Anna Llanos-Antczak
University of Economics and Human Sciences in Warsaw
e-mail: a.antczak@vizja.pl
ORCID  0000-0003-2342-1521

Abstract

This article aims at pointing out the role that could be played by the European Union Battlegroups in building its political and military potential. The article discusses the genesis of the battlegroups, their types, principles of operation and composition. It continues with the evaluation of the decision-making process regarding the use of battlegroups, their tasks and objectives. The article also provides the analysis of the actual use of the EU Battlegroups and ends up with the discussion of the causes of the system weakness. It tries to provide an answer to the following question: what is the contribution of the battlegroups to building the European Union's potential and strengthening its position on the international arena?

Keywords: European Union, battlegroups, capabilities, hard power, soft power.

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest wskazanie roli, jaką mogą odegrać Grupy Bojowe Unii Europejskiej w budowaniu potencjału politycznego i militarnego. W artykule omówiono genezę grup bojowych, ich rodzaje, zasady działania i skład. Artykuł dostarcza także ocenę procesu decyzyjnego dotyczącego wykorzystania grup bojowych, ich zadań i celów. Artykuł zawiera również analizę faktycznego wykorzystania Grup Bojowych UE i kończy się omówieniem przyczyn słabości systemu. Podjęto próbę znalezienia odpowiedzi na pytanie: jaki mógłby być wkład grup bojowych w budowanie potencjału Unii Europejskiej i umacnianie jej pozycji na arenie międzynarodowej?

Słowa kluczowe: Unia Europejska, grupy bojowe, zdolności, twarda siła, miękka siła.

Introduction

For years, there has been a debate as to whether the European Union can claim to be a civil-military power. The element that could enable the EU to achieve such status are the battlegroups. In order to be able to independently engage in missions and operations in the world, the EU must have its own operational capabilities. To this end, at the initiative of Great Britain, France and Germany, the concept of creating European Battlegroups was developed. This article aims at pointing out the role that could be played by the European Union Battlegroups in building its political and military potential. In this context, it seems reasonable to discuss the following problems:

- What was the purpose of creating EU Battlegroups?
- What tasks are they supposed to perform?
- In what activity have they been involved so far?
- What could be the contribution of the battlegroups to building the European Union's potential and strengthening its position on the international arena?

Building operational capabilities is necessary both to increase the politico-military potential of the EU and to shape its position on the international arena. An important element of this process should be efficiently operating EU Battlegroups. Unfortunately, they have not played an important role so far due to operational, deployment and politico-strategic issues. The article will thus also examine the reasons for their inefficiency.

The genesis of the European Union Battlegroups

At the European Council summit in December 1999, it was recognized that rapid reaction forces constitute an important element of crisis management. The result was the *Helsinki Headline Goal 1999–2003* document, which assumed that by 2003 there would be created a European Rapid Reaction Force of up to 15 brigades, i.e. 50–60 thousand soldiers to perform Petersberg-Tasks (i.e. humanitarian and rescue tasks; conflict prevention and peace-keeping; tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace-making; joint disarmament operations; military advice and assistance; post-conflict stabilisation). The forces were to be self-sufficient, capable of being deployed over a distance of over 4,000. km in 60 days and to stay at the operation theatre for a year. To ensure rotation and retreat, approximately 180,000 soldiers would have to be engaged.

The success of the EU operation “Artemis” in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which was carried out in 2003 with approximately 1,800 soldiers, and the lack of progress in meeting the Helsinki Headline Goal 1999–2003 prompted the launch of the EU battlegroup project. In 2004, the Helsinki Headline Goal was modified which resulted in launching the Headline Goal 2010 (Kertunnen et al., 2005; Anderson, 2006; Giegerich, Wallace, 2004; Hamelin, 2006). On its basis, at the initiative of Great Britain,

France and Germany, the EU Military Staff developed a preliminary concept of the EU Battlegroups. In June 2004, it was approved by the EU Military Committee, but it was not until 2006 that the idea of creating battlegroups was comprehensively explained and presented in an official document. EU Battlegroups started operating in 2005 (Granholm, Jonson, 2006; Reid, 2006) achieved full operational capability in 2007 and were to constitute the core of the European rapid reaction force.

Types, principles of operation and composition of EU Battlegroups

There are two types of the battlegroups – (1) national, formed by countries of the so-called motors of Europe, i.e. France, Great Britain, Spain, and Italy (and these states most often played the role of a framework state, especially in the initial phase of the groups' formation), and (2) multinational, led by a framework nation (Panek, 2007). These groups were designed as very mobile with combat potential and capable of rapid deployment and to be created from the general potential of the national forces of the member states. Battlegroups should be ready for deployment within 5–10 days of the approval of their use by the Council of the European Union, and the territorial scope of their activity has been limited to 6,000 km from Brussels. Groups should be capable of carrying out tasks for at least 30–120 days. According to the initial assumptions, battlegroups were to constitute the first and basic military force that would emerge in a crisis-ridden region. Their main task was supposed to stabilize the situation (this means that they were to serve as an entry force). Since the battlegroups were designed to have a significant combat potential, they were to perform the most difficult tasks (including conducting patrols, setting up posts, protecting selected objects), as well as engage in combat activities (Terlikowski, 2010).

