

# NATO-EU Strategic Partnership: Where is it Heading?

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### Abstract

*This study examines the security governance between NATO and the EU. I specifically focus on whether the EU-NATO strategic partnership has led to the institutionalization of complementarity between the two institutions. I empirically scrutinize the NATO-EU strategic partnership in the field of security governance. Then, I question whether Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Intervention Initiative (E2I) have marked a drift away from complementarity. PESCO and the E2I have mostly been considered as a challenge to the U.S.-led Atlantic Alliance. On the contrary, I see such initiatives as an enhancer for implementing better practices of security governance. In the first part of the study, the security governance approach to NATO-EU inter-institutional relations is explained. In the second part, the NATO-EU Strategic Partnership and initiatives for stronger European military capabilities are explored. In the last part of the study, the durability of the NATO-EU strategic partnership is questioned. I come to the conclusion that despite the different approaches to Euro-Atlantic security among the leading actors, such as the U.S., France and Germany, the NATO-EU Strategic Partnership will likely continue with complementarity in security governance between these two institutions.*

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## Introduction

Now celebrating the seventy-second anniversary of its founding, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is the largest and longest-lasting security alliance between sovereign states in modern history. There are undoubtedly many reasons for this, but probably one of the most prominent is NATO's ability to keep up with change. Most alliances are soon disbanded due to changes in external threats, differences in national interest perceptions among alliance members or the increased cost of maintaining the alliance on alliance members. For example, none of the seven coalitions of the Napoleonic Wars lasted more than five years. One example from the more recent past is the alliance between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, which was able to last only two years. A 2010 study by the Brookings Institute showed that over the past 500 years, only 10 of the 63 major military alliances survived more than 40 years. In the study, the average age of collective defense alliances was found to be 15 years.<sup>1</sup>

Will NATO, which has responded to the changes in international politics so far, manage to appropriately handle the challenges it faces? NATO continues its search for adaptation to power shifts in international politics and technological advances that play an important role in these changes. In this context, NATO also reviews its relations with international institutions; it searches for ways to engage in cooperative security with international institutions in the face of trials and takes steps to institutionalize this cooperation.

One of the international institutions with which NATO endeavors to develop cooperative security in this context is the European Union (EU). What decisively distinguishes the relationship between NATO and the EU from other international institutions is the presence of 21 states that are members of both institutions. What is the cooperative security conception of these two institutions, which share a majority of members? Why did the EU need to establish an autonomous security and defense policy, despite the fact that its leading members in the fields of security and defense, such as France, Spain, Italy and Germany, are also part of the NATO alliance? What does the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy mean for the NATO alliance? Do these two institutions compete with each other? Are

they alternatives to one another? Or do they, by complementing each other, strengthen security governance?

In light of the practices of these institutions, this article asserts that EU-NA-TO relations reinforce complementarity and security governance. In the first part of the study, the NATO-EU security governance approach to inter-institutional relations is explained. In the second part, the NATO-EU Strategic Partnership and initiatives launched for stronger European military capabilities are investigated. In the last part, the durability of the NATO-EU strategic partnership is questioned.

## Security Governance Approach to NATO-EU Inter-institutional Relations

Since the end of the Cold War, security risks have become more transnational, and thus security has become more difficult to ensure unilaterally.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, states have begun to prefer coordinating their efforts with multiple actors using a variety of cooperation methods. These changes have been defined as “governance without government.”<sup>3</sup> Governance involves the administration, coordination and regulation of activities in a particular subject area by multiple authorities. These three distinctive characteristics, depending on the subject area, are structured for formal and informal regulations, norms, discourses and goals aimed at specific political outcomes.

This trend has continued with the emergence of new security insights and the deepening and expansion of security in terms of potential reference objects and threats.<sup>4</sup> To capture this new complexity, the concept of security governance emerged.<sup>5</sup> Security governance is based on the claim that transnational risks pose challenges for traditional methods of providing security by nation states, and underscores the need for new methods of transnational governance. The concept of security governance first emerged in the context of debates over the transformation of security institutions in Europe after the Cold War. The main advocates of security governance sought to identify the key features of the institutional transformation scheme in Europe,<sup>6</sup> and the first studies categorized security governance systems within and around European security institutions.<sup>7</sup>

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Since then, the scope of the concept has broadened. Some studies examine security governance conceptually.<sup>8</sup> Some compare governance approaches in different regions.<sup>9</sup> Finally, some security governance studies, particularly in the 1990s, see liberal values such as democracy, the free market and the rule of law as a universal model.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, many applications of security governance have accepted these ideas as a basis for ensuring peace and security. In addition, the concept has been used to examine a range of specific policies and phenomena, including international efforts for security sector reform in post-conflict countries<sup>11</sup> and the growing importance of private security companies.<sup>12</sup> Recently, researchers have also begun to examine security governance in institutional and cultural contexts outside of Europe.<sup>13</sup> Overall, in the International Relations discipline, “security governance” refers to the shared exercise of administrative, economic and political authority for continued peace and stability in the international arena. The presence of a shared goal should be added to this definition. That is to say, security governance has to rely on proximity of discourses and values as much as an agreement over tangible components.<sup>14</sup>

