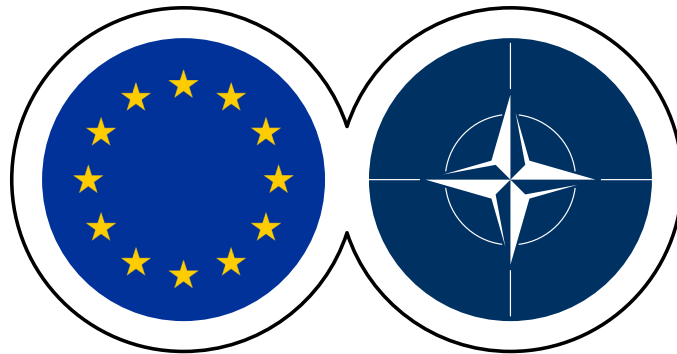


# NATO-EU Relations

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## 1. PREFACE

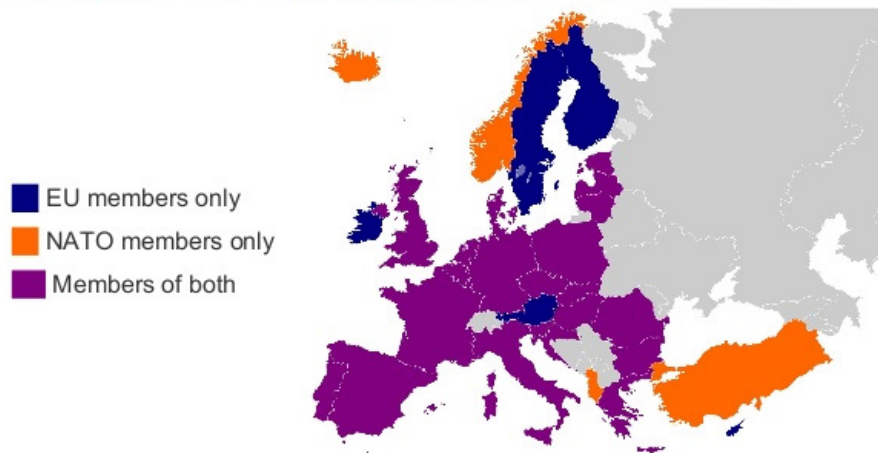
This background report (BGR for short) is supposed to introduce you, the reader, to the topic of NATO-EU relations. It is not to be considered an exhaustive or comprehensive work on this topic but rather a summary of the most essential information. You are highly recommended to not stop your research by reading this document (more on that in the last chapter of this BGR), especially for the purposes of writing a high-quality position paper. Seeing that this might seem like an overwhelming task at first, the questions included in the penultimate chapter of this BGR are designed to help the reader to better grasp the fundamentals and also to show what to concentrate on. In case of any questions or remarks concerning this document, please contact the author at *miroslav.rehounek@amo.cz*

## 2. INTRODUCTION

At first glance, it might seem inconsequential to explore what kind of relations the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation might have as they share a majority of member states and common values at that. However, upon closer inspection, it becomes clearer that this does not simplify the situation due to overlapping interests and agendas of both organisations. And perhaps most importantly, the fact that one organisation is strictly intergovernmental, demanding a consensus of all of its member states, while the other operates

supranationally, does not help either (although foreign relations and defence matters require unanimity)<sup>1</sup>.

### European membership of the EU and NATO



Picture 1: An overview of NATO and EU member states<sup>48</sup> (based on the time of you reading this, imagine North Macedonia being orange)

## 3. DEVELOPMENT

For the sake of brevity, this BGR will begin its description of the history of NATO-EU relations in the last decades of the 20th century as the collapse of the Soviet Union provides a convenient starting point for our discussion. Going any further upstream would disproportionately increase the amount of context needed to understand this relation.

With the fall of NATO's biggest rival and its satellites in eastern Europe, many considered NATO obsolete given that the reason for its establishment was deterrence and, if necessary, defense against this very rival. Shortly after that, with the eruption of what would later be called the wars in the Balkans, many European states wanted the EU to become an actor with a military force and structure capable of dealing with crises in its neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup> These 2 factors led to a blurring of the Cold War division of competences and roles.

### 3.1 Creating an official framework

The foundations for the relations between NATO and EU were laid in 1992 when the members of the Western European Union adopted the *Petersberg tasks*. Essentially, the

member states of the WEU agreed to allocate their troops and resources under the authority of the WEU in a wide range of situations like peacekeeping missions, interventions, humanitarian and rescue tasks, etc. Following up on this, a NATO ministerial meeting in Berlin in 1996 agreed that the WEU should oversee the creation of a European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) within NATO structures, a so-called European pillar of NATO.<sup>3</sup> This was done mainly to prevent duplication of command structures and military assets.