The EU Member States declare their participation in the creation of battlegroups during the battlegroup Co-ordination Conference chaired by the Military Committee, which are organised every six months. By default, planning takes place five years in advance but in practice, it is not always successful. Member States may invite other countries to participate in the creation of the battlegroup. The invited country may assign its soldiers to the group, but it cannot be a framework country.

The Operations Headquarters supervise the activities of the battlegroup. It is not deployed to the area of operations, nor is it part of the battlegroup as such. In the mission area, the direct command over the combat group is exercised by the Force Headquarters, which can be created on the basis of the brigade level command. Its structure includes an integral staff, command and communication system and reinforcement depending on the needs (Fig. 1).

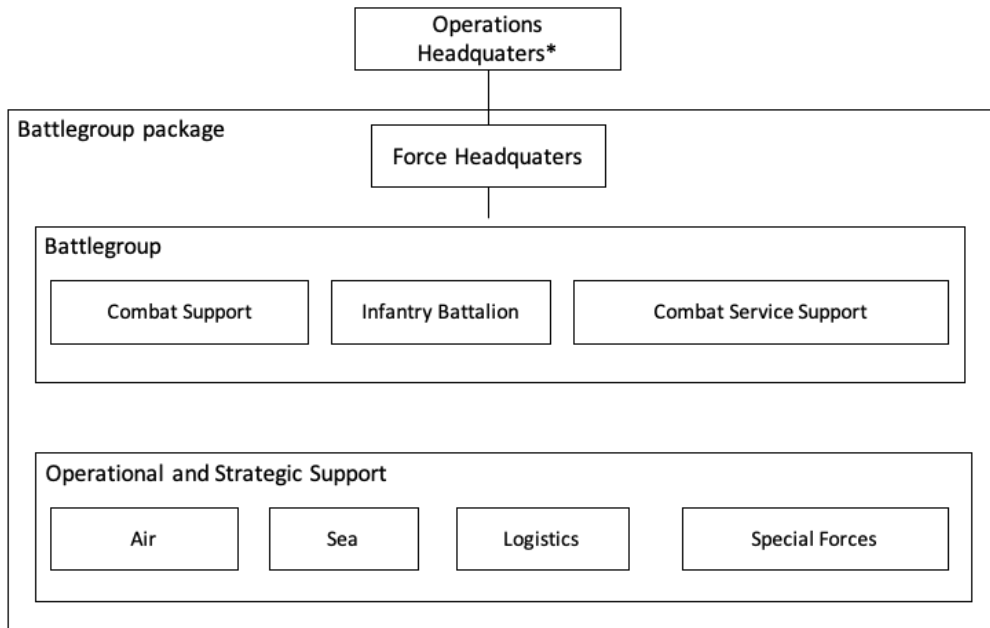


Fig. 1. Basic elements of the battlegroup

*not deployed

Source: based on: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/1222503/110106%20factsheet%20-%20battlegroups%20-%20version%207_en.pdf.

The decision-making process regarding to the use of battlegroups, their tasks and objectives

As mentioned by Major and Mölling (2011), the successful deployment of rapid response forces requires particularly high levels of military performance. The following interrelated processes have to take place very quickly to take the decision to start the operation:

- political decision-making;
- military planning and command and control of an operation;
- provision of military forces (combat troops, support and combat support, as well as strategic enablers) and their preparation for deployment;
- transport to the theatre of operations and support (logistics, especially strategic, and tactical lift).

This third step provides the legal basis for the operation.

Deployment of the battlegroups always requires a unanimous decision of the EU Council and would generally require an authorising UN Security Council Resolution. The Council evaluates if the planned activities are appropriate. In the case of a positive opinion, the Council must approve the Crisis Management Concept (CMC), which sets out the political objectives that the EU should achieve and the purpose of the

