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EU–NATO relations

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Introduction

In recent years, scholarly literature on the EU as a foreign and security policy actor has increasingly come to include studies on how the EU relates to and works with other security organisations on the international arena, both generally and with reference to specific organisations. One of the most frequently studied ‘partner organisations’ in the security field has been the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This should hardly come as a surprise: NATO and the EU share not only historical roots in the early years of the Cold War, but they also share 21 member states in Europe (around 2/3 of their respective totals).1

Moreover, with the EU’s gradual emergence as a security actor, NATO’s adjustment to the post-Cold War security landscape and the Eastern enlargement processes of both organisations, the two are increasingly facing overlaps in challenges, resources and tasks. This both makes them natural contexts and arenas for one another as security actors, and intimately links them as institutional partners and rivals.

In the present chapter, we offer a state-of-the-art overview of the extant scholarly literature on the EU’s relations with and position and influence as a security actor vis-à-vis NATO. We observe that overall; the scholarship on NATO–EU relations is extensive, especially within the practitioner’s field and within the literature on the EU as a foreign, security and defence actor, but increasingly also within traditional IR studies. As we shall see, however, it is characteristic of this literature that it tends to be descriptive, evaluative or normative, rather than seeking more general theoretical insights.

The chapter is structured as follows: in the first section, we go through the extensive extant scholarship on the emergence of the EU as a security actor in Europe and beyond, with particular attention to aspects involving NATO. Then, in the second section, we explore how EU foreign policy towards NATO has been traced and analysed in the scholarly literature. In the third section, we move on to assessing scholarly contributions on NATO and the EU as transatlantic partners and rivals. In the fourth and final section, we delve into the small but growing scholarship comparing the EU–NATO institutional relationship to other inter-institutional relationships, or theorising it as part of a more general framework on inter-institutional cooperation and partnership. Here, we argue, there is still much uncharted potential in both the literature on organisational theory and, especially, in IR theory.
NATO as context for the emergence of a European security framework

Extant scholarship includes a large number of publications tracing the historical efforts to establish a framework for foreign, security and defence cooperation in Europe – outside of as well as within the institutional bodies emerging as part of the European integration project. In these accounts, NATO usually forms a natural – not to say obligatory – part of that historical context. The early years of European integration did, after all, take place in a security environment dominated by the great power struggles of the Cold War; where the security guarantee provided by the United States through the North Atlantic Treaty (1949) had already acquired a key role. As summarised by Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler:

The early phases of community building in Europe took place in the aftermath of the Second World War, at a time when Cold War tensions were increasingly evident. Thus European policy elites faced two major challenges – the need to reconstruct their economies and societies; and the need to ensure a stable and secure external environment in which the processes of reconstruction might prosper. In 1950 this latter concern was largely met through the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which effectively linked United States military capabilities to the defense of Western Europe. Nevertheless, the need to secure peaceful relations between the states of Western Europe remained, as did aspirations to create a strong, united (Western) Europe capable of playing an important role in the post-War world.

(Bretherton and Vogler, 2006: 3)

From this shared starting point, historical accounts of European integration in the foreign, security and defence field typically set out by pointing at the defence dimension of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), established in 1952, which emerged alongside and in relation to NATO. NATO is also treated as an important explanatory factor for the failings first of the French initiated Pleven Plan to create a European army and, subsequently, the broader plans to establish a European Defense Community (EDC) in the 1950s (Goormaghtigh, 1954). Scholars particularly stress how central European countries like Britain and France, as well as the United States, had different approaches to how West Germany’s rearmament could be kept under control, and the way they envisaged a role for NATO or the European institutional frameworks in this respect (McGeehan, 1971; Sloan, 2005). While France keenly advocated the establishment of an independent European framework for this purpose, Britain’s main concern was to keep the United States committed to the preservation of European peace and security. The country therefore preferred to solve ‘the German problem’ inside the framework of NATO (see e.g. Dedman, 1996: Ch. 5).

