

# **EU–NATO RELATIONS**

## **RUNNING ON THE FUMES OF INFORMED DECONFLICTION**

Edited by

Simon J. Smith, Carmen Gebhard and Nina Græger



# EU–NATO Relations

For almost fifteen years, both the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have claimed to partake in a relationship that is purported to be a 'Strategic Partnership', albeit one that is troubled by lasting political blockages. The constraints that affect the formal relationship between the two organisations are well-covered terrain in the academic literature – including by most of the contributors to this volume; however, the popular argument that the EU and NATO simply do not cooperate in any substantive way warrants deeper investigation, both theoretically and thematically. Thus, EU–NATO relations might not at first seem like an under-researched area, but much of the existing literature on the issue re-engages oversimplified and formulaic statements about the nature, quality, and practice of interactions between the EU and NATO.

This volume aims to develop the EU–NATO research agenda by pursuing three key objectives: (1) reduce the lacuna of theoretically informed analyses of the relationship, (2) add empirically and analytically rigorous case studies to the relevant body of literature, and (3) point to possible developments and solutions in the 'Strategic Partnership'.

The chapters in this book were originally published as a special issue in *European Security*.

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First published 2019  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN, UK

and by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN13: 978-1-138-31855-7

Typeset in Myriad Pro  
by codeMantra

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# Citation Information

The chapters in this book were originally published in the journal *European Security*, volume 26, issue 3 (September 2017). When citing this material, please use the original page numbering for each article, as follows:

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*EU–NATO relations: running on the fumes of informed deconfliction*

Simon J. Smith and Carmen Gebhard

*European Security*, volume 26, issue 3 (September 2017) pp. 303–314

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Joachim A. Koops

*European Security*, volume 26, issue 3 (September 2017) pp. 315–339

## Chapter 2

*Grasping the everyday and extraordinary in EU–NATO relations: the added value of practice approaches*

Nina Græger

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*The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost: a Grounded Theory approach to the comparative study of decision-making in the NAC and PSC*

Simon J. Smith, Nikola Tomic and Carmen Gebhard

*European Security*, volume 26, issue 3 (September 2017) pp. 359–378

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## INTRODUCTION

# EU–NATO relations: running on the fumes of informed deconfliction

Simon J. Smith and Carmen Gebhard

### ABSTRACT

This article provides the framework for the contributions to this special issue. It first puts the theme into context and outlines the main issues that justify further analytical engagement with European Union (EU)–North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) relations to the extent we propose here. We then provide some historical background to frame the discussion, and in doing so also outline the current state of interaction between the EU and NATO. We then briefly contextualise the changing strategic environment shaping the relationship, including recent proposals to implement their declared “strategic partnership”. This introduction then presents an overview of the existing literature to set the stage for a renewed look at the research agenda that has emerged over the last two decades. We close with an outline of the individual contributions to this special issue, which are presented in two sections: one focusing on theoretical and conceptual approaches to the study of EU of EU–NATO relations, and one on the inter-organisational relationship in practice, followed by a concluding synopsis and outlook.

## Introduction

It is quite extraordinary that after almost 20 years (if St. Malo is taken as a starting point) of formal inter-organisational relations between the European Union (EU) (and its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), respectively) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), no special issue has yet been devoted to investigating interactions between them; especially given the fact that the two organisations are fundamental to underwriting European and Transatlantic security. While the scholarly literature on the EU and NATO has grown over time, gaps remain with regard to the way in which the relationship *between them* is theorised, conceptualised and studied in various empirical contexts.

The first section of the special issue focuses on theoretical and conceptual approaches to the study of EU–NATO (Duke and Gebhard 2017, Græger 2017, Koops 2017, Smith *et al.* 2017), followed by a more empirical section on key issues occupying the two organisations in their relationship with each other (Fiott 2017, Lavallée 2017, Mayer 2017). In this

introduction, we aim to contextualise and provide a historical, thematic and analytical backdrop to the individual contributions to this volume, and position our work in the existing literature.