operation itself. On this basis, the Working Party of Foreign Relations Counsellors (RELEX) draws up a joint action and operating budget. Once approved, documents such as Concept of Operations (CONOPS), Operational Plan (OPLAN), and Rules of Engagement (ROE) are prepared within five days. There is also the necessity of appointing an operational commander (Operations Headquarters) for the battlegroup. They can be designated by five Member States: Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, and Greece¹. If neither of the countries mentioned is able or willing to appoint the command, the EU might use its Operations Centre (OPCEN)² within the EU Military Staff in Brussels. This also was not the great solution, as the OPCEN was an ad-hoc, non-standing, non-commanding headquarters facilitating the planning and conduct of military operations deployed as part of the CFSP. It was supposed to be operational five days following a decision by the Council and reach its full capability to command after twenty days, at the latest. That would also influence the time (delay) of the battlegroups' deployment. Once replaced by the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), which is a permanent structure, this problem might be reduced, still, this institution has not yet commanded any military operation (or a mission with a military component), thus has no experience in these kinds of tasks. Moreover, the MPCC has its own responsibilities (at present, this is command and control of the EU's three military training missions, and it may also now command and control other types of missions) and too many tasks to perform combined with a lack of experience in commanding a military operation, may lead to a failure. Theoretically, a third solution is also possible, namely the application of the Berlin Plus Agreement and the use of NATO's planning and command structures, but it was never considered by EU member states (Major, Mölling, 2011). First of all, a consensus would be difficult to achieve, secondly, if the EU wants to show off its own capabilities, it would be against this policy to give up on the command and pass it to NATO structures. Lastly, the very NATO could be hesitant to such a solution for many formal and political reasons. After five days, the EU Council decides to launch the operation. From that moment on, the battlegroup has no more than 10 days to be deployed in the operation area (Fig. 2). Since July 2016 the Eurocorps, as first multinational headquarters, assumed the role of the deployable Force Headquarters of some of the EU Battlegroups: In that role, the Eurocorps had to be able to conduct combined and joint operations in the light of the comprehensive approach and had to be certified after a long exercise cycle to meet defined military criteria.

¹ A situation where the operational commander (and his whole HQ) is appointed and not related to the forces he will command may bring about more problems (communication, mutual trust, reliability, consciousness about the forces strengths and weaknesses, abilities, training details etc.).

² From 2020, the Operation Centre's role has been transferred to the Military Planning and Conduct Capability.

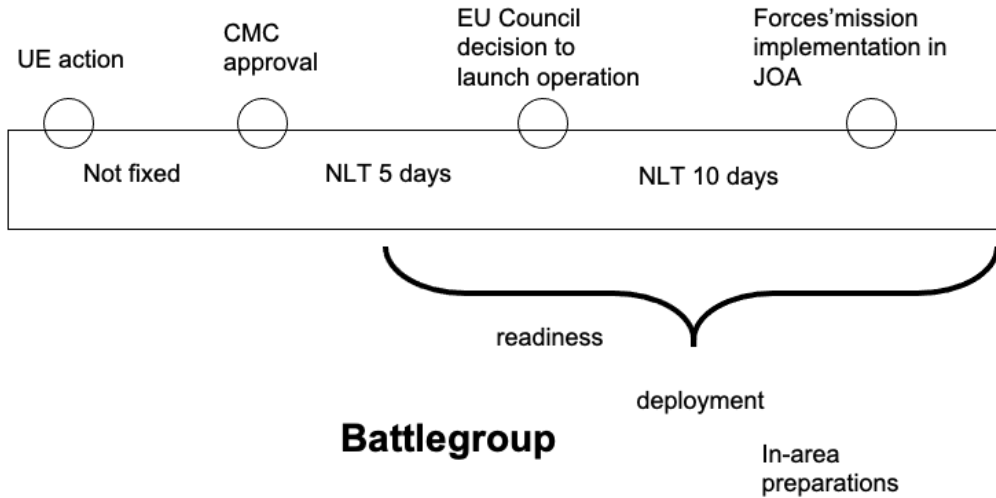


Fig. 2. Decision on the battlegroup deployment schema with timelines

Note: CMC – Crisis Management Concept; JOA – joint operation area; NLT – not later than.

Source: based on: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/1222503/110106%20factsheet%20-%20battlegroups%20-%20version%207_en.pdf

It should be noted that the above-described procedure seems clear and easy even though certain very serious potential problems have been indicated. In reality, it is a very complex process in military terms. It begins with the development of a contribution to the Crisis Management Concept, including analyses and assessments of the future operation and a preliminary draft of the use of military force. Guidelines in this area are issued by the Director General of the European Union Military Staff (EUMS) in co-operation with the Defence Staffs of the EU countries. Only this process is very time-consuming and to be useful in later phases, it should be detailed. The Military Staff is also responsible for co-operation (e.g. through the exchange of liaison officers or planning groups) with the activated Operations Command. Initial proposals of the Military Staff are submitted to the European Union Military Committee (EUMC), where the final version of the military Crisis Management Concept is prepared. Thus, the basic parameters of the future operation are determined. It should be noted that at this point, we have a clash of political interests and the military ones and not only of the general objective type, but also the particular ones, as the EUMC is a forum for the EU countries to conduct consultations, including presenting the country's position on the use of the battlegroup. Additionally, the role of the Military Committee is to