Other important landmarks in the history on European integration in the security and defence area include the development of the Western European Union (WEU) from 1948 onwards, and the establishment of the European Political Community (EPC) in the 1970s. Also in scholarly reviews of these institutional developments, NATO is treated as a natural part of the context (e.g. Forster and Wallace, 2000; Bretherton and Vogler, 2006).

With the end of the Cold War began also a new chapter in the story not only on European security and defence integration, but also on NATO–EU relations. From this point onwards, much scholarly literature focuses on the introduction of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) pillar in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty and the WEU countries’ signing of the so-called Petersberg Declaration the same year,² and these developments’ impact on NATO’s role and transatlantic relations more generally (Taylor, 1994; Bailes, 1997). The signing of the French-British
St. Malo declaration in 1998 and the process leading up to the Berlin Plus agreement in 2002 also set off intense debates about the nature and function of the EU–NATO relationship (Howorth, 2000a), something to which we will return below. Thereafter followed discussions of the gradual strengthening of the European Security Defense Policy (ESDP) (since 2010, the Common Security and Defense Policy, CSDP), including the agreement on the Helsinki Headline goals and the launch of the first EU military operations in the first half of the 2000s. In the discussion of all these institutional developments, NATO is typically dealt with as a constraining factor for the EU, one that complicated the development of an independent European security framework, or even prevented it from reaching its full potential.

**NATO at the receiving end: the EU as a security actor in a changing world**

The literature examining the EU’s emergent role as an actor in foreign, security and defense politics has been vast and steadily growing the last 10 to 15 years, reflecting the real-life development of ESDP and the EU’s participation in crisis management operations. It includes a large number of studies of what kind of security actor or power the EU is (e.g. Larsen, 2002b; Manners, 2006; Sjursen, 2006; Toje, 2010; Whitman, 2011), of what capabilities and resources it possesses or lacks to act as the one or the other (Shake *et al.*, 1999; Rieker, 2009; Weis, 2009), of how well it has ‘performed’ as such (Jørgensen, 1996; Jørgensen *et al.*, 2011), the degree to which it has succeeded in accomplishing its security objectives or peace-building efforts so far (e.g. Bono and Ulriksen, 2004; Gross, 2009; Björkdahl, 2011). More recently, and in light of global changes, there is also a growing literature on how the EU should meet the challenges from geopolitics and shifting international power relations, including the emergence of new great powers such as the BRICS (Grevi, 2009; Duke, 2011). In these scholarly discussions, NATO is often dealt with – implicitly or explicitly – as the key organisational ‘other’, one that the EU’s identity, capabilities or accomplishments are compared to and measured against. In this context, the corresponding literature on NATO’s future as the main framework for security and defence politics in Europe is worthwhile mentioning. Here, the EU and the EU’s emergence as a credible security actor form a natural part of the discussion (Cornish, 1996).

A substantial sub-group of literature on the EU as a security actor contends with the national foreign policies of individual EU member states, and their relationships with and ambitions for the EU and NATO respectively. Some such studies have taken a broad, all-inclusive approach, analysing and comparing the foreign policies of all EU member states in these respects (Hill, 1996b; Manners and Whitman, 2000; White, 2001; Smith, 2004b). Others have taken interest in the role and positions of distinct groups of European countries in this regard. Here, the literature on the old European great powers Britain, France and Germany is particularly prominent (Larsen, 1997; Haftendorn *et al.*, 2006; Hyde-Price, 2007; Aggestam, 2011). Britain, often described as a loyal Atlanticist and reluctant European, has been a favored study object for many researchers (e.g. Hill, 1996a; George, 1998; Gamble, 2003; Dunne, 2004). The same observation is true for France, not least due to its withdrawal from NATO’s military structures in 1966, and self-appointed role as an engine in the European integration process together with Germany. Germany’s relations with both NATO and the EEC/EU were marked by the debates concerning the country’s rearmament and, later, reunification until the 1990s (McGeehan, 1971). The Franco-German cooperation inside the EU was therefore based on Germany’s undisputable economic and political powers, but never reached into the security policy field. According to the literature, domestic concerns and a general anti-war stance have imposed on Germany a restrictive stance towards the use of force and on the use of German troops in the context of NATO (cf. ‘national caveats’ debate) and the EU (Hyde-Price, 2007).
Other distinct groupings of European states that have been subject to scholarly study include the ‘Atlanticists’ (Grøger and Haugevik, 2009), the Nordics (Grøger et al., 2002; Rieker, 2005), the neutral EU member states (Ojanen, 2002; Möller and Bjereld, 2010), and the new East and Central European member states in the EU and NATO following enlargement processes since 1999 (e.g. Smith, 2004a).4

