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NATO-EU COOPERATION: A SAFER EUROPE IN A BETTER WORLD

Security Policies



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Abstract

In a world where we strive for a safer Europe in a better world, the cooperation between the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is of great importance. However, three overarching obstacles have been identified from existing academic literature that hinder effective cooperation between these two major powers. First, internal power struggles and conflicts play a key role, leading to a crisis of trust and delayed cooperation. Second, there is a distinctly European perspective (Europeanism) held by some EU member states, which, instead of fostering a unified transatlantic approach to collective security, results in confusion over roles and inefficient information exchange. Finally, a discrepancy in threat perceptions within the EU exists, with the passive stance of southern member states leading to unequal contributions to collective security, further contributing to the fragmentation of NATO-EU cooperation. By addressing some internal conflicts and improving NATO's image, the three proposed recommendations can be implemented to overcome these obstacles and strengthen NATO-EU cooperation. These recommendations include: establishing a NATO-EU commission, focusing more on the southern flank of the EU, and strengthening the EU-US relationship.

Introduction

In the current geopolitical context, NATO and the EU are undeniably crucial partners ¹, with their cooperation being essential to respond swiftly and effectively to increasingly complex security threats ².

The concept 'human security' emphasizes that stability depends not only on military means but also on social, economic, and environmental factors ³. This broader understanding of security makes NATO-EU cooperation increasingly relevant, as the definition of security goes beyond military protection. Traditionally, NATO has focused on collective defense, while the EU has had a broader focus on economic, political, and diplomatic issues. Since neither organization is capable of addressing the full scope of modern security challenges independently, mutual complementarity and cooperation are essential ⁴. However, since the establishment of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), various obstacles to cooperation between the two organizations have emerged. The EU's role in international crisis

¹Howorth, J. (2019). *EU-NATO cooperation: the key to Europe's security future*. European Security, P. 454–459. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2017.1352584>

²Tardy, T., Lindstrom, G. (2019). *The scope of EU-NATO cooperation*. NATO Defense College. <https://www-jstor-org.utrechtuniversity.idm.oclc.org/stable/pdf/resrep19964.6.pdf>

³James, P. (2014). *Human security and Japan's triple disaster*. P. 83-87. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315795416>

⁴Lucioli, F.W. (May 28, 2009). *NATO & EU relations: present challenges and future perspectives*. Paper presented at: Netherlands Atlantic Association conference 'NATO's New Strategic Concept: moving past the status quo.'

management has increased, responding to growing security needs, but political tensions and institutional rivalry continue to hinder cooperation².

This paper explores the cooperation between these two powerful institutions, focusing on the holistic security strategy that encompasses both material and existential security. This integrated approach to security will better prepare us for the complex challenges of the 21st century and contribute to sustainable peace and stability⁵. With this in mind, the following research paper question has been formulated as guiding framework:

How can NATO and the EU strengthen their cooperation to ensure collective human security?

This main research question will be explored through literature research. Based on this, several key topics will be discussed. First, the focus will be on an overview of NATO and the EU as complementary institutions, followed by an analysis of the three major obstacles in NATO-EU cooperation. The paper will then address potential opportunities in the MENA region and conclude with policy recommendations, linking back to the guiding research question.

1. Overview of NATO and EU as Complementary Institutions

NATO, founded in 1949, aims to ensure the security and freedom of its members and promote global peace and stability. Comprising European and North American countries, the organization achieves this through political and military means. Each member contributes personnel, equipment, and other resources to support collective defense. However, NATO's strategic concept is changing into two roles: collective defence under Article 5 and a broader, more cooperative approach to security. This was visible in the mission in Afghanistan, where NATO required more cooperation with various partners. This shift requires the development of civilian capabilities, but cooperation is often hindered by the willingness of other actors to cooperate. This has led to a legitimacy problem, as NATO is not always seen as an appropriate partner.