present its recommendations to the Political Security Council (PSC)³. Again, the process may be lengthy, as it should be based on the detailed expert analysis of the situation in the region of operation. The EU Council, while deciding on the MSO (after its assessments by the EUMC and the PSC) asks the member states to confirm their readiness to support it, considering possible national constraints. This constitutes another potential problem – member states may not necessarily be unanimous at this stage. The next step of the planning process is the preparation by the Military Staff of the Initiating Military Directive (IMD), which contains information necessary for the operation commander to prepare strategic level documents, i.e. the Concept of Operations, Requirements for Forces and the Operations Plan together with the Rules of Engagement. Upon approval of the Concept for Operations and based on the Interim Requirements for the Forces, the EU Operation Commander (with the approval of the Military Committee the Political and Security Committee) may initiate the force generation and activation phase. The problem here may be with the commander's abilities to perform these tasks, as he might have very little time to get acquainted with the potential of the forces he will be supposed to command (as he is from outside the battlegroup). This is executed in the form of an Activation Warning (ACTWARN) and Interim Requirements for Force being communicated to contributing nations. The ACTWARN contains information about the outline of the operation, the forces necessary to carry it out and the most important dates. The last stage is the development of an Operation Plan along with the ROE by the Operation Commander. Only after approval of the plan by the EU Council is the Operation Commander entitled to issue an Activation Order (ACTORDER). There exists a huge probability that it will be rewritten by the force commander to make it more realistic and sticking to the real potential and capabilities of the battlegroup.

Battlegroups are designed to perform a full range of tasks listed in Article 43(1) of the Treaty on European Union, as well as the ones identified by the EU Global Strategy (Andersson et al., 2016) and those resulting from the Common Security and Defence Policy, namely the Petersberg tasks. They include conflict prevention, initial stabilisation, humanitarian interventions and rescue tasks, crisis management (embracing combat tasks and peace-making), peacekeeping, integrated disarmament operations, counterterrorism, third-country assistance operations, security sector reform operations, and state institution building missions. A different categorisation of tasks

³ After the approval of the Crisis Management Concept by the EU Council (based on the opinion of the Policy and Security Council) and the appointment of the EU Operations Command (the problems that may appear at this stage has already been mentioned and there are quite a few of them), the PSC orders the Military Committee to develop a Military Strategic Options (MSO) Directive. It includes feasibility and risk assessments, and a command-and-control structure design with a recommendation for operation commanders.

for battlegroups can be suggested when their activity is considered considering the type of mission/operation, its stage or scale (Wątor, 2018), namely:

- bridging operations – using the EU Battlegroups as a bridging force (supporting troops located in joint operations area) or taking responsibility for a specific area;
- initial entry rapid response operations consisting in the performance of preparatory tasks by the battlegroups for the main forces;
- stand-alone operations in the case when the potential of the battlegroup would be sufficient to achieve the assumed final state of the operation (it should be assumed that these would be small-scale operations);
- operations supporting other ongoing activities (including cooperation with civilian entities).

Thus, battlegroups can perform a variety of tasks, but a certain limitation may be their small size (number of soldiers). Moreover, there is still a discussion about the relevant tasks for the BGs and situations when they should be deployed. If they are designed to be used in both civilian missions and military operations, it seems that they should cover all range of the CSDP engagement, which is rather impossible.

Summing up, the main purpose of the battlegroups is to enable the EU to engage independently in missions and operations around the world and to contribute to increasing its operational capabilities. This should lead to the strengthening of the Union's position in the international arena because of strengthening hard power measures. Did the battlegroups really achieve their goals and why/why not? To answer these questions, it is worth getting acquainted with the actual use of the potential of battlegroups.

Actual use of the EU Battlegroups

Since 2005, EU Battlegroups have been on standby as rapid reaction force to be used in the EU security and defence policy operations, and since 2007, two groups are always on constant readiness. So far, however, no battlegroup has been used in an EU-led operation (Popa, Ștefan, 2019; Balossi-Restelli, 2011; Schilde, 2017; Tocci, 2018), even though European countries have taken a lot of steps to build and develop their capabilities (Kees, 2011). Moreover, in several cases the use of battlegroups was advisable, for example in 2008 during the Darfur crisis which destabilised the neighbouring states of Chad and the Central African Republic (Nováky, 2020; Pohl, 2014), but also later in Mali and Libya (Reykers, 2016.) Therefore, certain steps were taken to improve the procedures for engaging battlegroups, so that the Union could use its own tools effectively. Some countries, however, are against the concept of rapid reaction as the basis for the functioning of the EU Battlegroups.

The concept of the EU Battlegroups assumes that two groups will be operational at the same time. The history, however, proves that this condition is not always met (Gowan, 2009), which translates into real combat potential. This situation is mainly influenced by the principle of the voluntary allocation of national units for the needs of the BG. The analysis of the involvement of individual countries in this process shows also a large differentiation resulting from historical, cultural, political, and economic conditions, as well as the possessed military resources (especially their quality). Difficulties in creating a battlegroup (lack of willingness to allocate forces or problems with necessary unit and key individuals' certifications confirming readiness to take on duty) translated into a large variety of individual groups and their conventional division into "heavy", significantly exceeding the structure of the battlegroup (e.g. the participation of armour sub-units, often with the support of aviation and naval component), and "light" ones, built on the basis of a mechanized (reinforced) battalion. The first type is preferred by Germany; equally strong, well-equipped groups are prepared by the Scandinavian countries (Nordic battlegroup). By contrast, the Balkan battlegroup (HELBROC), formed by Greece (as the framework nation), Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Romania, is considered a relatively weak formation while the Visegrad Battlegroup (Urbanovska, Paulech, 2014) are somewhere in the middle of these two types.