Smaller EU member states have also been subject to scholarly analysis on an individual basis, with a view to their approaches to and positions between EU and NATO in the field of foreign, security and defence politics. Denmark is here often identified as a ‘special case’, because of its opt-out from the parts of the Maastricht Treaty dealing with the ESDP, concentrating its influence efforts in NATO (Larsen, 2002a; 2009). The negative effects of the Danish opt-outs have, scholars argue, have spilled into other policy areas, reducing Denmark’s influence inside the EU more generally (Manners et al., 2008). Similarly, Norway, who is an EU outsider but participates in certain ESDP structures and civilian and military crisis management operations, has also been subject to analysis in this regard (Grøger, 2005; Ojanen, 2006b; Grøger, 2007). Another EU outsider has, however, stirred up more severe political tension in the EU–NATO relation. Turkey is a considerable political and military player in NATO, but remains a non-EU member. Because EU officials have dismissed Turkey’s demands to be more involved in EU decision-making on security issues, Turkey has in return rejected Cyprus’ wish to take part in NATO meetings (Missiroli, 2002a). This conflict has been subject to considerable scholarly attention in the EU–NATO literature, and is discussed in more detail in the subsequent section.

EU–NATO relations

Discussions about the institutional relationship between the EU and NATO often appear in the literature on the European security architecture and these organisations’ place in it. This goes for analyses of relations between the United States and Europe more generally, often referred to as the ‘transatlantic bargain’ (e.g. Keohane, 2003; Penksa and Mason, 2003; Asmus, 2005; Sloan, 2005; Howorth, 2009). In addition, many scholars have concerned themselves with how the United States, being a key actor in NATO, has viewed and responded to the emergence of the EU as a security actor (Haftendorn and Tuschhoff, 1993; Gnesotto, 1996). These discussions were particularly centred on the autonomy of a European military dimension, leading to the agreement that the European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) should be established within NATO’s structures in 1996, but which was later abolished in favour of the more independent ESDP. The US position has arguably shifted from initial scepticism towards such a development, to supporting a stronger European military arm (if not an independent one) and actively encouraging Europe to take on more responsibility in matters of European security. This shift in attitude particularly followed from Europe’s unwillingness to take the lead in the in the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s (Asmus, 2005).

EU–NATO as institutional rivals and partners

The most extensive scholarly literature on EU–NATO relations concerns the nature of the institutional relationship between the two organisations from the 1990s onwards, as partners and rivals on the political level and in the field (missions). In the early period, the question of whether there was to be a place for the WEU alongside – or inside – an ever closer union and a transformed NATO, and indeed in the European ‘Alphabet Soup’, attracted much scholarly interest (Cornish, 1996; Deighton, 1996; Lenzi, 1998; Shake et al., 1999). This literature focused on how the development of the EU military dimension should proceed, finally leading
up to the ESDP, as well as on the need to avoid duplication with, diminution of or discrimination against NATO. At the political level, differences among member states concerning what role the EU and NATO should have vis-à-vis one another have been explicit as well as implicit. Some countries, especially France, and analysts have seen the ESDP as the ‘natural’ continuation of the process towards an ever closer union, whereas others, such as Britain, have worried that important security and defence issues would be removed from NATO’s agenda and competence area (Howorth, 2000a).