⁵Vlis, van der, A. (November 8, 2014). *Samenwerking EU en NAVO is onontbeerlijk*. www.jstor.org. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45279607>

The European Union (EU) is an economic and political partnership comprising 27 European countries (member states). These countries have granted the EU authority to implement common European policies. As a result, the EU accounts for approximately 15% of global trade in goods ⁶. The EU's foreign policy is managed through two main processes: the intergovernmental Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which includes the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and the supranational policy areas such as trade, development aid, and enlargement, which are primarily overseen by the European Commission ⁷. This duality in decision-making reflects the complex institutional structure of the EU, in which member states act independently on the one hand, but jointly formulate policies through European institutions on the other.

The EU aims to uphold its values, support democracy and human rights, maintain peace, prevent conflicts, and promote international cooperation ⁸. In line with these goals, the European Security Strategy (ESS) of 2003 focuses on three main objectives: conflict prevention, the protection of human rights, and the promotion of economic development in neighboring countries and adjacent regions ⁸.

The strategic partnership between the EU and NATO is founded on shared core values, including the promotion of peace, security, and prosperity in the Euro-Atlantic area and surrounding regions ⁹. Although both organizations have overlapping commitments to self-defense (NATO's Article 5 and the EU's Article 42(7)), their approaches differ ¹⁰. NATO focuses mainly on military preparedness and collective defence, while the EU follows a broader strategy with emphasis on capacity building and civil-military cooperation ¹⁰. NATO-EU cooperation primarily addresses hybrid threats, territorial defense, and counterterrorism ¹¹, and is facilitated through two main frameworks: the “Berlin Plus” agreement and “Permanent Structured Cooperation” (PESCO). The Berlin Plus agreement allows for operational cooperation by

⁶European Union. (2019). *Achievements and tangible benefits* | Europese Unie. https://european-union.europa.eu/achievements_nl#:~:text=De%20EU%20is%20het%20grootste.markt%20heeft%20dat%20mogelijk%20gemaakt

⁷European Union. (n.d.). *Foreign and security policy - this is what the EU does* | Europese Unie. https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/actions-topic/foreign-and-security-policy_nl

⁸Mix, D. E. (2013). *The European Union: Foreign and Security policy*. P. 2-16. http://bev.berkeley.edu/OLLI_2009/EU%20foreign%20Policy%20CRS.pdf

⁹European Council. (n.d.). *EU-NATO cooperation* / Europese Raad. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/nl/policies/eu-nato-cooperation/#:~:text=Het%20strategisch%20partnerschap%20EU%20DnAVO,te%20bevorderen%20en%20te%20waarborgen.>

¹⁰Latici, T. (2020). *Understanding EU-NATO cooperation: Theory and practice*, EPRS: European Parliamentary Research Service. Belgium. <https://coilink.org/20.500.12592/vb7p.htm>

¹¹Olech, A. K. (2021). *Cooperation between NATO and the European Union against hybrid threats with a particular emphasis on terrorism*.

granting the EU access to NATO assets ¹², while PESCO aims to enhance European defense capabilities through joint projects and initiatives.

Despite the operational cooperation, the political and strategic objectives of the EU and NATO are not fully aligned ⁸. Among EU member states, there is no unified vision regarding the division of roles between the EU and NATO within European defense policy.

2. Obstacles in the NATO-EU Cooperation

Based on the scientific literature, three fundamental causes can be identified for the difficult cooperation between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union. A detailed analysis of these causes provides a basis for the policy recommendations in chapter four. The main problems are: internal divisions within NATO, Europeanists in Europe, and a lack of a common threat perception within the EU.

2.1 Internal division

Internal divisions within NATO pose significant obstacles to effective cooperation between the two organizations. There are diverging national interests, leading to difficulties in formulating unified policies ^a. The biggest divisions concern the conflict with Turkey (and Cyprus) and the different interests with the United States.