The EU also tries to introduce innovative methods of capacity development (Table 1) aimed at ensuring the optimal use of own capabilities (Schilde, 2016) and achieving synergy. This process was initiated under the French Presidency and resulted in the publication of the *Declaration on Strengthening Capabilities* on December 11, 2008. The greatest shortcomings still exist in the areas of strategic and tactical lift, intelligence and reconnaissance, and forces protection.

The EU's ambition is to carry out the following activities simultaneously:

- two large stabilisation and reconstruction missions with the commitment of 10,000 soldiers and the civilian contingent for at least two years;
- two operations with rapid reaction forces (use of EU Battlegroups);
- evacuation lasting less than 10 days;
- surveillance or interception operation on sea or air;
- a civil-military humanitarian operation lasting up to 90 days;
- about 12 civilian missions, including a large one with the commitment of up to three thousand people for several years.

For the time being, the EU has not declared participation in stabilisation or peace-keeping missions with the use of force. Although participation in such operations is a European ambition, the conduct of such operations is prevented by insufficient combat capabilities.

Table 1. Chosen innovative methods of capabilities development

Method	Explanation (definition)	Example of usage
Capabilities sharing	The use of national capabilities during joint activities without any specific mechanism of their use	European Carrier Group Interoperability Initiative – ECGII
Combining capabilities	Delegation of national resources to be used by multinational structures	Movement Coordination Centre Europe – MCC-E in Eindhoven
Division of roles and tasks	States rely on other states or multinational structures for certain capabilities. This option includes the possibility of sharing niche capabilities, e.g. in the field of defence against the WMD or medical air lift, or the expensive ones, e.g. in the field of satellite reconnaissance	European Air Transportation Fleet – EATF
Pooling and sharing	Government-funded capabilities committed to multinational structures	Airborne Warning and Control System – AWACS, Strategic Airlift Capability – SAC
Smart defence	Concept that encourages Allies to cooperate in developing, acquiring and maintaining military capabilities to meet current security problems in accordance with the new NATO strategic concept	Baltic Air-Policing mission

Source: Own elaboration based on: *The Military Balance 2010*. Routledge, London 2010 and *Smart Defence*, 2017, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84268.htm (accessed: 09 December 2020).

Summing up, in practice, these are the governments of the countries whose soldiers are on duty in the battlegroup that make the final decisions about the deployment, based on national legal regulations guided by their own interests (Dempsey, 2013; Chappell, 2009). They often differ from the position of the EU Council. The main benefit of this co-operation is increasing the level of military interoperability and the possibility of organising a comprehensive, attractive training combined with a cycle exercises confirming the achievement of the required training standards. An unfavourable trend concerning the armed forces of European countries, which may have an impact on the process of creating and equipping the EU Battlegroups is the constantly decreasing operational readiness index of weapons systems, estimated for the most important types of equipment at the level of 50%⁴ (in some countries this index is

⁴ Operational readiness index is calculated taking into consideration many variables. It is defined as the probability of the implementation of the planned tasks by the device within a specified period of time. Evaluation refers i.e. to such variables as: broke-to-fix time, failure

often lower). Difficulties in conducting combined operations may also be caused by insufficient compatibility of military technology. For example, EU countries produce 17 types of tanks, 20 types of infantry fighting vehicles and 27 types of 152/155 mm artillery systems (Wątor, 2018) and the ammunition is not always interchangeable for similar sized guns and howitzers. Taking into account the lessons learned from the current armed conflicts, in order to increase the interoperability of the EU Battlegroups, the desired investments in the area of the armed forces of European countries are: increasing the cyber-defence capabilities, digitisation of weapon systems, building communication networks, and increasing spending on “human capital” to prepare highly qualified personnel (Wątor, 2018).

The cause of the system weakness

In the light of the contemporary intensification of local and regional crises or conflicts, the importance of early and rapid response has increased. Theoretically, these challenges are the ones that the battlegroups were designed for (Andersson, 2017). Is that really so? The potential use of battlegroups in expeditionary operations is significantly limited due to the lack of basic capabilities (including strategic air lift, air-to-air refuelling, and satellite reconnaissance⁵), but also many countries have very limited war stocks of expensive weapons, e.g. missiles. Moreover, there is a noticeable lack of sufficient will of the member states to use these groups and the frequent practice of involving units assigned to battlegroups in other initiatives, e.g. within the framework of national systems or NATO. On the other hand, so far there have been just a few clear reasons for the use of EU Battlegroups, as they were created as a tool for the Union’s response in the event of serious crises in its immediate vicinity.

