

# NATO-EU Cooperation to Project Stability

by Andrea Aversano Stabile, Guillaume Lasconjarias  
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## ABSTRACT

In an ever-changing security environment, in which the boundaries between peace, crisis and war are becoming increasingly blurred, the task of projecting stability has acquired prominence on the agendas of both NATO and the EU. Given that, as of today, no international organization owns the tools, awareness and capabilities to assess, treat and ensure a stable environment, undoubtedly there is a need for greater NATO-EU cooperation in projecting stability, particularly in the case of what happens at the borders of Europe. Despite high-level declarations, policy coordination and cooperation between the two organizations remain highly problematic since the respective methods used and strategies adopted have rarely been compatible. The two international entities have usually walked on their own tracks, not succeeding to move from mere coordination to effective cooperation and harmonization of initiatives. Building on these considerations, the present paper aims at highlighting major shortfalls, lessons learned as well as challenges ahead for NATO-EU cooperation in projecting stability. Eventually, one has to identify what old issues make still sense and what new challenges have arisen to further improve NATO-EU cooperation.

*NATO | European Union | Military missions | North Africa | Sahel | Middle East*

**keywords**

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### Introduction

In an ever-changing security environment, in which the boundaries between peace, crisis and war are becoming increasingly blurred, the task of projecting stability has acquired prominence on the agendas of both NATO and the EU. It is not surprising if one recalls that stability has been a core value since the beginning of the Alliance – it was mentioned in the Washington Treaty in 1949, where the Allies stated that they would “contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations [...] by promoting conditions of stability and well-being”.<sup>1</sup> Same goes for the EU, that has developed several tools and instruments to ensure and guarantee stability in partner countries.

However, stability seems at risk in an era of geopolitical shift, with an increasing Russian activism in the Middle East or the difficulty to properly assess the US Foreign Policy – ranging from leaving the Paris agreement on climate change to leaving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) signed with Iran in 2015. In addition, despite the victory over the Islamic State (IS), terrorism in Europe has not diminished with the risk of jihadist terrorists sparking panic among citizens with their random attacks. Moreover, such a threat is sometimes linked – artificially or not – with the waves of refugees and migrants thronging the Mediterranean Sea to escape from this unstable Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Considering the wide range of security challenges, including both state-based and non-state threats as well as issues deriving from the rapid dissemination of information and technological developments, addressing such a complex environment has become increasingly difficult for a single organization. Indeed, as of today, no international organization owns the tools, awareness and capabilities to

<sup>1</sup> See Article 2: NATO, *The North Atlantic Treaty*, Washington, 4 April 1949, [https://www.nato.int/cps/ie/natohq/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ie/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm).

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assess, treat and ensure a stable environment. Complexity and thus, comprehensive approaches have been on several international organizations agendas. Being more specific and considering what happens at the borders of Europe, undoubtedly there is a need for greater NATO-EU cooperation in projecting stability.

In this vein, the enhancement of neighbours' and partners' stability, by supporting "their sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence, as well as their reform efforts" is clearly defined as one of the main NATO-EU common objectives by the joint Declaration issued at the Warsaw Summit in 2016.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, despite high-level declarations, policy coordination and cooperation between the two organizations remain highly problematic. In fact, with specific reference to the European Southern neighbourhood, NATO and the EU have further increased their commitments to guarantee the security of their citizens, but the respective methods used and strategies adopted have rarely been compatible. The two international entities have usually walked on their own tracks, not succeeding to move from mere coordination to effective cooperation and harmonization of initiatives.

Building on these considerations, the present paper aims at highlighting major shortfalls, lessons learned as well as challenges ahead for NATO-EU cooperation in projecting stability. The initial section offers an overview about NATO and EU operations, missions and activities in North Africa, Sahel and Middle East, with a specific focus on Afghanistan. It paves the way for analysing open challenges for NATO-EU cooperation, remarking the need to agree a shared mechanism to detect threats as well as to assess the EU level of ambition in projecting stability, especially in light of recent developments in European defence integration. Eventually, one has to identify what old issues make still sense and what new challenges have arisen to further improve NATO-EU cooperation.

