



On Monday February 21<sup>st</sup> 2022, the Chair of Contemporary Strategic Issues welcomed Mr Joël Barre, General Delegate of the French Armament Directorate (DGA), for its sixth conference. Reviewing the main challenges facing the Member States of the European Union in building a "Europe of Defence", the General Delegate opened his speech with the necessity for France to implement an ambitious national arms policy to drag the other Member States of the Union on board.

The rise in the DGA's budget to 15 billion euros, stipulated in the military programming law (LPM) for the period 2019/2025, fulfils this expectation. Also, the DGA is actively renewing and modernising the military equipment and materials of the various components of the French armed forces. Reminding that it is vital for France to consolidate its strategic autonomy, the DGA has since its creation in 1961 by General De Gaulle, contributed to the technological robustness of the French deterrence model. This is demonstrated by the recent qualification of the M51 ballistic missile by test firings, the development of new third-generation SNLE nuclear submarines, but also the consideration of the "cyber defence" objective with the DGA centre for information control.

As our speaker underlined, the French strategic autonomy is based on "the autonomy of assessment of a military and operational situation, of decision and action" which must be guaranteed by the unhindered supply of military equipment and the control of the arms policy. These objectives cannot be dissociated from a competitive and innovative defence industrial and technological base (DITB). The DGA's role is to support, through contracts, the 4,000 French companies that make up this DITB. The DGA has placed orders with French arms companies amounting to 8.1 billion euros for 2022 and 8.1 billion in payment credits. Alongside this, arms exports are essential to our DTIB. They enable us to maintain the design and production capacities of our armaments, but also to develop new applications ensuring the maintenance of high standards, for example by supplying the air force with an electronic system for the Rafale which was initially intended for export. Finally, the DGA has a duty to promote innovation in French industries, and currently invests around 1 billion euros per year in defence innovations and 7 billion in research and development.

On the European level, Mr Barre stressed the significance of cooperation in the field of arms policy to support the "Europe of Defence". France and its partners could reap various benefits from this initiative. On the one hand, greater interoperability between armaments systems is obviously of mutual interest. And on the other, thanks to the pooling of development costs, weapons systems will become

more common on the market thus decreasing their prices. For several years now, European cooperation programs in the armaments sector have increased by a third. According to Mr Barre, France, which already had several long-standing strategic partners with the United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy, could benefit just as much from so-called "community" cooperation in the form of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PSC). Indeed, of the eight billion euros invested in the European Defence Fund (EDF), France had 500 million euros at its disposal from 2019 to 2020 and was included in 27 of the 33 projects identified at the close of the preparatory phase.

However, Mr Barre recalled certain prerogatives in the construction of a "Europe of Defence". Whether in the field of information security or in export, France must be able to retain a certain autonomy, essential for the proper functioning of its DTIB. Furthermore, in the framework of a cooperation programme, the need to harmonise the needs, requirements and timetables of EU Member States is just as important as rethinking the cooperation process. Indeed, Mr Barre advocates that a small number of Member States should take the lead before being joined by additional partners.