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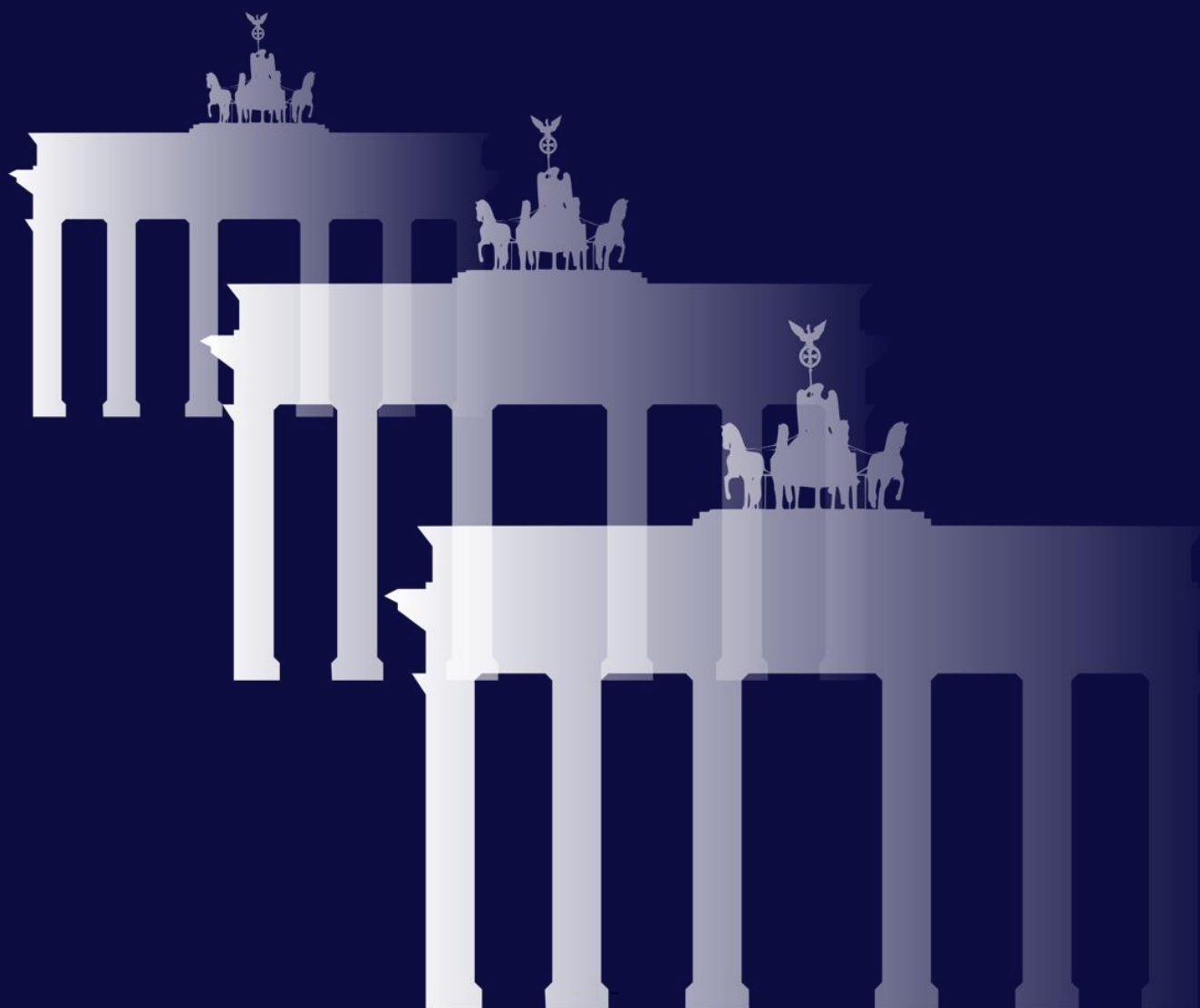
Thinking

Connecting

Building

## A GERMAN POINT OF VIEW ABOUT EUROPEAN DEFENSE

Interview of professor Masala  
Universität der Bundeswehr



## Professor Carlo Masala



Prof. Carlo Masala holds the professorship for International Politics at the Universität der Bundeswehr Munich. Co-publisher of various journals, he shapes in parallel the largest German-language podcast on Security policy ("Sicherheitshalber") and is founder of the Metis institute for strategy and foresight, also at the University of the German Armed Forces Munich. He is one of the most prominent representatives of Neorealist theory in the field of international relations in Germany.



