Centre for Economics
and Foreign Policy Studies

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Better NATO-EU relations require more sincerity

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EDAM Board Member

January 2010

G|M|F   The German Marshall Fund
of the United States
STRENGTHENING TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION

European nations' interest in collective security and defense dates back to the end of the Second World War. The establishment of the Western European Union (WEU) in 1948, the European Defense Community (EDC) initiative of 1954, the Fouchet Plan of 1961, and the European Political Cooperation which began in 1970 all represent efforts in that direction. However, the Cold War and the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) with the United States delayed plans for a more active European role in security initiatives until the 1990s. The end of the Cold War encouraged the EU to revisit the security chapter and resulted in the creation of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as a second pillar of the Maastricht Treaty of 1991.

The new architecture envisaged reactivating the dormant WEU as a way to embrace all European states that were members of either the EU or NATO. Members of both organizations were designated as Full Members, members of NATO only were Associate Members, and members of the EU only were assigned the status of Observers. Despite their different status and even rights, all 18 European states were able to sit around a single table and voice their opinions. Thus, during 1990s, the WEU managed to improve security ties between various European stakeholders.

This period came to an end in St. Malo in December 1998, when the UK and France agreed on moving the EU to the forefront in security matters and on bringing an end to the short-lived WEU period. A European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) was accordingly launched at the Cologne European Council summit meeting in June 1999. Since then, the European Union has created its own Political and Security Committee (PSC), Military Committee, and Military Secretariat. The EU has also created battle groups and targeted a Headline Goal - first for 2003 and then for 2010 - in order to be more capable in peacekeeping operations. A European Security Strategy defining threats and strategic objectives was accepted in 2003, and revised at the end of 2008. In short, the EU has developed the ESDP consistently over the last 10 years.

A short background on NATO-EU relations

The EU, at the beginning of this new era, developed a framework of cooperation with NATO which aimed to increase its visibility and capabilities. Negotiations over the framework took almost three years and were finalized in December 2002. It comprised the following elements:

- Berlin+ arrangements for the use of NATO assets and capabilities by the EU
- Arrangements for a NATO-EU Strategic Partnership (EU-NATO Declaration on ESDP and exchange of letters between Secretary Generals)
- Arrangements regarding the involvement of non-EU European allies in the ESDP (Nice Implementation Document)

This framework was based on a mutual understanding defined by the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in 1999 as the "3Ds". That is, the purpose was not to "Duplicate" NATO assets, not to "Discriminate" against non-EU NATO members, and not to "Decouple" the EU from the transatlantic security architecture. As such, the primacy of NATO was guaranteed, while the Europeans were allowed to assume more responsibilities. This was important as the Bosnian crisis of the 1990s had demonstrated the difficulties in mounting a concerted and institutionalized European response. Furthermore, the US was unwilling to remain the primary actor in the European security scene after the fall of the Berlin Wall and dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. Thus, it was time for the European Allies to reorganize themselves.

2003 was a critical year in terms of NATO-EU relations. Based on the agreed framework, the EU took over the responsibilities of the NATO-led Operation Allied Harmony in Macedonia in March 2003, first Berlin+ operation with NATO assets made available to the EU. The NATO-EU Capability Group was established in May 2003 to ensure the coherence and mutual reinforcement of NATO and EU capability development efforts and the first joint crisis management exercise of NATO and the EU was held in December of the same year. As such, even though it took almost three years to finalize, the NATO-EU cooperation was launched to a brisk start in 2003, raising expectations.

Clouds over NATO-EU cooperation

However, setbacks soon began to arise. The most cited reason for this is Cypriot membership to the EU after May 2004 and the problems this causes with NATO ally Turkey in particular. It is no secret that Turkey does not wish for Cyprus - a state that it does not recognize - to participate in official NATO-EU meetings. All states participating in official NATO-EU meetings need to have security agreements. Cyprus which is not a member of NATO and NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program does not have a security agreement with NATO. This is a consequence of decisions taken by NATO and the EU in December 2002, when they agreed on principles of their cooperation. Such decisions predate the EU's 2004 enlargement when Cyprus joined the Union. In other words, the arrangements were

undertaken deliberately since it was known that Cypriot membership to the EU – given the tense relationship with Turkey - would pose difficulties for NATO-EU cooperation. Thus Turkey negotiated the details of a NATO-EU consultation mechanism bearing in mind that likelihood and her remaining allies and members of the EU -including Greece- accepted this approach.

Cyprus now blocks the administrative arrangements that need to be implemented between the European Defense Agency (EDA) and Turkey. It can do so despite the fact that the EDA is a derivative of the NATO's former IEPG and WEAG, of which Turkey was a full member. Cyprus likewise obstructs any moves towards Turkey signing a security agreement with the EU.