At the turn of the 21st century, a process of transferring the tasks of the WEU onto the EU began, transforming the ESDI to the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). With this process complete, the WEU became practically obsolete and

**Western European Union was a defensive alliance of Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands and the United Kingdom founded in 1954. It was gradually integrated into the EU during the last years of the 20th century.**

was officially dissolved in 2011 as a result of the Lisbon Treaty coming into effect.<sup>4</sup>

The relations between EU and NATO were institutionalized in 2001 with a joint NATO-EU council.<sup>5</sup> A very important step towards cooperation between these two organisations came in 2003 when the so-called Berlin Plus agreement came into effect. This series of arrangements enabled the EU to use NATO planning capabilities for EU-led missions, facilitated the exchange of classified information and also showed promising signs for future cooperation as NATO agreed to incorporate the EU's needs into its defense planning.<sup>6</sup> In effect, the Alliance can provide its structures and assets to support EU-led operations in which NATO decides not to engage while preventing duplications.

### 3. 2 Examples of early cooperation

A promising consequence of the Berlin Plus Agreements was the first joint operation of NATO and the EU named Concordia<sup>7</sup> to Macedonia in 2003, which replaced NATO-led Operation Allied Harmony. Following up on this, NATO also ended its mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (SFOR) and transferred its tasks onto the EU which established Operation EUFOR Althea in 2004.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, NATO and the EU cooperate to this day in Kosovo with NATO in charge of the KFOR<sup>9</sup> peacekeeping mission and the EU leading the EULEX Mission focused on supporting the authorities of Kosovo in the rule of law area.<sup>10</sup> However, this cooperation is not based on Berlin Plus and as such has more of an informal character than the aforementioned missions.

NATO and EU maintained cooperation outside Europe as well. An example would be Afghanistan, where the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and later Resolute Support (RS) mission was complemented by the EU-led EUPOL mission whose goal was to train the Afghan police. This EUPOL mission was terminated in 2016.<sup>11</sup> Another example of cooperation would be the complementary anti-piracy efforts of both organisations in the Horn of Africa region.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. 3 Slowing down of progress

Despite a promising start for the EU-NATO cooperation, progress in this area pretty much came to a halt in the early 2010s.<sup>13</sup> One of the reasons for this was (and is) the continuous dispute between Cyprus and Turkey, both a solely EU and NATO member respectively with Cyprus blocking Turkey from joining EU led missions and conversely Turkey effectively banning Cyprus from participating in joint EU-NATO meetings<sup>14</sup> by blocking the attempts of Cyprus to join NATO's Partnership for Peace Programme, a prerequisite for taking part in such meetings. This seemingly minor

setback proved to be incredibly problematic in relation to potential greater exchange of information between the EU and NATO. At the same time, the EU also changed its focus from military aspects of security towards a more comprehensive approach which aimed at addressing the causes and consequences of conflicts as well as resolving them peacefully through diplomatic means.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. 4 Revival of efforts

The 2014 Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea changed the situation. European countries were forced to react to the developments both on its eastern (Russia) and southern border (irregular migration) as well as by threats that were not dependent on geography (cyber attacks and hybrid threats in general).<sup>16</sup> NATO's purpose suddenly seemed relevant again and a new impetus for higher military spending of its member states was reaffirmed during the summits of 2014 in Wales<sup>17</sup> and of 2016 in Warsaw.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, the EU began to pay more attention to its own security as opposed to external crisis management. This was more than clear from the 2016 EU's Global Strategy which states that: "*The EU needs to be strengthened as a security community: European security and defence efforts should enable the EU to act autonomously while also contributing to and undertaking actions in cooperation with NATO.*"<sup>19</sup> The Strategy was also complemented by new instruments designed to deepen the cooperation between EU member states like Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO),<sup>20</sup> Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD)<sup>21</sup> and European Defense Fund (EDF)<sup>22</sup>.