The literature on EU–NATO relations to a large extent departs from or focuses on the successes and, overwhelmingly, failures of the Berlin Plus framework from 2002. This set of agreements regulates formal institutional cooperation between the two, including the conditions under which the EU can draw on NATO assets in operations where the Alliance as a whole does not wish to act, and the provisions for EU access to NATO planning, European command options and assets and capabilities in these situations. A large part of the literature on EU–NATO relations analyses concrete obstacles to as well as efforts of EU–NATO cooperation in Brussels and in the field. One such obstacle concerns the abovementioned political controversy between Turkey and Cyprus. The dominant narrative in the policy-oriented contributions holds that Turkey’s demand for more involvement in EU decision-making on security issues has been dismissed by EU officials, leading Turkey to veto Cyprus’ participation in NATO meetings. Cyprus, for its part, has blocked Turkey’s signing of an administrative arrangement with the European Defense Agency (EDA), which as a prerequisite for Greece’s acceptance of a security agreement between the EU and Turkey (Sturm, 2010). There is also a narrower scholarly literature which questions whether a solution to the controversy would actually reset or boost EU–NATO cooperation, and that adds a cultural and historical dimension to Turkish EU and NATO policy by focusing on Turkish identity, Turkey as a border land between East and West, etc. (Rumelili, 2004; 2007; Grigoriadis, 2009; Duke, 2011).

Analyses of how transatlantic relations have been put to the test, because of diverging political and/or normative policies between, in particular, European and non-European NATO-members are ample. The differences or rift between Europe and the United States over the (legitimacy of the) Iraq war was debated and documented in a number of scholarly publications (Lindström, 2003; Hallenberg and Karlsson, 2005; Cornish, 2006; Ojanen, 2006a; Touzovskaia, 2006).

At the level of defence cooperation and capabilities, the literature has to a large extent studied the development of EU assets and often compared them to those of NATO. This exercise more or less gives the same result whenever it is conducted; notably that the EU is weaker than NATO regarding ‘hard’ power and military force projection (Howorth, 2000b; Giegerich, 2010). This focus is also reflected in a niche literature that has been preoccupied with analysing the degree to which the EU has managed to create a European strategic culture, seeing this as a precondition for developing the EU into an effective security (and military) actor similar to NATO (Rynning, 2003; Cornish and Edwards, 2005). Although the civilian dimension of CSDP usually is mentioned in analyses of EU security policy and operations, the general focus on the EU’s military capabilities in the literature has played down the important role of the EU as a civilian power, also in its relationship with NATO (Jakobsen, 2009). The priority that NATO and the EU have given to, respectively, a ‘comprehensive’ or ‘integrated’ approach to on-going missions, especially in Afghanistan, has however generated new interest in the EU–NATO relationship issue. NATO’s recent decision to create a civilian capacity further underline the political importance attached to the civilian aspects of security.

The literature on the EU’s contributions on the ground, in crisis management operations or state building efforts, has grown with the number of EU-led or ESDP-operations. There is an extensive body of publications describing and assessing practical cooperation between the EU
and NATO in the operational field, both in general (Missiroli, 2002a; Cornish, 2006; Shimkus, 2007:10–12) and with reference to specific operations (e.g. Mace, 2004). Here, the contributions from the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) need to be highlighted, which over the past decade have systematically conducted research on missions where the EU plays a role (recent examples include Gross, 2009; Pirozzi, 2009; Szewczyk, 2010).

