

## NDC Conference Report

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# **Enhancing NATO-EU Cooperation: Looking South and Beyond**

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#### **Key Points**

- NATO and the EU are two of the most important security providers globally. Failure to enhance cooperation between these organizations would mean missing an important opportunity. Progress especially on the operational level notwithstanding, much remains to be done to encourage the further deepening of coordination, de-confliction, and information sharing between the two organizations.
- The NATO-EU joint declaration<sup>2</sup> signed in Warsaw in July 2016, as well as the common conclusions to the joint declaration agreed upon in December of the same year,<sup>3</sup> is an important milestone on the path towards enhancing cooperation. In particular, the 42 concrete steps contained in the common conclusions have brought new energy to the project. It is important to follow through on these first steps and to build upon the joint declaration.
- NATO-EU cooperation has the greatest potential in areas where the two organizations' activities overlap. Two such issue areas are countering hybrid threats and dealing with the challenges of instability in the southern neighborhood. In both areas cooperation between NATO and the EU is already taking place but could be strengthened by more sustained efforts.
- The main dynamism in NATO-EU cooperation has been on the level of staff-to-staff cooperation or coordination on the operational level. Extracting lessons from successful examples of bottom-up cooperation between the two organizations could help to further cooperation in areas where the two organizations have thus far been engaged in separate yet complimentary efforts.

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<sup>2</sup> See http://www.nato.int/nato\_static\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\_2016\_07/20160708\_160708-joint-NATO-EU-declaration.pdf

<sup>3</sup> http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15283-2016-INIT/en/pdf

#### **NATO-EU Relations: Strategic Partnership?**

NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept considers the EU a "unique and essential partner" and calls for a strengthening of the "strategic partnership with the EU, in the spirit of full mutual openness, transparency, complementarity and respect for the autonomy and institutional integrity of both organisations." Similarly, the 2016 EU Global Strategy affirms the Union's intention to "deepen cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance in complementarity, synergy, and full respect for the institutional framework, inclusiveness and decision-making autonomy of the two." Beyond political statements, NATO-EU cooperation is also furthered by practical factors. Not only do the two organizations share common strategic interests and challenges, but there also is substantial overlap in its membership with 22 states being members of both the Alliance and the EU. From this perspective, it should not come as a surprise that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the presidents of the European Council and the European Commission, Donald Tusk and Jean-Claude Juncker, signed a joint declaration at the 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw aiming to "give new impetus and new substance to the NATO-EU strategic partnership." Building on this step, a set of common conclusions on the implementation of the joint declaration was agreed in December 2016, containing 42 specific steps to be taken to enhance NATO-EU cooperation.

These declarations, however, contrast rather sharply with the assessment of NATO-EU relations by many observers. Academic analyses have routinely used terms such as "deadlock" and "institutional fatigue," they speak of "strategic paralysis" and "muddling through," and they raise the question of whether the NATO-EU partnership can still be considered "strategic" given the lack of strategic convergence. One EU military official summed up this perspective by saying that "if the state of NATO-EU cooperation today represents progress, I don't want to know what things were like in the past." What, then, explains the apparent contrast between the declared objectives of political leaders and the perception of both, analysts and practitioners?

The answer is that both perspectives paint parts of the picture. To begin with, progress towards better coordination and more cooperation has been slow on the political level. Declarations by (and arguably the best intentions of) leaders of both organizations notwithstanding, formal cooperation between the Alliance and the Union remains fraught with difficulties. This is particularly the case since the EU's fifth wave of enlargement when Cyprus joined the Union, thus making cooperation with the EU a delicate matter for Turkey, a long-term NATO ally. In this sense, skeptics are right to point to a lack of "strategic convergence" between the two supposed partners.

On the other hand, there is cooperation on the operational level in settings as diverse as the counter-piracy operations off the Somali coast between EU Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) Operation Atalanta and NATO's Ocean Shield, <sup>14</sup> in Kosovo between the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) and

<sup>4 2010</sup> Strategic Concept, paragraph 32. See http://www.nato.int/nato\_static\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\_publications/20120214\_strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf

<sup>5</sup> European Union Global Strategy, p. 20. See http://www.eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top\_stories/pdf/eugs\_review\_web.pdf

<sup>6</sup> See the text of the declaration at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\_texts\_133163.htm?selectedLocale=en

See the common conclusions at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\_texts\_138829.htm
 Simon John Smith 2011, "EU-NATO Cooperation: A Case of Institutional Fatigue?" European Security 20(2), pp. 243-264.