In the same year, a Joint Declaration of NATO and EU representatives was signed. This document contains **a set of 74 actions designed to improve cooperation in 7 areas including hybrid threats, cyber security or operational cooperation including that at sea.**<sup>23</sup> A third important milestone of 2016 was NATO's commitment to assist FRONTEX (European border and coast guard agency) in the Aegean Sea to "*crack down on human trafficking and criminal networks fueling this crisis.*"<sup>24</sup> Although NATO was active even before in the region, this announcement meant "*direct links with Frontex at the operational and tactical levels.*"<sup>25</sup> NATO also reinforced its presence in the Central Mediterranean to help EU's Operation Sophia.<sup>26</sup> Again, NATO was already active here with its operation Active Endeavour and this was only more the case after 2016 with NATO's new operation Sea Guardian.<sup>27</sup>

The EU-NATO Joint Declaration was followed up by another in June 2018, "calling for swift and demonstrable progress in implementation".<sup>28</sup> This declaration mentions 3 especially important actions that are already being implemented:<sup>29</sup>

- » Maritime cooperation in the Mediterranean;
- » Increased ability to respond to hybrid threats through information exchange, coordinated exerci-

ses and confronting disinformation;

- » Support of defence and security capacity of our neighbours to the East and to the South.

More importantly, the declaration states that both organisations will aim for swift and demonstrable progress particularly in:

- » Military mobility;
- » Counter-terrorism;
- » Strengthening resilience to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear-related risks;
- » Promoting the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

The first point was further reiterated just a day after as a part of NATO's Summit, where there was talk of "unprecedented progress being made in NATO-EU cooperation, including on military mobility."<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. Current situation

At the time of writing this BGR (June 2019), the 74 actions from the first Brussels Joint Declaration of 2016 are still being implemented and as such, they are the focal point of NATO-EU cooperation. 7 areas of cooperation were defined, namely:

- » Hybrid threats
- » Operation cooperation including maritime issues
- » Cyber security
- » Defence capabilities
- » Defence industry and research
- » Exercises
- » Capacity building

Below is a brief description of 2 of these areas that appear to be the most pressing for both organisations and their member states and which also provide the biggest room for further initiatives, namely countering hybrid threats and strengthening European defence capabilities.

#### 4. 1 Countering hybrid threats

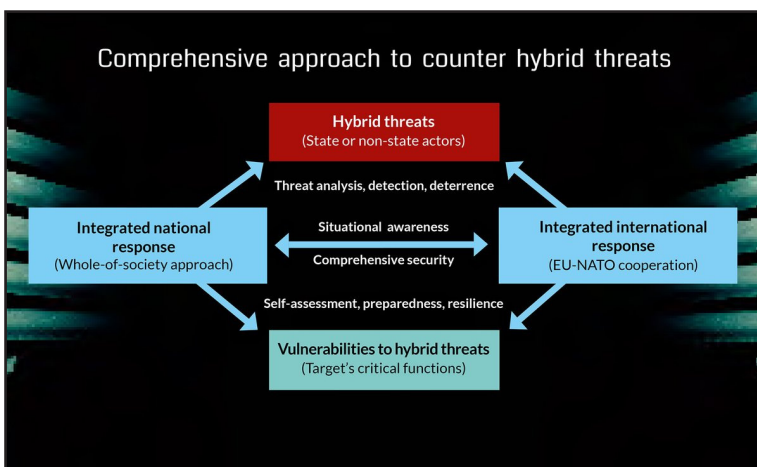
This area comprised almost 20 of the total 74 actions set out for implementation and as such sits atop the priority list of both organisations, at least in terms of their cooperation.

Perhaps a bit paradoxically, the concept of a "hybrid threat" is not clearly defined and universally agreed upon. The European Commission defines hybrid threats as: "mixture of coercive and subversive activity, conventional and non-conventional methods (i.e. diplomatic, military, economic, technological), which can be used in a coordinated manner by state or non-state actors to achieve specific objectives while remaining below the threshold of formally declared warfare"<sup>31</sup>

Both organisations have established institutions to counter these threats. For instance, the EU created the East Strategic Communications Tasks Force, which is specifically tackling disinformation by communicating EU's policies better and disproving misinformation.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, NATO has the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Estonia since 2008 focused primarily on...well cyber-defence.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, there exists the Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Riga since 2014, serving similar purposes as its EU counterpart.<sup>34</sup> In 2018, NATO has also established counter hybrid support teams that can be sent in support of the authorities of a stricken nation.

A common project of both organisations is the think tank European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (COE) established in 2017.<sup>35</sup> As an independent entity, COE falls neither under the authority of NATO nor the EU and thus plays a unique role in terms of NATO-EU cooperation. It can also be seen as one of the most concrete examples of cooperation to counter hybrid threats. Rather than a task force dedicated to counter hybrid threats directly by for instance, fighting disinformation, COE is more of a think tank whose job is to "to focus on the phenomenon itself.

