

European Neighborhood

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EU-NATO COOPERATION: IS PESCO THE ANSWER TO THE BALANCE OF EU'S REGIONAL PRIORITIES?

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The current situation in Ukraine, on the one hand, and the issue of migration from different regions of the Middle East and North Africa, on the other, bring into light an unstable state of affairs with respect to the EU's Neighbourhood security. This comes at a time when the EU is rethinking its greater purpose in the region and around the world. This paper aims to identify the cooperation gaps between the EU and NATO, concluding with a set of policy proposals aimed at dissolving the current limitations of the EU-NATO relationship.

Introduction

The 2015 refugee crisis, added to the perennial illegal immigration from several North African countries into EU member states, as well as President Trump's election in 2016, brought into discussion new elements related to the EU's security. Besides Russian threats to Eastern Europe, the intricate relationship between Russia and the Baltic States and the 2014 annexation of Crimea, new vectors within the EU security policy emerged, such as rampant terrorism, as a consequence of the almost uncontrollable wave of immigrants from different Middle East and North Africa (MENA) states, and especially from Syria. Also, the Brexit process plays an important role, as the prospects of a non-deal Brexit are becoming more and more realistic. In the

context shaped by uncertain transatlantic relations, as well as the positions of non-EU NATO members such as Turkey and the UK, starting with the spring 2019, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) seems to be able to provide an answer to the 'local pains' engendered by the aforementioned security problems in Southern and Eastern Europe.

However, as NATO has a long tradition in ensuring security for most of the EU countries, debates regarding the necessity of PESCO have arisen. The main question to be asked is, therefore, whether PESCO must be seen as a political instrument in the post-Brexit balance of power among the NATO members, as after this moment "80% of NATO defence spending will come from non-EU Allies"¹. In connection to this question,

¹ J. Stoltenberg, *Doorstep*, NATO, 2017, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_148840.htm accessed 27 August 2018].

the paper builds its argumentation on the idea that the establishing of PESCO (as other initiatives before it, such as the European Defence Community – EDC, the European Political Cooperation – EPC, the European Security and Defence Policy – ESDP, and the Common Foreign and Security Policy – CFSP) must be seen as a part of the EU process of redefining its post-Westphalian, post-World War II, and post-Cold War political identity.

Both occurrence of new threats (the migration crisis, hybrid attacks, etc.) and recurrence on a higher scale of older issues address the EU's defence capacity: 765 failed, foiled, or completed attacks in the European Union from 2014-2017² require an updated approach. Therefore, while damaging in their very nature, these threats might be seen as a necessary evil in pushing aside the obsolete traits of the EU-NATO cooperation and leading to a refreshed relationship. While one may say that PESCO can be seen as an alternative to NATO, the paper will argue for the complementary relationship of the two.

Historical Context and PESCO

In order to understand the real contribution that PESCO brings, one should take a look at both the historical and political contexts. In a period right after the World War II, Europe found itself in a sensitive position from political, economic, and social points of view. As Dean Acheson said at that moment, "No such step as a United States of Europe is feasible...at this stage, but rather a series of concrete steps to solidify the remarkable progress already made".³ During that period and the Cold War, as Henry Kissinger described the situation in a more specific

manner, "the objective of European policy was primarily psychological: to oblige the United States to treat Europe as an extension of itself in case of an emergency".⁴

Through the Marshall Plan and the creation of NATO, Western European countries managed to find a coagulant for the transatlantic relations and a more coherent foreign policy. The political context at that time was synonymous to the zeitgeist. The Western European countries had to deal with the Eastern proximity, as it was the case of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact countries. The threats were different, as well as the economic situation. The refugees during the World War II, who were Europeans, were perceived in the same manner in which the immigrants to Europe from the MENA regions would be perceived today. Moreover, the cohesion among the NATO members was stronger as the efforts to contain the Soviet Union were representing a vital objective.

Current Political Context

The current political context is much more different and involves different threats that require new instruments of cooperation. This strongly challenges the traditional approach towards the EU-NATO cooperation, as NATO resilience needs time, and some of the threats are directed strictly at the EU security, as not all the EU members are NATO members and vice-versa. This does not suggest any incapacity of NATO to adapt to different external threats for its EU members, but it can rather manifest disagreements in regard to threats between the EU members that are in and outside NATO. This relation, as we will see further, represents the main gap in the EU-

² *Number of Failed, Foiled or Completed Attacks in the European Union from 2014 to 2017*, "Statista", 2018, [<https://www.statista.com/statistics/746562/number-of-arrested-terror-suspects-in-the-european-union-eu/>].