The main advantage of the EU Battlegroups was supposed to be the speed of reaction in a crisis. Apart from the political decision that initiates it, which is largely dependent on the unanimous consent of all EU member states, the scope of this concept includes numerous factors, starting with the parallel (all command levels) planning process through force mobility, as well as the efficiency of the logistics and transport system (air and maritime). The decision to use the battlegroup is preceded by a complex and lengthy process of military planning (described in detail in the previous section) which can jeopardize the very idea of rapid deployment. The general principles of activation of EU battlegroups show that it is a long process, not even

rate, operating time of the device, the number of damages to the device in a fixed unit of time. Operating time of the device is one of the key elements influencing the index being low in numerous cases, as a lot of devices in many countries are quite old.

⁵ The Galileo system was supposed to become operational in 2008, but this deadline was postponed due to financial difficulties. In 2010, it was finally decided that it would not be launched until 2017–2018. Right now, it is in its initial phase of usage, while some of the satellites are still being tested.

mentioning the very BG level, where mission-planning teams comprise specialist roles in intelligence, military strategy, geography, metrology, ordinance, etc. (Walker et al., 2009). As mentioned by Major and Mölling (2011), there are different doctrines and ROEs to be considered whilst planning, as well as the fragmentation of planning and command structures within the EU, which seems to be the greatest challenge. Disintegration of the planning process makes it time inefficient. The problem is that even at the preliminary stages (advance and strategic planning at the political level) requires solid military expert support. The EU does not possess a constantly functioning military planning unit and command capability.⁶ It is estimated that the time necessary to carry out the decision cycle in accordance with the procedures in force will be at least 3-4 months. The extended decision-making process is in contradiction with the short time regimes adopted for the battlegroups on duty and limits their basic advantage, which is high readiness to act. The operation commander appointed by the EU Council, at the strategic level, is responsible for: developing the concept of operations (CONOPS) and the operation plan (OPLAN), co-ordinating the transfer of forces to the area of operation, and then for: their deployment, implementation tasks and return after completing the mission. Thus, advance and strategic planning are executed at the EU level, while operational planning at operational headquarters of the battlegroup which is activated only after the adoption of the Crisis Management Concept, which is far too late to be time- and task-efficient. Still, to generate the CMC, quite specific military expertise is needed. Who delivers it if the Operations Headquarters (OHQ) are not yet activated? It seems that planning is done by a unit which later has nothing to do with the Battlegroup itself. Extraordinarily fragmented military planning process makes the whole procedure long and inefficient. Late activation of the OHQ means that after it familiarises with the CMC, it would probably require to change some aspects. Moreover, as far as the very OHQ is concerned, although it operates on a permanent basis at the national level, it is just activated to serve as command centre for a given battlegroup. The need to keep the national OHQ on stand-by for the possible need of the battlegroup generates enormous costs, so in reality it does not function like that and in consequence, in many cases they lack the necessary experience (which is revealed during military exercises with the participation of the battlegroups). Once activated, it also needs to build up its planning and command activities. The other question that arises concerns contingency planning. When and where does it take place?

⁶ As mentioned earlier, at the end of 2020, the responsibilities of the Military Staff were taken by the Military Planning and Conduct Capability which is a permanent structure. Thus, there is a chance that the problem of the battlegroup command will be at least partially solved with the flow of time.

Another problematic issue is the absence of permanent planning structures and the training certification system, which in theory is guided by the EU Military Committee. Still, the battlegroup concept should be modified to establish more consolidated guidelines when it comes to its certification. The current one is ambiguous since, although it indicates that multinational exercises must be carried out, it also establishes that the final certification is a national responsibility. Therefore, it has been a common practice to organise national exercises to certify units separately, and on that basis communicate to the framework nation the certification of troops whose interoperability has not been assessed under the operational and doctrinal framework of the EU. The lack of a permanent OHQ does not help the situation, as there is no-one to determine training and certification standards. To improve the certification process, and therefore the military effectiveness of the battlegroups, the EUMC should be incorporated in a systematic way throughout the entire certification process (Girona, 2016) if the EU wants to be independent from NATO with this respect. This will ensure interoperability not only between battlegroup forces, but with European doctrine, while the EUMC can act as institutional memory on lessons learned and best practices. In the first place, although European doctrine provides for strategic-military planning relying on non-permanent actors, the Operations Headquarters, and other subordinate headquarters (FHQ and CC HQ) must be activated simultaneously once the Council decides to launch an operation. Therefore, during the previous phases, the Council will have limited military inputs while the OHQ and subordinates will have to activate quickly and simultaneously for the mission and to support the planning process. Thus, consolidation of strategic-military planning seems indispensable. This would also allow the Council to get acquainted with the BG's capabilities, strengths, and vulnerabilities in advance. Currently, the recourse to the various national HQs is an unnecessary redundancy and the degree of familiarity of these HQs with European concepts and doctrines is unknown (Girona, 2016).

