

PART VIII

NATO-EU RELATIONS

CHAPTER 28

**The strategic partnership between NATO and
the European Union**

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THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN NATO AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Both NATO and the European Union (EU) have, since their inception, contributed to maintaining and strengthening security and stability in western Europe. NATO has pursued this aim in its capacity as a strong and defensive political and military alliance and, since the end of the Cold War, has extended security in the wider Euro-Atlantic area both by enlarging its membership and by developing other partnerships. The European Union has created enhanced stability by promoting progressive economic and political integration, initially among western European countries and subsequently also by welcoming new member countries. As a result of the respective organisations' enlargement processes, an increasing number of European countries have become part of the mainstream of European political and economic development, and many are members of both organisations.

No formal relationship existed between NATO and the European Union until 2000. Prior to that, during the 1990s the Western European Union (WEU) acted as the interface for cooperation between NATO and those European countries seeking to build a stronger European security and defence identity within NATO.

The situation changed fundamentally in 1999 when, against the backdrop of the conflicts in the Balkans, EU leaders decided to develop a European Security and Defence Policy within the European Union itself, in coordination with NATO, and to take over responsibility for most of the functions that had been exercised by the Western European Union. The following year, NATO and the European Union started to work together to develop a framework for cooperation and consultation. This led to the development of a strategic partnership (NATO-EU Declaration on the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)) between the two organisations and the agreement of the Berlin Plus arrangements, which provide access to NATO's collective assets and capabilities for military operations led by the European Union.

These developments established the basis for NATO-EU cooperation in the sphere of crisis management in the western Balkans as well as for the development of cooperation on other issues.

The evolution of NATO-EU relations

The Cold War period

Despite shared objectives and common interests in many spheres, the parallel development of NATO and the European Union throughout the Cold War period was characterised by a clear separation of roles and responsibilities, and the absence of formal or informal institutional contacts between them. While a structural basis for a specifically European security and defence role existed in the form of the Western European Union, created in 1948, for practical purposes western European security was preserved exclusively by NATO. For its part, the Western European Union undertook a number of specific tasks, primarily in relation to post-war arms control arrangements in western Europe. However, its role was limited and its membership was not identical to that of the European Union.

Given this institutional background, when questions arose concerning the need for a more equitable sharing of the burden of European security between the two sides of the Atlantic, they were discussed primarily at the bilateral, political level. A number of representational initiatives on the part of the European member countries of NATO were conducted with a view to reassuring the United States about the level of the European commitment to security and defence. However, no multilateral or institutional arrangements existed for developing independent structures outside the Alliance framework.

NATO-WEU cooperation and the development of a European Security and Defence Identity within NATO

In the early 1990s, it became apparent that European countries needed to assume greater responsibility for their common security and defence. A rebalancing of the relationship between Europe and North America was essential for two reasons: first, to redistribute the economic burden of providing for Europe's continuing security, and second, to reflect the gradual emergence within European institutions of a stronger, more integrated European political identity, and the conviction of many EU members that Europe must develop the capacity to act militarily in appropriate circumstances where NATO is not engaged militarily.

The emergence of these new approaches to the problems of European security was profoundly influenced by the conflicts in the western Balkans during the 1990s. The inability of Europe to intervene to prevent or resolve such conflicts led to a collective realisation that the European Union must redress the imbalance between its far-reaching economic power and the limitations on

its political power. It had become obvious to many that a coordinated diplomatic effort to end conflict by political means needed to be backed up, if necessary, by credible military force. This led the European Union to become increasingly committed during the 1990s to conflict prevention and crisis management beyond its borders.

An important step in this direction was taken in 1992 with the Treaty of Maastricht, which included an agreement by EU leaders to develop a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) “including the eventual framing of a common defence policy which might in time lead to a common defence”. As an integral part of the development of the European Union, the Western European Union was requested to elaborate and implement EU decisions and actions with defence implications. The initiative to develop European defence capabilities through the Western European Union was later carried forward on the basis of the 1997 EU Treaty of Amsterdam. This Treaty, which entered into force in May 1999, incorporated the so-called WEU Petersberg tasks – humanitarian search and rescue missions, peacekeeping missions, crisis management tasks including peace enforcement, and environmental protection – providing the basis for the operative development of a common European defence policy.