Security governance is comprised of three indispensable elements.<sup>15</sup> Primarily, it relies on a horizontal (heterarchical) understanding of relationships defined by increased interactions among multiple actors. Secondly, it involves institutionalization with both concrete (organizational structure) and non-concrete (ideational) components. As Mark Webber points out, security governance needs both ideational and organizational foundations.<sup>16</sup> Despite the presence of differing interests, it requires a shared goal. Inter-institutional relations between NATO and the EU incorporate these founding elements of security governance. First, there is no superior-subordinate (or principal-agent) relationship between NATO and the EU, which is in line with the heterarchical nature of security governance. From a legal perspective, these two institutions, as two different legal entities, must live together and respect this difference. As for the political aspect, the policies and activities of these two different legal entities overlap to a large extent. This political dimension brings about the need for the establishment of a complementarity-based partnership between the EU and NATO. The EU Global Strategy states that collective security will continue within the framework of NATO and that EU-NATO relations will not harm the security and defense policies of non-NATO EU members.<sup>17</sup> In this context, it can be deduced that the EU considers its relations with NATO within the framework of the principle of complementarity.

Indeed, for a number of reasons, the NATO-EU partnership has become a central component of the comprehensive security governance architecture. These reasons, along with the similarity of their nature and threats they face, as well as the fact that they operate within a similar geography, bring about a functional distinction. Accordingly, while NATO is the major defense actor, the EU is predominantly a security actor. Due to the erosion of the internal security/external security dichotomy resulting in the indivisibility of security, these two institutions, by developing an explicit and implicit division of tasks, complement each other.

Although defense is clearly expressed in the context of the use of military force, security, as a broader and less coercive concept, more aptly characterizes the EU's policy. Indeed, the EU has invested in the fields of conflict prevention and mediation, security sector reform (SSR), the rule of law, civil policing, border management, education, capacity-building and peace and resilience development. These activities reflect a comprehensive security approach making use of the security-development connection, which thus goes beyond a single Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) country. This policy proves that EU's role as a security actor surpasses its role as a defense actor.

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Hence, it cannot be claimed that the EU has evolved into a military actor (or a defense actor) since the creation of the CSDP. Even the defense dimension of the 12 military operations carried out to date by the EU remained weak. In these operations, the deployment of military units never meant to use force to coerce the enemy. As a matter of fact, the task and impartiality of CSDP military operations, which implied a reluctance to identify any enemy, have made those missions closer to policing than military activities.<sup>18</sup> Further, coercive military measures were clearly avoided during CSDP operations. Until today, operations have not been exercised as "tasks of combat forces in crisis management" as laid down in Article 43 of the Treaty of Lisbon, and the EU has not prioritized the use of force in CSDP operations. In fact, CSDP operations were never about coercion. Accordingly, battle groups have never been deployed to date. In actual fact, CSDP operations are third-party interventions deployed with the consent of the host state to perform the task of stabilization. In this context, except

for two naval operations—Operation Atalanta in the South Mediterranean Sea and Operation Sophia in the Gulf of Aden—armed forces acted as police officers or capacity developers rather than as soldiers.<sup>19</sup>

The intertwinement of internal and external security further enhances the complementary aspect of the NATO-EU partnership. Thanks to its regulatory role at the national scale, the EU (including the European Commission) has a comparative advantage in the fields of counter-terrorism, hybrid threats and cyber security, all of which have an important internal security dimension. In contrast, NATO enjoys a comparative advantage in the defense domain. NATO operates inside its Member States' territories in its response to the Russian threat, whereas the EU can only operate outside of the EU Member States through its CSDP. In other words, NATO is a more suitable actor in the face of threats requiring defense, while the EU is a key actor in responding to attacks threatening security.

Second, the level of institutionalization between NATO and the EU is also in line with the nature of security governance. Regarding the reasoning behind security governance, both NATO and the EU share the same values. Apart from building a strategic partnership, the formation of arrangements, as an organizational element of security governance, are also a component of the NATO-EU cooperation. In 2003, for example, the distribution of tasks between the two institutions provided a rationale for 'Berlin Plus' arrangements by which the EU could rely on NATO assets for EU-led operations. This relationship also suggests complementarity between the two institutions.

Third, with respect to the shared goal element of security governance, similarities in threat perceptions lead these two institutions to work together with a view to overcoming the same threats (ranging from Russia's resurrection to terror, cyber threats and general instability at their Southern peripheries). As a result, both institutions have an objective interest in working together to make use of their respective comparative advantages to create synergies and ultimately to maximize impact.

On this basis, in practice, certain instances of complementarity come into play. The most obvious examples are NATO's presence in the three Baltic States and Poland in response to Russia's activities in Ukraine. Thus, NATO compensates for the absence of the EU as a defense actor within the territory of its own Member States. In contrast, various EU-led missions and operations have been deployed in Sub-Saharan Africa in the absence of NATO in the South of Libya. While the EU conducts civilian missions within the Palestinian territories and Georgia, a NATO mission in these

regions seems impossible due to political sensitivities. In all these cases, comparative advantages became decisive and the EU and NATO, by deploying in certain locations in the absence of the other, have performed an actual complementarity.

