

NEXT STEPS FOR EU-NATO RELATIONS

This year the European Leadership Network (ELN) has done substantial research and advocacy work on the opportunities and challenges for EU-NATO cooperation. In May, we published a [report](#) and [group statement](#) arguing for more focused action to advance the relationship. We recommended a set of simple, practical steps for constructive and pragmatic development of the seven areas for cooperation identified in the EU-NATO Joint Declaration of July 2016 and in the subsequent 42 Implementation Action Points of December 2016.

These practical steps would still be essential for effective EU-NATO cooperation even if the well-known political obstacles and differing institutional mandates did not exist. And the progress made in staff-to-staff contacts between the two institutions over the past twelve months shows that political constraints can no longer be used as an excuse for failing to address the practical issues that get in the way of better relations:

“Ultimately, the greater obstacles are lack of attention in European capitals, lack of resources and practical arrangements for collaboration in the two organisations, lack of knowledge in each organisation about the other, and a long-standing lack of cultural affinity.”

Statement from 62 European Leaders, ELN, 17 May 2017.

We emphasized **mutual familiarity and mutual education**, which are crucial for long-term collaboration. We argued for **better resourcing** of the relationship and underlined that **security of communication** for internal EU work on defence must be improved. We gave several examples of how cooperation can be enhanced from the ground up in common theatres of operation and also made the case for further top-down political direction from Member States. *(Figure 1)*

Among our more political recommendations we recommended **moving the EU-NATO relationship from mere cooperation to active collaboration, raising the level of ambition** to joint planning and deeper relations on the already agreed points for cooperation. We urged the institutions to develop a **compelling narrative** about the value added by their joint work on better security for Europe. And we suggested that they should consider **extending cooperation** to new areas. *(Figure 2)*

FIVE PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Educate

- EU and NATO delegations to host workshops for their own personnel, and for international staffs.
- Incentivise staff exchange between EU and NATO, especially in the 7 areas.
- Frequent, regular visits to each other by international staff and national delegations.

2. Provide logistics

- Security clearance and training for more Commission staff.
- More secure telephones and secure email for EEAS, EDA and Commission.
- More secure locations for secure telephones, email and meetings.

3. Cooperate from the ground up: member states can “just do it” in the field

- Encourage host countries to convert existing centres of excellence into joint ones for members of both organisations.
- Require/incentivise EU and NATO operations, member states and delegations to cooperate on capacity building in third countries. Use pilot projects.
- Member states could just take the initiative to coordinate among themselves on the ground

4. Cooperate from the top down: member states can drive further practical cooperation

- Support mapping of areas of common activity
- Seek to align programming and planning cycles
- More EU-NATO joint planning of activities, drawing on each other’s best practice
- Use of funds for EU-NATO common projects
- Expand the areas of cooperation beyond the existing seven

5. Resource

- Give EU-NATO collaboration some staff and some money in each institution so that collaboration is not at the expense of outcomes and day jobs.

THREE POLITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Be ambitious:

- Shift in thought, word and deed from cooperation on goals that happen to overlap to active collaboration on the shared goal of better security for Europe.
- The shift does not have to be announced: it could just become a fact.
- But it would help the international staffs to be given shared - and preferably joint - language.

2. Explain:

- Create a compelling public narrative about the value added of EU-NATO collaboration.
- The narrative could develop naturally from the joint communiques of leaders. But it would be stronger if public affairs divisions collaborated on a common line, mainstreamed across all relevant outward-facing material from the two organisations.

3. Sustain:

- Create mechanisms and dynamics that encourage further cooperation.
- Consider more formal structures for cooperation.
- Extend cooperation beyond the existing seven areas.

Figure 1 (left); Figure 2 (above).

The ELN has since convened follow-up discussions with senior representatives from EU Member States and NATO Allies about their next steps. Building on our practical proposals, these exchanges have identified some clear messages, promising ideas and remaining obstacles.

BE AMBITIOUS, TOP DOWN

A strong preference was expressed by member state representatives for a top-down approach.

Clear direction from leaders, ‘opening doors that were previously closed’ is possible and still needed. This can be done without a further political mandate from member states, because EU-NATO atmospherics have much improved, inspiring confidence in the inter-institutional dynamics. This momentum should be sustained. Momentum is also needed because the eroding state of collective security in Europe makes EU-NATO collaboration essential. The current staff-to-staff process will soon require greater clarity about the end goal. And while bottom-up collaboration could transform the relationship organically, it is too slow and risks being overshadowed by more pressing concerns. The 2018 NATO Summit and the June 2018 EU Council meeting should mark a strong step forward.

The EU and NATO should also move in thought, word and deed from cooperation on goals that currently overlap to active collaboration on the shared goal of better security and stability for the Euro-Atlantic region. This would be positive in NATO’s transatlantic burden-sharing debate, providing more evidence of Europeans’ will to invest in their own security. It would also show that the EU is shouldering its responsibility and addressing the key concerns of its citizens. Since a 28+29 statement would pose a tremendous coordination challenge, the message of shared ambition could be expressed through a Tusk/Juncker/Mogherini/Stoltenberg EU-NATO Declaration in mid-2018. The process would be strengthened further if leaders from Member States and Allies expressed public support for such a step through their speeches and endorsements.

EXPLAIN

EU and NATO leaders should therefore start behind-the-scenes consultations among themselves about an ambitious Euro-Atlantic Declaration.