Interview conducted by David Schmidt, undergraduate student at the Universität der Bundeswehr Munich (Germany), member of the EDN since 2020.

**This interview took place on the 20th of April 2021.**

*This text engages only the responsibility of the interviewee. The ideas or opinions expressed may not in any way be regarded as the expression of an official position of the European Defence network.*

**EDN:** Prof. Masala, thank you, for being here today. I would like to start with a quote from your Twitter account. On the 9th of April you tweeted: "Vertreter der EU haben sich jetzt innerhalb kürzester Zeit zweimal demütigen lassen (Moskau, Ankara). Projekt Weltmacht läuft." Transl.: Representatives of the EU have have now been humiliated twice in a very short time (Moscow, Ankara). World power project is underway. What successful areas of the European foreign and security policy do you see?

**Prof. Carlo Masala:** What I tweeted is of course cynical and negative in the sense, that the EU has assigned to itself, in its fundamental documents, the wish to play a role in what they consider to be the upcoming multipolar system. I think that if you look at it security-wise, the EU is still far away from that. This doesn't mean that the EU is not successful in its foreign and defence policy. If you go into detail, you will see that the EU undertakes quite a couple of especially civilian missions in crisis management situations which are quite successful. Be it in Africa, be it in the Caucasus or Central Asia, these are the areas where - let's put it this way - where the use of force is not involved, the EU is quite successful with its civilian instruments of conflict management and conflict prevention. What I think is, that there is a mismatch. The EU has a huge ambition, which it is not able to fulfill. My hypothesis would be that it won't be able to fulfill this ambition even in the midterm future. Nevertheless, if you go into the nitty gritty details of security and defence policy, you see quite some successes, especially in the civilian crisis management.

**EDN:** But if we look at the level of European defence projects, we also can see some successes, can't we?

**Prof. Carlo Masala:** Of course, there is PESCO and PESCO tries to identify shortcomings among military forces and to get countries together. But I would say if you look very much into detail, most of these projects don't make a difference. Look for instance at the medical corps, it is "nice to have", but it doesn't turn the EU into a world power. All the hard stuff is agreed among some European states outside the EU. And this is for one reason, because it's much more practical to do it outside the EU than inside the EU. If you take FCAS and have a look at the French-German battle tank project, there are a lot of problems associated with that, introducing it outside the EU-framework. If you would try to produce a next generation fighter jet with 27 EU-member states, this would blow the whole thing apart.

**EDN:** So the abilities to coordinate on the EU-level are not developed enough yet for comprehensive projects like these?

**Prof. Carlo Masala:** No, if these are the abilities, I think the status of defence policy in the EU reflects the lack of a common threat perception. NATO has partly the same problem, although NATO works differently. The major problem is, that there is no unifying threat perception among the EU member states. It's not Russia, it's not the situation in the Southern Mediterranean, it is not China. Some do agree that Russia poses a threat, some do agree that China is a challenge, some have an eye on the situation in the Southern Mediterranean. A unifying threat, in the way I think about defence, is the precondition to have policies. We actually have the will to move forward, but in absence of a unifying threat, the EU undertakes baby steps. And it undertakes baby steps because of its nature. You have the member states, you have the European Commission, you have the European Parliament. If you look at the members, you have NATO-members, you have non-NATO members and among the non-NATO members you have neutral countries, which makes it all difficult. It's a very slow process in the EU, hampered by the lack of a common threat perception, hampered by various security cultures and by political ambition. Political ambition means that, on the political level, everyone agrees to move forward with defence. But then you have those, who are afraid that a more autonomous EU would undermine NATO. Then you have others whose aim is exactly this. Being able to become independent from NATO, this means independent from the US. There are a lot of interests involved, which are diverging, sometimes they converge. Let's put it like this: The big interest is shared by most of the EU members but if you boil it down into practical steps, particular interests of different EU members are coming into play and are hampering the process.