*We're not pinpointing individual targets or companies or actors. It's not about an individual case. It's about identifying the pattern."*<sup>36</sup> The Centre is responsible for organising meetings and exercises to "share best practices on issues such as legal resilience, maritime and harbour safety, energy networks or drones and election interference."<sup>37</sup> Given the fact that the Centre is based in Helsinki, it can draw upon the experiences of Finland and the Baltic states which already suffered from hybrid attacks in the past, in turn proposing new legislation to implement in other member states. Though COE demonstrates just how well the EU and NATO can cooperate, there are concerns about to what extent this approach to hybrid threats will prove useful, pointing out its "bureaucratic approach to a non-bureaucratic problem"<sup>38</sup>



Picture 2: A conceptual overview of EU-NATO approach for countering hybrid threats<sup>49</sup>

NATO and the EU also cooperated in fighting disinformation with regular information exchange and coordination of efforts, especially in the regions of Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. For instance, the Task Force East „EUvsDisinfo.eu“ webpage and EU social media accounts are used to raise awareness about pro-Kremlin disinformation regarding NATO.<sup>39</sup>

## 4. 2 Strengthening European defence capabilities

Despite initial ambitious steps towards strategic autonomy declared way back in the Saint-Malo Declaration of 1998 which can be seen as the birth of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP),<sup>40</sup> Europe has remained reliant on the United States in terms of their defence even in spite of continuous rhetorical ambitions for “European strategic autonomy” such as: *“We will take responsibility foremost in Europe and its surrounding regions, while pursuing targeted engagement further afield. We will act globally to address the root causes of conflict and poverty, and to champion the indivisibility and universality of human rights.”*<sup>41</sup>

Contrary to how the US reacted towards European efforts to create an autonomous “European pillar” within NATO during the last years of the 20th century, the United States of today have assumed an almost diametrically opposing approach with statements like that of the contemporary president of USA Donald Trump which hint that European allies should start paying for their own defence<sup>42</sup> (while at the same time criticising EU initiatives like PESCO and EDF).<sup>43</sup> The increasing multipolarity of our world forces the US to shift its focus elsewhere, and the resources now expended on Europe’s defence will very likely shift with it. The Americans expect Europe to take care of its own defense (ideally by purchasing arms manufactured by US companies) and the Europeans know this well. However, such momentous changes imply certain risks that should be taken note of.

Any expansion of EU’s independent military capabilities carries with it the risk of duplication of command

and operational structures which would in turn lead to a fragmented and potentially incompetent high command with some authority belonging to NATO and other to the EU, yet other to the individual member states. It is for these reasons that propositions such as EU’s own military headquarters were blocked in the past. Though in principle, the EU should have guaranteed access to NATO’s command structures thanks to the Berlin Plus agreement, in practice, NATO decides on a case-by-case basis and it is not that hard to see a NATO member using its veto power to prevent this.<sup>44</sup> A European headquarters known as Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) has existed since 2017 but it is currently limited to non-executive missions (i.e. non-combat, usually training-oriented). MPCC is scheduled to turn into EU Operational Headquarters with its mandate including executive missions up to 2,500 troops by the end of 2020.<sup>45</sup> However, this is largely dependent on UK’s withdrawal from the EU.

NATO and EU are aware of these risks and there are efforts already under way to avoid them wherever possible. There is coordination between the EU’s coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and respective NATO processes such as the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) and the Partnership for Peace Planning and Review Process (PARP) and extensive consultations with individual member states from both organisations.<sup>46</sup> EU and NATO also consult each other in the area of standardisation and related to this, military mobility is being worked by addressing issues such as military requirements as well as transport infrastructure and border crossing legislative and procedural issues.<sup>47</sup>

Although it is hard to speculate how, it is certain that should the European Union thoroughly implement its Global Strategy and reinvigorate its Common Security and Defence Policy, a true European Pillar of NATO would change the dynamics of the whole organisation. On the other hand, the EU might just as well take only small incremental steps towards European strategic autonomy, which would create an appearance of a status quo, while its real consequences would be even harder to predict than in the first case.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The relations between the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation can be described as a complex aggregate of relations of individual countries to each other, combined with differing agendas towards each of the two organisations and the relations of the organisations as independent entities themselves. All of this naturally complicates forming a consensus and consequently cooperation and

although this has to be taken into consideration, *the focus of the upcoming negotiations of the North Atlantic Council should be on formulating a common stance towards the European Union and less so on EU’s inner workings or any individual country.*

Fortunately, a certain division of labour between the organisations as well as a degree of cooperation has been achieved over the years which eliminates overlap and at the



same time facilitates (perhaps even requires) cooperation by each entity. On the other hand, this might easily be seen as a status quo of sorts with none of the big questions being de-

finitely resolved, something which will happen only when (or if) individual member states show the necessary resolution to deal with them.