### 1. NATO and the EU: Converging but still divergent slants to tackle instability

The strategic outlook of the Atlantic Alliance started to include the management of new threats, not limited to the long-standing tension between the Western and the Eastern pole, following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. This marked the start of a new era for NATO, which had to build on a new strategy, translated into the (first ever published) Strategic Concepts of 1991 and 1999. Issues such as political turmoil, human rights violations and economic crises gained significance and marked the beginning of Peace Support Operations (PSO) in third countries, whose rationale

<sup>2</sup> EU and NATO, *Joint Declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, Warsaw, 8 July 2016, [https://www.nato.int/cps/de/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133163.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/de/natohq/official_texts_133163.htm).

differed from the one related to collective defence.<sup>3</sup> Significantly, the latter – whilst being still the *raison d'être* of NATO and one of the major inspiration for countries to join the Atlantic Alliance – was slowly marginalized as the Organization went “out of area” in order to not “get out of business”.<sup>4</sup>

The European commitment to crisis management, instead, dates back to the late 1990s, when the participation to Common Defence and Security Policy (CSDP) missions was envisaged as part of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).<sup>5</sup> The first missions were deployed in 2003, when the European Security Strategy (ESS) – a manifesto defining goals and priorities of the EU in a challenging security environment – was launched by the then High Representative Javier Solana.

In line with these developments, the first collaborative efforts between NATO and the EU have been undertaken with the 2003 Berlin Plus arrangement. Through this normative instrument, NATO granted the EU access to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in order to enhance the transparency of the relationship, following frictions between the organizations ahead of the EU’s proposal to build a detached headquarters for planning capability.<sup>6</sup> At the end of the decade, the new 2010 NATO Strategic Concept clearly stated the need for a bilateral and complementary partnership with the EU, especially following the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty “which provides a framework for strengthening the EU’s capacities to address common security challenges”.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Florin Nistor, “Operational Planning Process and NATO’s Strategies”, in Carol I National Defence University, *Technologies – Military Applications Simulation and Resources. Proceedings of the 8th International Scientific Conference Strategies XXI, Bucharest, 5-6 April 2012*, Vol. 2, Bucharest, Carol I National Defence University, 2013, p. 109-110, <https://www.strategii21.ro/index.php/ro/conference-proceedings>. Cf. also Marius-Iulian Badiu, “NATO’s Strategic Challenges Face of the Present-Day International Security Context”, in Gheorghe Calopăreanu, Constantin Popescu and Daniel Ghiba (eds.), *Strategic Changes in Security and International Relations. Proceedings of the 13th International Scientific Conference Strategies XXI, Bucharest, 6-7 April 2017*, Vol. 2, Bucharest, Carol I National Defence University, 2018, p. 111-117, <https://www.strategii21.ro/index.php/ro/conference-proceedings>.

<sup>4</sup> This refers to the statement made by US Senator Richard Lugar in 1993 to justify NATO out of area operations.

<sup>5</sup> The EU expanded its tasks agreed upon in Maastricht thanks to the Amsterdam Treaty which foresaw the inclusion of the Western European Union (WEU) and its Petersberg operations in the EU framework. For further elements in this regard, please refer to: Tomasz Bąk, “Modern Military Missions as a Method of Resolving Conflict in Order to Maintain International Security”, in *Internal Security*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (July-December 2013), p. 36-37.

<sup>6</sup> Catriona Mace, “Operation Concordia: Developing a ‘European’ Approach to Crisis Management?”, in *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2004), p. 474-490 at p. 484-486. Cf. also Section 2.2 in this paper.

<sup>7</sup> See point 32: NATO, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence. Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation* adopted by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon, 19 November 2010, [https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/official\\_texts\\_68580.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/official_texts_68580.htm).

In this vein, further developments occurred after the launch of NATO's smart defence, aimed at "transform[ing] the approach to defense acquisition in order to deliver capabilities in a more efficient and cost-effective manner", against the backdrop of the global financial crisis.<sup>8</sup> In this regard, the introduction of the EU-led concept of pooling and sharing (P&S) represented an attempt to foster NATO-EU cooperation, by acknowledging the need to work closely and in a complementary way with NATO.<sup>9</sup>

In recent times, NATO-EU relations have been further improved thanks to the 2016 Joint Declaration, according to which the two organizations agreed to cooperate on the following areas: countering hybrid threats, sharing of maritime situational awareness and operational collaboration on migration issues, cyber security and defence, interoperability of defence capabilities, strengthening defence industry and defence research, development of exercises, capacity building.<sup>10</sup> To this end, the North Atlantic Council and the European Council jointly adopted 74 implementation proposals to be carried out in the timespan from December 2016 to the end of 2017.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, although cooperative efforts between NATO and the EU have been taken forward and currently proceed, missions, operations and activities have been often performed in an independent fashion, with different approaches and not always well-coordinated efforts. It suffices to mention that only two CSDP missions were conducted jointly by the two organizations, namely: EU Force (EUFOR) Concordia and EUFOR Althea, deployed respectively to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and to Bosnia-Herzegovina, which relied upon NATO assets as foreseen by the Berlin Plus agreement.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, also considering North Africa, Sahel and Middle East, joint activities between the organizations have not been very frequent and member states have often had to prioritize a mission over the other because of their reliance on one "single set of forces" to be put either at NATO or at EU disposal.<sup>13</sup> For instance, in the

<sup>8</sup> Camille Grand, "Smart Defense", in Chicago Council on Global Affairs, *Smart Defense and the Future of NATO: Can the Alliance Meet the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century?*, Chicago, Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2012, p. 45-49 at p. 45, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/node/3122>.