<sup>9</sup> Simon Duke and Sophie Vanhoonacker 2015, "EU-NATO Relations: Top-Down Strategic Paralysis, Bottom-Up Cooperation," Paper prepared for the UACES 45th Annual Conference, September 2015.

Trine Flockhart 2014, "NATO and EU: A 'Strategic Partnership' or a Practice of 'Muddling Through'?" in: Liselotte Odgaard (ed.): *Strategy in NATO*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 75-89.

Nina Græger and John Todd 2015, "Still a 'Strategic' EU-NATO Partnership? Bridging Governance Challenges through Practical Cooperation," *PISM Policy Paper* 21(123), June 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Since the workshop was held under Chatham House Rules, statements will not be attributed.

<sup>13</sup> Græger and Todd 2015, op. cit.

Carmen Gebhard and Simon J. Smith 2015, "The Two Faces of EU-NATO Cooperation: Counter-Piracy Operations Off the Somali Coast," *Cooperation and Conflict* 50(1), pp. 107-127.

NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR),<sup>15</sup> in Afghanistan between NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the EU police mission (EUPOL),<sup>16</sup> and most recently in the Mediterranean between Operations Sophia and Sea Guardian. At the staff-to-staff-level, moreover, consultation and cooperation across organizational boundaries in Brussels has become routine. Informal meetings between NATO and EU foreign ministers have taken place since 2005 in the form of 'transatlantic' lunches or dinners.<sup>17</sup> The emerging picture of NATO-EU cooperation is thus one of routinized cooperation on the staff and operational levels, coupled with continuing political stasis. This has led observers to speak of the emergence of 'communities of practice' or the 'institutionalization of informal cooperation.' 19

The double-faced nature of NATO-EU cooperation is rooted in the history of relations between the two organizations. Formally, the Berlin Plus arrangement governs NATO-EU relations, although it has only been used twice since its adoption through an exchange of letters between NATO and the EU in March 2003.<sup>20</sup> This agreement gave the EU access to NATO assets and capabilities "for operations in which the Alliance as a whole is not engaged militarily as an Alliance" and regulated the mechanisms through which such operations would be structured.<sup>22</sup>

The development of the Berlin Plus mechanism also illustrates the problems in NATO-EU cooperation on the political level. Up to the end of the Cold War there had been practically no ties between NATO and the different organizational expressions of European integration—even though there had always been significant overlap in terms of membership and notwithstanding the fact that—after 1967—both organizations were based in the same city. One main reason for this lack of interaction was that the two organizations had very different purposes: During the Cold War, NATO focused mainly on deterrence and collective defense, while the project of European integration did not have a security component until the fall of the Berlin Wall. As John Ikenberry explains, NATO and the postwar European integration process can be seen as based on two different visions of order-building, one driven by containment and deterrence, the other aiming at institutionalization.<sup>23</sup>

With the end of the Cold War, however, the project of European integration took on a security aspect. The 1992 Maastricht Treaty foresaw the establishment of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), first under the auspices of the Western European Union (WEU) and later, after the 1999 Cologne summit, under the umbrella of the EU and the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). In the context of NATO-EU cooperation, the transition from the WEU to the EU with the 1999 summit is significant: Since all members of the WEU were simultaneously members of NATO, European efforts within the WEU were understood to be part of wider Alliance strategy. The British government in particular had been highly critical of European defense efforts outside of NATO, thus preventing a stronger European role. This changed with the 1998 Saint-Malo declaration in which the British and French governments jointly called on Europeans to develop the "capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces" which cleared the way for the transition of European security and defense efforts from the WEU to the umbrella of the EU in the following year.

Initially envisioned as a framework for NATO-WEU cooperation, the extension of the Berlin Plus mechanism to NATO-EU relations was subject to negotiations between the two organizations after 1999. This process

Nina Græger 2016, "European Security as Practice: EU-NATO Communities of Practice in the Making?" European Security 25(4), pp. 478-501.

Simon J. Smith 2013, *The European Union and NATO Beyond Berlin Plus: The Institutionalisation of Informal Cooperation*, PhD Thesis, Loughbourough University, Chapter 6.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. David S. Yost 2014, NATO's Balancing Act, Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, p. 257.

<sup>18</sup> Græger 2016, *op. cit.* 

<sup>19</sup> Smith 2013, op. cit.

The precise content of the letters exchanged on Berlin Plus remains classified. The two operations conducted under Berlin Plus are Concordia in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia from March to December 2003 and Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina, active since December 2004.

<sup>21</sup> As cited by Yost 2014, p. 253.