That said, the restricted cooperation between NATO and the EU cannot be attributed exclusively to the Cyprus problem and the complex technicalities it entails. There are three more important reasons why NATO-EU cooperation has faced difficulties since 2004.

A second and perhaps a less cited reason was Washington's unhappiness with the EU's sudden move towards autonomy. Consider that the EU launched its first autonomous military mission to Congo in June 2003. The move came after a UNSC resolution, and NATO was not consulted prior to the launching of Operation Artemis. This is probably the main reason why the EU and NATO – responding to the call of the African Union - launched separate operations to Sudan later in 2005. Such moves testify to reluctance on the part of both institutions to further their cooperation.

However, many experts believe that the US is getting ready to accept a more autonomous ESDP and sees US Ambassador to NATO Victoria Nuland's speech in Paris in 2008 as an expression of a renewed US approach. She declared: "Europe needs, the United States needs, NATO needs, the democratic world needs a stronger, more capable European capacity".

The renewed US approach does not necessarily mean a shift away from the 3Ds. It reveals more the degree to which the US needs more able partners for dealing with the challenges ahead. Obviously, the EU is the kind of partner with which the US would prefer to work. The US now seems to be in support of better civilian-military planning capability on the part of the EU. This should not be accomplished by duplicating existing NATO capabilities, but is should complement such capacities. But at the end of the day, the fate of a permanent EU planning and operational headquarters depends on British rather than American attitudes.

Similarly, the question as to whether the EU should act as a caucus within NATO or as a conglomeration of sovereign states has a simple answer. For turning NATO into a politico-military consultation forum between the US and the EU would not only undermine its history and capabilities, but also alienate other non-EU members. It could mean that differences of opinions and perceptions between the US and the EU might lead to a decoupling of NATO and the EU. By the same token, the EU should be more open to cooperation with non-EU Allies, as opposed to today's restrictive approach. Non-discrimination will be a key to sustainable NATO-EU cooperation. Indeed it seems the US is keen on working with non-EU allies like Turkey for dealing with challenges ahead.

The third reason for difficulties in NATO-EU relations lies with the EU itself. The internal debate on the future of the ESDP is not over, as the question of weather the EU should have a permanent planning and operational headquarters remains open. This is a key question, particularly for operations where more military resources are required. The Lisbon Treaty has finally come into force and provides a new opportunity for those who seek to establish such headquarters via a Permanent Structured Cooperation (PSC). PSC would allow those willing to advance faster to do so in an institutionalized manner, rather than necessitate the formation of a coalition of the willing on a case by case basis. Thus, within the framework of PSC, the EU's six largest member states (France, Germany, UK, Italy, Spain and Poland) could hypothetically form a kind of defense bloc as favored by French President Sarkozy, with each country providing 10,000 troops for a 60,000 strong EU rapid reaction force; they could also constitute a defense equipment procurement market. If realized, such a scenario would have a determining impact on NATO-EU relations.

Further difficulties are related to differences in the bureaucratic cultures of the two institutions. By virtue of their history and capabilities, NATO and EU have different institutional instincts. This may indeed be cited as a reason why the two organizations have not been able to close the gap between the EU's European Capability Action Plan (ECAP) and NATO' Prague Capabilities Commitment even though 21 of the countries are members to both the EU and NATO.

For all the reasons mentioned above, there has only been one EU-led operation which drew on NATO planning expertise and Alliance assets and capabilities since 2004, namely Operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina which was launched in December 2004 after the conclusion of NATO's Stabilization Force in Bosnia (SFOR). This has been possible because

the situation on the ground obliged the parties to cooperate. There were simply no other alternatives.

This has not been the case in other instances where cooperation was not perceived to be imperative. Hence, today the two organizations do not fully cooperate even though they work side by side in the same theater of operation in Kosovo (KFOR and EULEX), Afghanistan (ISAF and EUPOL) and Gulf of Aden off Somalia (Ocean Shield and ATALANTA).

Since 2003, the EU has conducted more than 20 military and civilian operations. Among them only two were Berlin+ type of operations which drew upon NATO assets and capabilities. There are at least two explanations for the low numbers of Berlin+ operations. First, EU operations were small in scale and hence all resources could be provided and managed by the EU. In any case, on most of these occasions their military component was restricted. Second, given the difficulties associated with NATO-EU relations, the EU has sought to go autonomous as early as possible.