<sup>9</sup> European Defence Agency (EDA), "EDA's Pooling & Sharing", in *EDA Factsheets*, last update 30 January 2013, <https://www.eda.europa.eu/info-hub/publications/publication-details/pub/factsheet-eda's-pooling-sharing>.

<sup>10</sup> EU and NATO, *Joint Declaration by the President of the European Council...*, cit.

<sup>11</sup> Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on the Implementation of the Joint Declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (ST 14802 2017 INIT), 5 December 2017, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/register/en/content/out?&typ=ENTRY&i=ADV&DOC\\_ID=ST-14802-2017-INIT](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/register/en/content/out?&typ=ENTRY&i=ADV&DOC_ID=ST-14802-2017-INIT).

<sup>12</sup> Tinatin Aghniashvili, "Towards More Effective Cooperation? The Role of States in Shaping NATO-EU Interaction and Cooperation", in *Connections*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Fall 2016), p. 67-90 at p. 73, <http://connections-qj.org/node/14090>.

<sup>13</sup> NATO, *Statement on the implementation of the Joint Declaration signed by the President of the*

Horn of Africa EUNAVFOR Atalanta was chosen as the best option in comparison with NATO Operation Ocean Shield.<sup>14</sup>

### 1.1 North Africa and Sahel

In the African continent, instability is fuelled by numerous challenges, ranging from extreme poverty, to irregular migration, to the outbreak of domestic conflicts. Furthermore, other potential drivers for instability include factors such as the increasing demographic pressure, the lack of precipitations due to the process of climate change, as well as gender issue and access to education.

Therefore, efforts to project stability in such a complex scenario have to consider also human and social aspects of security, as well as support local initiatives and stakeholders. To this end, while the EU is trying to apply the so-called integrated approach to the region,<sup>15</sup> NATO is pursuing political dialogue and cooperation through its partnership policy.<sup>16</sup>

Among the EU priorities in these areas, mobility and tackling of human trafficking have gradually become the most prominent ones, with the adoption of a more securitized approach when addressing migration and border control issues. Accordingly, the main European tools and actions in the regions involve CSDP missions, which include both civilian and military capabilities, as well as support and funding of initiatives and projects promoted by local stakeholders.

Similarly, NATO approaches the region both through multilateral formats, such as the Mediterranean Dialogue – involving Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia –<sup>17</sup> as well as through NATO-to-Government partnerships. Among other activities, the NATO Defence and related Security Capacity Building (DCB) Initiative is based on a demand-driven and tailored approach, and aims at providing advice, assistance, training and mentoring to local forces. DCB packages are currently being provided to Georgia, Iraq, Jordan and the Republic of Moldova; NATO has also received requests for DCB support from Libya and Tunisia.

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*European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 6 December 2016, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_138829.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_138829.htm).

<sup>14</sup> Marianne Riddervold, "Why Not Fight Piracy Through NATO? Explaining the EU's First Naval Mission: EU NAVFOR Atalanta", in *The Maritime Turn in EU Foreign and Security Policies. Aims, Actors and Mechanisms of Integration*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 195-217.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on EU's integrated approach to conflicts, please see: European External Action Service (EEAS), *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, June 2016, p. 28-32, <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/node/331>.

<sup>16</sup> On this issue, please cf. NATO website: *Partnerships: Projecting Stability Through Cooperation*, last updated 23 February 2018, [https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics\\_84336.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics_84336.htm).

<sup>17</sup> The initiative dates back to 1994. For more information, please refer to NATO website: *NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue*, last updated 13 February 2015, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_60021.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_60021.htm).

With specific reference to EU and NATO operations deployed in North Africa thus far, Libya has experienced the intervention by both organizations after the popular insurgency of 2011. Following the United Nations (UN) Security Council (SC) Resolutions 1970 and 1973, NATO took the lead of the Operation Unified Protector for the introduction of an arms embargo, coupled with a no-fly zone and air and naval strikes. In 2013, two years after the end of the NATO-led operations, the EU inaugurated its Integrated Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) with the aim of helping the newly constituted Libyan government to guarantee border control and security in order to prevent human trafficking. Interestingly enough, in the context of the fight against trafficking of human beings, two naval missions have been launched in the Mediterranean Sea: the EU Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia), and the NATO-led Sea Guardian, which replaces the former Active Endeavour Operation. Although these two missions “intend to work closely” together, results achieved so far are showing that, without an optimal degree of cooperation, the activities of NATO and the EU in projecting stability lack evidence of effectiveness.