To reinforce a shift of focus to a shared goal of better security in the Euro-Atlantic area, the two organisations should develop a more compelling – and joint – narrative about the value-added of EU-NATO collaboration. This narrative should be promoted in all relevant communiqués and press statements. This strategic communication needs to take the form of a campaign by both organisations and their member states that builds wider public and parliamentary support for joint and parallel EU-NATO work. The proposed Euro-Atlantic Declaration could play a major part in this. National administrations should regularly highlight the benefits of EU-NATO cooperation and do so in a way that audiences on both sides of the Atlantic can understand and relate to.

As the EU develops its common narrative for European Defence, it should aim to integrate this with NATO messaging. Practical evidence of useful EU-NATO cooperation – in partner countries and in Brussels – could be highlighted and underpinned by examples of the efficiencies, shared use of capabilities, cost-saving and above all greater security and defence synergies to be gained, particularly for combatting cyber and hybrid threats.

PRACTICAL COOPERATION

Areas in which EU-NATO cooperation should focus in the next nine months include:

- Improving the security of the Western Balkans (a joint Mogherini/Stoltenberg initiative could drive regional and international efforts);
- Ukraine;
- Cyber defence and resilience (encourage the creation of an EU Centre of Excellence to complement the work of NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence – or consider joint programming in Tallinn). The lessons of the recent parallel and coordinated exercise involving the two organisations should be drawn on: the distinction between cyber (and wider hybrid) defence and security is eroding; joint efforts are thus a fundamental element of an effective response to any cyber-attack.

By July 2018, the EU is expected to have taken important, visible steps on defence collaboration (having officially launched permanent structured cooperation - PESCO) and capabilities (furthering the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) process and passing key legislation on the European Defence Fund). These steps should be designed to add further momentum to EU-NATO collaboration and transatlantic relations.

The EU and NATO need to discuss the impact of the new EU defence initiatives. These have raised questions in NATO as to how new capabilities will benefit the European single set of forces, how capability projects will be chosen and prioritised, and how non-EU Allies (such as Canada and a post-Brexit UK) can participate in EU-funded projects. Both organisations need to coordinate even better in order to avoid parallel capabilities processes.

REMAINING PROBLEMS

In December, or at least before July 2018, progress needs to be made on:

- Coherence between CARD/PESCO and the NATO Defence Planning Process;
- Access and preferably inclusivity for non-EU Allies to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the European Defence Agency (EDA), and the European Defence Fund and for non-NATO EU Member States to NATO's Partnership Interoperability Initiative and even to its Enhanced Opportunities Programme;

- Specifically, Turkey's relationship to the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and Cyprus's to NATO's partnership opportunities;
- Better mutual understanding by EU and NATO national delegations and by international staffs of the other organisation.

NEXT STEPS

This December, the EU and NATO are due to take a further step forward in implementation of their Joint Declaration. Measures could include:

- Widening the areas of cooperation. For example:
 - Counter terrorism;
 - Cross-border military movement;
 - Women, Peace and Security.
- Deepening cooperation in existing areas. For example:
 - Defence capabilities (more clarity on integration in CARD, NDPP, EDA, EDF, EIF; institution-neutral capability frameworks)
 - Liaison arrangements/situational awareness (EU liaison at NATO's southern hub, more EU-NATO dialogue in Brussels)
 - Defence capacity building (aligned or cross-funded programmes; counter terrorism for partners)
 - Maritime security.

Our interlocutors were sceptical about the political feasibility of securing extra resource for the mechanics of EU-NATO collaboration and about the establishment of new institutional mechanisms for collaboration. But the importance of such steps should not be minimised. As the EU-NATO relationship develops and expands, it will need dedicated financial, logistical and personnel investment if it is to deliver increasingly positive change.

CONCLUSIONS

These findings from senior national representatives when combined with the earlier ELN proposals for practical steps can be summarised in recommendations for EU and NATO member states under three main headings:

1. Facilitate practical cooperation

- Support more secure communications capacity in the EU and more interaction and mutual education between international staffs.

- Arrange more mutual education between national EU and NATO delegations.
- Deepen cooperation in the existing seven areas. This deepening should include western Balkans security, Ukraine, cyber and maritime security and the development of greater clarity and cooperation on defence capabilities work, defence capacity building and EU-NATO liaison arrangements.
- Expand cooperation to new areas including counter-terrorism; cross-border military movement; and women, peace and security.

2. Give the EU-NATO process clearer purpose

- Member states of the two organisations should work for a further EU-NATO Declaration in mid-2018 that shifts the vision from cooperation to collaboration – from cooperation where EU and NATO goals happen to overlap to actual collaboration by the two organisations for better European security. National leaders should publicly urge this shift.
- Support this practically by encouraging alignment of programming and planning in areas of common activity, and doing more joint planning of activities and funding of common projects.

3. Give the EU-NATO process a stronger narrative

- Member states should support the EU and NATO international staffs in producing and using a stronger joint narrative about the value of EU-NATO collaboration.
- Highlight evidence of the practical value of EU-NATO cooperation.

Taken together, action under these three headings would enable the EU and NATO to take a further substantial step forward in mid-2018. Such a step would materially contribute to better security in Europe and not just to more efficient working between the two organisations that carry so much of the responsibility for this security.