

Ralf Dahrendorf Roundtable 'Towards a European Army?' | 02 July, The Hague

'The concept of a European Army is often used by liberal groups, and very also very ill-defined', moderator Sebastian Vagt remarked in his opening statement in parliamentary press center Nieuwspoord and before an audience of around 80 people. With that, he provided the key-reason for organizing the roundtable discussion: working towards a clearer understanding of what a European army means to different people and why, and what the core challenges are to European military cooperation. Namely, until now, attempts of cooperation have mostly been half-hearted and not too successful. Since 2016 the political debate on and public perception of a European army has shifted. Does this bring us closer to a European army?

The first to speak was member of parliament Salima Belhaj – defence spokesperson for D66. She recently published a policy initiative in which she argued in favour of a European army. She stated that the document was meant to start a serious and clear discussion. No matter if you are in favour or against, she argued it to be crucial that all Europeans are part of this debate. Developments in the world have made a European army inevitable in the eyes of some – albeit many of them are located in the foreign policy and defence policy circles. Ms Belhaj stressed time and time again that the far-reaching decision to work towards a European army cannot be an almost invisible process, slowly implemented from Brussels, with silent agreement of national leaders. This decision needs to be discussed front and center in all national parliaments. It needs support of local populations.

Second speaker Ben Jones – teaching fellow at King's College London – did not recognize the necessity of a European army in our current geopolitical reality. Although Mr Jones acknowledged that developments in the world are raising new questions on European security, he saw difficulties in combining a European army with a US defence guarantee. Europe has to choose. And, regarding that choice, he found it questionable if EU member states together would have enough capabilities to form a respectable force. This would either require an immense investment or an extreme high level of integration. For that, there currently does not seem to be the political will.

Lastly, Bartek Nowak – Foreign Affairs Secretary of the Polish Nowoczesna Party and a teacher at the Vistula University in Warsaw - spoke. Mr Nowak started off with stating that transatlantic relationships are about much more than Donald Trump – that the US-EU relationship has been undergoing a transformation for quite while already. The US have become more passive in the world arena ever since their involvement in Georgia in 2008. Their priorities have been switching for a while and will continue to turn away from Europe after Trump, as they did before him. In this sense a European army would be perfect. However, Mr Nowak displayed pessimism on this part. According to him, a European army will most likely remain a dream, as defence should start with a common conception of threat. This barely exists in Europe.

The three speakers – all with three different backgrounds and perceptions on European military cooperation – engaged in fiery discussions with each other *and* the public. It was remarkable to see the mixed crowd that showed up and participated – it would not be the first time a discussion on military matters would be dominated by grey retirees of a male kind. Students, politicians and former politicians, representatives of Ngos and veterans all contributed to the debate, and forced the speakers to reflect on their statements and opinions. If the event – taking almost three hours – showed one thing, it was that more debate, more exchange of perspectives and more daring visions on the future of European military cooperation are necessary. This will surely not be the last roundtable on the topic.



The speakers: Bartek Nowak, Salima Belhaj, Ben Jones

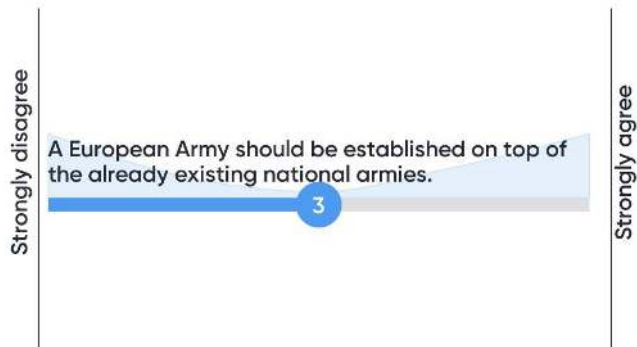


Statement I



57

Statement II



61

Statement III

Strongly disagree

A European Army should be developed as fast as possible, even if some countries do not participate.

3.1

Strongly agree