When they deploy in the same location, NATO's defense dimension rises to prominence in terms of comparative advantages, while the EU acts as the key security actor. This tacit division of tasks constituted to a large extent the rationale for NATO to enter Kosovo via KFOR at the same time the EU launched EULEX, its rule of law mission. Likewise, while NATO was leading the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, the EU engaged in a civilian police mission (EUPOL Afghanistan) there. While NATO was undertaking Operation Unified Protector in Libya, the EU conducted a border mission (EUBAM Libya). Likewise, while NATO implemented reassurance measures in Poland and the Baltic States following the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, the EU imposed sanctions against Russia.

Most of the EU's missions and operations are small in scale and impact. The large-scale operations are those that the EU conducts in cooperation with NATO. Yet they perform different functions.<sup>20</sup> While the EU undertakes geographically limited and relatively low-level operations such as peace-keeping, humanitarian intervention and stability operations, NATO undertakes the functions of peace enforcement, long-range expeditionary operations, and territorial defense. In brief, there exists an operational division of tasks and complementarity between the two institutions.

As can be seen, the security governance approach provides an appropriate perspective with which to explain the inter-institutional relationship between NATO and the EU. The heterarchical dimension of the NATO-EU relationship, the level of its institutionalization and the presence of shared goals make security governance possible. Based on their capacity and capabilities in the field of security and defense, there exists a division of tasks between NATO and the EU that ensures complementarity between these two institutions. Yet, this division of tasks and complementarity are not flawless. The hesitation or unwillingness of the European allies of NATO regarding burden-sharing and the EU's relatively weak defense capabilities are challenges that should be overcome. These two problems will be scrutinized in the remainder of the study.

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## Stronger European Military Capabilities: An Enhancer or a Competitor?

Continued tensions between the U.S. and NATO's European members regarding burden-sharing since the end of Cold War have served to some extent as motivation for the Europeans.<sup>21</sup> The U.S. has increasingly pushed the EU to take on greater responsibility for stabilizing its neighboring regions (the Balkans, the Mediterranean and the Eastern border regions). Since 1989, Europe has ceased to be at the center of the U.S.'s strategic radar screen. This has led to various initiatives to bolster the European defense capacity both within NATO (c.f. the short-lived European Security and Defense Identity—ESDI—initiative in the 1990s) and outside NATO (the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy).<sup>22</sup>

The European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), which was renamed CSDP under the Treaty of Lisbon, was primarily designed as a military policy. As laid down in the 1998 Saint-Malo Joint Declaration on European Defense, the ESDP is subjected to “the progressive framing of a common defense policy,” suggesting that the Union should have “the capacity for autonomous action, backed by credible military forces.”<sup>23</sup> When the EU's CSDP was first launched in December 1998, the key concept was “autonomous action.” The CSDP aimed to allow European forces to respond to regional security challenges, which the U.S. does not want to deal with. The subsequent 1999 Helsinki Headline Goal also incorporated a military element. In the document, the EU Member States called for creating an armed force at the corps level (15 brigades or up to 50,000–60,000 persons) that “will be promptly deployed and will be capable of the full range of Petersburg tasks as specified in the Treaty of Amsterdam.”<sup>24</sup> The Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force in 2009, provided that the ultimate goal of

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This problem was discerned in the absence of a unified strategy in the 2011 Libya intervention. Libya is a signifi-



cant turning point in the history of the CSDP. Libya had the ideal characteristics of a regional crisis management operation, which the CSDP was designed to address. Situated close to Europe and in line with the EU's comprehensive security approach, Libya had all the military and civilian components. In the early days of the crisis, Europeans statespersons reacted with national responses. At first, Italy, Greece and Malta did not endorse the sanctions to be imposed. Later, in the post-intervention period, a lack of capacity to control migration, a highly contentious issue in the EU, became evident. Disagreements between Italy, France and other Member States eventually led to the reinstatement of border controls between certain Member States. In the face of the most serious crisis on the border of the EU since the launch of the CSDP, the Union proved to be incapable of acting in unison.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the EU's intervention in the Libyan crisis revealed the weakness of the CSDP's own intergovernmental institutional structure and decision-making process, in which national sovereignty (and thus national interest) is centered. That limits the effectiveness of the EU in crises that require collective action when there is no convergence of national interests among EU states.

The Libyan case shows that despite all the steps taken toward the CSDP, NATO continues to be at the center of European security. During NATO's Libyan mission, Operation Unified Protector, the U.S. concept of "leading from behind" was introduced.<sup>27</sup> Even though the NATO mission in Libya largely benefited from the American military input, the Obama administration's insistence that Europeans should at least be perceived as "taking the lead" in Libya represented a paradigm shift both in political and symbolic terms. The U.S. signaled that henceforth it was ready to delegate responsibility on the European stage to the Europeans.