In the same timeframe, a decision was taken at the 1994 NATO summit meeting in Brussels to develop a European Security and Defence Identity within NATO. This led to the introduction of practical arrangements to enable the Alliance to support European military operations undertaken by the Western European Union.¹ Decisions which served to reinforce this development were taken by the Alliance at subsequent meetings of NATO foreign and defence ministers in Berlin and Brussels in June 1996, and at the 1997 NATO summit meeting in Madrid.

In this way, the Western European Union was simultaneously developed as the defence component of the European Union and as a means of strengthening the European pillar of NATO. European member countries of the Alliance recognised that in the process of achieving a genuine European military capability, unnecessary duplication of the command structures, planning staffs and military assets and capabilities already available within NATO should be avoided. Moreover, such an approach would serve to strengthen the European contribution to the Alliance’s missions and activities, while responding to the

1 These arrangements included several provisions that are laid out in the June 1996 Final Communiqué. They include the availability of Alliance assets for the WEU, the elaboration of appropriate multinational European command arrangements within NATO for commanding and conducting WEU-led operations, and the concept of Combined Joint Task Forces, the purpose of which was to provide more flexible and deployable forces able to respond to new demands of all Alliance missions as well as separable but not separate deployed headquarters that could be employed by the WEU.

European Union's goal of developing a common foreign and security policy as well as to the overall need for a more balanced transatlantic partnership.

The arrangements made for NATO-WEU cooperation from 1991 to 2000 laid the groundwork for the subsequent development of the future NATO-EU relationship. In practice these arrangements were designed to ensure that if a crisis arose in which the Alliance decided not to intervene but the Western European Union chose to do so, the WEU could request the use of Alliance assets and capabilities to conduct an operation under its own political control and strategic direction.

New impetus for the development of this relationship was provided by the British-French summit meeting at St Malo, in December 1998. France and the United Kingdom agreed that the European Union "must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises". They issued a joint statement outlining their determination to enable the European Union to give concrete expression to these objectives.

Transfer of WEU responsibilities to the European Union

In the new climate that prevailed after the Anglo-French initiative, further decisions could be made. At the Washington Summit in April 1999, NATO leaders welcomed the new impetus given to the strengthening of the European Security and Defence Policy, affirming that a stronger European role would help contribute to the vitality of the Alliance in the 21st century. NATO leaders further stated that as this process went forward, NATO and the European Union should ensure the development of effective mutual consultation, cooperation and transparency, building on existing mechanisms between NATO and the Western European Union.

They also set in train further work to address a number of principles for future cooperation with the European Union and, in particular, satisfactory resolution of outstanding questions. These related in particular to three issues that had long proved difficult to resolve, namely:

- the means of ensuring the development of effective mutual consultation, cooperation and transparency between the European Union and the Alliance, based on the mechanisms that had been established between NATO and the Western European Union;
- the participation of non-EU European Allies in the decisions and the operations that might be conducted by the European Union; and
- practical arrangements for ensuring EU access to NATO planning capabilities and NATO's assets and capabilities.

EU leaders meeting in Cologne in June 1999 welcomed the St Malo statement and, taking into account the Amsterdam Treaty which incorporated the WEU Petersberg tasks, agreed on the concept and the objective of a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) for the European Union. They decided “to give the EU the means and capabilities to assume its responsibilities regarding a common European policy on security and defence” and also made a commitment to ensure the development of effective mutual consultation, cooperation and transparency with NATO. Similar reassurances were offered at subsequent European Council meetings, particularly in Helsinki (December 1999) and Nice (December 2000).

