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TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION AND EUROPE'S SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

REPORT

In association with

Atlantic Council

BRENT SCOWCROFT CENTER
ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

INTRODUCTION

In the final decades of the 20th century, transatlantic bonds on security and defence were strong. Broadly speaking, support between allies within NATO was unquestioned. But in recent years global security and instability has brought about a new era in the transatlantic relationship.

"The old concept of regional security has given way to a 21st-century concept more geopolitical in nature," noted **Giles Merritt**, Founder and Chairman of Friends of Europe. "Europe and America are keen on stability, and that means working together on a super-regional level."

"The continuing instability in the Middle East and North Africa and the effects of this instability on Europe is a major transatlantic security challenge," stressed **Magnus Nordenman**, Director of the Transatlantic Security Initiative and Deputy Director of the Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security at the Atlantic Council of the United States.

The joint declaration that came out of the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw underlined that EU member states and NATO allies must work more closely together in the face of shifting regional and geopolitical priorities in the world.

Nordemann added: "Many of the issues surrounding the instability in Europe's southern neighbourhood are also central to the debate on the future of the transatlantic relationship, including burden-sharing, the future of counter-terrorism, projecting stability, and how we project the EU-NATO relationship to our partners and the world."

Not limited to Europe's southern neighbourhood, EU-NATO cooperation has been brought into sharper focus following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, underlining the need for the two organisations to pool resources and find solutions together in the East as well as the South.

The Warsaw joint declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary-General of NATO identified seven key areas in which the organisations need to improve cooperation[1].

This declaration was followed up in the December 2016 European Council conclusions that translated these seven key areas into a set of 42 concrete proposals by European Union member states and NATO allies[2].

"Often, leaders meet and make decisions but there is no follow-up," noted **Gábor Iklódy**, Director of Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD) of the European External Action Service (EEAS). "In the case of these 42 proposals, the focus is on practical cooperation and we have put in place mechanisms to regularly revisit and report on the progress achieved."

"EU-NATO cooperation is at the centre of everything right now," stressed moderator **Pauline Massart**, Deputy Director, Security and Geopolitics at Friends of Europe, and Vice-President of Women in International Security (WIIS) Brussels. "EU citizens are interested in how the EU and NATO can address the instability on Europe's periphery and the next steps in the transatlantic partnership on security and defence."

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EU-NATO COOPERATION – MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN EVER

"The EU-NATO relationship in security is a decades-long courtship that never quite became a real marriage," noted **Stefano Stefanini**, Italy's ambassador to NATO from 2007 to 2010 and non-resident Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council of the United States. "Now might be the time to recommit and decide on a marriage of convenience."

Political upheaval and policy shifts following Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States have weakened the transatlantic partnership, he stressed.

Stefanini added: "Brexit effectively eliminates a transatlantic link, even assuming the best outcome between the UK and EU. The moment that the British Prime Minister will no longer have a seat on the European Council, we will lose an important bridge between Washington and Brussels."

Furthermore, Trump's public statements on the EU and NATO suggest a new and unorthodox perspective on security, allies' responsibilities, and burden-sharing.

"We need an urgent consultation between NATO allies and EU member states on the future of the transatlantic relationship," he concluded. "Both organisations have a consistent track record in security and are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses but we need to have a clearer picture of who does what."

Cooperation between the two organisations has become more important than in the past. As the security threats to the east and south of Europe have grown in recent years, the EU-NATO relationship cannot be taken for granted.

The situation is complicated by the different security challenges in Europe. To the east, Russia has been growing bolder, both militarily and through increasing cyberattacks and misinformation campaigns.

In the south, war, political instability, terrorism fears, and the migration crisis require non-traditional responses alongside military action and a concerted effort from both organisations.

"We have to be able to deal simultaneously with these two fronts," stressed **Jamie Shea**, Deputy Assistant Secretary-General for Emerging Security Challenges Division at NATO and a Trustee of Friends of Europe. "We cannot have the luxury of doing one thing in one place at one time, and Europe cannot be secure if we do not succeed."

Threat perceptions differ depending on the geography of member states and allies. "Estonia does not care about migration and jihadis, they care about hybrid warfare and Russia; and this is where they say money and efforts should be spent. In Greece, it is the opposite," noted **Teri Schultz**, a freelance reporter for National Public Radio, CBS and Deutsche Welle.

The threat spectrum in Europe requires focus and sustained attention, but also a willingness from each country to share the responsibility for dealing with Europe's security issues as a whole.

"If we want France to send aircraft and troops in to Estonia, there is a good argument that the Polish and Estonians should agree to pull their weight in the South," Shea said.

The situation in the East is a more straightforward exercise than in the South, he added, requiring operations on NATO ally territory and using NATO's toolbox – a largely military approach in the absence of meaningful political discourse with Putin's Russia – developed over years of defence and deterrence on Europe's own borders.

NAVIGATING THE COMPLEX SITUATION
IN EUROPE'S SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

Europe's southern neighbourhood presents a number of security challenges that can be split into three main categories: immigration, terrorism, and state failure, with state failure being the root challenge in the area, Stefanini said.

"Once there is a state in which there is no responsible authority, the door is opened to other security issues, such as terrorism and organised crime," he stressed.

Dealing with these issues should ideally be a shared responsibility between EU and NATO, with a focus on partnering with the southern neighbourhood to avoid or prevent state failure and work towards reconstruction in failed states.

This cooperation already exists to a certain extent, with Libya being one test case and the power vacuum that will follow the fall of ISIS in Mosul and Iraq another. But Iklódy noted that it is essential to be clear on the scope of action for both organisations.