Simultaneous with those developments within the EU, there was also remarkable dynamism between the EU and NATO at the institutional level. A Joint Declaration was issued at the NATO summit in Warsaw on July 8, 2016, which called for 'giving new impetus and new substance to the EU-NATO strategic partnership.'<sup>28</sup> The Joint Declaration underlined the collaboration between the two institutions:

In light of the common challenges we are now confronting, we have to step up our efforts: we need new ways of working together and a new level of ambition; because our security is interconnected; because together we can mobilize a broad range of tools to respond to the challenges we face; and because we have to make the most efficient use of resources. A stronger NATO and a stronger EU are mutually reinforcing. Together they can better provide security in Europe and beyond.<sup>29</sup>

Various roadmaps have been presented for NATO-EU cooperation. For example, the 2016 Joint Declaration lists common threats. The declaration called for a new momentum and new substance to the NATO-EU strategic partnership and identified seven areas of cooperation: 1) countering hybrid threats, 2) operational cooperation in the maritime sector, 3) cyber security and defense, 4) defense capabilities, 5) defense industry and research, 6) operations and 7) the resilience of partners.<sup>30</sup>

In the wake of NATO's Warsaw Summit, held on July 8–9, 2016, the NATO members undertook to establish “a stronger defense industry across the Alliance” with the aim “to maintain and advance the military and technological advantage of Allied capabilities through innovation.”<sup>31</sup> As stated in the Declaration, there is a need for “a stronger defense industry and greater defense research and industrial cooperation within Europe and across the Atlantic.” Accordingly, the EU not only published the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS), but also developed a specific Security and Defense Implementation Plan (SDIP) and a European Defense Action Plan (EDAP). Each of these documents called on the EU Member States to invest more in defense and defense innovation. These plans also outlined defense cooperation based on financial incentives in the EU.

It is possible to identify four core objectives in the EU Global Strategy. The first objective is the protection of the “European way of life,” particularly in the context of terrorism, cyber threats, hybrid warfare and energy security. These are not threats that require military response. Usually, they are best addressed domestically, but they require serious coordination. The second objective is to provide security both in the EU's Eastern and Southern neighboring regions, by using force if necessary. The third is to help global maritime trade partners maintain sustainable access, that is to say, to keep maritime trade routes open. The fourth objective is to support and contribute to UN peacekeeping operations. These objectives point out that EU members should expand their armed forces and allocate more budget to defense.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, Germany and France proposed a European Security Compact that would embrace all aspects of security and defense at the European level.<sup>33</sup> The European Council, which subsequently convened in Bratislava on September 16, 2016, issued the “Bratislava Roadmap” for a stronger European defense capacity.<sup>34</sup> On November 22, 2016, the European Parliament overwhelmingly voted in favor of the establishment of the European Defense Union.<sup>35</sup> On November 30, 2016, the European Commission published the European Defense Action Plan, which would lead to a substan-

tial increase in the EU's defense capacity, research and development and procurement spending.<sup>36</sup>

In December 2016, the EU and NATO published a "Statement on the Implementation of the Joint Declaration" involving a common set of 42 actions to be implemented with the active cooperation of the two institutions.<sup>37</sup> Cyber threats, security sector reform, capacity-building, strengthening resilience in neighboring countries, global governance, maritime security, parallel and synchronized exercises and hybrid warfare were among the special cooperation projects. Reports on progress in these areas are published every six months.

In May 2017, German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced, "The era in which we could fully rely on others is over to some extent."<sup>38</sup> Later, then European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker suggested that European integration should be given further momentum through defense policy.<sup>39</sup> In June 2017, the European Commission published a reflection paper<sup>40</sup> on the future of European Defense, and the European Defense Fund (EDF), a new instrument designed to allocate billions of Euros for industrial research and technology projects, was launched.<sup>41</sup> On June 23, 2017, the European Council officially launched the PESCO process, an institutional mechanism that ensures the cooperation of the Member States that have made binding military commitments to one another, as outlined in Article 42 (6) of the Lisbon Treaty.<sup>42</sup>

The most remarkable of the EU's current initiatives to improve its defense capacity are PESCO, the EDF and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defense (CARD).<sup>43</sup> The EU countries' inadequate defense spending must somehow be overcome, but the real problems lie in the fragmented structure of the European defense market and its inefficient defense industry.

European countries collectively spend more than \$280 billion on defense annually, which, if Europe were a single country, would make it the second largest defense spending in the world after the U.S. Europe's 1.8 million military personnel outnumber the 1.3 million military personnel under the command of the U.S.<sup>44</sup> However, it would not be reasonable to consider Europe in this way. The European Commission stated that the deficit of cooperation between Member States in the field of security and defense is estimated to cost between €25 billion and €100 billion every year, which corresponds to between 9 to 36 percent of overall European military spending. "Investment per soldier" among EU countries is merely one quarter of that of the U.S.<sup>45</sup> The lack of a single market for research, development, procurement, operation and maintenance places a considerable burden on

the EU.<sup>46</sup> An abundance of systems in Europe also makes interoperability difficult. PESCO, EDF and CARD aim to overcome this problem, albeit partly.

PESCO, which was established and launched in 2017, is an EU Treaty-based framework for defense cooperation on capability development or operational projects. The 25 EU Member States participating in PESCO (Denmark and Malta remain outside of PESCO) have agreed to participate in at least one of 34 current projects ranging from common training to development of new capabilities, each led by different member states. The best known PESCO initiative addresses “military mobility,” harmonized procedures and physical infrastructure for the flow of military equipment aiming to introduce something like a “military Schengen area.”<sup>47</sup> PESCO is designed to address an important need at relatively low cost in the framework of the principle of complementing NATO. At present, very few PESCO initiatives envisage investments in hard capabilities or equipment, such as advanced aircraft, vehicles or autonomous weapons systems, which would be the most likely to contribute to European capabilities. For example, the Euroartillery project has only two participants: Italy and Slovakia.