The conflict between Cyprus and Turkey started after the Turkish invasion in 1974, in response to a Greek coup. The island has since been divided: the north is occupied by Turkey, while the south remains Greek-Cypriot. Cyprus became a member of the EU in 2004, but the conflict persists, leading to tensions with Turkey, which recognizes the north as an independent state. This situation hinders cooperation between the EU and NATO ¹³. Turkey blocks Cyprus' participation in NATO operations, while Cyprus opposes Turkey's involvement in the European Defence Agency (EDA) ¹⁴. In addition, tension between Turkey and NATO was heightened by

¹²Helwig, N. (2018). *New tasks for EU-NATO cooperation: an inclusive EU defence policy requires close collaboration with NATO*. (SWP Comment, 4/2018). Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik -SWP- Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit. P. 3-4. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ss0ar-56215-8>

^a Calcagno, E. (2024, October 11). NATO, the EU, and European Security [Guest lecture]. Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali (LUISS), Viale Romania 32, Rome, Italy.

¹³Acikmese, S. A., & Triantaphyllou, D. (2012). *The NATO–EU–Turkey trilogy: the impact of the Cyprus conundrum*. *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, P. 560–564. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2012.741846>

¹⁴European Commission. (November 29, 2023). *State of EU-Turkey political, economic and trade relations*. JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/NL/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52023JC0050>

the acquisition of the Russian S400 air defence system, which undermines joint NATO air defence and raises concerns about Russian access to sensitive information ¹⁵. This led to sanctions and Turkey's exclusion from the F35 programme, hurting Turkey's defence industry ¹⁵. These tensions intensify divisions between the EU and NATO, with Turkey using its veto rights to influence and hinder cooperation ¹³.

Besides internal conflicts, the EU-US conflict of interests plays an important role in hindering NATO-EU cooperation. The dominance of the U.S. within NATO since its founding ¹⁶and its current position as the largest contributor ¹⁷has led to tensions, given the differing expectations of transatlantic relations ¹⁸. The more transactional approach of the U.S., as seen during the Trump administration, has put European defense efforts on edge, with the U.S. less inclined to intervene automatically in European conflicts, while simultaneously urging European countries to take more responsibility for their own security ¹⁸. While there is some support for stronger European defense capabilities, underlying political tensions remain, particularly regarding the level of U.S. involvement and the division of responsibilities within NATO. Washington has consistently pushed for "robust engagement" from EU allies, expecting European countries to increase their defense spending to ensure collective security and adhere to the goal of spending 2% of their GDP on defense ¹⁹. This dynamic has weakened the joint efforts of the EU and NATO in defense and crisis management, as mutual expectations regarding the role of the U.S. and European responsibility are not always aligned.

¹⁵Deen, B., Heukelingen, van, N., Drost, N. (2021). *Poetin, Erdogan en de worsteling van de NAVO. Atlantisch Perspectief*. Nieuwe uitdagingen? P. 9-14. Stichting Atlantische Commissie. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48638212>

¹⁶Kirkendall, R. S., Kaplan, L. S. (1985). *The United States and NATO: the formative years*. The American Historical Review. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1859862>

¹⁷Duggal, H. (July 11, 2024). *How much is each NATO country spending on its military in 2024?* Al Jazeera.

¹⁸Billon-Galland, A. & Thomson, A. (May, 2018). *European Strategic Autonomy: Stop Talking, Start Planning*. European Defence Policy. P.3-5 & P.6-7. <https://www-jstor-org.utrechtuniversity.idm.oclc.org/stable/pdf/resrep22125.pdf>

¹⁹Falkenek, C. (July 8, 2024). *Who's at 2 percent? Look how NATO allies have increased their defense spending since Russia's invasion of Ukraine*. Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/econographics/whos-at-2-percent-look-how-nato-allies-have-increased-their-defense-spending-since-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/>

2.2 Europeanists in Europe

According to Billon-Galland & Thomson¹⁸, there is a divide within the EU between “Europeanists” and “Transatlanticists.” This divide refers to divisions over the EU's role in defence and foreign policy. Europeanists advocate for greater strategic autonomy for the EU, emphasizing stronger independent defense capabilities and reduced reliance on the U.S. In contrast, transatlanticists highlight the importance of the transatlantic alliance, supporting the EU's continued cooperation with NATO and the U.S., particularly in the areas of security and crisis management.