<sup>22</sup> See the detailed discussion in Smith 2013, pp. 42-52. 23 G. John Ikenberry 2011, *Liberal Leviathan: The Orig* 

G. John Ikenberry 2011, Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order, Princeton: Princeton UP.

<sup>24</sup> http://www.cvce.eu/obj/franco\_british\_st\_malo\_declaration\_4\_december\_1998-en-f3cd16fb-fc37-4d52-936f-c8e9bc80f24f.html

first led to a EU-NATO Declaration on ESDP in December 2002<sup>25</sup> and finally to the exchange of letters in March 2003 which formally adopted the Berlin Plus mechanism for NATO-EU cooperation. Berlin Plus became the framework under which the EU stood up follow-up missions to NATO operations in FYROM in March 2003 (Operation Concordia) and in Bosnia-Herzegovina in December 2004 (Operation Althea). In both cases, however, the EU took over operations from NATO and used Alliance assets in the process—rather than initiating autonomous operations. In the strict sense, therefore, Berlin Plus has never been fully used thus far.<sup>26</sup>

In parallel to these developments, the 2004 wave of EU enlargement brought Cyprus into the union. Since Cyprus is neither a member of NATO, nor of NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, the intelligence-sharing component of the Berlin Plus mechanism does not apply to the island. Since 2004, formal NATO-EU cooperation has thus been hampered by the so called 'participation issue,' with the EU insisting that all members of the Union should be included in NATO-EU deliberations and NATO—and specifically Turkey—objecting to the inclusion of Cyprus as a non-NATO and non-PfP member of the EU. Since 2004, then, formal meetings between NATO's North Atlantic Council (NAC) and the EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC) could exclusively deal with Operation ALTHEA, since all participating countries are either NATO allies or members of PfP.<sup>27</sup> With Cypriot reunification rejected by the Greek part in a referendum a week before EU accession and with Turkey's non-recognition of the Greek-Cypriot government in Nicosia blocking the prospects of Cypriot PfP membership, formal NATO-EU cooperation faces formidable obstacles.

Against this backdrop, the Joint Declaration signed by NATO and the EU in July 2016 and the common conclusions on the implementation of that statement represent important steps. The wisdom of the common conclusions lies in the fact that they do not attempt to address the political problems associated with NATO-EU cooperation, but instead attempt to capitalize on areas where the two organizations have already established successful practices of coordination. Based on an assessment of existing practices, lessons learned can be distilled and, if possible, transferred from one setting to another.

### **NATO-EU Cooperation in Addressing Hybrid Threats**

The workshop on Enhancing NATO-EU Cooperation: Looking South and Beyond held at the NATO Defense College (NDC) on March 27, 2017 in cooperation between the Atlantic Council, the U.S. Mission to NATO, and the Middle East Faculty at the NDC was conducted against this broad background. Bringing together participants from both, NATO and the EU as well as a number of experts and other stakeholders, the workshop aimed at providing a platform for informal exchange of opinions on the state and potential of NATO-EU cooperation. The following summarizes some of the issues raised during the workshop.<sup>28</sup>

The first area addressed by the workshop was that of hybrid threats and the potential for NATO-EU cooperation in this context. Addressing hybrid threats also means dealing with issues of social resilience, rather than with classical questions of warfare. Given the different organizational profiles of NATO and the EU, it was argued that the Union should take the lead in this endeavor. In fact, the EU is already addressing strategic communication challenges both in the East and the South with two separate task forces and is assessing vulnerabilities in member states so as to close any capability gaps. Cooperation with NATO

<sup>25</sup> http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\_texts\_19544.htm

<sup>26</sup> Smith 2013, p. 51.

<sup>27</sup> Yost 2014, 256.

<sup>28</sup> Since the workshop was held under the Chatham House Rule, statements and positions will not be attributed to specific individuals.

in this domain, however, is hindered by the absence of a mechanism for sharing classified information between the two organizations. Even though situational awareness and information sharing are crucial, the potential of NATO-EU cooperation in this field is currently not fully exploited given differences in how the two organizations deal with intelligence.

In the domain of addressing hybrid threats, common exercises between NATO and the EU would be very welcome. Such exercises have not taken place since 2003 due to differences over participation but have instead been postponed periodically by mutual agreement. Recognizing the importance of common exercises, the common conclusions to the NATO-EU joint declaration call on both organizations to enable "parallel and coordinated" exercises, not least in the area of hybrid threats. These exercises should include situational awareness, cyber threats, crisis awareness and response, as well as strategic communication.<sup>29</sup>

Common exercises dealing with the issue of hybrid threats are all the more important given that NATO is active in this area as well. The NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Riga takes the lead in dealing with strategic communication.<sup>30</sup> The StratCom CoE is organizationally independent of NATO, but works within the framework set by the Alliance. It has done important work on the communication strategies of actors such as Russia and Daesh and has successfully cooperated with EU actors, including the European External Action Service (EEAS).