In the Sahel, it can be generally observed that, in comparison to the EU, NATO is playing a limited operational role and, although it has shown commitments for increased assistance to operations developed in the region, cooperation with the EU is almost non-existent at the present date.<sup>18</sup> More precisely, NATO allies have offered their support to France in Mali and some have been willing to be deployed under a EU banner for a training mission – be it the Capacity Building Missions (EUCAP) in Niger and the Training Mission (EUTM) in Mali. Indeed, the latter marks the strong interest and will within the EU to do more in helping and advising local military forces, as there is a common belief that educated and trained militaries are a condition for regional stability, and be at the forefront of fighting terrorist organizations.

### *1.2 Middle East*

The Middle East nowadays is home to a plethora of tensions challenging Euro-Atlantic stability in various ways. Among these, the enduring civil war in Syria, theatre of frictions not only among regional actors such as the Kurds and fighters belonging to the Islamic State (IS), but also between the superpowers US and Russia. In particular, the IS organization has succeeded in recruiting and mobilizing foot soldiers and activists on a broader scale to conduct random terroristic attacks, which have caused hundreds of casualties throughout Europe and the US.

In a similar vein to the case of Sahel, the leverage of NATO in the Middle East is less stringent if compared with that of the EU, since the latter actor is currently leading the Border Assistance Mission to Rafah (EU BAM Rafah) and the Police Mission in the Palestinian territories (EUPOL COPPS) aiming at guaranteeing personal

<sup>18</sup> Paul Pryce, “Securing the Sahel: A Role for NATO?”, in *NATO Review*, January 2013, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2012/Predictions-2013/NATO-Securing-Sahel/EN/index.htm>.

security to Palestinians and at enhancing the process of institution building. In this challenging security environment, NATO is oriented towards building “better mutual understanding” and confidence throughout the region,<sup>19</sup> a commitment reaffirmed with the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) with particular regard to countries like Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and United Arab Emirates (UAE).

From an operational point of view, NATO is currently involved in one combat operation (participating to the US-led coalition fighting the IS), and two training missions: the first one is Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, which has followed International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and the second is the possible NATO Training Mission in Iraq – after one already happening back in 2006.

In Afghanistan, NATO is present since August 2003, with the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) which conducted security operations and helped building up the Afghan security forces. In addition, in 2009 the Atlantic Alliance launched also Training Mission (NTM-A) specifically tasked with supporting ISAF and providing a higher-level training for the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. In 2014, these efforts were replaced by Resolute Support, an ongoing non-combat mission focused on strengthening the sustainability of the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF). Interestingly enough, from 2007 to 2015 the EU was also present in Afghanistan, through the deployment of its Police Mission (EUPOL).<sup>20</sup> It is noticeable that, despite being involved simultaneously, the two Brussels-based organizations have coordinated their activities in a limited fashion, sometimes resulting in overlapping and duplicative efforts.

When considered separately, NATO and EU missions can be valued as successful stories in terms of accomplished results. Concerning the EU-led operation, in spite of the lack of human and logistic resources as well as hurdles deriving from the low literacy level of Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan Security Forces (ASF), training activities and, to a limited extent, advising and mentoring tasks have been deemed successful.<sup>21</sup> NATO training activities, instead, were more directed at the military, rather than civilian domain and proved to be effective in fulfilling this aim, also thanks to the recourse to an optimal degree of situational awareness.<sup>22</sup> However, the efforts lacked of coherence, also because cooperation was nearly non-existent.

More generally, as confirmed by the International Police Coordination Board (IPCB) – a mechanism created in 2007 to guarantee close coordination among

<sup>19</sup> NATO website: *NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue*, cit.

<sup>20</sup> NATO website, *Operations and Missions: Past and Present*, last updated 26 June 2018, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_52060.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_52060.htm). Cf. also Tomasz Bąk, “Modern Military Missions as a Method of Resolving Conflict in Order to Maintain International Security”, cit.

<sup>21</sup> Tinatin Aghniashvili, “Towards More Effective Cooperation?”, cit., p. 77-79.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

NATO, the EU and other international entities involved in Afghanistan – contacts among the different actors have proven to be scarce and ineffective.<sup>23</sup> In the bilateral relationship between NATO and the EU, the lack of a common strategic vision has represented an insurmountable hurdle: overcoming contradictions and reconciling procedures to train police forces according to a civilian or military orientation has proven to be particularly difficult. This notwithstanding, types of synergies have been reached at the operational level since protection to the EUPOL personnel deployed to Kabul has been granted by NATO forces.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, a coherent division of labour and strategic coordination were not achieved.