This divide hinders NATO-EU cooperation in practice, as some EU member states tend to favor increasing the autonomy of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). This has led to “decoupling”, a process where NATO and the EU increasingly operate independently from one another²⁰. The peak of this decoupling so far was reached at the 2003 “Tervuren”-summit, where European countries met following divisions over the Iraq war²⁰. France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg proposed the creation of a fully independent European headquarters for the CSDP, separate from NATO structures. This proposal was viewed by NATO members as a direct challenge, as it implied that the EU would become less reliant on NATO assets for military operations. The establishment of an autonomous headquarters was criticized as a risk to NATO's efficiency, potentially leading to duplication of efforts¹⁸. Consequently, Washington views such initiatives with scepticism. This can lead to tensions over the role of non-EU countries in European defence projects and alignment of purchasing processes between the EU and NATO¹⁸.

Moreover, decoupling hinders information exchange²¹. The exchange of information between the two organizations is already challenging²². To date, there are no direct, secure communication lines between the EU and NATO. Instead, all communication occurs through individual member states within NATO or the EU, respectively. This makes it difficult to share

²⁰Cebeci, M. (n.d.). *NATO-EU COOPERATION AND TURKEY*. In *TURKISH POLICY QUARTERLY*, P. 93–95 & P. 99–102. <http://turkishpolicy.com/files/articlepdf/nato-eu-cooperation-and-turkey-fall-2011-en.pdf>

²¹Wijk, R. D., Bekkers, F. (2021). *Machtsbalanspolitiek en de toekomst van NAVO en EU*. <https://hcss.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Machtsbalanspolitiek-en-de-toekomst-van-NAVO-en-EU.pdf>

²²Maio, G. (December 2021). *OPPORTUNITIES TO DEEPEN NATO-EU COOPERATION*. Foreign Policy at Brookings P. 6-7. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FP_20211203_nato_eu_cooperation_demaio.pdf

information between the EU and NATO, creating an obstacle for effective coordination during a crisis ^a.

2.3 Lack of shared threat perception

A significant barrier to effective cooperation between NATO and the EU lies in the lack of a shared threat perception among their member states. This perception varies considerably among EU member states within NATO, resulting in a reactive stance where countries only take action when they feel directly threatened ²³. This leads to inequality in contributions to NATO's collective security. For instance, following the Cold War, the decline in armed conflicts in regions where NATO member states were active prompted countries like the United Kingdom, Germany, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia to gradually reduce their military spending. Such differences hinder cooperation, not only because they cause friction with the largest contributor and most influential player, the United States, but also because not all member states perceive an urgent need for enhanced NATO-EU cooperation.

Today, this problem manifests itself mainly on the southern flank of the European Union (France, Italy, Portugal and Spain) ²⁴. Previously, the south was about internal instability within NATO members such as Greece and Turkey. Now it is more about regional instability and its impact on Europe. Due to the absence of a clear and immediate threat in this region, as compared to the eastern border of Europe, attention from NATO on these areas has diminished, along with public support within member states for strong NATO-EU cooperation ²³. This attitude also affects the policy choices of national governments. For example, Spain's military expenditures were significantly higher during the period from 1977 to 1982 (*1982: NATO accession*) ²⁴. NATO is trying to increase the involvement of the southern flank ²⁵ through initiatives such as the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (focused on information exchange and training), the NATO training mission in Iraq (currently led by Spain), and the NATO Strategic

²³Odehnal, J. (2015). *Military Expenditures and Free-Riding in NATO*. *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy*, P. 479-487. <https://doi-org.utrechtuniversity.idm.oclc.org/10.1515/peps-2015-0015>

²⁴De La Fe, P. G., & Montolio, D. (2001). *Has Spain been free-riding in nato? An econometric approach*. *Defence and Peace Economics*, P. 465-475. <https://doi-org.utrechtuniversity.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/10430710108404999>

²⁵ Winrow, G. M. (1996). *A threat from the South? NATO and the Mediterranean*. *Mediterranean Politics*. Abstract. <https://doi-org.utrechtuniversity.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/13629399608414566>

Direction South Hub (focused on threat analysis and information exchange). However, since the accession of Sweden and Finland, NATO's focus has shifted more towards the eastern front^a. This shift in priority has led some southern member states, like Turkey and France, to prefer bilateral approaches over broader NATO cooperation.