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The EDF is an initiative of the European Commission, the executive body of the EU, to co-finance defense research and development with EU Member States. The EDF is the most innovative and perhaps the most important new EU defense initiative, since it, for the first time, involves EU institutions

directly in the European defense market. Although the financial scale is not large, the EDF represents a potentially significant change in the way in which Europe invests in defense. The EDF, by incentivizing Member States to pool their resources on common defense investments, aims to reduce fragmentation and enhance the efficiency of European defense R&D.

CARD is an updated EU process for evaluating defense spending and capability development trends. CARD is closely related to the Capability Development Plan (CPD), the EU’s annual statement of defense planning priorities. Both the CPD and CARD reports are products of the European Defense Agency (EDA), an intergovernmental EU agency. CARD aims to link EU defense planning to PESCO and the EDF. By measuring progress toward the goals set out in the CPD, CARD potentially calls upon countries to consider PESCO options for further cooperation, and EDF as a potential funding source.<sup>48</sup>

While all these developments were taking place, French President Emmanuel Macron proposed a European Intervention Initiative (E2I), which was supposed to provide the EU with a high level of capacity for military crisis management.<sup>49</sup> Introduced in a speech by the President at the Sorbonne in September 2017, the initiative is designed to enhance European integration and develop the concept of European sovereignty as an alternative to national sovereignty. The aim of the initiative is to respond to crises in regions near Europe's borders without NATO (or the U.S.). Macron's aim is to keep the UK within the European defense system, even after Brexit. The initiative in question is supported by Angela Merkel as well. As a matter of fact, E2I has originated from the need for a new approach due to the EU's failure to meet its defense objectives and to improve its military capabilities.<sup>50</sup> The initiative appears as a coalition that will respond rapidly to potential crises outside the EU. This new initiative was developed outside the CSDP framework.

The EU-NATO Joint Declaration of 2018 called for rapid progress in four key areas: 1) military mobility; 2) counter-terrorism; 3) strengthening resilience to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear-related risks (CBRN); and 4) Women, Peace and Security (WPS).<sup>51</sup> In addition, the member states of both institutions endorsed the cooperative process at the institutional level, stressing the necessity to strengthen the political dialogue between the two institutions. In parallel, progress reports are published regularly to maintain the momentum of cooperation.<sup>52</sup>

Both the EU and NATO are institutions through which European states can engage in European defense-industrial cooperation. Both organizations embody a unique set of institutional tools with which to manage issues such as the high and rising costs of concerning defense procurement, technological innovation, defense R&D, standardization, multinational capability programs and interoperability.<sup>53</sup> Both NATO and EU members support defense-industrial cooperation, but their methods of support differ.

In practical terms, the two institutions have tangibly improved cooperation in a number of areas as a result of this process. Three levels of cooperation can be identified. First, political dialogue between the NATO Secretary General (SG) and the Deputy Secretary General on the one hand and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and European Commissioners on the other has become a standard practice. Second, specifically, points of contact have been identified, and staff-to-staff dialogue has facilitated exchanges and information-sharing. Cross-briefings on issues of mutual interest (under one of the seven areas of cooperation) take

place frequently and representatives from each institution participate in the meetings of the counterpart organization.<sup>54</sup> Third, the two institutions have made progress in their operational cooperation in thematic areas such as hybrid threats, military mobility, cyber security and cyber defense, and on the ground when they deploy missions simultaneously, as is the case in Iraq and in the Mediterranean Sea. This cooperation not only prevents any possible conflict between the two institutions, but also ensures information exchange and policy coordination.

Among other notable instances of progress are the implementation of a “Technical Arrangement on Cyber Defense,” a coordinated response to high profile cyber threats like WannaCry and active cooperation in the field between NATO’s Operation Sea Guardian and EUNAVFOR Operation Sophia. The European Commission agreed to contribute €2 million to NATO’s Building Integrity Trust Fund, and NATO has collaborated with the European Defense Agency on the procurement of a European multinational fleet of multirole tanker–transport (MRTT) aircraft.<sup>55</sup> NATO and EU officials continue to coordinate their respective defense planning processes.<sup>56</sup>

Recently, the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic has made the need for complementarity among security providers more vital than ever. In terms of the future of NATO-EU cooperation, it is expected that cooperation and coordination between these two security actors will mitigate the devastating and widespread impact of the pandemic. So far, COVID-19 has created new challenges for transatlantic cooperation. As a matter of fact, the COVID-19 agenda for EU-NATO cooperation includes civil-military cooperation.<sup>57</sup>

**In terms of the future of NATO-EU cooperation, it is expected that cooperation and coordination between these two security actors will mitigate the devastating and widespread impact of the pandemic.**

Strategic communication and combating hybrid threats have already been identified as areas of EU-NATO cooperation.<sup>58</sup> In particular, military support services for civilian structures, military contributions to resilience-building and improvement of civilian and disaster protection are on the EU-NATO agenda.<sup>59</sup> This could trigger a new momentum for closer EU-NATO cooperation.

As can be seen, the EU countries, for the sake of complementarity, strive to strengthen their military capabilities and capacities in order to make up for shortages, or to cover the gaps between NATO and the EU. Aside from organizational arrangements to enhance cooperation between the two insti-

tutions, great importance is attached to strategic partnership, and steps are taken to boost it. Despite these efforts, however, the NATO-EU strategic partnership, and more specifically U.S.-European relations, are questioned and the partnership and the future of these relations are debated. In the next section, the permanence of the NATO-EU strategic partnership will be examined.