**EDN:** With your institute Metis at the University of the German Armed Forces in Munich, you also work on questions regarding strategy and foresight. What would be the threat in the future which could unite the EU to stronger connect on common defence policies at European level?

**Prof. Carlo Masala:** Honestly, I can't foresee a unifying threat in the midterm future. I mean China poses a huge challenge and the stronger China becomes, the more difficult it will be to maintain relations with China. On the other hand, some European economies like ours, the German one, are quite heavily dependent on China. In the current policy, the German

government tries to separate the issue of economy and security because it doesn't want to risk the market in China, by sidelining too much with the US and getting too tough on China. I think this is also the situation with some other EU-members who are even more economically dependent on China, like Greece for instance. In 2008, during the Financial Crisis, the EU allowed Greece to sell its ports, especially the port of Thessaloniki, to China. If I'm not mistaken, China owns now every port in Greece, which of course creates also a huge political influence of China in Greece. Therefore, I don't think that China will be seen as a unifying threat. The Russians neither because the Russian ambitions are quite clear on a regional point of view, in contrast to the global Soviet ambitions before the end of the Cold War. Russia is aggressive vis-à-vis the Baltic countries but there they stop because they don't want to risk a confrontation with NATO. It's extremely aggressive against the cordon sanitaire (in geopolitical terms, which means Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia) between NATO and Russia, where it considers having a strategic depth towards NATO. Russia doesn't want to risk an all-out confrontation with NATO because this would be a nuclear confrontation and the Russians have no interest in that because at the end of the day, it would destroy Russia as well. This is very clear to the Europeans. The further away you are from Russia, geographically speaking, the less you consider Russia as a threat to your own integrity. If you live in Spain, you're fully aware that Russia is a threat to your eastern partners, but Russia is not a threat to Spain and will not become a threat to Spain anytime soon. The Spanish reaction towards Russia is a completely different one than the Polish one, because the Poles have borders with Belarus and Ukraine. The moment, the Russians invade Belarus and Ukraine completely, Poland will share a border with Russia, what they don't want to have.

**EDN:** What should happen at European level then to unify these countries? We have Germany for instance, which conducts the Nord Stream 2 project against the interests of the Eastern EU and NATO members.

**Prof. Carlo Masala:** There is nothing you can do to unify that. If it's not perceived as a threat, then it's not a threat and they act on the basis of a threat. If the US would leave the organization of European defence completely in the responsibility of the European countries, this would be a gamechanger. It is exactly the reason why we have so much progress in the EU right now. This scenario was a scenario most of the countries were afraid of under Donald Trump. With Joe Biden, some European countries are quite relaxed now because he made very clear, that the US is still sticking to Article 5 of NATO and the US is still committed to Europe. You see a relaxation among certain European countries, who just wanted more Europe because of the scenario that the US would abandon Europe completely.

**EDN:** In the strategic update of the French government, France, in a back-handed way, said that they contribute heavily to Europe, but they cannot act on their own. It says they need others to step up and contribute to the European defence. What do you think? Is France really in the position to declare that they're in the first line and others must follow? If they are, what should the other European countries do, especially Germany with its comparatively large military?