The declining involvement of the EU's southern flank in NATO not only hinders participation in collective security initiatives, but also leads to a reduced financial contribution²³. This presents an obstacle to cooperation, especially as the United States continues to push for compliance with NATO's 2% of GDP defense spending target¹⁷. It is evident that many southern EU member states have yet to meet this standard, which could lead to growing frustration among other NATO members over time²³. This lack of financial commitment risks undermining NATO's cohesion and further fragmenting the cooperation between NATO and the EU.

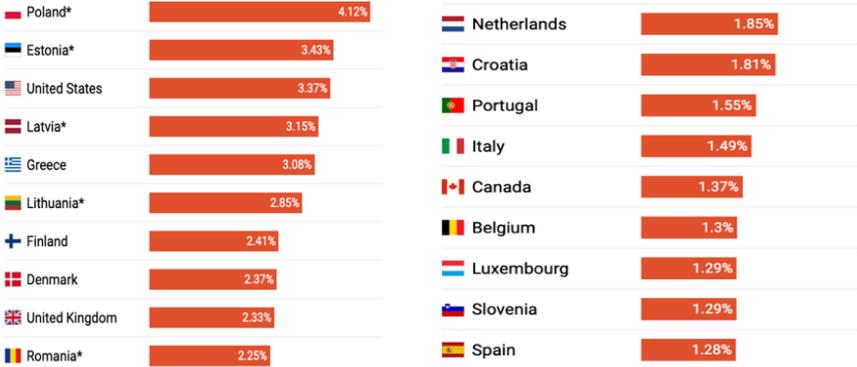


Figure 1: Financial contribution to NATO as a percentage of GDP by member state.¹⁷

3. Opportunities for cooperation in the MENA-region

The cooperation between NATO and the EU presents significant strategic opportunities for promoting peace, stability, and economic collaboration in the MENA region^a. It is crucial to proactively leverage these opportunities, especially in light of recent economic developments in MENA countries, where subregional trade blocs, such as various Arab unions, are being established²⁶.

²⁶Romagnoli, A., Mengoni, L. (2009). *The challenge of economic integration in the MENA region: from GAFTA and EU-MFTA to small scale Arab Unions*. Econ Change Restruct, Abstract. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10644-008-9058-0>

The MENA region holds strategic importance for the EU, both politically and economically, due to its geographical proximity and historical ties. The region plays a crucial role in issues such as migration, energy supply and regional stability²⁷. NATO also benefits from stability and peace in the region. NATO and the EU could complement each other effectively by collaborating here. Such cooperation would counter further Europeanization, as member states with specific interests in the region often prefer bilateral relationships instead of working through NATO, undermining the alliance's cohesion and effectiveness²⁸. To enhance the effectiveness of NATO and the EU in the MENA region, a coherent and integrated policy approach is essential. The EU can focus on programs promoting democratization, modernization, and job creation, while NATO can concentrate on addressing regional security challenges and conflicts²⁷. This cooperation would contribute to improving human security in the region. Moreover, NATO can support the EU in overcoming capacity issues that may arise during the implementation of EU projects in the MENA region²⁹.