Turkey and the ESDP

Turkish authorities constantly repeat the following: Turkey is not against an enhanced NATO-EU cooperation. On the contrary, Turkey - in principle - supports the development of an ESDP. ESDP (or CSDP - its new acronym after the Lisbon Treaty) is by all means important for Turkey. So is the development of a CFSP. Indeed, Turkey's alignment with CFSP statements and positions stand at over 80 percent. It can easily be argued that Turkey shares with the actors involved in CFSP the same threat perceptions, priorities and means for addressing challenges. Turkey, for example, was officially consulted during the preparations for the first European Security Strategy Document in 2003 and was happy to witness that her concerns were taken into consideration. Turkey is also committed to multilateralism in its foreign policy. As a member of the Western Alliance for over 50 years, Turkey's alignment with the EU is a natural outcome of this environment. Who is Turkey going to genuinely cooperate with, if not the EU? It is therefore wrong to perceive Turkey's requests to take an active role in ESDP as a bid for back door entry to the EU.

Indeed, Turkey neighbors unstable regions like the Middle East and Caucasus. Thus, security matters are important to Turkey and its international commitments and membership to the Atlantic Alliance are deeply embedded in the making of its foreign policy.

However, Turkey's status in the European Security Architecture has been constantly eroded, at least institutionally, since the end of the Cold War. For understandable reasons, the US is asking for more burden sharing from its European Allies and accordingly NATO's role in purely European matters is decreasing. An ongoing operation in Bosnia, for instance, is a case in point. It is no longer a NATO operation, but led by the EU.

Turkey, on the other hand is not yet an EU member state. Its participation in the regular EU consultation meetings is not possible. EU meetings are not open to third countries, not even to non-EU allies, even as observers. Turkish authorities claim they were not even consulted prior to EU operations in Iraq and in Georgia, both immediate neighbors of Turkey. The EU replies that its responsibility to consult Turkey through NATO-EU consultation arrangements only covers military operations while activities undertaken in Iraq and Georgia fall under the heading of civilian operations. In short, the EU does not feel the need to consult a candidate country on what is happening in its immediate neighborhood.

This problem may not be related to the Cypriot question, but the Cyprus factor, does come into play in Turkey's arrangements with the European Defense Agency which remain pending due to a Cypriot veto. The same applies to the signing of a security agreement with the EU on the exchange of classified material. For unclear reasons, Turkey was not officially consulted for the 2008 implementation report of the EU Security Strategy Document. This, at least, is the picture as seen from the Turkish side.

All that the EU offers to Turkey with regard to security issues is to contribute troops - if accepted by the EU, which may not always be the case - for international peacekeeping operations in which the overall political framework has already been defined by the EU. In practical terms, the actual situation refers to one where Turkey's concerns can not be voiced if it is not NATO but the EU which is taking the lead in a given situation. This is obviously a frustrating situation for the Turkish authorities.

While Cyprus' membership to the EU complicated Turkey's relations with the ESDP, problems around Turkish contributions seem to go well beyond. The EU is not yet ready to be more inclusive and transparent on ESDP matters. Institutional rigidities provide only a good excuse. The real issue is the lack of political will to include non-EU Allies. Therefore, it is not certain that all NATO-EU issues and Turkey-ESDP issues will be solved overnight if or when the Cyprus problem is resolved.

It is thus misleading to attribute all difficulties surrounding the NATO-EU cooperation to Turkey and, moreover, to blame the Cypriot question for all problems associated with Turkey-ESDP relations. Turkey is simply asking the EU to be more open and transparent to non-EU Allies.

What is practically applicable is not necessarily politically correct. Turkey practically can be left by the EU at the edge of the European security architecture, by using the existing rigid EU institutional framework. The security of Europe, however, is indivisible. Turkey feels she is increasingly being left aside. Leaving Turkey out in the cold is not a politically acceptable solution for the future of European security.

A way forward

NATO will review its Strategic Concept in 2010. Consultations have already begun. This exercise will be an opportunity for the parties to agree on a number of principles for the future of the European security environment. The EU reviewed its Security Strategy at the end of 2008 through the implementation report. If the two institutions genuinely consider working closer with each other, the NATO Strategic Concept and the European Security Strategy need to complement one another. 21 EU members are able to voice their concerns during NATO Strategic Concept negotiations. In the same vein, and with the requisite political will, they should be able to further review the European Security Strategy taking into account the new NATO Strategic Concept. Therefore, the review of the NATO Strategic Concept offers a unique opportunity for the parties to bridge their differences.

Following an agreement on a new NATO Strategic Concept, the EU needs to take compatible steps. A number of practical arrangements need to be put in place in such a way as to embrace all non-EU European Allies. The renewed arrangements need a new and open mindset. The artificial distinction between participation in military and civilian operations for instance need to come to an end. Consultation mechanisms for non-EU Allies must be genuine. Obviously, the decision-making will lie with the EU. But its authority cannot be undermined by listening to other allies and trying to accommodating their concerns. This is particularly relevant if the ally in question is a candidate to the EU with a vision for shared security that has endured over 50 years.