## 2. Challenges ahead for enhanced NATO-EU cooperation

As previously noted, notwithstanding the convergence of interests of NATO and the EU, clear distinctions in the approach toward projecting stability still exist. These mainly relates to the classical dichotomy between civilian and military power<sup>25</sup> according to which the EU performs the leading role concerning the former dimension while NATO gains prominence when it comes to military aspects. In particular, the EU has developed coherent approaches aiming at evaluating and addressing critical situations, especially in the field of institution-building. Conversely, on the military side the EU lags behind NATO because it lacks structures devoted to ensure collective defence and deterrence.<sup>26</sup>

While according to this dichotomy one could envisage a complementary division of labour between the two organizations, a joint strategic planning and *ex-ante* NATO-EU coordination is challenged, among other things, by the lack of a shared concept of threat perception. This is true not only between NATO and the EU, but also within the realm of the same organization. In addition, recent developments in terms of defence integration seem to have complicated the picture even further, urging for the clarification of the EU level of ambition in this domain.

### 2.1 Absence of shared concepts of threat perception

Despite the agreement on seven areas representing frameworks for cooperative opportunities, NATO and the EU still adopt slightly different approaches even in defining multifaceted threats that need to be countered. This is partly caused by the reliance upon different perspectives and strategic plans building on locally pressing scenarios: Allied countries in Southern Europe are rightly more worried

<sup>23</sup> European Court of Auditors (ECA), "The EU Police Mission in Afghanistan: Mixed Results", in *ECA Special Reports*, No. 7/2015, p. 19, <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/DocItem.aspx?did=32184>.

<sup>24</sup> Tinatin Aghniashvili, "Towards More Effective Cooperation?", *cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>25</sup> On this issues, cf. Karen E. Smith, "Still 'Civilian Power EU'?", in *EFPU Working Papers*, No. 2005-1, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/internationalRelations/centresandunits/EFPU/EFPUpdfs/EFPUworkingpaper2005-1.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Claudia Major, "NATO and European Security: Back to the Roots?", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 15|53 (December 2015), p. 15-16, <http://www.iai.it/en/node/5744>.

about migration issues while those located in Eastern Europe prioritize the containment of the Russian aggressive posture together with the US. In particular, it has been argued that divergences among priorities on the NATO agenda depend on the absence of a clear-cut hierarchy of threats which can be used to define a common core purpose.<sup>27</sup>

In this sense, the definition of hybrid threats clearly epitomizes these hurdles. For instance, by drawing on the statement phrasing that “Each member state, sub-agency or center of excellence understood it [hybrid warfare] its own way, so that they could use it to push their own agenda”,<sup>28</sup> it may be said that there is a subjective dimension in which such threats are framed. In addition, hybrid threats are by nature vague, volatile and multifaceted, which render them very difficult to define rather than *a posteriori*.

NATO has firstly adopted this terminology to refer to Russian operations in Crimea and targeting Ukraine and, subsequently, has extended the meaning of hybrid threats and contributed to the definition of a comprehensive approach. In spite of divergent national visions, member states have been asked to improve the mechanisms of information-sharing and to contribute to providing indications on potential threats in a timely manner.<sup>29</sup> Since hybrid is “less deterrable”, its concept has been associated to that of resilience<sup>30</sup> and, for this reason, it has been used as a complement of the comprehensive approach to tackle menaces coming from the Eastern flank as well as the southern neighbourhood.<sup>31</sup>

In a similar vein, albeit neither the EU has clearly defined what hybrid threats are, a common sentiment to counter the “new normal” has arisen.<sup>32</sup> Among the efforts to define this phenomenon, the European Parliament (EP), through its Research Service document, has drafted an exhaustive list of aspects also embracing the actions of terroristic groups as well as crises and shortage of primary resources.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>27</sup> On this issue, cf. Peter Viggo Jakobsen and Jens Ringsmose, “Victim of Its Own Success: How NATO’s Difficulties are Caused by the Absence of a Unifying Existential Threat”, in *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2018), p. 38-58.

<sup>28</sup> Élie Tenenbaum, “Hybrid Warfare in the Strategic Spectrum”, in Guillaume Lasconjaras and Jeffrey A. Larsen (eds.), *NATO’s Response to Hybrid Threats*, Rome, NATO Defense College, 2015 (NDC Forum Papers No. 24), p. 95-112 at p. 97-98, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=886>. On the issue of countering hybrid threats, please cf. also Kevin Koehler, “Enhancing NATO-EU Cooperation: Looking South and Beyond”, in *NDC Conference Reports*, No. 2/17 (May 2017), p. 4-5, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1066>.

<sup>29</sup> Jan Jakub Uziębło, “United in Ambiguity? EU and NATO Approaches to Hybrid Warfare and Hybrid Threats”, in *EU Diplomacy Papers*, No. 5/2017, p. 22-23, <https://www.coleurope.eu/node/38509>.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Rühle, “Deterrence, What It Can (and Cannot) Do”, in *NATO Review*, April 2015, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2015/also-in-2015/deterrence-russia-military/en/index.htm>.