NATO takes a cautious stance towards the MENA region, mainly because of a problematic past and fragmented relations with regional partners³⁰. In contrast, the EU could use its experience of intercultural dialogue and shared identity to promote cooperation with the MENA region, due in part to historical cultural exchanges²⁹. However, the EU should be careful about its image in the MENA region. Recent research by Gadd and Engström³¹ reveals that global perceptions of the EU are mostly positive, but Arab citizens outside the elite are significantly more sceptical. These findings highlight a gap between EU policy objectives and the priorities of the people in the MENA region. While the EU is strongly committed to democracy and human rights, including women's rights, socio-economic issues such as employment and education appear to be the main concerns of citizens in the MENA region.³¹

²⁷Gligorov, V., Havlik, P., Richter, S., & Vidovic, H. (2012). *Transition in the MENA Region: challenges, opportunities and prospects*. Wiiw Research Reports. P. 1-2 & P.23-33. <https://wiiw.ac.at/transition-in-the-mena-region-challenges-opportunities-and-prospects-dlp-2550.pdf>

²⁸Reichborn-Kjennerud, E. (2013). *NATO in the 'New' MENA Region: Competing Priorities amidst Diverging Interests and Financial Austerity*. NUPI Report. P.26-32. & P. 42-44. <https://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/handle/11250/276505>

²⁹Trobbiani, R. (April 2017). *EU Cultural Diplomacy in the MENA region: a qualitative mapping of initiatives promoting regional cooperation*. The EL-CSID project is coordinated by the Institute for European Studies (IES). Working paper. P. 5-8 & P.17-22 & P. 32-35. http://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:7155/EL-CSID_Working_Paper_2017-02.pdf

³⁰Reichborn-Kjennerud, E. (2014) *NATO's Problematic Partnerships in the MENA Region*. Mediterranean Quarterly, P. 6-10. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/548442>

³¹Gadd, K., & Engström, V. (2024). *EU delegations as intermediaries of perceptions of the EU: A view from the MENA region*. Mediterranean Politics. 6.3. Competing aims & 8 Concluding remarks. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2023.2291740>

4. Policy Recommendations

Given the importance of this cooperation, especially in light of the opportunities arising in the MENA region, it is necessary to overcome the obstacles identified in chapter two. In this context and given the analysis, the following three broad policy recommendations are relevant. There is one overarching recommendation that will improve the context in which the cooperation should be facilitated.

4.1 Overarching

It is necessary for NATO and the EU to define together strategic interests that are relevant within the current geopolitical landscape. The shifts in international power dynamics make it crucial to pursue a coherent policy where geo-economic strategies and military power complement each other. This requires a joint balance-of-power approach, where the EU and NATO operate not as separate entities, but as complementary partners. A proactive stance in this cooperation is necessary given the urgency of the current geopolitical challenges. To correct the negative public perception, NATO should develop a targeted communication strategy that highlights its successes. Currently, the positive outcomes of NATO operations are overshadowed by a focus on incidents and criticism, contributing to a distorted image. Establishing campaigns to spotlight these successes will help strengthen trust and support within the EU.

Finally, to overcome internal conflicts, such as the Turkey-Cyprus conflict and Turkey's EU accession issue, a "medium bargain" approach is proposed. This strategy avoids seeking comprehensive solutions to all the problems between them, opting instead for a pragmatic approach with smaller, achievable agreements. For example, this could involve granting Turkey limited administrative access to the European Defence Agency (EDA) and ensuring that non-EU countries participating in EU missions obtain full participation rights in decision-making commission. Such an approach could improve operational cooperation and contribute to building mutual trust.

This overarching recommendation will facilitate the following three policy recommendations within a context of increased mutual and public trust, without a determining barrier posed by internal conflicts.

4.2 NATO-EU Commission

The first recommendation concerns the creation of a NATO-EU commission. This commission rests on four pillars and revolves around coordinating cooperation.

4.2.1 Task distribution

NATO and EU member states should use existing policy forums more effectively to coordinate joint initiatives and strategically allocate their resources. In this context, NATO's military capabilities and logistical systems should be combined with the EU's capacity-building and financial support. Such an integrated approach model allows for a flexible and efficient division of tasks, where the division of roles can be tailored for each crisis. NATO would focus on military operations, while the EU would be responsible for civilian crisis management. To prevent future operational issues, such as those encountered during the mission in Afghanistan, it is essential that both organizations learn from previous missions. This will avoid duplication of efforts and increase operational effectiveness.