³ *Secretary General's Eisenhower Lecture: The Relevance of Atlanticism*, NATO Defence College, September 2000, [<https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2000/s000915a.htm> accessed 27 August 2018].

⁴ H. Kissinger, *World Order*, Penguin Random House: UK 2014, p. 89.

NATO cooperation that not only justifies the existence of PESCO, but also brings into discussion a more diversified approach to the current political situation. Moreover, “military capacities developed within PESCO remain in the hands of Member States that can also make them available in other contexts such as NATO or the UN”.⁵

The issue of migration with its 2015 peak is a multifaceted one, and it created many debates and dissensions among the EU member states. In relation to the European security, there is one major consequence of these dissensions represented by the fact that “some member states are intent on continuing to rely on NATO for all defensive capabilities while others are looking to wield their sovereignty and expand defensive capabilities bilaterally and through the EU”.⁶ In the bigger picture, it is obvious that the European Union has to deal with a more complex situation than the one right after the World War II. Besides the fact that the number of the EU members is bigger than the one that the Coal and Steel Community had in 1951, the threats are more diverse and multiplied. In this context, one can talk about a Europe that is closer to the post-Westphalian spirit of division than to the one of the European Recovery Program.

Without a doubt, the 2015 migration crisis found an already divided Europe with strong right-wing and far-right parties in countries such as Hungary, France, Austria, Slovenia, Poland, and Sweden. However, the migration had also a major contribution to such events as Brexit or the recent election of the Freedom Party of Austria. Are these divisions signs of

weakness of the EU structure or should they rather be interpreted as the manifestation of a political maturity of the EU member states? It is obvious that the member states expect a more proactive bureaucracy in Brussels, as also the involvement of the EU abroad is growing. As the EU wants to be a more important actor on the global political scene, each member state wants its share of participation.

In the context of the 2015 refugee crisis, an important role was played also by the relations between the EU and Turkey. The role played by Turkey as a gatekeeper for Syrian refugees has to be seen as revelatory, if not for a full membership prospect, then for a seriously improved relationship between the two sides. On the night of 15 July “we (EU) stood on the side of Turkey’s democracy and of the democratic institutions [...] There is much the European Union and Turkey can do together starting with Cyprus or against terrorism, for our economies and our business, on refugees for the future of Syria and for the stability of the Caucasus” (EEAS, 2016). Mogherini’s words represent, alongside its solidarity core, a clear declaration of the EU’s security priorities not only in its relations with Turkey, but in general. The EU’s desire to cultivate its mercurial relationship with Turkey is obvious and it was reiterated through the EU’s response to the US decision to relocate its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. However, regardless the silent consensus between the two in regard to this kind of issues, “Turkey is expecting much more from EU when its border security is concerned”.⁷ Not less can be said about the EU’s expectations when it comes, for instance, to the issue of human rights in Turkey.⁸

⁶ H. DeMint, *EU-NATO Relations: A Future of Cooperation or Conflict?*, 2018, p. 5.

⁷ A. C. Ertürk, *EU’s PESCO: A New Foreign Policy Instrument or the Same Old Story?*, “Global Political Trends Centre Istanbul Kultur University Policy Brief”, No. 51, January 2018, p. 7.

⁸ *Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the European Parliament Plenary Session on the human rights situation in Turkey and the situation in Afrin, Syria*, EEAS, 2018, [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/39509/speech-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-european-parliament-plenary_en accessed 29 August 2018].

While of obvious importance for the EU, the relations with Turkey are a clear indicator of Brussels' desire to minimize the US influence in certain affairs and a sign of the EU's desire to strengthen its position as a global contributor. Additional to other technical benefits that PESCO may provide, such as "opportunities for those member states willing to deploy the military for migration efforts, similar to the Italian mission in Niger"⁹, the mediation role played by PESCO is undeniable as, for instance, "before PESCO, it was unimaginable for the EU to reason with members like Cyprus and Austria for defence cooperation"¹⁰ as the two are not NATO members.