Currently, the EU is investing more heavily in the region because of the broadness of the issues involved. Counter-terrorism, for example, requires more than simple military responses. Instead, dealing with the threat spectrum in Europe's southern neighbourhood requires capabilities and action in counter-radicalisation, strengthening governance, and state-building.

Conflicts in the region, from Afghanistan to Tunisia, depend as much, or even more, on the EU's €80bn of annual development assistance than on military action.

"In the South, military forces are necessary but are not the solution," Shea stressed. "Capacity-building and working with multiple partners are much more important but it is difficult to implant international cooperation in a region where there is no cooperation between local players."

Part of the solution is to stimulate more regional cooperation between regional powers. But this is no small task, as some of the more acrimonious relationships in the region – between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, or Algeria and Tunisia, for example – do not lend themselves to simple resolutions.

To achieve stability the EU and NATO must seek to establish more operations and trust with other actors in the region, such as the United Nations in Libya, the African Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council, and be more effective with regional security organisations.

The broad geographical expanse of Europe's southern neighbourhood poses the question of which organisation should bear the responsibility for which areas.

Should the EU be more involved in North Africa because of its clearly stronger presence there? Should NATO, having developed more of a security role with Gulf countries in recent years, play a more prominent role in this area? Should the two organisations, along with international and regional partners attempt to limit their involvement with countries such as Jordan or Tunisia where the security situation is more stable than others?

These are questions that need to be addressed and resolved, preferably before proceeding with further operations, Shea said.

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In the near future, there are a few issues in the southern neighbourhood that the EU and NATO will concentrate on, noted Iklódy, notably maritime issues, capacity-building, and information exchange.

Maritime issues are an important and practical driver in the EU-NATO relationship and one of the seven areas for cooperation emphasised in last summer's joint declaration.

As it stands, both organisations are running maritime operations in the Mediterranean – NATO's Operation Sea Guardian and the EEAS's Operation Sophia. The Warsaw Summit last year directed Sea Guardian to provide ongoing support to the EU's operation.

But these side-by-side operations are using many of the same national resources, he stressed. These expensive and scarce resources – whether they be German ships, French submarines, or Spanish aircraft – must be managed in a more efficient and effective way.

Another critical area for cooperation is capacity-building. "There is a need to coordinate efforts between the EU and NATO in countries in the South," he said. "Very often we find overlap in our capacity-building missions on the ground."

"There are some areas where NATO can contribute," Shea said, "but capacity-building is a long-term enterprise. You need a lot of manpower, proper military structures and training establishments, a footprint in the region, and a 20- to 30-year commitment on the ground."

The problem is compounded by the fact that some countries with security issues do not have a great enough sense of their critical vulnerabilities. Once this information is gathered, the EEAS can target European assistance programmes to provide aid in those areas where it will help the most, Iklódy said.

To this end, the European Commission has offered €2m to support NATO capacity-building programmes. "If NATO is the best implementing and delivery agency in any given area, we are committed to finding EU funding to support its efforts," he concluded.

IMPROVING COOPERATION IN INFORMATION EXCHANGE

One of the key issues arising from the declaration and subsequent discussions between EU and NATO members has been information exchange.

"In discussing the EU-NATO relationship, intelligence-sharing is of critical importance," Iklódy said. "As it stands, we have major blockages in this area. The paralysis that has plagued the two organisations for so long is still there."

Whether this issue is a question of power, trust, culture, or otherwise, it must be dealt with to improve security results in Europe, its southern neighbourhood, and the world.

"We need to be honest about information-sharing," Schultz said. "Even within the EU and NATO there is only a superficial sharing of intelligence between member states. Many countries are hesitant to pass on useful information even to their own allies."

Indeed, if one compares the amount and sensitivity of shared information between the Five Eyes Community to that shared between NATO members, it is clear where the more substantive information is being shared, Iklódy stressed.

On the other hand, noted Shea, it is unrealistic to expect NATO allies to share operational information amongst 30,000 people in 29 countries via an internet connection.

"We need to better define what we need in terms of group intelligence-sharing," he said. "Operations-level information is delicate but strategic-level intelligence-sharing on organisations, trends, and conflict predictions needs better coordination between our members and allies."

"We are just not being honest about how far information exchange can go," Schultz stressed. "Inside the organisations, there is no real dialogue about intelligence-sharing, which means we cannot talk about true, deep cooperation."

CONCLUSION

"It is said that NATO protects citizens' lives and the EU protects their livelihoods," Schultz said, "but today, even European livelihoods are threatened by the security situation." The discussion within and between the EU and NATO must strive to improve cooperation to make citizens feel more secure.

While NATO has a key role to play in the security situation in Europe's southern neighbourhood, with so many commitments around the world, the US is unable to be involved in every conflict in the EU periphery, concluded Shea.

"We need the US-EU-NATO structure to handle big threats to our members' territories but with the migration crisis and the greater situation in Europe's southern neighbourhood, the EU needs to take the lead," he said.

The interdependency between the EU and NATO could not be more clear or relevant – if the current security and defence efforts in Europe fail, not only will European security suffer but also the European integration process, transatlantic burden-sharing, and NATO itself.

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1. The 7 areas are as follows: Countering hybrid threats; operational cooperation including maritime issues; cyber security and defence; defence capabilities; defence industry and research; parallel and coordinated exercises; and defence and security capacity building. For the full text of the joint declaration, visit: http://www.nato.int/cps/de/natohq/official_texts_133163.htm

2. The 42 proposals and full text of the EU Council conclusions here: http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15283-2016-INIT/en/pdf

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