

# **The Evolving EU, NATO, and Turkey Relationship: Cyprus Impasse and Implications for Transatlantic Security\***

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Having come into being as a result of the St Malo agreement between France and the UK back in 1998, the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) will soon enter its second decade. Within its first decade of existence, ESDP became a significant contributor to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The emergence of ESDP went hand in hand with the EU's growing willingness to take responsibility for a number of peace support missions around the globe. To date, there have been a total of 20 missions, of which nine have been completed and eleven are current and ongoing. The majority of these missions have been in the sphere of civilian crisis management. Recent examples include the EULEX mission in Kosovo and the EUPOL mission in Afghanistan.

Yet despite its burgeoning role, the effectiveness of ESDP remains hindered by the continuing lack of a sound relationship with NATO, the more traditional security provider. As a result, the implementation of the envisaged partition of labour between EU and NATO in areas of crisis faces serious practical difficulties. A case in point is the increased security risks faced by the civilian EULEX members in Kosovo where their protection cannot reliably be outsourced to NATO forces.

An improvement in the NATO-EU relationship depends to a great extent on the evolution of two issues. The first one is the French attitude towards NATO. As opposed to the more Atlanticist members of the EU, France has traditionally given precedence to the development of an independent European pillar. However, the advent of Sarkozy seems to have changed this policy. Although it will become clearer when the White Paper on French security strategy is published in the near future, there are signs that France is now ready to re-engage with NATO and to support a more harmonious NATO-EU relationship.

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The second root cause of the outstanding problems can be traced to the difficulties inherent in the Turkey-EU relationship. As long as Turkey's quest to fully take part in European security structures remains unresolved, the strains in the NATO-EU relationship are likely to remain visible. Moreover the Cyprus question further compounds already existing difficulties as it precludes Turkey's further convergence with ESDP. Yet with the elimination of the French obstacle to the betterment of the NATO-EU relationship and the ongoing ESDP missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan, pressure is mounting for the settlement of this thorny question.

This first section of this paper will review the evolution of the Turkey-EU relationship in the security domain. The second section will analyze the current bottlenecks and their consequences. The last section concludes with a number of key recommendations for overcoming the present stalemate.

### **Turkey in the European Security Architecture: the Early Years**

The starting point for Turkey can be characterized as the quest to maintain NATO's role as the primary institution for security and defence in Europe and the main forum for transatlantic cooperation, while carving out a role for itself within the burgeoning sphere of European Security and Defence. Turkey achieved a considerable degree of success more than a decade ago by obtaining a virtual member status within the Western European Union (WEU). This achievement proved, however, to be of a temporary nature. The St Malo agreement of 1998 between the UK and France, which paved the way for the development of an ESDP within the EU structures, meant the dishelming of the WEU as the security institution of the EU. It also meant the sudden vanishing of all the hard fought "acquis" regarding the foundation of the security relationship between Turkey and the EU.

Since then, the security relationship between Turkey and the EU was forced to undergo a redefinition. This exercise proved to be a rather difficult and strenuous one, and the process has been significantly influenced by the internal political dynamics within the EU intent on determining the limits of the "communautarization" of defence and security policy. The concomitant process of enlargement, and the constitutional debacle, which ushered in a new period of reflection on the future of Europe, further compounded the picture. Finally, the lingering

uncertainty about Turkish accession provided another layer of volatility.

Indeed, policy makers have had to negotiate the current institutional arrangements between Turkey and the EU Member States in the field of security and defence cooperation without knowing whether they would be temporary or permanent. Had there been a clear political will on the EU side for supporting Turkey's full membership objective, Turkish policy makers may have been more flexible with regard to their demands, knowing that these arrangements would necessarily be upgraded once Turkey became a full member. However the last EU enlargement, which brought in the Republic of Cyprus created a new set of problems, not only for the Turkey-EU relationship but also for the EU-NATO relationship.

### **The NATO-EU relationship: a Stalemate?**

The central problem for the EU-NATO relationship can be traced back to the interpretation of the agreement between NATO and the EU reached at the end of 2002. This basically sealed the decision taken by NATO at the Washington Summit to provide support to the EU under "Berlin Plus" in exchange for certain rights within ESDP for non-EU European allies, as stipulated in the Nice implementation document. The NATO decision excludes non-Partnership for Peace (PfP) countries and those lacking security agreement from activities, including discussions, related to both Berlin Plus and strategic partnership. The EU decision, however, limits the exclusion only to Berlin Plus and does not refer to strategic cooperation. Therefore, under the NATO decision, Republic of Cyprus (and Malta) is excluded from participating in anything falling under "strategic cooperation." However, according to the EU decision this is not the case. Today, the EU seeks to overcome problems posed by this wording. On the basis of the Community solidarity principle, the EU claims that the Republic of Cyprus cannot be left outside the scope of this arrangement any longer and refuses to engage in dialogue with NATO without all EU members sitting around the table. Turkey sticks to its position of the strict interpretation of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) decision of 2002 and blocks the participation of the Republic of Cyprus in the NATO-EU strategic cooperation.

