

## The fight against pandemics: a new strategic priority for European armies?

Evening Conference  
16 December 2021  
17:00 – 18:30

Dr Jean-Baptiste WATELET, MD (Ghent University Hospital)  
Dr Édouard JOLLY (Institute for Strategic Research at the Military School – IRSEM, Paris)

Dear Madam, Sir,

We are pleased to invite you to an **evening conference** organised on **Thursday 16 December 2021** by the **Centre for Security and Defence Studies** of the Royal Higher Institute for Defence.

In recent years, European armed forces have had to reconsider their engagement priorities, placing more emphasis on tasks in support of other ministries on their national territories in order to contribute to the security of populations: terrorism, effects of climate change, migration, pandemics. The health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic provides an illustration of this evolution and reveals how public authorities can resort to armed forces in order to resist great dangers falling outside the sheer military scope. In Europe, the health crisis shows us that, depending on the country, the deployment of military means takes more or less time and is organised in a different manner. The current context, marked by new threats surging in the short term, encourages us to rethink our armed forces' main missions and the scope of Defence.

Are the resources of the defence ecosystem of European countries designed to respond to a health crisis? Should public health assignments become a new strategic priority for European armed forces? What were the strengths but also the weaknesses of the Medical Component of the Belgian Defence in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic? What should the future of military health services look like in order to cope with epidemics in Europe, but also beyond its borders?

In order to provide an answer to these questions, we are pleased to welcome Dr Jean-Baptiste WATELET, medical reserve major of the Medical Component of the Belgian Defence and head of clinic at Ghent University Hospital, as well as Dr Édouard JOLLY, researcher at the French Institute for Strategic Research at the Military School (IRSEM), who will present us their analysis of the mobilisation of armed forces in Europe in the fight against this pandemic.

This conference will take place in Dutch and in French on **Thursday 16 December 2021 at 17.00 hours in the conference room at campus Renaissance** (entrance: **rue Hobbema 8/Hobbemastraat 8, 1000 Brussels**) and **will be broadcasted online through the Skype platform**. A simultaneous interpretation in English, French and Dutch will be provided in the conference room. We thank you in advance for registering via the following link: [www.defence-institute.be](http://www.defence-institute.be). **Registration, subject to availability, is compulsory and must be received by Monday 13 December 2021 at the latest.** You will then receive a registration confirmation and a link to connect to the conference.

(Signed)

Filip BORREMANS, MSc Eng  
Air Force Colonel GS  
Director-General  
Royal Higher Institute for Defence

**Programme:**

16:30 – 17:00: Welcome  
17:00 – 18:30: Conference and Q&A