## 6 FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

These questions can serve you as a guideline for formulating the positions of your countries and by extension for the negotiations overall:

- » Is your country a member of both organisations? Does it aim for the membership in the other one? Why (not)?
- » What is your country's stance on EU's common security policy? If it is an EU member, is your country's government making any efforts to emphasize or expand EU's military role? If so, what role (if any) should be left to NATO?
- » Is your country participating in any EU-led/NATO-EU missions?
- » Is your country an EU member participating in PESCO, CARD or EDF? If not, why?
- » Which of the 7 areas of the NATO-EU Joint Declaration is your country most concerned with? Is there an important area missing in the declaration according to your country? Why (not)?
- » Is your country opposed to any of the 74 actions undertaken? What sort of new propositions would your country suggest/support? Is it satisfied with the progress thus made?
- » What efforts did your country make or has set out to make in countering hybrid threats?
- » Is your country strengthening its own military capabilities? Did it set out to meet the 2% GDP criterion? Why (not)?
- » Is your country working to expand Euroatlantic military capabilities in other (not national) ways like joint armaments or military research and development projects?

## 7 RECOMMENDED READING

The official NATO website would probably come to your mind anyway but it is a good place to gain basic understanding as well as find topics for further research:

[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49217.htm#](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49217.htm#)

The aforementioned joint declaration of both organisations from 2016 is also a rather obvious way to gain more information on the cooperation between NATO and the EU:

[https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2016\\_07/20160708\\_160708-joint-NATO-EU-declaration.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160708_160708-joint-NATO-EU-declaration.pdf)

Guess what, there are actually two joint declarations, this one from 2018:

[https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/36096/nato\\_eu\\_final\\_eng.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/36096/nato_eu_final_eng.pdf)

Regular progress reports concerning the progress on the 74 actions are issued, based on the time that you are reading this, try to find the newest one (they are released semiannually):

[https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2019\\_06/190617-4th-Joint-progress-report-EU-NATO-eng.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/190617-4th-Joint-progress-report-EU-NATO-eng.pdf)

A thought-provoking essay discussing the future roles of NATO and EU and the interested parties:

<http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2017/05/SPB85.pdf?type=pdf>

A report discussing the extension of European defence capabilities and its consequences for NATO (and the Czech Republic, should that interest you):

[https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/AMO\\_Budovani-obrannych-kapacit-EU-a-delici-linie-uvnitri-NATO\\_1.pdf](https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/AMO_Budovani-obrannych-kapacit-EU-a-delici-linie-uvnitri-NATO_1.pdf)

An in-depth report dealing with the NATO-EU relations, providing a historical overview as well as reflections on the future of NATO-EU cooperation:

[https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2018/ICDS\\_Report\\_A\\_New\\_Era\\_of\\_EU-NATO.pdf](https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2018/ICDS_Report_A_New_Era_of_EU-NATO.pdf)

A massive official source of information on any topic related to NATO, including the European Union:

<http://www.natolibguides.info/?b=s>

A detailed article describing the cooperation of NATO and the EU to counter hybrid threats:

<https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2018/Also-in-2018/cooperating-to-counter-hybrid-threats/EN/index.htm>



## RESOURCES







- 1 Qualified Majority Voting in Common Foreign and Security Policy is hotly debated. 3 initial areas where QMV could be applied are human rights promotion, EU sanctions and launching civilian missions - [https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-18-5683\\_en.htm](https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-5683_en.htm)
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## Pražský studentský summit

Pražský studentský summit je unikátní vzdělávací projekt existující od roku 1995. Každoročně vzdělává přes 300 studentů středních i vysokých škol o současných globálních tématech, a to především prostřednictvím simulace jednání tří klíčových mezinárodních organizací – OSN, NATO a EU.

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## Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky (AMO)

AMO je nevládní nezisková organizace založená v roce 1997 za účelem výzkumu avzdělávání v oblasti mezinárodních vztahů. Tento přední český zahraničně politický think-tank není spjat s žádnou politickou stranou ani ideologií. Svou činností podporuje aktivní přístup k zahraniční politice, poskytuje nestrannou analýzu mezinárodního dění a otevírá prostor k fundované diskusi.

## Miroslav Řehounek

Autor je spolupracovníkem Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky a členem přípravného týmu Pražského studentského summitu.

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