## **A brief historical overview**

For almost 15 years, the EU and NATO have claimed that they partake in a particular organisational relationship,<sup>1</sup> a purported “Strategic Partnership”, set out in the so-called Berlin Plus agreements of 2002 as “the comprehensive framework for EU–NATO permanent relations” (EU–NATO 2003). With their large overlaps in membership and seemingly obvious need for convergence in strategic terms, the launch of such an official partnership would hardly have been perceived as ground-breaking or particularly contestable. Yet, this impression overlooks a number of organisational challenges the relationship faces to this day. They entered the “strategic partnership” at a time where both were undergoing fundamental political and institutional changes: NATO was engaged in its comprehensive remake from a regional military alliance to a global security organisation (Wallander 2000, Wolff 2009), while the EU was in the process of launching its first crisis management operation, marking the launch of its own security and defence policy (Grevi *et al.* 2009). As a military alliance, NATO is traditionally understood as the provider of a “hard” security umbrella for the continent, which has ensured defence guarantees among allies, and most importantly from the United States of America since 1949. The EU, while an economic giant with an almost equally long organisational history, has entered the field of security provision relatively late, and is therefore perceived as the junior partner in the relationship, at least when it comes to providing “hard security”. Conceptions of the EU as a “soft”, “normative” (Manners 2002), and mostly “civilian” (Bull 1982, Orbie 2006) power have long been incorporated into mainstream debates. This has reinforced the dominant “Atlanticist” view that the CSDP is more of a European experiment at “doing security” in the form of crisis management, security sector reform and stabilisation while NATO has mainly remained an organisational and strategic point of reference for territorial defence with ambitions in the area of more robust expeditionary “out of area” security operations (see Zyla 2016).<sup>2</sup> In reality, both organisations inched away from their traditional comfort zones towards a collective security middle ground from the late 1990s onwards, leading to academic discussion of organisational rivalry and “competition” (Cornish 2006). However, NATO seems to have gone back to its “roots” somewhat more recently (Major 2015).

Against this backdrop and in light of the discussions about the functional relationship between these two different yet historically entangled organisations, the Berlin Plus agreement and Agreed Framework were created to ensure that if NATO could not – or more plausibly, would not – engage in a particular operational context, the EU could do so under its own political guidance and chain of command but via “presumed access” to NATO assets and capabilities. More broadly, this framework for cooperation provides the EU/CSDP “‘assured access to NATO planning’ (SHAPE), ‘presumed access to NATO assets and capabilities’ and a predesignated European-only chain of command under the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe” (Howorth 2014, p. 78). Yet despite this, Berlin Plus has not been adopted for any new EU military missions since it was implemented in 2004 for Operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although the

Berlin Plus arrangements are technically still in place and remain the operational framework for Althea, any subsequent lack of implementation is largely due to a political stalemate arising from the so-called “participation problem” (see Smith 2011), which is further outlined in the subsequent section.

### **Moving beyond the “participation problem”**

The purported “strategic” partnership between the EU and NATO is widely understood to be problematic, by both academics and practitioners. EU–NATO relations are rarely discussed without at least a reference to the long-standing political blockages between them. The constraints arising from the so-called “participation problem” are well-covered terrain in the literature, and will be drawn on by most articles in this special issue. The problem is well-known to arise from the membership of Turkey in NATO but not the EU on the one hand, and Cyprus’ membership in the EU but not NATO on the other.

Leading up to the signing of the Berlin Plus agreements in 2004, and in view of Cyprus’ upcoming accession to the EU, Turkey sought to ensure that no future EU member state would be allowed to interact directly with NATO decision-making unless they had a security agreement in place, thus clearly targeting Cyprus with their attempts to bend the arrangements. Institutional red lines arose and have remained in place since. NATO member Turkey has been blocking any attempt at establishing stronger formal cooperative ties between the alliance and the EU. It does so “mainly by denying Cypriot (and until 2008, Maltese) participation in EU–NATO meetings” (Gebhard and Smith 2015, p. 110).<sup>3</sup> As a non-NATO and non-Partnership for Peace (PfP) member, Cyprus has in turn blocked formal cooperation between the EU and Turkey from within the EU, such as in the context of Turkey’s involvement in the European Defence Agency (EDA) (Duke 2008, p. 39). Most importantly, the continued political deadlock between Turkey and Cyprus has hampered political progress towards a more comprehensive – and compared to the existing Berlin Plus arrangements, more functional – inter-organisational relationship.

The repercussions of this political problem and an ensuing “cooperation failure” (Biermann 2015) have never ceased to preoccupy scholars with an interest in EU–NATO relations. However, this special issue is premised on the view that the complex nature of the formal, informal and operational relationship between the two organisations warrants deeper investigation, both theoretically and empirically. While the proposed special issue does not challenge the notion that the relationship is problematic, it does challenge the argument that the EU and NATO simply do not cooperate – an argument that is arguably very limited in its value and empirical evidence. In fact, the editors and contributors to this special issue argue that the two organisations cooperate far more, albeit less efficiently, outside of the formal Agreed Framework for cooperation. According to the formal rules of Berlin Plus/Agreed Framework, the EU and NATO should, in practice, not be cooperating at all outside the Bosnia Herzegovina (Althea) context. This is clearly not the case, as has been argued in earlier works by the editors and others, and which will be further developed in this special issue.