## Challenges to the Durability of the Security Governance

The transatlantic relationship is undoubtedly going through turbulent times, sharpening concerns over the future of NATO-EU relations. U.S. relations with many EU Member States in particular, and the EU in general, are bogged down in disagreement on issues ranging from the future of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (also known as the Iran nuclear deal) to the possibility of imposing new tariffs on specific goods traded between the two sides. In this context, the situation of NATO-EU relations is discussed on the political agenda.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated recently, “NATO is the most successful alliance in history,” citing NATO’s ability to change as the main reason for its success.<sup>60</sup> But, he added, “It is not written in stone that this Alliance will last forever.”<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the potential failure of the resilient Alliance stems from the founding conditions of its formation;<sup>62</sup> when these conditions change, the Alliance’s existence will be thrown into question.

NATO was busy deterring the Soviet threat throughout the Cold War.<sup>63</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Alliance virtually reinvented itself and managed to survive, undertaking new tasks. In this context, it helped Eastern Europe go through its political and economic transition period in a stable manner and conducted out-of-area operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan and the African Horn. Following Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO once again concentrated on deterrence activities. Today, NATO simultaneously conducts its activities in the fields of collective defense (Article 5 of NATO Treaty),<sup>64</sup> deterrence and crisis management. For an international security organization, this is not an easy task.

When NATO was founded in 1949, there were 12 founding members. Now in its 72<sup>nd</sup> year, it has 30 members. Some of the Central and Eastern European states (Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia) that later joined the Alliance were former members of an alliance against NATO, the Warsaw Pact. Even the former Soviet Union republics (Estonia,



Latvia and Lithuania) chose to join the alliance. All these additions point to NATO's appeal. North Macedonia joined the Alliance in 2020, as its most recent member.<sup>65</sup>

Despite NATO's ability to adapt itself to new conditions, including its expansion, in 2012, then U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates warned the Europeans about a "dim and bleak future" for NATO if imbalances within the Alliance were to persist.<sup>66</sup> The 2012 Strategic Guidance proclaimed that the U.S. had turned its face to Asia,<sup>67</sup> and the strategic non-prioritization of Europe on the part of the U.S. has continued to today. NATO's political dimension cannot be separated from military burden-sharing. Indeed, military burden-sharing has become a litmus test for the U.S. to continue its support for NATO.

Discourses questioning the future of the NATO Alliance are resounding in Europe as well. For example, in 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron called for the creation of a "true European army."<sup>68</sup> The U.S. is disturbed by Macron's emphasis on a European Army and "strategic autonomy." The Europeans' efforts to boost their own defense capabilities may strengthen the NATO Alliance, but there are also concerns that these efforts could undermine it.

Soon afterward, Angela Merkel, in her address to the European Parliament in November 2018, said, "It's simply true that the times when we could fully rely on others have ended."<sup>69</sup> On January 22, 2019, Germany and France signed a treaty on mutual security (similar to Article 5<sup>70</sup> of the NATO Treaty and Article 42 (7)<sup>71</sup> of the Treaty on European Union), concretizing their wish to lead a defense policy independent from NATO—and even from the EU.<sup>72</sup>

In fact, neither European defense cooperation nor transatlantic burden-sharing are new issues. European countries have historically considered the integration of security and defense in 'high politics' more difficult when compared to other problematic areas. In the meantime, the U.S. has historically sent mixed signals, promptly demanding more of Europe but unwilling to give up leadership. It encouraged Europe to develop its defense capabilities on the one hand, but resisted its proposals for doing so on the other. The U.S., while actively encouraging the EU to develop serious military capacity, also worried that such capacity might lead to Europe being on the same level with the U.S.<sup>73</sup>

The formula for U.S. policy toward certain European defense efforts gained an unforgettable expression in the late 1990s as the "3 D's:" no

decoupling [of transatlantic security], no duplication [of NATO], and no discrimination [against non-EU NATO allies].<sup>74</sup> Americans and Europeans agree—as both have acknowledged in the EU Global Strategy and NATO’s Wales Pledge on Defense Investment<sup>75</sup>—that Europe is insufficiently capable in matters of defense. Despite the discourse that cloaks NATO as an alliance of equal sovereign states with a consensus-based decision-making mechanism, the reality is that all NATO members have actually managed to maintain collective security under the nuclear umbrella of the U.S. In other words, the security of the NATO alliance has been ensured by the nuclear umbrella provided by a single member state, the U.S. In fact, the European allies already have doubts whether they can defend themselves against Russia without the U.S. The combined GDP of NATO’s European members is 10 times greater than Russia’s, and their collective military spending is more than 3.5 times that of Russia.<sup>76</sup> However, Russia’s nuclear warheads outnumber those of NATO’s European members thirteen to one.<sup>77</sup> Of the European allies, only France and Britain possess nuclear weapons. After the U.S. withdrawal from the INF Treaty in 2019, European allies must choose to either buy missiles or develop their own.

