



# BULLETIN

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## EU-NATO Partnership and Its Prospects

by Marcin Terlikowski

*The strategic partnership of the EU and NATO has produced rather modest results so far, and its existing formula has been increasingly wearing out. But because of the political situation, no thorough redefinition of mutual relations is possible. A certain potential for change can be found at the technical level of these relations: by expanding on the good practices that have emerged in to-date cooperation between the EU and NATO civilian and military personnel and, where possible, by formalizing these good practices, the two organizations could reinforce their bottom-up collaboration in areas where their interests converge.*

**Relations between the NATO and the European Union.** The political and formal basis for the strategic EU-NATO partnership were laid down at the time when the EU was launching its autonomous European (now: common) security and defence policy (ESDP/CSDP). In a joint declaration of 2002, both parties described their relations as basing on strategic partnership, equality and mutual reinforcement, with due regard for the decision-making autonomy of both organizations and ensuring the fullest involvement of non-NATO member states of the EU as well as non-EU allies in the joint decision-making processes. The declaration was followed in 2003 by the so-called Berlin Plus agreement, setting out the mechanisms for the EU to carry out independent operations—provided, that NATO opts out—using the allied assets and capabilities, including planning capabilities and NATO European command. The agreement also provides for both parties to consult (but only on operations conducted in the Berlin Plus formula) and coordinate the development of their military capabilities.

The Berlin Plus mechanism has been put to use in two EU military operations, of which only one (Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina) is still underway. This operation has been steadily phased out, and once it comes to an end the agreement's formula will have been exhausted. Nevertheless, the Union and the Alliance conduct autonomous operations, often in the same regions (in Afghanistan, Kosovo, off Somali coast), but no formal cooperation is then established, as such operations do not fall under Berlin Plus. For the very same reason, the supreme bodies of the EU and NATO have no grounds on which to tighten up consultations, which could make possible an overall coordination of their operational activities. Meanwhile, a the EU-NATO Capability Group, called into being under the Berlin Plus package, exerts only limited influence on the coordination of both organizations' efforts in the field of developing military capabilities.

Since the beginning, the EU-NATO partnership has been affected by political problems unconnected with the two organizations themselves—the Cyprus issue, where Turkey and Cyprus steadfastly block any closer collaboration between the EU and NATO (as a means of pressing one another), and absence of a consensus among the EU member states on the future lines of the CSDP. Some EU members, e.g. France and Belgium, have invariably promoted a fast development of the EU's security policy, regarding NATO partnership with scepticism and fearing that the Union could be overwhelmed by the Alliance, with its greater military assets and capabilities (for this reason, the concept of 'Berlin Plus à rebours', to make EU assets available to NATO, faced resistance within the EU). Others, including the UK, Greece and smaller Central European countries, do not want the CSDP to gain in importance as a result of tightened-up partnership with NATO, pointing out that the Alliance is the primary vehicle of guaranteeing European security.

In reaction to these problems, low-level cooperation has developed between EU and NATO administrative and military personnel—both formal (e.g. exchange of liaison officers, technical agreements) and informal (e.g. decisions agreed in personal contacts by mission commanders). As a result, parallel operations of the EU and the Alliance exchange information their actions, and EU

personnel gets support from NATO troops in crisis situations (such cooperation was initiated at the grassroots level, mainly in order to increase the security of mission personnel). Some results were also scored with regard to coordination of NATO and EU capability development. Although the Capability Group has no decision-making competences and only serves to exchange information, it did help coordinate programmes to increase the availability of helicopters for NATO and EU operations (which poses a big challenge for both organizations). Contacts have also been growing between the European Defence Agency (EDA) and Allied Command Transformation (ACT), the motive being the savings obtained by avoiding a duplication of capability development programmes, and an intention to increase the complementarity of EU and NATO projects.

**Prospects.** A comprehensive redefinition of the partnership's formula will not be immediately possible, as it would require a durable solution to the Cyprus problem and a consensus within the EU on CSDP development and on the EU's place in the European security architecture. At the same time, conditions favourable to increased cooperation are there, both at the EU and NATO. These include not only the growing requirements for in the field cooperation and coordination of capability development, but also the consolidation of EU administration in the process of European External Action Service (EEAS) formation and a debate on the Alliance's New Strategic Concept. Even though the improvements would be confined to technicalities and have a limited extent, such proposals do emerge in both organizations.

As far as operational cooperation goes, it would be crucial to expand the existing practice of exchange of information between EU and NATO mission commanders about the measures taken and, on this basis, create a model mechanism (formalized, if necessary), available for future use. It would also be important if mutual consultations and coordination of future EU and NATO operations concepts could be made at as early stages as possible, and if a system to exchange information on recognized in-theatre threats could be created. Other proposals are for joint manoeuvres involving EU and NATO staff preparing for missions, a joint research centre to work out the most effective models of civilian-military cooperation, and joint evaluation of the experiences gained from operations.

With regard to capability development, the greatest potential lies in the Capabilities Group, even despite its limitations. Its effectiveness would be improved if it focused on the most relevant detailed problems and if it were more oriented to particular results, such as working out a uniform terminology for military capabilities, identifying overlapping gaps in EU and NATO capabilities, or picking a method to coordinate long-term plans for development of both organizations' assets.

It is not clear which of these proposals could be adopted without an agreement at the political level. Governments' consent would no doubt be required for the most far-reaching improvements. For example, the formalization of EDA-ACT cooperation, seen as a major step forward in coordinating both organizations' capability development, is contingent within the EU on its agreement with Turkey on exchange of confidential information and also on the so-called administrative agreement (opposed by Cyprus), while within NATO it is contingent on Turkey's nod. It is unlikely that these conditions could be met, given the rigidity of Cyprus' and Turkey's positions. Guarded hopes for a change in the two countries' policies have been raised by statements from the NATO Secretary-General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, and the Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, who want to use diplomatic means to prod both countries to accept concessions.

**Conclusions for Poland.** Although unable to influence Cyprus question settlement on its own or break the impasse at the EU over the future lines of the CSDP, Poland should nevertheless propose a cross-sectional, systematic review of the desirable direction and means of strengthening the practical cooperation of EU and NATO bodies and agencies. An audit of this kind, backed by recommendations from practitioners, could help pinpoint the areas where cooperation could be tightened up and indicate possible ways of its formalization, thus helping to identify the goals that can be achieved without political agreements (and ways of pursuing these goals), as well as long-term challenges that are contingent on a solution to political problems.