<sup>31</sup> Jan Jakub Uziębło, “United in Ambiguity?”, cit., p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> EEAS, *Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the EUISS Annual Conference*, Paris, 9 October 2015, <http://europa.eu/lyH74mq>.

<sup>33</sup> Patryk Pawlak, “Understanding Hybrid Threats”, in *EPRS At a Glance*, June 2015, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_ATA\(2015\)564355](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_ATA(2015)564355).

The result of this wide-ranging approach, similar to the one endorsed by NATO, has contributed to creating disagreements among EU institutions in the short-run, the latter being overcome by an overarching broad strategy known as “Joint Framework to Counter Hybrid Threats”.<sup>34</sup> While the EU approach is more civilian-oriented if compared to NATO one, it does not automatically exclude the recourse to the idea of deterrence.<sup>35</sup>

Notwithstanding similarities in the strategies employed, NATO and the EU have not been willing or able to provide a common definition of hybrid threats and, consequently, to draft a joint action plan. In spite of unofficial contacts and exchange of views, like those between the High Representative Federica Mogherini and Jens Stoltenberg, the absence of a formal cooperative framework still hampers effective cooperation. Accordingly, the EU’s “ability to broadly assess Europe’s vulnerabilities, and to produce a ‘risk register’ of areas including critical national infrastructure to help indicate when hybrid actions might be under way” would be essential in complementing NATO’s deterrence effect.<sup>36</sup> The institutionalization of a mechanism of shared threat perception is not only a formal matter, given that it would substantially reduce the logic of competition characterizing the relationship among the officials of the two organizations, thus contributing to enhance the effectiveness of cooperation.<sup>37</sup>

### 2.2 The EU level of ambition in projecting stability

According to the EUGS, “an appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important for Europe’s ability to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders”.<sup>38</sup> Even if this excerpt clearly highlights EU commitment to project stability, it does not clarify what “an appropriate level of ambition” needs to entail.

The immediate follow-up of the EUGS was the drafting of implementing proposals in the European External Action Service’s (EEAS) Implementation Plan on Security and Defence.<sup>39</sup> However, while defining crisis-management, capacity-building and protection of the citizens as primary concerns, the document limited itself to affirm the need of increasing the EU level of ambition without providing further explanations. This notwithstanding, the plan has in turn been essential to kick-start European integration in the defence domain.

<sup>34</sup> European Commission, *Security: EU Strengthens Response to Hybrid Threats*, 6 April 2016, <http://europa.eu/!by74jp>.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Jan Jakub Uziębło, “United in Ambiguity?”, cit.

<sup>36</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2016*, Abingdon, Routledge, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Jan Jakub Uziębło, “United in Ambiguity?”, cit.

<sup>38</sup> EEAS, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*, cit., p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> EEAS and European Defence Agency (EDA), *Implementation Plan on Security and Defence*, 14 November 2016, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/register/en/content/out?&typ=ENTRY&i=ADV&DOC\\_ID=ST-14392-2016-INIT](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/register/en/content/out?&typ=ENTRY&i=ADV&DOC_ID=ST-14392-2016-INIT).

First, a military planning and conduct capability (MPCC) has been inaugurated in 2017 as a permanent headquarters to manage strategic responsibility for the operational phase of EU's non-executive military missions, namely operations in which the EU is a mere assistant supporting the efforts of the host country.<sup>40</sup> To note, this represents a mid-way achievement in the process that may lead to the realization of a headquarters for all the EU military operations: a long-term goal whose attainment requires time and step-by-step developments.<sup>41</sup>

Second, in late 2017 the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PeSCo), whose provisions are enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty, was launched. Accordingly, on 11 December 2017, 23 EU member states decided to participate in this binding mechanism and were then joined also by Ireland and Portugal,<sup>42</sup> with only Denmark, Malta and the UK left aside. In the wake of this unfolding, 17 projects, related to training, operational activities as well as capability development, have been approved<sup>43</sup> and their implementation should enhance cooperation among participating countries.

Third, in November 2016, the European Commission issued the European Defence Action Plan (EDAP),<sup>44</sup> which envisaged the creation of a European Defence Fund (EDF)<sup>45</sup> to finance, for the first time in the history of the EU, research and capability development in the defence domain.

Furthermore, another development in the defence field is represented by the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), a mechanism whose objective is to ease coordination of military planning among member states, both voluntarily and through the mediator role of the EDA, in order to fill capability shortfalls.<sup>46</sup> The CARD entails a yearly assessment of national capability plans adopted in the defence sector by member states participating to PeSCo, so that overall convergence among interests and investment may be progressively ensured.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>40</sup> EEAS, *The Military Planning and Conduct Capability-MPCC* (Factsheet), 5 May 2018, <http://europa.eu/!Kp63du>.