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In this respect, PESCO might be the only umbrella under which the European states embrace cooperation and integration to achieve all capability targets set for NATO and the EU. This is what the members of PESCO stated in the Notification on PESCO of November 13, 2017, by which they declared their intention to launch the initiative. According to the notification, ‘A long-term vision of PESCO could be to arrive at a coherent full spectrum force package—in complementarity with NATO, which will continue to be the cornerstone of collective defense for its members.’<sup>78</sup> PESCO’s first list of projects indicates that in practice, it serves both the EU and NATO, although this is not explicitly stated.

The military mobility project is a key example. The project, by tackling both procedural obstacles and infrastructure problems (such as roads and bridges that are unsuitable for heavy military vehicles), aims to facilitate the movement of armed forces across the EU. At one time, NATO was

in charge of such projects, but after the end of the Cold War, the existing mechanisms were neither updated nor extended to new allies in Central and Eastern Europe. Even though the primary objective is to boost the capacity for rapid response in the context of collective defense, today, the EU is much better placed to assume this responsibility. The project has therefore been welcomed by NATO and the U.S. The Euroartillery project is another example. This capability, which aims to develop a new mobile precision artillery platform, is undoubtedly appropriate for the type of high-intensity operations that, at least until now, European states have conducted through NATO or through ad hoc coalitions rather than the EU.<sup>79</sup>

Then President Trump threatened that the U.S. would go its own way if other NATO countries did not increase their military spending to the desired level and if they abstain from sharing the financial burden of the alliance. He also said the option of pulling his country out of NATO is on the table.<sup>80</sup> Despite Trump's statements, the U.S. Congress gives full support to NATO.<sup>81</sup> Likewise, the American public's support to NATO has increased in recent years.<sup>82</sup> In addition, in recent years, the U.S. increased its defense spending by 40% in regard to its military presence in Europe through funds aimed at the European Deterrence Initiative, and dispatched more equipment and troops to Europe.<sup>83</sup>

European public opinion, except that of Turkey and Greece, is also favorable toward the Alliance.<sup>84</sup> The North Atlantic Council continues to take important decisions in its meetings.<sup>85</sup> The establishment of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, the deployment of combat-ready multinational battle groups in Poland and three Baltic States and the 'Four 30s' initiative<sup>86</sup> are among the examples of NATO's self-adaptation against the threats it identifies. A new NATO headquarters was recently built in Brussels. In late 2018 and early 2019, NATO tested its capabilities in Exercise Trident Juncture, its biggest since the end of the Cold War.<sup>87</sup> On February 1, 2019, the U.S. withdrew from the INF Treaty, which banned land-based ballistic missiles with ranges of 500–1,000 kilometers, in response to Russia's alleged violations of the Treaty. NATO supported the U.S. reaction. It can be concluded in the light of these data that there exists a consensus in the transatlantic community regarding the continuity of the NATO alliance.

At the Munich Security Conference in 2019, German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen affirmed that NATO remains "the first choice for our security" and said, "it is more than a military alliance." She stated that the existence of NATO strengthens the sovereignty of the members, and acknowledged the U.S. demand for higher defense spending from Euro-

pean partners: “We Europeans need to throw more weight in.” In response to calls from the U.S., Von der Leyen called upon all NATO members to spend at least 2% of their economic output on defense, and pointed out the increase in European defense spending. At the same time, she underlined Europe’s efforts toward its own common defense policy, and said, “Europe has finally made its way towards a European Defense Union, which also includes a strengthening of NATO.”<sup>88</sup> French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian praised Europe’s contribution to NATO as “strong;” referring to recent European initiatives such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defense Fund, he said that the EU had “created considerable European capabilities” within NATO, and added that the aim of the Europeans should be “to become more and more full within the transatlantic alliance.”<sup>89</sup> Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz, too, spoke in favor of reinforcing European defense capabilities as long as there is no duplication. He said, “When it comes to synergies in NATO, that is fine,” but he warned that if that means independence from NATO, “we will have problems.” He added “We need an American presence in Europe.”<sup>90</sup> Likewise, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini stated that more EU “strategic autonomy” and transatlantic cooperation were “two sides of the same coin.”<sup>91</sup> Then President Trump said that he would like to see NATO members pay more than 2% of their gross domestic product for defense. Reiterating that the U.S. pays 4.3% of its GDP to NATO, he called upon the alliance governments to increase defense spending to 4% of their GDP.<sup>92</sup>

Clearly, discourses about the sustainability of the Alliance and the EU’s need for “autonomous action” capacity have brought the nature and future of transatlantic relations onto the agenda. The 2016 European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) pointed to the EU’s need to deepen its partnership with NATO, while at the same time emphasizing the Union’s strategic autonomy. The term ‘strategic autonomy’ itself indicates the EU’s wish to boost its defense capacity. Yet there is no consensus among Europeans on what the concept of strategic autonomy means. Autonomy may refer to non-dependence (e.g. self-sufficiency to conduct military operations), but it may also imply ‘separation.’ Accordingly, the concept is argued in countries with particularly strong views on relations with the U.S.<sup>93</sup> Nonetheless, most Europeans see autonomy as fully compatible with NATO;<sup>94</sup> at

**Clearly, discourses about the sustainability of the Alliance and the EU’s need for “autonomous action” capacity have brought the nature and future of transatlantic relations onto the agenda.**

the discourse level, it is frequently voiced that NATO in particular and transatlantic relations in general play central role in the security of the alliance members, and are vital. European allies will not be able to withdraw from NATO unless the EU countries reach a clear consensus on the CSDP. Thus, given the practical developments described above, it can be foreseen that NATO will continue to exist.