That said, leaving aside recent efforts from both EU and NATO officials to reset relations, it is the firm view of the editors of this special issue that the established inter-organisational practice of “informed deconfliction” (Smith 2015), of staff on both sides consciously

circumventing institutional red lines through informal and improvised channels, is not a sustainable approach for managing the complexity of the contemporary security environment in Europe and across the Atlantic.

## **A changing strategic context**

For as much as the EU and NATO have been found to lack “respective strategic specificity” (Duke and Vanhoonacker 2016, p. 153), that is, a clear enough distinction between their political and organisational mandates to define their functional relationship as security organisations, their strategic environment is largely conditioned by very similar factors and challenges. This important commonality clearly emerges from strategic assessments made periodically by each organisation and is also echoed repeatedly in joint declarations (see e.g. NATO 2010, 2014, European Union 2016, European Commission 2017b).

Most contemporary analyses of the two organisation’s strategic environment revolve around three key issues: the West’s deteriorating relationship with Russia, particularly following the events in Ukraine since 2014, the continued instability in the Middle East, since 2011, exacerbated by a civil war in Syria and by the continuously unwieldy ISIS, and the constant threat posed by terrorism both in the region and across EU and NATO territories. More recently, the Euro-Atlantic community has also been tested by US president Donald Trump’s mercurial behaviour, not least because of the way it challenges the liberal consensus underlying both the EU and NATO as well as the transatlantic relationship more broadly. That said, the unpredictable nature of his foreign policy has potentially also fuelled a new sense of responsibility and ownership among European leaders. Equally, Brexit appears to have, on the one hand, created a new dynamic within the EU as recent moves towards enhanced European defence cooperation suggest (see European Commission 2017a). On the other, the political fallout triggered by the EU-referendum in Britain has most certainly created further institutional, diplomatic, budgetary and capability-related complications for the EU’s CSDP (and CFSP more generally), likely affecting relations with NATO as well (see further Jain 2017). What is more, 2016 and 2017 have seen a deterioration of Western relationships with NATO member country Turkey. An escalating dispute with Turkey is likely to further disrupt and complicate the functional relationship between the two organisations, and to affect key bilateral relationships between Turkey and individual member states. What is common to all these challenges is the way in which they seemingly boost European political ambitions to renew the “transatlantic bargain” to substantiate the original idea of a “strategic relationship” as it now seems more necessary than it was at one point desirable.

On 8 July 2016, the Presidents of the European Council and the Commission as well the NATO Secretary General (although importantly not the Member States themselves) signed the EU–NATO Joint Declaration (European Council, 2016a). The Declaration states that “today, the Euro-Atlantic community is facing unprecedented challenges emanating from the South and East” (ibid). To “address” these challenges, the document addresses seven key areas in particular: “hybrid threats”, “operational cooperation”, “cyber security and defence”, “defence capabilities”, “defence industry”, “coordination on exercises” and “capacity”. In September 2017, the EU further decided to give new impetus to the European External security and defence in what is referred to as a “challenging geopolitical

environment” in the document and to “start implementing the joint declaration with NATO immediately” (European Council 2016b).

Leaving aside the fact that “immediately” was two months after the Joint Declaration was signed, it has been a rather busy period for EU–NATO activity. December 2016 saw the European Council adopt conclusions to implement the Joint Declaration including 42 action points (European Council 2016c). Finally, in June 2017, a “Progress report on the implementation of the common set of proposals endorsed by NATO and EU Councils” was released. This document states that the political efforts of the last year had seen “substantial results” and “a change in the culture, quality and dynamics of [...] engagement” (NATO 2017). As editors of this special issue, we propose that this flurry of recent activity warrants renewed conceptual, theoretical and empirical engagement with EU–NATO relations both to contribute to ongoing and long-standing debates and to point out avenues for future analysis and research.

## 1. The state of the art and the contributions to this volume

Each organisation, the EU/CSDP and NATO, has garnered abundant scholarly interest. Theoretical accounts of each organisation have also evolved steadily over the years, more so of the EU/CSDP than of NATO.<sup>4</sup> Arguably, work on the relationship between the two organisations is more limited both in number and in scope (albeit less so with work examining the wider relationship between the US and Europe, e.g. Art 2006, Steffenson 2005, Rees 2011). However, scholarship has evolved in line with this oft-cited “unstrategic” partnership (Koops 2010) and is more disparate than it is underdeveloped *per se*.

