**Dr. NINA GRÆGER, NUPI:**

***NATO and the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy – partnership on parallel tracks?***

Why and how is the EU-NATO partnership important today, if at all? The composition and relevance of institutional structures often is linked to their historical origin; they were either built to serve a particular purpose or resulted from a historic event. For the EU-NATO partnership, the intra-state conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s and the emerging CSDP were particularly important drivers.

EU-NATO relations were formalized in December 2002 with the so-called Berlin Plus agreement, which stipulates – most importantly – the conditions under which the EU may draw on NATO planning, capabilities and assets where NATO does not wish to act. (‘Berlin Plus’ refers to the outcome of the NATO defence minister meeting in June 1996 in Berlin, who decided to make assets available to the WEU.) The Berlin Plus framework from 2003 established rules for the exchange of classified information and for consultation as well as the framework for cooperation in the case of EU-led crisis-management operations.[[1]](#endnote-1) Permanent meeting formats and contact points were established at the level of ministers, ambassadors, chiefs of defence, military and political staff, also in operational headquarters. [[2]](#endnote-2) So on paper, all looks good.

The EU-NATO partnership established under Berlin Plus soon fell victim to the long-term political conflict over borders between Cyprus and Turkey (also involving Greece) when non-PfP member Cyprus entered the EU in 2005. Only PfP-members, who have a security agreement with NATO are allowed to participate in NATO-meetings and receive classified information. Turkey has blocked any involvement of Cyprus in such information sharing and discussions beyond the only Berlin Plus operation, Operation Althea in Bosnia. On the EU side, only states who have a security agreement with the EU may participate in CSDP-meetings, and only states with an administrative arrangement with the EDA are allowed into EDA meetings, excluding Turkey.

In this long-term situation of deadlock, what are the dynamics and drivers of EU-NATO cooperation? The most visible driver of the partnership the past decade has been operational necessity. Day-to-day informal, ad hoc cooperation among EU and NATO military and political/civilian staff takes place in offices and field operations. Such cooperation has developed in HQs; over meals, on the phone, by email, and on the fringe of formal meetings – EU–NATO specific but not only. For instance, informal trans-Atlantic ministerial dinners have been held since 2005. Reciprocal cross-briefings between the NAC and the PSC and ‘cross-invitations’ are hosted by both organisations, involving the NATO Secretary General and the High Representative, and the EU Lisbon bodies (e.g. the Department for Crisis Management and Planning, and the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate).

Staff-to-staff cooperation is particularly important when both organisations are running operations in the same theatre and during crises. Informal consultations among EU and NATO ambassadors took place in 2005 and 2006 in the context of the Darfur operation and in 2007 over Kosovo, during the intervention in Libya in 2011, and when violence broke out in Bosnia in 2012. This Spring informal meetings between the EU and NATO about the Russian–Ukraine crisis have been taking place several times at the levels of ambassadors and between the chiefs of defence.

Like all informal cooperation, the quality and frequency of EU-NATO cooperation depend on personal relations among decision-makers and staff. In addition, the shared background knowledge that staff bring into EU-NATO settings is an important driver of cooperation. This shared professional identity cuts across organisational (EU-NATO) as well as professional (military-police-civilian) boundaries, and also reflects shared experience from education and training, and sometimes also from former postings. (Although the fact that practitioners/staff rotate in their positions contributes to weakening these personal ties) Professional education, especially among militaries and policemen, takes place at several points during their careers, which provides ample opportunities for socialisation.

But the past couple of years have revealed or set off new drivers in the EU-NATO partnership, such as the financial crisis, the new division of labour question, and re-emerging security threats against Europe.

1) The financial crisis or defence austerity is one push-factor or driver of EU-NATO cooperation. Defence cooperation is the glue in the Alliance. NATO has been essential for the denationalisation of European defence for more than half a century, both through regular defence cooperation and NATO standardisation, and military operations. And the European Defence Agency has gradually become increasingly important for improving EU coordination by encouraging joint contracts, cross-border procurement, research and collaboration, although following the EDA Code of Conduct is voluntary and non-binding. For both organisations, the ISAF mission has boosted security interoperability at the s*trategic* level, reflecting shared or overlapping world views, values and interests, as well as o*perational* and *tactical* interoperability.