As a result, whereas there is an agreed mechanism to do so, there is practically no meaningful dialogue between NATO and the EU on emerging threats. The EU-NATO strategic cooperation remains blocked.

The agenda of the regularly scheduled joint meetings of the NAC and the Political and Security Committee of the EU (PSC) is generally void of any new items and can only legitimately discuss the Berlin Plus operation in Bosnia. Questions of imminent concern such as the fight against terrorism or energy security cannot be tackled.

In addition, this state of affairs can also negatively influence performance in the theatre of operations. The need for strategic cooperation will become more pressing as the EU is set to replace the UN in Kosovo while starting a rule of law mission in Afghanistan. In both of these areas, NATO's military presence will co-exist with EU civilian missions. The existing collaboration in the field between the two institutions cannot remedy the lack of cooperation at the policy level in the headquarters. This predicament will be increasingly visible if and when the situation on the ground, especially in Afghanistan or Kosovo, becomes crisis prone. In short, the uncertainties linked to Turkey's EU accession and the intractable Cyprus problem have created serious liabilities for a genuine and substantive NATO-EU partnership.

### **A Dilemma for Europe, a Dilemma for Turkey**

Another consequence of this state of affairs is the Republic of Cyprus veto on the signature of the security agreement between EU and Turkey as well as the administrative arrangements that would enable Turkey to formally cooperate with the European Defence Agency. The purpose of EDA is to help EU Member States develop their defence capabilities for crisis-management operations under the ESDP. The EDA encourages Member States to spend their defence budgets on required capabilities and to pool their resources where appropriate. 26 EU Member States participate in the EDA, with the exception of Denmark, which has an opt-out from ESDP. The non-participation of Turkey in the work of EDA can certainly be considered a serious liability for this organisation given that Turkey has the largest standing army among the European members of NATO and especially in view of its sizeable defense budget.

The inability or unwillingness of some EU member states to think constructively about the institutional arrangements linking Turkey to ESDP creates a similar dilemma for Turkish policy makers. On the one hand, on almost all issues related to regional security, with the notable exception of the problem of Cyprus, Turkish policy is actually quite closely aligned with European foreign policy. It is perhaps worth

recalling that Turkey's alignment with CFSP statements and common positions stands at 92 %.

Turkey has participated in a number of military and civilian ESDP missions including Concordia and Proxima (Macedonia), and EUFORRD Congo. It is currently participating in Althea (Bosnia), EUPM (Bosnia), and EUPOL Kinshasa. Turkey is also slated to participate in the EU-led Kosovo rule of law mission as well. As such, it is the most active participant in ESDP missions among all third countries and out performs many EU member states as well. For instance, Turkey is overall the 6th largest contributor to Althea and it is also set to become a contributor to the Italian-led EU battlegroup to be operational in the second half of 2010.

Furthermore, Turkish security doctrine is more at ease with the approach outlined in the EU security strategy than the US security strategy. References to effective multilateralism, soft power and critical dialogue contrast with the heavy-handed approach of the US to regional security as illustrated in Iraq and as feared in relation to Iran. With its growing political and economic influence and self-confidence, Turkey has become more active in regional politics. Its relationship with the countries of the Middle East has improved considerably. Trade and investment flows between Turkey and the region are at an all time high. Therefore the opportunity cost for Turkey of a radical change in the status quo in the region that may upset the current state of affairs is significant. In that sense, Turkey is a status quo power in the region. Whereas the EU is perceived as a more conservative foreign policy actor, the US is seen as a "revolutionary" power that may sometimes act without taking into consideration the full implications of its actions.

It may be useful to recall that one of the main stumbling blocks during the Turkish-US negotiations in February 2003 before the ill-fated vote of the Turkish parliament for the opening of a new northern front in Iraq was the inability of the US administration to clearly spell out and convince Turkish authorities about their exit strategy for Iraq.

So the dilemma for Turkish authorities is a very fundamental one. From a policy perspective, the natural ally seems increasingly to be the EU. But institutional and political realities preclude the elaboration of a mutually satisfactory framework for the deepening of the Turkey-EU security cooperation.

Moreover on the foreign policy front, the Turkey-EU relationship

has not progressed as one would have hoped. The reason is the difficulties brought about by the start of the negotiations. Whereas the initiation of negotiations had been expected to usher in a period of increased mutual trust, confidence and therefore collaboration, the real as well as imaginary barriers erected in Europe against Turkey's full membership have prevented such an outcome. As a result, foreign policy cooperation and dialogue between Turkey and the EU remains below its potential. The frequency, scope and format of the currently existing framework for the exchange of views on regional issues such as Iran, Iraq and the Caucasus and even in the area of energy security are clearly insufficient for a genuine policy dialogue and partnership to emerge between Turkey and the EU.