Another important factor affecting the usage of the battlegroups are their costs (Reykers, 2017). More specifically, the financing of EU battlegroup operations has always been the most significant obstacle. During the 2017 European Council meeting, Member States agreed broadening of the costs that would be borne in common, particularly regarding the deployment of EU Battlegroups. Decisions are currently under discussion in the context of the review of the Athena Mechanism for the financing of EU missions and operations. Brexit is also a factor that impedes the enhancement of European military capabilities (Biscop, 2016), including the battlegroups, as Great Britain was the largest military power within the EU. This also only deepens the already existing problems of the rapid deployment of the battlegroups due to the lack of strategic lift and European military headquarters. Establishment of a small European command centre in Brussels and the European Defence Fund in 2017 seems insufficient to requirements, as these actions do not solve the command or financial

problems of the battlegroups. The reason is that these are not only the costs of their deployment, but also preparatory expenditures, i.e., to reach the standby status, an EU battlegroup need to be certified according to fixed criteria. In the case of multinational BG, this generates not only additional costs, but also further problems. Even though the certification process is very flexible and provides only the general objectives while the details are left for the decision of the framework and contributing states, it still requires lengthy and carefully planned training cycles for specific criteria to be met. Flexibility may be the biggest advantage and disadvantage of the certification system at the same time. The lack of standardisation of the certification process, procedures, and requirements may affect the interoperability within and across the BG packages. Once sent to the field, in the case of change of the BG in the field or necessity to use the reserves, it may happen that the battlegroup is no longer able to carry out its tasks. The greatest problems are predicted within the C3/C3I (Command, Control, Communications/C3 + Intelligence) which are more national in nature and scope including little multilateralism. Summing up this part of the analysis, the six-month duty of the BG is preceded by a multi-stage preparation and training cycle lasting about two years. Thus, the relatively short on-call time does not compensate the costs of creating the formation. However, the postulate of extending the duty to twelve months, which was first submitted by Poland during its presidency in the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2011 was not implemented. Other proposals related to the optimisation of the battlegroup's formation process formulated at that time concerned strengthening the co-operation of combat groups with civilian entities and extending the possibility of joint financing of the costs of participation in the operation.

For the battlegroups to be used, there must be a consent of all Member States, and this is also very difficult to achieve due to sometimes very different political interests of the countries. Balossi-Restelly (2011) mentions another stumbling block: a lack of strategic vision by the EU and its member states (except Mediterranean countries) towards the African region where the battlegroups were initially meant to be deployed. The closest they came to the deployment was in 2013 when the conflict in the Central African Republic turned into regular war. Still, France did not want to wait for the long bureaucratic procedures to come into final uncertain effect and sent its own forces to the conflict area. It is worth mentioning that it is not only politics that is preventing the EU Battlegroups from deployment, as their usage needs to be authorised by the United Nations Security Resolution, which also constitutes a potential problem. Some countries need also detailed internal procedures in such case, i.e. Germany apart from the EU and UN approval, requires also its own Parliament's consent. Thus, domestic procedures of some EU Member States may seriously affect or even obstruct the deployability of the battlegroup (Landstrom, 2007). Finally, the fear about the manpower losses may also be the reason of some MSs reluctance for deployment.

Logistics and its costs (creating restrictions) seems to be another problematic area. The most important one is strategic lift. As far as the transportation aircrafts are concerned, the EU mostly possesses small and medium size aircrafts (mainly C-130 and C-160), while access to the large one like C-17 is very limited which may significantly affect the equipment which can be carried to the area of operations. On the other hand, larger aircraft like An-124 that the EU possesses require airfields with very high demands regarding the runways (length, width, and weight-bearing capacity). Very few countries, especially in Africa, where the EU Battlegroups could supposedly operate meet such criteria. It is possible to use alternative airports, but this raises further political, procedural, and logistic challenges. Slow entrance into service of the A400M Atlas may help solve some of these problems. Sea lift, on the other hand, is not an option either, as it will not enable operability of the battlegroup within 15 days in vast majority of African countries which may be potentially the target of the operation. Finally, privatisation of some areas of logistics (transportation⁷ and support services such as supplies) may carry new risks (Major, Mölling, 2011) related to the dependency and on the outsourced service and its price which is low at the beginning, may rise in the event of crisis, as the outsourced services are managed by the market rules only (economic interests come first after all). Thus, their reliability may be quite low. BGs should serve as a starting point for further experimentation in the area of pooling and sharing, as well as joint procurement (till now they had minor effect in this area (Major, Mölling, 2011)) making the use of the European Defence Agency.

Finally, there are doctrinal problems related to unclear link of the European Union battlegroups to the United Nations (Reykers, 2020), including their dependence on the UN resolution, as well as the UN's forces. The discussions relate to the necessity to have the UN mandate in the case of an intervention in a crisis-affected state if the battlegroups were to be deployed on the invitation of this state or the very call of the UN (this case is also imprecise with respect to both – political and military (especially command) issues). Probably Germany would still be reluctant to use the battlegroup without the UN's resolution (Chappell, 2009). If the BG is used in the field when UN forces also operate what is the command subordination? On what basis these two types of forces would co-operate as they might not have any interoperability. Another problem arises with reference to the NATO Rapid Response Forces – what is the division of roles between them and the EU Battlegroups. Can they operate together in one field? What will be the relation between them? If not, what is the division of tasks so that they are not redundant?