<sup>41</sup> Thierry Tardy, "Does European Defence Really Matter? Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Common Security and Defence Policy", in *European Security*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2018), p. 119-137 at p. 127.

<sup>42</sup> Notification on Permanent Structured Cooperation (PeSCo) to the Council and to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 13 November 2017. Annex to Council of the European Union, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2017/2315 of 11 December 2017 Establishing Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and Determining the List of Participating Member States*, OJ L 331, 14.12.2017, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:32017D2315>.

<sup>43</sup> EEAS, *Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) - Factsheet*, 28 June 2018, <http://europa.eu/!fY63Tc>.

<sup>44</sup> For more information, please see: European Commission, *European Defence Action Plan: Towards a European Defence Fund*, 30 November 2016, <http://europa.eu/!DP89Ky>.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. European Commission, *A European Defence Fund: €5.5 Billion Per Year to Boost Europe's Defence Capabilities*, 7 June 2017, <http://europa.eu/!hV74NB>.

<sup>46</sup> Thierry Tardy, "Does European Defence Really Matter?", cit., p. 126-127. Cf. also Daniel Fiott, "The CARD on the EU Defence Table", in *EUISS Issue Alerts*, No. 10 (April 2017), <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/1745>.

<sup>47</sup> The CARD is currently performing its trail run, at the end of which its full implementation will

As previously mentioned, the importance of NATO-EU cooperation is highlighted within the EUGS, when it states: "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>48</sup> Accordingly, PeSCo may represent an added value for NATO too, as it could reconcile the different existing cleavages for European capability development and indirectly contribute to an increased burden sharing, as requested by the US Presidency.<sup>49</sup>

Although the complementarity with NATO has been repeatedly stated, the development of an embryonic stage of EU defence without a clear definition of the meaning and content of "an appropriate level of strategic autonomy" risks to raise avoidable concerns and misunderstandings. For instance, at the Munich Security conference Kay Bailey Hutchison, the US permanent representative to NATO, warned against possible protectionist attempts of PeSCo and the possibility that it could become a competitor to NATO for military resources.<sup>50</sup> As Jens Stoltenberg stated in his comments on the same occasion; "it is important that [...] European leaders, as they have done many times, state again and again that this is not about competing with NATO [...] or be an alternative to NATO."<sup>51</sup>

### 3. Towards more effective cooperation: From coordination to division of labour

Despite the fact that several steps forward have been made, effective NATO-EU cooperation both from a general standpoint and particularly to project stability in the southern neighbourhood is still far from being achieved. In order to tackle current threats, such as terrorist attacks, political turmoil as well as uncontrolled migrants' flows, more promptly and effectively, NATO and the EU need to enhance their relationship even further. To do so the two organizations should move from mere coordination of initiatives to effective division of labour, by addressing inherent and perennial problems as well as new issues that could shape the future of this relation.

occur. For more information, please refer to: EDA, "Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD)", in *EDA Factsheets*, last update 9 January 2018, [https://www.eda.europa.eu/info-hub/publications/publication-details/pub/factsheet-coordinated-annual-review-on-defence-\(card\)](https://www.eda.europa.eu/info-hub/publications/publication-details/pub/factsheet-coordinated-annual-review-on-defence-(card)).

<sup>48</sup> EEAS, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*, cit., p. 20.

<sup>49</sup> Alessandro Marrone, "Permanent Structured Cooperation: An Institutional Pathway for European Defence", in *IAI Commentaries*, No. 17|26 (November 2017), p. 3, <http://www.iai.it/en/node/8508>.

<sup>50</sup> Aaron Mehta, "US Warns Against 'Protectionism' with New EU Defense Agreement", in *Defense News*, 14 February 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/smr/munich-security-forum/2018/02/14/us-warns-against-protectionism-with-new-eu-defense-agreement>.

<sup>51</sup> NATO, *Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the opening session of the Munich Security Conference*, 16 February 2018, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_152209.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_152209.htm).

The first dilemma is *how to reconcile positions of member countries not owning a double hat, namely states belonging to only one organization*. This especially relates to frictions between Cyprus and Turkey, which represent a significant hurdle for the stalled Berlin Plus arrangements and, more generally, for NATO-EU cooperation. The possibility to express veto power at NATO and CSDP tables in fact drastically reduces room for concerted efforts, thus resulting in an institution “hostage”.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, finding a solution to this dispute should remain a primary concern to further encourage a convergence between NATO and the EU.