With the introduction of a ‘Solidarity Clause’ in 2007, the EU member states agreed to ‘act jointly in a spirit of solidarity’ should a member become victim of terrorist attack or natural or man-made disaster. In addition, the EU has adopted a Clause on mutual assistance in the case of military aggression against a member-state on its territory. These treaty provisions were adopted to integrate the WEU’s structures and commitments into the EU but are also considered to bolster solidarity and strengthen the CSDP. While primarily aimed at protecting neutral or non-aligned EU members who are outside NATO (Finland, Sweden, Austria, Ireland, Luxemburg), in principle they apply to all EU members (Rhinard et al., 2010). Scholars seem to agree, however, that this development does not challenge NATO’s position as the cornerstone of its member states’ national defence (Lachmann, 2010; Menon, 2011).

To conclude this sub-section, the literature tells the story of an EU-NATO relationship marked by rivalry and competition, especially in the first years, but also by practical cooperation and partnership. Scholars have pointed at the interdependent relationship between the EU and NATO, and how their respective futures largely depend upon the other (e.g. Howorth, 2003). As Hanna Ojanen observes:

For various reasons the different organisations all saw crisis management as a new and central field of activity in the 1990s. The defense organisations, Nato and WEU, had to find new, broader activities after their traditional defense function ceased; but so had the EU, which was looking for ways to act and to give credibility to its common foreign policy. From two opposite directions, therefore, the organisations’ tasks and fields of competences started to converge and increasingly overlap. At times, it even seemed as if the organisations would swap identities: Nato becoming a political organisation and the EU a military one.

(Ojanen, 2006a: 68)

Hence, the inherent tension in the EU–NATO relationship has also led to a certain degree of dynamics in both organisations’ development as security actors. This notwithstanding, and despite certain synergies, the lack of dynamics in and even dysfunction of the inter-institutional relationship seems to have received the primary scholarly attention. Continued political disagreement between some of the participating states is often put forward to explain the absence of a true strategic partnership between EU and NATO (Touzovskaia, 2006), although the incentives for solving the issue might not be present, either, in what could also be seen as a ‘comfortable paralysis’ after 10 years of development (Gnesotto, 2009). Others have instead argued that the obstacles are of a more profound nature, reflecting diverging visions – also between the US and central EU members – about the respective roles of the two organisations, but also the absence of a shared outlook on the way forward, providing more gloomy prospects for the future (Biscop et al., 2010; Lachmann, 2010).

EU–NATO as a case of inter-organisational cooperation

In recent years, scholars have increasingly taken an interest in the EU–NATO relationship as a case of inter-organisational cooperation more generally, including in light of theoretical perspectives. Some of these studies take an inductive, exploratory approach, seeking to arrive at general
theoretical insights on inter-institutional cooperation and rivalry by the EU–NATO relationship alongside other inter-organisational relationships. They include the UN–EU relationship, the UN–NATO relationship and relationships involving other regional organisations such as the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the African Union (AU), the Organization of American States (OAS) and ASEAN (Yost, 2007; Haugevik, 2009; Jørgensen, 2009). Others have sought to theoretically explore inter-organisational convergence, degree of formalisation and rivalry between the two organisations in light of the EU’s claim to pursue a strategy of effective multilateralism (Varwick and Koops, 2009).

Studies have also been carried out deductively, seeking to shed light on the EU–NATO relationship on the basis of theoretical frameworks and models established for the study of related phenomena. Here, one path has been to ‘scale up’ theoretical insights on integration (Ojanen, 2006a) or inter-state cooperation and rivalry from the state level (e.g. Stokke, 2001; Biermann, 2008). Another suggested path has been to look for theoretical frameworks developed within organisational scholarship, i.e. models for inter-institutional cooperation developed for the study of relations between business corporations (e.g. Smith et al., 1995; Van de Ven and Poole, 1995; Lang, 2002; Child et al., 2005).