⁷ Pooling and sharing refers only to air and maritime lift.

Conclusions

The creation of battlegroups was, on the one hand, to drive the transformation of the national armed forces of the EU Member States and on the other, to enable the EU to react independently to a potential crisis (or other situation requiring the involvement of expeditionary forces) in its vicinity. The first goal was partially achieved. Has the second goal also been achieved? It is difficult to give unambiguous answer to this question (Hatzigeorgopoulos, 2012). The EU Battlegroups are small and thus have quite limited range of tasks, cannot undertake operations at a considerable distance from Europe, so they are incapable of participating in large-scale operations (both in terms of territorial scope and type of tasks). This means that they are also unable to be a leading force in classic peacekeeping operations for being too small and mainly created for short-termed deployment in crisis situations, they could only be treated as helping forces in the initial stage of the peacekeeping. However, in the case of peace-restoring operations, they can act as a reserve in the event of an escalation of guerrilla activities. As stated by Górká-Winter (2006), battlegroups should be capable of preventing humanitarian disasters or escalating a conflict, ensuring security during elections, and organizing evacuation operations. Still, is it really what the EU was and is looking for and aspiring to? Probably not.

It is also worth considering strengthening the co-operation and co-ordination of the activities of the EU Battlegroups and NATO Response Force, as their tasks and objectives largely overlap⁸. It would be necessary to define which areas of operation of the EU Battlegroups and the NATO Response Force do not overlap (the differences concern only the size and composition of the forces). The creation of battlegroups has disguised the prospect of creating a rapid reaction force capable of carrying out larger-scale operations. Although the groups are considered the EU's flagship military instrument, their way of functioning is incomprehensible and their potential untapped (including the political scope and as an instrument of building power in the international arena). Other option is to rethink the scope of the BGs activities and types of missions and operations they are to be involved in and make these more civilian.

Most EU Member States are reluctant to use groups for CSDP operations (Biscop, 2015) even though the battlegroups are theoretically having the capabilities and the range of tasks that overlaps CSDP missions and operations. Moreover, as the battlegroups are based on land forces, nations are not so willing to give up command authorities to multinational level, as they require greater command authority than the air or naval ones, their ROEs are far more complex and vulnerable to change due to the dynamics of the operation (Young, 2003). It is likely that in the event of a serious crisis in the close vicinity of the Union, untested groups might not be able to reach the

⁸ Even though during Trump administration and his reluctance to engage in Europe, it may be difficult.

intended goal, mainly due to their small size. Operations in which EU Battlegroups could be involved in do not directly affect the security level of the states that extract forces, but generate significant costs, both financial and political in nature. Granting permission to use the groups once could trigger a wave of such involvement, and it would be much easier to make further decisions about using these forces. Moreover, some EU countries (including the Netherlands and Germany) believe that the use of battlegroups in typical CSDP operations, i.e., humanitarian, or advisory and training activities, would be ineffective, given the good training and preparation of the battlegroups to perform tasks in the event of serious crises. The high cost of such involvement is also an issue, and it is perceived disproportionate to the above-mentioned tasks. At the same time, it is noticeable that the United States is less willing to engage in activities which it believes the EU should deal with on its own (e.g. in Libya in 2011 or in Ukraine in 2018). It therefore seems necessary to increase the EU's involvement in international affairs and to take greater responsibility for them. It is necessary to create an armed force that will remain at the disposal of the European Union. Battlegroups can be a kind of a clue, but not a matrix, as their functioning in the current model has not proved successful.

The system of the EU Battlegroups is dysfunctional in its current shape. The usefulness of these forces is limited, and their appearance has not solved the problem of recruiting military units for Common Security and Defence Policy missions that are not rapid response operations. The real and greatest problem seems to be the lack of permanent planning and command unit which makes rapid deployment impossible. Eventually, the creation of battlegroups did not contribute to strengthening the Union's power in the military aspect. Although their combat capabilities are considerable and they were intended for operations granting security, they were never used. Thus, the EU could not prove that it had a common military instrument that was effective, and which enabled it to respond to a major crisis on its own. In order to improve the system, it would be necessary to introduce further changes to the very rules of using the groups, i.e. to define even wider range of activities in which they could be actively involved, e.g. to enable their broader participation in the civil-military dimension of crisis management.⁹ This would require changes in the financing system (greater extension of the areas financed by the Athena mechanism), as well as support by EU governments of the idea of joint purchasing and pooling and sharing, especially in the field of combat service support. EU governments should also develop Permanent Structured Cooperation,¹⁰ which could become a model or at least help to build new standards for the battlegroups.

⁹ Before that, however, permanent EU civil-military planning and command structures (e.g. in Brussels) should be established.

¹⁰ A mechanism introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, enabling European Union Member States that meet the higher criteria of military capability and have entered greater commitments in this field to deepen cooperation in the field of the CSDP.

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