**Prof. Carlo Masala:** After the Brits left the EU, France is the only military power with a partially global reach. France is the strongest military power now in the EU and France considers itself as a global power. They have a permanent seat in the Security Council of the United Nations, and they still have interests in their former colonies. However, France also realizes that as France, they are too small to pursue their global interests alone and lack the money as everyone else does. What France tries to do, and they already did in the 90s successfully with Africa, they try to Europeanize their foreign policy. They try to act in the framework of the EU and use European money but to have the lead in the action. From a French perspective, it is totally legitimate to see it this way. From a German perspective it is quite clear that it is a No-Go to subordinate itself to France. While France is the strongest military power, the Germans are the strongest economic power, so the trade-off must be a kind of bigamy. Both have to agree, and both have to be in the front seat of this process. The showstopper here, in the past, was that the Germans didn't want to undermine NATO. They were always suspicious that France would like to undermine NATO. As long as NATO plays the leading role in European defence, of course the Americans are in the driving seat. On the political level, there is this kind of diverging interests which have to be reconciled. Maybe with a future German government, we will see much more willingness to subordinate to France, I mean if you look at the extremely pro French and European attitudes of the Greens or parts of the Green party, this might change if they come into government. But so far, the problem is exactly how to strengthen the EU without undermining NATO. Macron is not very clear on that point. He gives interviews and makes speeches where you could read out that at the end of the day, it is about undermining NATO, and he gives speeches and makes interviews where you can read between the lines that it's not about undermining NATO. There is a lot of suspicion about the ultimate aim of French European, foreign and defence policy and as long as this is not clear, you will have always this contradiction in the German-Franco relations.

**EDN:** Do you think that France and other European countries, like for example Italy with its interests in Libya, would be able to overcome their foreign policies in parts regarding a unified European foreign and security policy?

**Prof. Carlo Masala:** Here, we come to the bottom line. What does it mean to overcome the obstacles? Like I said, there is no unifying threat perception. Take Italy. Italy is a front state in the whole Mediterranean Sea. They see the problems with Russia, but their main concern is the Mediterranean and whatever happens south of them. They want to see a European policy basically dealing with these kinds of problems. If you go to the Poles, the Poles don't care about the Mediterranean. The only thing they do care about, legitimately, is Russia. So, we will always have tradeoffs between diverging threat perceptions. At the end of the day, there is one thing which of course a lot of people are not aware of: If we talk about defence policy, we talk about the use of Armed Forces. The use of Armed Forces involves the political decision to put the lives of your sons and daughters, I mean as a country metaphorically speaking, at risk. This is something, which has, at the end of day, to stay a national decision. I don't rule it out that we will get more cooperation or interoperability of European armed forces. That is the way we go. But I would completely rule out the idea of a unified European army, being somewhere under the command of some Brussels structures. If the decision to use these forces is taken by unanimity, the EU will never use them, because someone would always object the use of this kind of European army. If the decision to use them or to deploy them is based on qualified majorities votes for instance, what are we going to do with those countries which are outvoted? Then, those men and women in uniform would probably be killed in a mission, where the society they originated from had no interest in deploying troops. If this happens two or three times, I think the whole structure would collapse, because societies won't accept this kind of decision making, when it comes to putting the lives of soldiers at risk.

**EDN:** So you would need a European Union as a national state to establish a consistent European foreign and security policy, which includes ultimately the use of military force?

**Prof. Carlo Masala:** Yes! If you think it logically through, only when the European Union turns into a state, a real state, then those things are possible. As long as this kind of sovereign and supranational entity remains, where foreign and security policy is clearly on the side of sovereign member states, you will always have the problems I tried to illustrate to you.

**EDN:** One last question on another topic. There are military space activities of some European countries, especially regarding the use of military satellites. Is space a different dimension where EU members should work together more closely?

**Prof. Carlo Masala:** I'm not a space expert but, from my logic, space is becoming more and more important. All the big players are in space or are developing more sophisticated instruments for their space policies. If the EU wants to catch up with that, it has to cooperate closer because no EU member, even the most technologically advanced EU member state, has sufficient resources to catch up with what the Chinese, what the Russians and what the Americans, not to speak of India and the others, are doing in space. If there is a political decision that space basically is the fifth dimension of defence policy you want to take care of, this would give a push to the European structures, because simply of the fact that European countries do lack the resources to develop capabilities which can catch up with what the Chinese and others already do have. They need cooperation because they lack money and probably even technological innovation. These are clear areas where I could foresee a stronger European cooperation.

**EDN:** At least a small optimistic glimpse on the horizon of European defence cooperation. Thank you for your insights Prof. Masala, it was a pleasure.





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