Avoiding unnecessary duplication was important in the ‘Berlin Plus’ framework, which sought to synchronise and streamline EU and NATO efforts and plans through a joint NATO–EU Capability Group at the level of MOD political directors. However, the group was long hampered by the Turkey-Cyprus stalemate. But EU-NATO coordination exist, for instance about helicopter capacities (where NATO is in charge of upgrading whereas the EU has responsibility for providing training and language skills) and the development of an air-to-air refuelling tanker capacity (for which the EU has responsibility). Initiatives like Smart Defence and the Connected Forces Initiative, and Pooling and Sharing of Resources nevertheless emerged as parallel NATO and EU initiatives, outside of Berlin Plus. And even if defence austerity is likely to promote cooperation rather than renationalisation, defence cooperation is sensitive and involves potential loss of sovereignty over key capacities.

2) Another driver of EU-NATO partnership that has gained new importance in recent years is the division of labour issue. At the level of EU-NATO cooperation, several arrangements under Berlin Plus were created to encourage cooperation and complementarity. A Permanent Liaison Team was established at NATO in 2005, with an office at the EUMC, and a permanent EU Cell was created at SHAPE in 2006. At military committee level, 22 ‘double-hatted’ representatives from EU states who are also NATO members were to meet regularly to provide military advice and assessments to the ambassadors in NAC and PSC. As a result of the Turkey-Cyprus issue, formal NAC-PSC meetings have been few and far between, with one item on the agenda: The only current ‘Berlin Plus’ operation, Althea. (The other EU-led operation conducted under Berlin Plus was Concordia, in FYROM in 2003).

The deadlock also has led to an unfortunate *duplication* of EU and NATO capabilities, institutions and operations, such as the EU Battle Groups and NATO Response Force in 2002 and 2003, separate political and military HQs, military committees and military staff structures - not least the Lisbon Treaty reforms introduced a number of new EU ‘counterparts’ to NATO. An EU operational HQ is also being discussed. At the level of operations, separate EU and NATO crisis management operations were launched in Kosovo – KFOR and EULEX, in the Gulf of Aden - EUNAVFOR Atalanta and NATO’s Ocean Shield, and in Afghanistan - EUPOL and ISAF. Though these missions have somewhat different mandates –in Kosovo and Afghanistan the EU is conducting civilian police operations, they also conduct similar tasks like in the anti-piracy missions. At a time when Europe needs to pool its defence capabilities and the USA is rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific, more EU-NATO coordination might emerge out of financial necessity.

3) A third driver of EU-NATO cooperation is the current strategic context. Is the Ukraine crisis a game changer that could reinvigorate the partnership (just like the wars in the Balkans were in the 1990)? The re-emergence of Russia as a world power and its illegitimate actions in Ukraine demonstrate that Russia is not part of and actively fights the Western liberal order. Due to past years’ investments, Russian military strength represents a greater challenge than before, with shorter warning time. At the same time, Russia conducts a new type of illegitimate or hybrid warfare by supporting pro-Russian rebels in Ukraine and deploying uniformed forces without insignia. Arguably, the US rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific and the European financial crisis are reinforcing the effect of the ‘Russian’ factor in the changing strategic context in which the EU and NATO must navigate.

One important question is whether the EU-NATO partnership is a targeted tool in times of peace and stability, as an institutional arena for cooperation at various levels, or whether this partnership may become more important in times of instability and insecurity? The EU and NATO are complementary organisations, if responses are coordinated.

To conclude: Informal cooperation represents the most important driver of the EU-NATO partnership and has been relatively successful. However, EU and NATO staff is feeling the weight of the political deadlock, as well as the absence of political input and visions. Furthermore, when working outside of formal cooperation frameworks and mandates, those involved – also at lower levels – are held responsible whould things go wrong. For political decision-makers, the incentives for breaking the stalemate are fewer when things work alright in practice (though far from optimally). Ultimately, the revitalisation of the EU-NATO partnership depends on whether the EU and NATO are able to reach beyond the declaratory level and negotiate a step-change for the partnership. If not, I fear that this partnership belongs to the past.

Thank you for your attention.

1. Apart from assured access to NATO planning capabilities and NATO capabilities and assets, such as communication units and headquarters for operations, the arrangements include assured availability of and procedures of release, monitoring, return and recall of NATO capabilities and assets; terms of reference for NATO’s Deputy SACEUR and European command options; consultation arrangements for EU-led operations under ‘Berlin Plus’; and incorporation within NATO's long-established defence planning system of the military needs and capabilities that may be required for EU-led military operations. For a full overview, see <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49217.htm?selectedLocale=en>. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. A full overview is available at http://www.aco.nato.int/resources/4/documents/14E\_Fact\_Sheet\_Berlin\_Plus[1].pdf . [↑](#endnote-ref-2)