Progress in the field notwithstanding, strategic communications requires further concerted efforts within the Alliance which is underlined by the fact that not all Allies currently have a working strategic communications division. Developing capacities in this area is crucial for increasing Allies' capacity to withstand potential attacks. It should therefore be seen as central in the light of Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

NATO-EU cooperation on countering hybrid threats is in its infancy. Both organizations have recognized the need to enhance their cooperation in this area, however, with the common conclusions calling, among other things, for the establishment of a European Centre for Countering Hybrid Threats, increased information sharing between NATO staff and the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell, synchronizing the crisis response mechanisms for responding to hybrid threats, and a hybrid element in future "parallel and coordinated" exercises.<sup>31</sup>

### **NATO-EU Cooperation in the Southern Neighborhood**

The southern neighborhood is crucial for both NATO and the EU. Violent conflict and instability, the spread of terrorist groups, and uncontrolled migratory flows are some of the common challenges faced by both organizations. NATO-EU cooperation in the face of these and other challenges will be influenced by the developing posture of the new U.S. administration. Given that the administration is currently focusing on domestic issues, it is still too early to tell what kind of approach President Trump will take towards defense and security matters and what role the Alliance will play. What is clear, however, is that a stronger European role will be required and that, in order to be taken seriously in the U.S., the European Union cannot replace hard power capabilities with an emphasis on soft power tools. Given the current crisis in the EU, however, some doubts remain within U.S. policy making circles as to whether the Union can credibly commit to a stronger defense posture. Events in Ukraine and the Balkans seem to have increased rather than weakened Europe's dependence on NATO.

At the upcoming special meeting of NATO heads of state and government in Brussels on May 30<sup>th</sup> 2017,

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<sup>29</sup> http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official texts 133163.htm

See http://www.stratcomcoe.org/

<sup>31</sup> See the common conclusions at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\_texts\_138829.htm

the issues of burden sharing within the Alliance as well as NATO's contribution to counter-terrorism efforts are likely to play an important role, especially given the priorities of the new U.S. administration. NATO-EU cooperation is pertinent in both issue areas. Increased European efforts in the field of common defense will contribute to burden sharing with European allies assuming greater responsibilities within the Alliance. NATO-EU cooperation in defense capacity building (DCB), in turn, is an important element in the fight against terrorism. Bolstering local partners' capacity to provide effective security themselves is crucial in this regard.

Active cooperation between NATO and the EU in the southern neighborhood is currently taking place mainly in the maritime domain. Both organizations are engaged in missions in the Mediterranean, NATO with Operation Sea Guardian and the EU with EUNAFVOR Med Operation Sophia. With partially overlapping mandates, there are significant synergies between the two operations.

NATO decided to deploy Operation Sea Guardian to the Mediterranean at the 2016 Warsaw Summit following the activities of Operation Active Endeavour.<sup>32</sup> The mandate of Sea Guardian comprises seven core tasks, including supporting maritime situational awareness, upholding freedom of navigation, conducting maritime interdiction, fighting the proliferation of WMD, protecting critical infrastructure, supporting maritime counter-terrorism, and contributing to maritime security capacity building.<sup>33</sup> Operation Sophia, on the other hand, is mandated "to undertake systematic efforts to identify, capture and dispose of vessels and enabling assets used or suspected of being used by migrant smugglers or traffickers, in order to contribute to wider EU efforts to disrupt the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks in the Southern Central Mediterranean and prevent the further loss of life at sea."<sup>34</sup> The EU is also active in capacity building efforts. The first 89 officers of the Libyan coastguard completed their training in February 2017 and a second round of training has started on the island of Crete.<sup>35</sup>

Given the overlap in the two mission's tasks, close cooperation is important for both parties. Building on prior experiences with NATO-EU cooperation in the maritime domain during counter-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia, cooperation between Sea Guardian and Sophia is taking place on the operational level. NATO and the EU are involved in information exchange to de-conflict their respective missions in the central Mediterranean. Moreover, NATO Maritime Command (MARCOM) in Northwood, UK, and European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR Med), headquartered in Rome, are currently working on ways of deepening the cooperation process, including a more structured process of information exchange. A EUNAVFOR liaison officer at MARCOM is tasked with facilitating cooperation between the two parties.