The 2016 election of Donald Trump brought forward a quite unorthodox view on the US role played within NATO, as he is "the first US President to openly question the existence of NATO, while the global security situation is increasingly characterised by hybrid threats and transnational terrorist operations"¹¹. Additionally, the old arguments between the US and Turkey surrounding Fethullah Gülen, as well as the recent developments around the detainment of the American pastor Andrew Brunson including the subsequent sanctions reiterate the need of the EU for a political instrument for mediation in matters of defence.

While some deny the complementarity of PESCO with NATO, the relationship within the US-EU-Turkey triangle is just one of the many situations in which the EU has

to hold with the hare and hunt with the hounds. Contrary to arguments about any surreptitious use of PESCO by the EU in its relations with the US, the role of PESCO is the one of an instrument to bring together opposed or apparently incompatible state actors on matters of security. The issue of migration in general, in many of its aspects depending on non-NATO or non-EU members such as Turkey, is one of the two major reasons – in conjunction with the Russian threat – for the existence of PESCO as an instrument of mediation and cooperation between the EU and other actors, especially NATO.

The Future Prospects of PESCO

We identified three ways in which PESCO influences both the EU's security and the relationship between the EU and NATO.

Firstly, PESCO should be regarded as something more than a political move made by the EU in response to Brexit and the actions of the Trump Administration with regards to NATO¹². On Brexit, the main issue here is that even if the UK, traditionally opposing many EU projects, has decided to withdraw, "several historical and political constellations will remain"¹³, meaning that some member states have their own plans for the development of the EU: a reformed/reimagined EU and a lesser integrated EU. Overall, PESCO is seen as a security guarantee in case of a hard Brexit and the unlikely withdrawal of US support for NATO¹⁴ – events

⁹ J. Himmrich, A "Hybrid Threat"? *European Militaries and Migration*, "Dahrendorf Forum-Debating Europe", 2018, p. 20.

¹⁰ A. C. Ertürk, *op. cit.* p. 7.

¹¹ R. Beckmann, R. Kempin, *EU Defence Policy Needs Strategy: Time for Political Examination of the CSDP's Reform Objectives*, "Dutch Institute for International Politics", Berlin: SSOAR, Vol. 1-3, 2017, p. 1.

¹² J. Gotkowska, *The Trouble with PESCO: The Mirages of European Defence*, "Point of View", No. 69/2018, Centre for Eastern Studies: Warsaw, p. 17.

¹³ Ø. Svendsen, *European Defence and Third Countries after Brexit*, "Policy Brief", 3/2018, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, pp. 2-3

¹⁴ N. Nováky, *The EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation in Defence: Keeping Sleeping Beauty from Snoozing*, "European View", Vol. 17, No. 1, 2018, p. 99.

that will negatively impact the EU and will also have other effects such as disrupting the delicate balance of power in the East (Ukraine in particular), which will undoubtedly empower the Russian Federation to act in a more threatening manner towards Eastern Europe¹⁵ and the Baltic region. If the worst case scenarios come to pass, PESCO could be seen as a 'contingency plan', so as to ensure not only security on the inside of the EU, but also that of the neighbouring states in an effort to prevent much more complicated situations from occurring.

Secondly, PESCO must be seen as a way to reinforce the EU projections of power and defend the EU's interests in regions directly affecting European security. The EU has launched several high-impact projects and actions, such as the Eastern Partnership and the EU Neighbourhood Policy¹⁶, which are specifically targeted to ensure a two-fold objective: (1) to ensure that the borders and security remain safe in relation to the increase in Russian threats, terrorist threats resulting from the migratory flux from the MENA, and other hybrid and cyber menaces; (2) to establish the EU as a regional power.

From a political perspective, the adoption of PESCO came as a move that sought to ease the burden of the many shocks that the EU suffered throughout the last decade. In the optics of EU affairs, the PESCO move triggered by Brussels can also signify that after years of failing to successfully expand and integrate cooperation on defence and security among its members, the EU is finally trying to up its game and propose not an alternative to

NATO, but rather an efficient framework of cooperation on security and military affairs within the EU. Still, PESCO cannot be seen, keeping in mind previous unsuccessful attempts on the matter¹⁷, as having the capacity to become the 'military arm' of the EU, or as an 'EU Army'. Nonetheless, in the current circumstances, the potential that PESCO brings is specifically oriented towards improving and adapting the system of cooperation among the various militaries of the EU.



