

Event report:

The Future of European Security – The Stakes of EU Member States in the Defence Market”

Liberal defence experts gathered in Brussels on May 24 and 25 for a two-day exchange on the “**Future of European Security**”. 19 participants from 11 countries convened at what was the third edition of a regular conference initiated last year by the European Liberal Forum and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom.

Some of the attendees were new to this format. Among them were policy advisors and parliamentary assistants of the Macron party “La République En Marche” and the German FDP. They might have been surprised by the intensity of discussion that arose already around a warm-up game. Workshop participants were asked to position themselves politically using a red dot on a pin board. They had to choose if NATO or rather the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the EU should be their country’s main frame of military cooperation and if they consider territorial defence or rather intervention abroad the main task for their military.

The resulting pattern proved not very surprisingly to be dispersed. But it provided an important starting point for the two days of discussions and presentations that were to come. It was not the intention of the workshop to change any of the participants’ opinions in order to bring them closer together. The aim was rather to provide orientation and understanding for the political positions of European partners which are rooted in geography, history and many other important aspects. It was also the ambition of this meeting to continue fostering a lively network of liberal defence experts that can seek for advice in another country when needed. Last but not least, the gathering was supposed to be the kickoff event for a larger publication project on “**The Stakes of EU Member States in the Defence Market**”, which aims to eventually help liberal decision makers across Europe to understand how the defence market works and how its persistent malfunctioning can be tackled.

A first step to a deeper understanding of the defence market was provided by Michael Kluth, a well reputed researcher from the University of Roskilde. He analyzed examples of successful cooperation and underlined that it’s mainly the naval domain, where collaboration is lacking. He was later joined by Patrick Rudloff, head of EU affairs at Airbus, who delivered insight into the recently announced Franco-German fighter jet project. Ben Jones, a Liberal democrat and researcher at King’s College London, added to this his view on British-European defence cooperation after Brexit. As day one drew to a close, the group enjoyed German beer and sausages with the deputy permanent representative of Germany to NATO, Heiko Thoms.

Day two provided an opportunity for more exchange within the group. German and French participants debated about the opportunities and cultural barriers to deeper cooperation between both of their countries. The Dutch and Spanish added to this with their perspective on industrial cooperation and future European integration. These exchanges proved again to be very fruitful and intriguing for workshop attendees who commonly lack the time and resources to connect internationally during their day-to-day work in national parliaments.

So it was with a tired but smiling face when most of the liberal defence experts headed back to the airport or train station after two days of intense discussions. They will be invited to convene for the next edition of this format in autumn 2018.

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