A second crucial question is *how to ameliorate mechanisms of ex-ante coordination between NATO and the EU*. Despite the mentioned fruitful contacts and synergies at the operational level, the lack of joint strategic plans restrains the achievement of significant results. In order to replace case-by-case coordination of initiatives on the ground, NATO and the EU need a shared constructive and long-term approach on projecting stability, encompassing a common understanding of major threats.

*How to ensure an adequate division of labour between NATO and the EU in order to optimize the efforts and achieve best-possible outcomes* is another pressing issue that needs further investigation. Bearing in mind the distinguishing features of approaches adopted along the lines of the civilian/military continuum, it would be possible to envisage different tasks for NATO and the EU during operations. These should be agreed upon together and conducted under a common umbrella. Accordingly, differences in the capability endowment of the two organizations could represent, rather than a factor undermining concerted actions, a significant tool for burden sharing.<sup>53</sup> An effective division of labour could be built also on the idea of multilevel analytical frameworks. For instance, joint NATO and EU actions could be modulated by allocating different competences to each organization, according to different layers – global, regional or local level – or different phases in conflict management and institution building processes – e.g. stabilization, reconstruction, transformation. Such a division of labour would first require a solution to the East and South dilemma, according to which NATO should focus on territorial defence in the East while the EU should manage crisis in the South.<sup>54</sup> With specific mention to North Africa, Sahel and Middle East, the creation of shared European military bases could facilitate joint operations with NATO, leaving the door open also to cooperation with third countries. This could, in turn, represent an opportunity to foster the development of interoperability among European forces that would benefit both the EU and the Atlantic Alliance.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Jolyon Howorth, *Security and Defence Policy in the European Union*, 2nd ed., Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 130. On this issue cf. also Tinatin Aghniashvili, “Towards More Effective Cooperation?”, cit.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Tinatin Aghniashvili, “Towards More Effective Cooperation?”, cit.

<sup>54</sup> For more information regarding the 360 degree approach and the NATO-EU cooperation addressing challenges coming from the East and the South, please see: Pierre Haroche and Marcin Terlikowski, *A 360° Approach: Tackling the EU and NATO East-South Dilemma*, paper presented at the IRSEM conference on “The Future of EU/NATO Relations”, Paris, 2 July 2018.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

As previously mentioned, NATO and the EU will need to consider also new factors that could shape their future relation. In particular, depending on the advancements made in the European defence integration process, *the two Brussels-based organizations shall work in synergy when it comes to capability development*. In this sense, NATO and EU frameworks should be closely coordinated and mutually reinforcing. To be effective, such a convergence should envisage back-to-back meetings between CARD, EDA's Capability Development Plan (CDP) and NATO's Defence Planning Process (NDPP), the latter two being responsible for the identification of priorities concerning the acquisition of defence capabilities.<sup>56</sup> In this regard, the invitation of EDA as an observer to the NATO Framework Nation Concept (FNC) meetings, certainly represents a positive development. This is even more the case, reconsidering the FNC actual contribution to meet the capability targets agreed within the NDPP as well as its potential to be "a game changer for the way capabilities are developed and forces provided".<sup>57</sup>

Finally, it remains also to be seen what will be *the impact of the ongoing Brexit process on NATO-EU cooperation, if any*. In this case, considering the political and economic leverage of the UK country, Brexit may cause a reduction of EU ambitions in its operations in third countries. For instance, following Brexit, NATO funds for defence will be five times higher than those allocated by the EU.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, a change in the nature of UK-EU relations could change also the British role in NATO and NATO-EU relations, either in positive or negative terms. In the first case, the UK could increasingly support transatlantic cooperation as a bridge towards the EU. In the second, NATO would build upon UK-US privileged relationship and the Anglo-Saxon axis, while the EU would establish its domicile in the continental Europe thanks to Franco-German catalyst.

In the current ever-changing security environment, characterized by a wide range of security challenges, projecting stability has become a prominent task, which calls on NATO and the EU to move beyond mere coordination of initiatives towards an effective division of labour. In this sense, addressing and properly considering old and new issues is crucial to ensure enhanced NATO-EU relations.

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<sup>56</sup> On this issue, cf. Alessandro Marrone, "Permanent Structured Cooperation: An Institutional Pathway for European Defence", cit. Cf. also Kristi Raik and Pauli Järvenpää, "A New Era of EU-NATO Cooperation. How to Make the Best of a Marriage of Necessity", in *ICDS Reports*, May 2017, <https://icds.ee/?p=22144>.

<sup>57</sup> Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, "The Framework Nations' Concept and NATO: Game-Changer for a New Strategic Era or Missed Opportunity?", in *NDC Research Papers*, No. 132 (July 2016), p. 4, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=965>.

<sup>58</sup> Kristi Raik and Pauli Järvenpää, "A New Era of EU-NATO Cooperation", cit., p. 10.

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