4.2.2 Strengthening the Berlin Plus Agreement

The Berlin Plus agreement can be better utilized. This means that the EU can rely on NATO's resources and capabilities for operations when necessary. Enhancing this cooperation through the NATO-EU commission would prevent duplication of resources and enable more efficient use of limited defense budgets, especially in a time of low European defense spending.

4.2.3 Information exchange

NATO and the EU should increase information exchange within this commission and establish protocols in critical sectors, from counterterrorism cooperation to cybersecurity ^a. While this recommendation ultimately depends on political will, smaller channels could be created to streamline limited but vital information, especially in the event of a cyberattack.

^a Calcagno, E. (2024, October 11). NATO, the EU, and European Security [Guest lecture]. Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali (LUISS), Viale Romania 32, Rome, Italy.

4.2.4 Strategic regulation

NATO and the EU should intensify their dialogue in this commission regarding regulations and jointly address obstacles related to military mobility and interoperability. NATO has deep expertise in strategic air mobility and military operations, which can support the EU in streamlining and improving relevant laws and regulations. Closer cooperation in this area will facilitate the rapid and efficient movement of troops and equipment within Europe. Additionally, NATO can benefit from the EU's regulatory power to achieve shared goals, such as capacity building and countering the growing influence of China on global security issues. This could for example include using trade barriers as a strategic security tool.

4.3 NATO assistance for migration flows in the Southern EU

Southern EU member states face a lower threat risk, which does not positively influence public opinion regarding NATO-EU cooperation. Politicians in these countries try to emphasize NATO's relevance by focusing on urgent issues such as irregular migration and regional instability. It is essential that NATO takes these concerns seriously and actively supports these member states in their approach to migration flows from unstable regions. This could involve strengthening operations aimed at accommodating migrants in the region, conducting missions to manage migrant flows at sea and/or to help developing the Eurodac-database. Exploring cooperation with Frontex is also strongly recommended. Furthermore, it is of strategic importance to involve Turkey in broader discussions on NATO's role in maintaining regional stability. This will not only contribute to better management of migration issues but also help reduce tensions over military acquisitions and strategic priorities. Closer cooperation can reduce divisions among EU member states and prevent further conflicts that could weaken transatlantic relations.

By taking the concerns of southern EU member states more seriously, NATO can contribute to stability within the EU and increase public support for NATO contributions. This, in turn, would raise the willingness of these countries to make more substantial contributions to collective defense efforts, thereby strengthening NATO's overall cohesion and effectiveness.

4.4 Strengthening the EU-US Relationship

The United States plays an indispensable role in collective security and, by extension, in NATO-EU cooperation. Therefore, it is strategically important for European countries to continue investing in their own military capabilities, while also ensuring close cooperation and clear communication with the U.S. To improve joint defense efforts, European countries should review their defense spending and work towards a more integrated procurement system. This could lead to greater efficiency and cost savings. A key aspect of this is enabling the participation of the U.S. defense industry in European projects. Facilitating this participation can minimize economic losses and foster technological development and cooperation at the transatlantic level.

Strengthening cooperation between NATO and the EU should be considered a priority. The U.S. should actively support this process rather than hinder it, as a strong NATO-EU partnership benefits the transatlantic alliance and enhances collective security.

Concluding remarks

In the current geopolitical context, effective cooperation between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) is crucial for collective security. While these institutions can be complementary, their cooperation is hindered by three overarching obstacles. However, these obstacles can be overcome through one overarching recommendation and three specific policy recommendations, which require a short-term approach to resolve internal conflicts and improve the image of their cooperation. Additionally, efforts must be made to prevent duplication and promote efficient information exchange through a NATO-EU commission. Developing a shared threat perception, with a greater focus on the southern EU member states and consequently lowering the threshold for their contribution to collective security, is also crucial. Furthermore, strengthening the relationship with the United States remains important, as this can facilitate the acceleration of NATO-EU cooperation. Implementing these policy recommendations will contribute to more efficient cooperation and stronger cohesion among NATO member states, ultimately strengthening the partnership.

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