



The construction of the European Defence and its obstacles

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The march of the European Union towards political and military cohesion¹ has faced many obstacles. However, events such as the Brexit² or the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States could play in its favour. The High Representative, Federica Mogherini, argued that in a scenario of global uncertainty, the European Union could earn its keep as security provider, becoming a [superpower](#)³ on the international stage. Up until now, the dream of a *stronger Europe*, which seemed impossible, could reach its turning point: the European foreign and security policy seems ready to re-think its implementation as well as its relationship with NATO.

RELATIONS BETWEEN NATO AND THE EU

NATO and the European Union are two regional powers coexisting in the same region of the world yet belonging to two different regional orders: the binding transatlantic relationship and the growing reality of the European Union. The real struggle of the European Defence construction has always been the combinations these two dimensions which requires avoiding duplication and collision of interests.

In the past, there have been a lot of proposals regarding EU Defence; the terrorist attacks of 2015 and 2016 have increased the need for a unified security structure, thus shedding light on the acute urgency to conclude new agreements⁴ on the European Security and Defence Policy. To this end, a proposition by the High Representative for a EU Global strategy was issued June 2016, itself followed by a EU-NATO Joint Declaration at the Warsaw Summit in July. These documents are complementary and have been implemented through these two months by the Council of the European Union.

THE EU-NATO COOPERATION FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

The Document on the EU Global Strategy "*Shared Vision, Common Strategy: A stronger Europe*" presented in June 2016 is an ambitious one. It claims strategic autonomy and close partnership with NATO. Yet is this a real step forward or an oxymoron?

The section dedicated to Security and Defence underlines the importance of "security at home": it embodies the necessity for a greater cooperation among member states in order to tackle internal threats – an idea

that emerged one year ago with the attacks of Paris and Brussels. The latter demonstrated a lack of communications between the two EU member states involved. In this context, the document mentions the role of a European Border Security – which is in accordance with one of the three priorities of the Council's conclusions, namely, "protecting the Union and its citizens"⁵. The two other priorities "responding to external conflicts and crises" and "building the capacities of partners" are meant to foster coexistence between NATO and the European Union. Europe will pursue an integrated approach complementary to the endeavours of NATO. According to the Document presented in June NATO remains a security provider for countries which are not part of the European Union. Yet for those states that are EU members NATO still represents one of the most important linkage between Europe and the United States.

For its part, the Joint Declaration of Warsaw reinforces the cooperation in various domains, including: shared security know-how, agent training, and cooperation to tackle hybrid threats. The NATO-EU cooperation is understood as a respective process that could strengthen the capabilities of both organisations. In this context,

the missing link is the realization that not every member of these institutions is willing to share their knowledge on cyber-security as well as their capabilities. Indeed, revealing such information is akin to renouncing sovereignty – an unfathomable idea for some. For instance, it would be preposterous to believe that Turkey, member of NATO, will be willing to cooperate along with European member states.

The aspiration of the European Union and its Defence project should not undermine the political will of both EU and non-EU member states.

ARE THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES COMMITTED TO THE EUROPEAN DEFENCE PROJECT?

The commitment of EU member states is crucial to a meaningful enhancement of the European Union's construction. Without their support, the old-established cooperation would become a mere façade. Actually, Europe is divided between pro-NATO countries and pro-EU ones. Hence, the rate of approval for the Defence Union varies according to states; VoteWatch Europe⁶ has showed the consistency of the divergence – the Scandinavian countries are the least supportive of greater EU integration in Defence Policy. In general, EU member states are more likely to accept the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) than the European Headquarters.

The unwillingness of states to cede their sovereignty and to fully commit to the EU Defence Project is also due to the lack of a well-defined EU project. The vision of the EU as a global actor is made of intentions rather than structure. In the absence of a structured organisation even the EU-NATO relationship, though remarkable, seems unsubstantial. The role of European Union should be clarified and determined in order to avoid hybrid structures and to normalize its bond with NATO. Eventually, once the European Union clarifies its role, its member states will be

more likely to provide economic and political support. In this context, the EU-NATO cooperation could be used to bridge EU and non-EU countries.

(ENDNOTES)

1 Starting with the Saint Malo Conference in 1998.

2 The United Kingdom has always been against the idea of a European Defence.

3 Euractiv, *Mogherini calls EU a peace 'superpower', in wake of Trump win*, 10/11/16

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/security/news/mogherini-calls-eu-a-peace-superpower-in-wake-of-trump-win/>

4 Council conclusions on security and defence - Council of the European Union, 14 November 2016

5 Council conclusions on security and defence - Council of the European Union, 14 November 2016

6 Data showed at the Conference "Getting serious on European Defence" held in Brussels on 16 november 2016

<http://www.votewatch.eu/blog/category/insights/>