## Concluding Remarks

In this study examining the NATO-EU strategic partnership in terms of complementarity from a security governance perspective, it is argued that if one disregards the rhetoric, the practice reveals the existence of elements of security governance. In essence, these two institutions either functionally complement each other or, in cases where the other is not present and common interests (or a shared goal) are at stake, one of the partners takes on a task.

In order to take the concept of ‘strategic autonomy’ beyond rhetoric, the EU must provide a high level of coordination among its Member States and achieve an integrated defense capacity. This rhetoric points out the EU’s capability to engage in high-intensity military operations with minimal assistance from the U.S., but there are factors to overcome before the achievement of strategic autonomy. The most prominent of these factors are the permanence of the nationalist perspective of the EU Member States in the field of defense and significant differences in their strategic culture. Without the UK, Europeans appear less fragmented than in the past, but they have a very long way to go before they are considered close to a common defense policy. Aside from these, there are varying opinions among EU Member States on whether or not to integrate in the field of defense, and what percentage of their GDP the defense budget should be. Some Europeans see common defense as an unnecessary duplication of NATO. It seems that the persistence of differences in the EU Member States’ strategic culture as well as in their institutional preferences (whether NATO or the EU) will continue to hamper Europe’s ambition in regard to defense.

Even though they have triggered debates at the discourse level, U.S. criticisms concerning burden-sharing and the EU’s calls for (strategic) autonomy (and PESCO and E2I) in fact strengthen the defense capabilities of both institutions, since they have led to an increased defense capacity in practice. A stronger EU will make NATO stronger as well. This will also serve the EU to complement NATO and allow it to act separately from

the U.S. In both cases, security governance will solidify throughout the existence of shared values and shared goals. Neither NATO nor the EU can cope with all security threats on their own. Therefore, some form of complementarity is needed between the two institutions. Recently, the struggle against COVID-19 has made this need more urgent.

Indeed, such a complementarity is inevitable, as neither NATO nor the EU can deal with transnational security threats based solely on their own assets and capabilities. The EU and NATO are institutions with different characteristics. NATO is required for hard power applications in terms of its military assets and capabilities, but lacks sufficient soft power applications for political solutions. The EU, unlike NATO, has a wide range of civilian capabilities for implementing stability measures accordingly.

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- 80 “Trump Discussed Pulling U.S. From NATO, Aides Say Amid New Concerns Over Russia,” *The New York Times*, January 15, 2019, p. 8.
- 81 In the U.S. Congress, both Republicans and Democrats support the NATO alliance. In July 2018, the U.S. Senate voted 97 to 2 to reaffirm American support for NATO. In January 2019, the House of Representatives voted 357 to 22 in support of the NATO Support Act. The Bill prohibits the use of funds to withdraw the U.S. from NATO. See NATO Support Act, HR 676 RDS, January 23, 2019.
- 82 64% of respondents who participated in the survey were in favor of NATO. This percentage was 49% in 2015. See Moira Fagan, “NATO is Seen Favorably in Many Member Countries, But Almost Half of Americans Say it Does Too Little,” *Pew Research Center*, July 9, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/09/nato-is-seen-favorably-in-many-member-countries-but-almost-half-of-americans-say-it-does-too-little> (Accessed December 12, 2020). Another survey showed that more Americans than at any point since polling began in 1974 favor increasing their country’s commitment. See “America Engaged,” *Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, October 2, 2018, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/lcc/america-engaged> (Accessed December 8, 2020).
- “2019 European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) Fact Sheet,” <https://www.taxpayer.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/TCS-Factsheet-EDI.pdf> (Accessed December 6, 2020).
- 83 Ibid.

- 84 Fagan, “NATO is Seen Favorably in Many Member Countries.”
- 85 See particularly NATO’s Wales Summit 2014, Warsaw Summit 2016, and Brussels Summit 2018.
- 86 NATO Defense Ministers decided to launch a Readiness Initiative, a costly initiative also known as “Four 30s” to ensure that, by 2020, the allies will have 30 mechanized battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 combat vessels ready within 30 days or less. In this context, they also decided to create two new commands in Norfolk, Virginia and another new command for support and logistics in Ulm, Germany for ensuring rapid movement of forces. See Jonathan Hill, “NATO-Ready for Anything?” *NATO Review*, January 24, 2019, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2019/01/24/nato-ready-for-anything/index.html> (Accessed December 8, 2020).
- 87 50,000 personnel took place in the Trident Juncture 2018 exercise in Norway. See “Trident Juncture 2018,” *NATO*, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/157833.htm> (Accessed August 8, 2019).
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- 89 Ibid.
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- 93 Jolyon Howorth, *Strategic Autonomy: Why it’s Not About Europe Going it Alone*, Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2019, p. 17.
- 94 Ulrike Franke & Tara Varma, “Independence Play: Europe’s Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy,” *ECFR*, July 2019, [https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/scorecard/independence\\_play\\_europes\\_pursuit\\_of\\_strategic\\_autonomy](https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/scorecard/independence_play_europes_pursuit_of_strategic_autonomy) (Accessed December 10, 2020).