At the Helsinki meeting, the European Council established a “Headline Goal” for EU member states in terms of developing military capabilities for crisis-management operations. Its objective was to enable the European Union, by 2003, to deploy and sustain for at least one year military forces of up to 60 000 troops to undertake the full range of the Petersberg tasks referred to above, in the context of EU-led military operations in response to international crises where NATO as a whole is not engaged militarily. In addition, the European Union decided to create permanent political and military structures, including a Political and Security Committee, a Military Committee and a Military Staff, to ensure the necessary political guidance and strategic direction for such operations. The crisis management role of the Western European Union was also transferred to the EU at the Helsinki meeting (decision taken at the WEU Council Ministerial meeting in Marseilles in December 2000). The residual responsibilities of the WEU remain unaffected and are handled by a much reduced formal political structure and a small secretariat.

Built on decisions taken in Cologne and Helsinki, the Treaty of Nice signed in December 2000 (which came into effect in February 2003) provides the EU with the political framework for military operations (ESDP) and permanent political and military structures.

At the end of 2000, with the formal transfer of responsibilities for EU decisions and actions with defence implications from the Western European Union to the European Union itself, the relationship between NATO and the EU took on a new dimension.

Towards a strategic partnership with the European Union

Negotiations initiated in September 2000 led to an exchange of letters between NATO’s Secretary General and the EU Presidency in January 2001 to define the scope of cooperation and the modalities of “consultations and cooperation on questions of common interest relating to security, defence and

crisis management, so that crises can be met with the most appropriate military response and effective crisis management ensured”.

The exchange of letters provided for joint meetings at different levels. It prescribed two joint NATO-EU foreign ministers meetings every year and a minimum of three joint meetings per semester at ambassadorial level of the North Atlantic Council and the EU Political and Security Committee (known as NAC-PSC meetings). In addition, two joint Military Committee meetings would be held each semester, and meetings between subordinate committees would be scheduled on a regular basis. The exchange of letters also provided for meetings at staff level.

Since then, NAC-PSC meetings have become a normal feature of cooperation between the two organisations. The September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States provided a further incentive to enhance cooperation. The very next day, NATO's Secretary General participated in the deliberations of the EU General Affairs Council to analyse the international situation following the attacks. Formal contacts and reciprocal participation in meetings have subsequently increased.

At the Prague Summit in November 2002, NATO leaders reaffirmed their commitment to enhance NATO-EU cooperation, the effectiveness of which had already been evident in joint efforts to restore peace and create the conditions for progress in the Balkans.

In the NATO-EU Declaration on ESDP issued in December 2002, the two organisations “welcomed the strategic partnership established between the EU and NATO in crisis management, founded on our shared values, the indivisibility of our security and our determination to tackle the challenges of the new century” . A few months later, NATO and the European Union gave substance to this strategic partnership and opened the way for coordinated action by agreeing a series of documents that provided for exchanges of classified information and for cooperation in crisis management, including through the Berlin Plus arrangements.

The development of practical NATO-EU cooperation

The Berlin Plus arrangements

The Berlin Plus arrangements are based on the recognition that member countries of both organisations only have one set of forces and limited defence resources on which they can draw. Under these circumstances, and to avoid an unnecessary duplication of resources, it was agreed that operations led

by the European Union would be able to benefit from NATO assets and capabilities. In effect, these arrangements enable NATO to support EU-led operations in which the Alliance as a whole is not engaged. They have facilitated the transfer of responsibility from NATO to the European Union of military operations in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* and in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see below).

Agreed in March 2003, these arrangements are referred to as Berlin Plus because they build on decisions taken in Berlin in 1996 in the context of NATO-WEU cooperation. The main features of the Berlin Plus arrangements consist of the following main elements:

- assured EU access to NATO planning capabilities able to contribute to military planning for EU-led operations;
- the presumption of availability to the European Union of pre-identified NATO capabilities and common assets for use in EU-led operations;
- identification of a range of European command options for EU-led operations, further developing the role of NATO's Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR) in order for him to assume his European responsibilities fully and effectively;
- the further adaptation of NATO's defence planning system to incorporate more comprehensively the availability of forces for EU-led operations;
- a NATO-EU agreement covering the exchange of classified information under reciprocal security protection rules;
- procedures for the release, monitoring, return and recall of NATO assets and capabilities;
- NATO-EU consultation arrangements in the context of an EU-led crisis management operation making use of NATO assets and capabilities.