Another important challenge in the southern neighborhood is the threat of terrorism. Given the new U.S. administration's call on NATO to assume greater responsibility in the area of counter-terrorism, there are currently dynamic efforts within NATO's Emerging Security Challenges Division to strengthen the Alliance's counter-terrorism strategy. Counter-terrorism is not primarily a military concern since terrorism is first and foremost a criminal activity. As such, responsibility for counter-terrorism is mainly a responsibility of member states and of domestic law-enforcement agencies. Nevertheless, NATO can contribute to the fight against terrorism.

Currently, NATO's counter-terrorism strategy is characterized by a three-pronged approach comprising awareness raising, capacity development, and cooperation with partners—including with national partners and other international organizations. Counter-terrorism is increasingly being seen as a significant pillar in

See Alessandra Giada Dibenedetto, "Implementing the Alliance Maritime Strategy in the Mediterranean: NATO's Operation Sea Guardian," NDC Research Paper 134, December 2016.

http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\_136233.htm

<sup>34</sup> https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eunavfor\_med\_-\_mission\_31\_march\_2017\_en.pdf

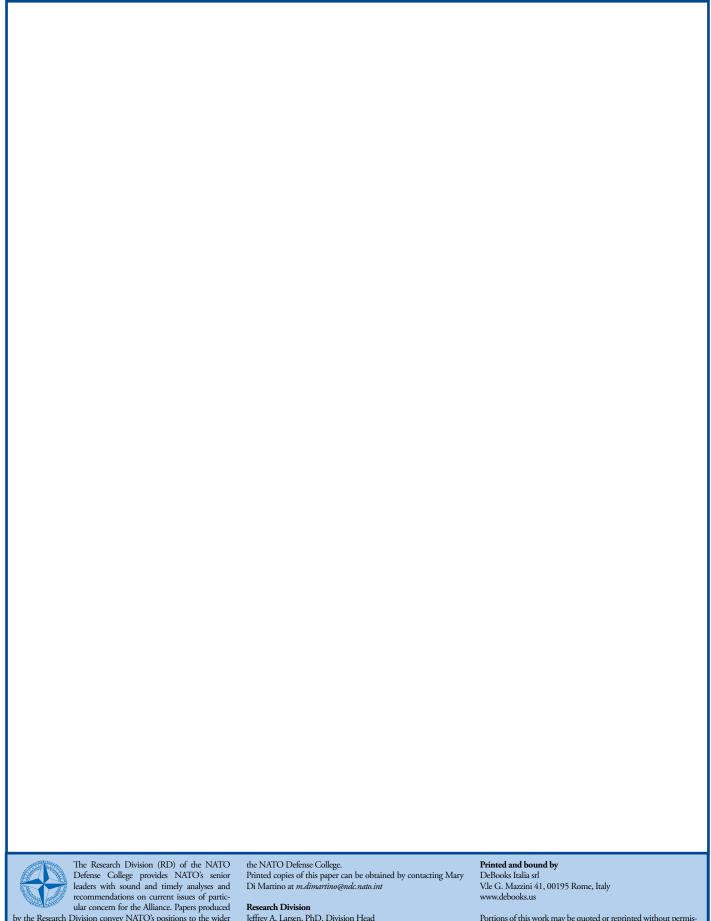
 $<sup>35 \</sup>qquad https://eeas.europa.eu/csdp-missions-operations/eunavfor-med/20095/eunavfor-med-operation-sophia-hrvp-mogherini-attends-graduation-ceremony-first-training\_en$ 

the Alliance's overall deterrence and defense posture. This realization is mirrored in tools allowing NATO to protect stability beyond its own territory, prime among which is the Defense Capacity Building (DCB) initiative initiated by the Allies at the Wales Summit in 2004.

NATO-EU cooperation in counter-terrorism has so far been mainly indirect. The common conclusions on the implementation of the Joint Declaration do not explicitly mention counter-terrorism, but they do include reference to supporting security capacity and fostering resilience of partners, two notions closely connected to counter-terrorism efforts. Moving forward, however, and given that an increasing emphasis on counter-terrorism within the alliance is a likely development, an explicit emphasis on counter-terrorism in NATO-EU cooperation would be welcome.

#### **Conclusion**

NATO-EU cooperation is characterized by dynamic bottom-up activity. The Joint Declaration between the two organizations signed by September 2016 could help transfer some of this dynamism to the political level as well. Moreover, drawing on examples of successful NATO-EU cooperation on the operational level could help to develop lessons that could be useful for other issue areas in which the two organizations have so far pursued largely separate efforts. In this field, progress in the implementation of the Joint Declaration is crucial and promises incremental progress in NATO-EU cooperation.



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