As things stand now, the Turkey-EU relationship in the security domain is fraught with difficulty. Turkey's aspirations to become a full-fledged actor contributing to Europe's security with almost equal rights as EU full members remain unfulfilled. In particular Turkey wants:

- to be fully associated with the planning and implementation of EU-led missions as opposed to being asked its contribution if and when needed after the political and technical planning phase is already completed;
- particular attention to consultations when the EU envisages action in the proximity of Turkey or in areas of strategic interest to Turkey;
- increased bilateral contact between the parties on crisis management;
- the convening of the Committee of Contributors at a higher level and more frequent updates from the Operation commander to the Committee;
- Turkish presence in EU headquarters for operations to which Turkey contributes;
- participation in the work of the European Defense Agency (EDA);
- conclusion of the Security Agreement between Turkey and the EU;

That is in essence how Turkish policy makers define the characteristics of a genuine partnership in this sphere. They also believe that if these conditions were to hold, Turkey could substantially reinforce the EU's military and also civilian capacities of crisis management.

### **Towards a settlement ?**

Turkey is therefore under increased pressure from its European allies to

accept the new state of affairs and lift its veto on the Republic of Cyprus. So far, Turkey conditionally decided to lift its objection to the NATO-EU strategic dialogue with the EU-27 i.e. including the Republic of Cyprus. The conditions are for the meetings to be held non-officially (i.e., "informal" dialogues) and in relation to urgent matters involving humanitarian concerns. As a result of this change of attitude, "informal" NAC-PSC meetings were held on Darfur and on Kosovo.

Turkish officials are undoubtedly aware of the detrimental consequences of blocking the conclusion of the Republic of Cyprus' security agreement with NATO for the Alliance as a whole. Technically, it is the absence of such an agreement, which prevents the Republic of Cyprus from taking part in the EU-NATO strategic dialogue. The other condition is Cyprus' participation in PfP. However, this is a strategic and politically sensitive decision for Turkey. It is seen as the sole real leverage that Turkey has on the Republic of Cyprus government. The Greek Cypriot government is intent on using Turkey's negotiations process to steal concessions from Turkey regarding the political settlement on the island. So for Turkish policy makers, the NATO card remains an indispensable element in their efforts to redress this asymmetric relationship.

As a result, Turkish policy makers will not lift their objections to the Republic of Cyprus concluding a security agreement with NATO unless a political settlement is achieved. As a matter of fact, this is perhaps nothing more than an annoyance for the Greek Cypriots. The Greek Cypriot government may eventually be unwilling or find it politically impossible to apply for a NATO partnership. But at the least, the present state of affairs serves to underscore the existence of an international problem and raises the spectre of a possible contagion in other areas. It may hence induce the transatlantic community to become more actively involved in the resolution of this specific conflict.

To conclude, what specific measures should be taken to overcome the problems highlighted in this analysis?

The Cyprus question must be resolved. The election of a seemingly more conciliatory new Greek Cypriot president and the expected start of a new round of negotiations is certainly a window of opportunity for settling this intractable dispute. This opportunity should not be missed. A failure this time around will have a host of negative consequences. It will ossify the division of the island, jeopardize the whole process of Turkish-

EU accession and solidify the existing institutional problems between NATO and the EU. Therefore relevant parties should draw the right lessons from the failure of the last UN sponsored round of negotiations.

Turkey and the EU must engage in a program of confidence building. The normalization of the NATO-EU relationship will depend to a great extent on the normalization of the Turkey-EU relationship, which in turn depends on two factors. The first one is Cyprus. As long as the dispute remains unresolved, Turkey's EU aspirations will remain on hold. The second factor is the EU's approach to Turkey. Notwithstanding the question of Cyprus, the EU has been unable to send the right messages to its future member and negotiating partner. For instance, the privileged partner rhetoric refuses to die down. The possibility of national referenda in some member states on Turkish accession is a further difficulty clouding the road to full membership. As a result, under these conditions, Turkish policy makers and the Turkish public opinion continue to nurture doubts about the country's ability to ever fulfil the conditions for full membership. EU member states must now simply allow Turkey to proceed with the negotiations on the same basis as past candidates. In addition, both European institutions as well as national governments should take more responsibility in communicating with their publics about enlargement with a view to building a more solid foundation for what can be considered as the EU's most successful policy.

In relation to Turkey's aspirations to be fully associated with European security, a package deal that would fulfil Turkey's specific demands as identified in this paper including its membership of EDA and the conclusion of the Security Agreement can be engineered in return for the lifting of Turkey's veto, albeit on an ad hoc and case by case basis, for the NATO-EU dialogue on ongoing ESDP operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan.

Finally, even if the Cyprus obstacle is lifted, NATO-EU relationship may still stumble as a result of the deep divisions regarding the future of NATO between the Atlanticist members of the Alliance and the others. Therefore, the rejuvenation of the transatlantic dialogue with a view to engaging in a more constructive debate about the division of tasks between NATO and the EU should be envisaged. The changing attitude of France towards the Atlantic Alliance seems to provide an opportunity for this strategic debate to go forward.