Cooperation in the western Balkans

The crisis in southern Serbia and the unstable political situation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* became a focus of international concern in 2001. A series of joint visits to the region by NATO's Secretary General and the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy underscored the unity of purpose and commitment shared by NATO and the European Union with regard to the security of the region.

On 30 May 2001, at the first formal NATO-EU foreign ministers' meeting in Budapest, the NATO Secretary General and the EU presidency issued a joint statement on the western Balkans. Later, they met in Brussels in December 2001 and in Reykjavik in May 2002 to review their cooperation across the board. They underlined their continuing commitment to strengthening the peace process in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* as well as elsewhere in the western Balkans, and reaffirmed their commitment to a close and transparent relationship between the two organisations.

Cooperation on the ground contributed positively to the improved situation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.* From August 2001 to the end of March 2003, NATO provided security for EU and OSCE monitors of the peace plan brokered with the support of the international community in the city of Ohrid. On 31 March 2003, the NATO-led peacekeeping mission (Operation Amber Fox) was terminated and responsibility for this task was formally handed over to the European Union, with the agreement of the government in Skopje. Renamed Operation Concordia, this was the first EU-led military crisis-management operation. Undertaken on the basis of the Berlin Plus arrangements, it marked the real starting point for cooperation between NATO and the European Union in addressing an operational crisis-management task.

On 29 July 2003, NATO and the European Union formally agreed on a "concerted approach to security and stability in the western Balkans" and outlined their strategic approach to the problems of the region. Both organisations expressed determination to continue to build on their achievements in working together to bring an end to conflict and to help stabilise the region as a whole.

At the Istanbul Summit in June 2004, in view of the positive evolution of the security situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Alliance leaders confirmed their decision to terminate NATO's peacekeeping mission there, which it had led since 1996, and welcomed the readiness of the European Union to assume responsibility for a new mission, Operation Althea, based on the Berlin Plus arrangements. Close cooperation and coordination with regard to the planning and implementation of the EU mission was facilitated by the appointment of the NATO Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR) as the EU Operation Commander.

NATO leaders stressed that NATO would nevertheless remain committed to the stabilisation of the country and would maintain a residual military presence through a NATO headquarters in Sarajevo. This headquarters is responsible primarily for providing assistance in the defence reform process and other tasks including counter-terrorism and support for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

A ceremony marking the handover of the primary responsibility for security in Bosnia and Herzegovina from NATO to the European Union took place in Sarajevo on 2 December 2004. The new NATO military headquarters was formally established on the same day.

Cooperation on other issues

The strategic partnership also covers other issues of common interest. These include concerted efforts with regard to the planning and development of military capabilities. NATO experts have provided military and technical advice for both the initial preparation and the subsequent implementation of the European Union's European Capabilities Action Plan (ECAP), which was created in November 2001. ECAP aims to provide the forces and capabilities required to meet the EU Headline Goal set at Helsinki in 1999. A NATO-EU Capability Group, established in May 2003, is working to ensure that the Alliance's capabilities initiatives and the ECAP are mutually reinforcing and is also examining the relationship between the NATO Response Force and newly created EU Battle Groups, as part of the NATO-EU agenda under the Berlin Plus arrangements.

The EU rapid reaction units, composed of battle groups, were part of the new Headline Goal for 2010 announced in February 2004. They are to be completely developed by 2007. The Headline Goal also led to the creation of an EU Defence Agency that focuses on the development of defence capabilities, research, acquisition and armaments.

Through information exchanges on their respective activities, consultations and contacts at expert and staff level, and joint meetings, NATO and the European Union also undertake joint work on issues such as the fight against terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the situation in Moldova, Mediterranean issues and cooperation in Afghanistan. Additional spheres of information exchange and cooperation include protection of civilian populations against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear attacks and other civil emergency planning and WMD-related issues. Cooperation can sometimes involve reciprocal participation in exercises. In November 2003 for instance, the first joint NATO-EU crisis management exercise (CME/CMX 03) was held. It was based on a range of standing Berlin Plus arrangements and concentrated on how the EU plans for an envisaged EU-led operation with recourse to NATO assets and capabilities, where NATO as a whole is not engaged.