Finally, a small but rapidly growing literature concerns itself with how the EU works and performs as an actor within the framework of other global and regional organisations (Jørgensen, et al., 2011). While the literature on the EU’s work inside the structures of the UN has so far been the most developed (e.g. Laatikainen and Smith, 2006), scholars are increasingly also taking interest in how NATO functions as an arena for the EU as a whole and for the 21 EU member states that members of both NATO and the EU (see Garbers, 2008; Graeger and Haugevik, 2011). In this niche of the literature, there is unexplored potential, for example for field-based analysis of informal ways in which EU member states collaborate inside the institutional structures of NATO, as well as inside the EU–NATO cooperation structures, also beyond Berlin Plus.

Conclusion and suggestions for future research

In this chapter we have discussed the scholarly contributions on the EU–NATO relationship and the various ways in which this relationship has been studied over the past 15 years or so. The literature review shows that NATO has not only been a context for the emergence of a European security framework, but it is also at ‘the receiving end’ of the emerging EU foreign and security policy actor.

As our literature review has suggested, the EU and NATO are in this respect both institutional rivals and partners. There is ample political support for the idea of EU–NATO cooperation, reflected in scholarly studies of policy development and how such cooperation could promote European security interests writ large as well as the EU as a regional and global security actor. However, most scholarly contributions conclude that the EU–NATO relationship, as a case of inter-organisational cooperation, is a story of weak intra-institutional cooperation and lack of shared political visions and operational ambitions. This picture also partly covers transatlantic cooperation, both within and outside of NATO, which was dealt a serious blow by the Iraq crisis in 2003 and which continuously is looking for a mission that leads into a common future.

Furthermore, the scholarly contributions to a considerable degree remain focused on the EU’s military capabilities and operational achievements, often comparing these with those of NATO. However, and unsurprisingly, it is the civilian dimension of crisis management that may provide the EU with an opportunity to realise its potential as a fully-fledged European security actor, also in cooperation with NATO. This has been a relatively unexplored ground
of EU–NATO cooperation, although concepts like ‘comprehensive approach’ and ‘integrated missions’ have become important in relation to the operations in Afghanistan and, lately, Libya. NATO’s recent decision to develop a civilian capability may, however, open up new areas of cooperation – and competition – also in this field. Ultimately, this may also re-open the debate about a better division of labour between Europe and the United States, which has been underpinning many debates about European security since the 1990s.

We have also observed that while there is an extensive literature on EU–NATO relations – as partners, rivals, contexts and arenas for one another – this particular literature for the most part remains under-theorised. On a final note, it is important to keep in mind that regardless of political controversy at the political level, a lot of interaction is going on between the two organisations on a daily basis, at the diplomatic and bureaucratic level in Brussels and in field operations. Ambassadors, working diplomats and military representatives go to work and interact with one another every day, even if the political decision-makers at the top in their respective countries or institutions have their disagreements. Hence, instead of analysing the EU–NATO relationship by measuring the degree to which the two organisations actually fulfil or fail to fulfil the politically negotiated and publicly stated ambitions for that relationship, one could explore those EU–NATO practices that have developed since Berlin Plus to solve everyday, often nitty-gritty problems – not necessarily even as part of that agreement. This would furthermore remove the focus away from what the actors involved think about the desirability, necessity or futility of EU–NATO cooperation to what they think from; what they bring into the institutional setting (see Pouliot, 2010). It is our view that these everyday, routinised and often micro-level practices that take place among practitioners ought to be subject to increased scholarly analysis, potentially leading to theory development. In short, a practice approach to EU–NATO cooperation would bring forward new types of knowledge about a set of intra-institutional relations, which are central to understanding European security.

Notes

1 These 21 countries are Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom.

2 The Petersberg tasks cover a range of possible military missions, ranging from humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks, tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking.

3 The acronym ‘BRIC’ is commonly used as a collective term for Brazil, Russia, India and China. An ‘S’ adds South Africa to the group.

4 For a view from the region, see (Missiroli, 2002b).


6 Article 28 A (7) of the Lisbon Treaty, enshrined as Article 222, Title VII of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

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