It is crucial that member states understand that competing national interests should not negatively affect the overall image of the EU, particularly in the context of trade wars and economic confusion. frictions arising from the competing interests of member states.

It is crucial that member states understand that competing national interests should not negatively affect the overall image of the EU, particularly in the context of trade wars and economic confusion. Therefore, the interests of the EU as a regional/global actor should be understood as a whole. PESCO, thus, has the capacity to assemble EU member states in providing a united position on relevant topics, which would imply a strengthening of the EU's overall position on the international scene in defence, economic, and industrial sectors.¹⁸

¹⁵ M. Przywała, *Cyber Security*, [in:] D. Szóke (ed.), *New Security Challenges from a Visegrad 4 Perspective*, Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade: Budapest 2018, pp. 24-26.

¹⁶ E. Korosteleva, *Eastern Partnership: Bringing "the Political" Back in*, "East European Politics", Vol. 33, No. 3, 2017, pp. 321-322.

¹⁷ A. C. Ertürk, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁸ S. Seitz, *PESCO's Prospects: Tracing the Path of EU Defense Reform and Considering the Future of Permanent Structured Cooperation*, "Politics in Theory and Practice", 05 February 2018, [<https://politicstheorypractice.com/2018/02/05/pescos-prospects-tracing-the-path-of-eu-defense-reform-and-considering-the-future-of-permanent-structured-cooperation/> accessed 27 August 2018].



It is crucial that policymakers take into consideration previous attempts of EU defence cooperation and impose clear regulations to mitigate any frictions arising from the competing interests of member states.

Thirdly, PESCO can also be seen as trying to compete with NATO on issues such as cyberdefence, cybersecurity, and on combating hybrid menaces. Yet when discussing European security today, especially after the initiation of PESCO, it seems that NATO neither holds complete authority on security matters, nor does it benefit from the full commitment of its member states, as it was the case in the early 2000s. This might be considered by some as being the main area of contention¹⁹ between the supporters of PESCO and those of NATO, given the fact that in relation to the general view on the security of the EU, there is no clear indication where NATO attributes would end and PESCO jurisdiction would start. For example, “Germany could introduce PESCO projects that are more closely aligned with NATO’s strategic goals. NATO is interested in projects that improve interconnectivity, digitization and joint training of troops”²⁰ – meaning that at least for the foreseeable future, PESCO will be considered as being part of national efforts which member states will exert in support of NATO defence projects.

Nevertheless, at the moment, PESCO is aiming towards integrating the national security elements in a functional framework with defence purposes (such as the European Air Transport Command) as well as projecting capabilities in a more coherent fashion so as to reduce duplication.²¹ Still, cooperation between PESCO and NATO on these issues of great importance will be the likely outcome²². The role of NATO in relation to the EU’s security can be neither denied nor diminished: “NATO is named as the primary framework for collective defence”²³ for the EU, for a very simple reason – it represents the general understanding that without NATO, Europe’s security could be threatened on a level never seen before since 1945.

Conclusions

An expansion in cooperation between the EU (via PESCO) and NATO is a crucial step forward towards ensuring the security of Europe. The increase in the complexity of security threats and the apparition of new categories of menaces, coupled with already-present threats (terrorism, hybrid and cyber threats, etc.) require a novel approach, needed to effectively combat and contain them. It is crucial that policymakers take into consideration previous attempts of EU defence cooperation and impose clear regulations to mitigate any frictions arising from the competing interests of member states.

The main principle of PESCO should be the development of a framework that would strike a balance between the interests of

¹⁹ S. Biscop, *L'Europe de la défense : donnons une chance à «PESCO»*, “Défense”, No. 191, March - April 2018, pp. 24-25.

²⁰ N. Helwig, *New Tasks for EU-NATO Cooperation: An Inclusive EU Defence Policy Requires Close Collaboration with NATO*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik – SWP – Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit: Berlin 2018, p. 3.

²¹ S. Biscop, *European Defence: Give PESCO a Chance*, “Survival”, Vol. 60, No. 3, 2018, pp. 166-168.

²² N. Helwig, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

²³ J. Gotkowska, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

both the EU and its member states, which, coupled with the increase in the EU's strategic autonomy on security matters, can positively contribute to the overall strength of not only the EU, but also NATO. In the end, cooperation between PESCO and NATO would be substantially beneficial to the adaptiveness and resoluteness of the EU's presence at both the regional and the international levels.

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