The first surge in the EU–NATO literature was overwhelmingly devoted to recounting the political impetus behind the creation of the ESDP (now CSDP), and the negotiations that finally led up to “working out the Berlin Plus arrangements” (Schimmelfennig 2003, Gnesotto 2004, Peters 2004, Whitman, 2004, Touzovskaia 2006, Yost 2007, p. 74, Flockhart 2011). A second strand in the literature focused more on specific operations and on investigating (predominantly empirically) the performance of Berlin Plus operations (Concordia and Althea) as well as operations where the EU operated autonomously from NATO (Artemis) (e.g. Mace 2004, Grevi *et al.* 2009, Petrov 2010).

From 2008, and coinciding with NATO’s drawdown in Afghanistan, more consideration was given to unpacking “political realities” (Howorth 2009, Mayer 2011, 2014, Schleich 2014, Duke and Vanhoonacker 2016) between the two organisations as well as analysing practical cooperation on the ground where the EU and NATO operated in the same mission spaces (Lachmann 2010, Muratore 2010, Smith 2011, 2014, Howorth 2012, 2014, Gebhard and Smith 2015, Smith 2015) as well as in the offices and institutions in Brussels (Græger and Haugevik 2011, Græger 2014).

Beyond their idiosyncratic and historical importance for transatlantic and European security, EU–NATO relations have of course also attracted analytical interest through the way they engage existing conceptualisations and theories about security organisations, including in previous work of some of the contributors of this special issue (Koops 2011, 2012, Smith 2011 Græger 2014, 2016). Theoretically orientated work on EU–NATO, however, has thus far remained at the margins of the literature although some rare exceptions exist (see Schimmelfennig 2003, Posen 2004, Ojanen 2006, Lachmann 2010, Reichard 2013, and the symposium edited by Karp and Karp 2013).

The first section of this special issue brings together four articles that aim to develop existing theoretical and conceptual perspectives on the study of EU–NATO relations. First, Joachim Koops (2017) discusses the issue as a case of inter-organisational cooperation, convergence and overlap. He argues that EU–NATO has had a “catalytic effect” in the literature, inspiring a bulk of work on inter-organisationalism and the development of a range of key conceptualisations and more theoretical approaches that together make up a burgeoning yet somewhat disparate subfield in organisational studies and IR. In a comprehensive stock-taking exercise he produces a synopsis of existing work to identify the most fruitful avenues for future theory-guided research into the case and beyond. His argument culminates in a newly revisited research agenda of inter-organisationalism that reaches beyond the idiosyncrasies of the case and beyond the confines of security and defence policy.

Second and following on from Koops’ conclusions about effectively framing the EU–NATO relationship in theoretical and conceptual terms, Nina Græger (2017) further develops an actor-centric approach through practice theory to study how the two organisations interact with each other at the tactical and micro level. The aim is to complement the dominant focus in the existing literature on wider political issues and strategic questions surrounding the relationship between the two organisations. She argues that practice approaches are particularly well suited to capture the logic at work in informal EU–NATO staff encounters, both in the everyday and in exceptional situations. Her research shows that the logic of practicality is especially visible among professionals who share certain background conditions, such as education and training, and experience.

Smith *et al.* (2017) introduce an inductive perspective to develop existing perspectives on EU–NATO cooperation and interaction. Their analysis focuses on an aspect of this inter-organisational relationship that has thus far received surprisingly little scholarly attention: decision-making in and between NATO’s North Atlantic Council and the EU’s Political and Security Committee. Through their use of the Grounded Theory method, they consciously depart from the bulk of existing work in the IR literature that is widely dominated by a deductive, theory-testing approach, and even more so, by largely atheoretical “analytical” frameworks that fall short of problematising their very starting assumptions. Their findings emphasise the impact of both structural and more agency-related categories, pointing to potential new avenues in the study of the crucial decision-making fora at the heart of the EU–NATO strategic partnership.

In their article on the West’s “integration dilemma”, Simon Duke and Carmen Gebhard (2017) look at the way in which events in Ukraine have rekindled discussions about NATO’s post-Cold War purpose and the way it relates to the EU. They argue that, through EU sanctions and a traditional military response from NATO, the West has manoeuvred itself into an “integration dilemma”, that is, a paradoxical situation where every step it takes to reassure its Eastern allies increases rather than diffuses tensions with Russia. They juxtapose this argument with the application of a classic neorealist “security dilemma” to develop a more clear-cut conceptualisation of this complex geostrategic challenge. They argue that NATO’s robust reaction to the crisis in Ukraine might have been based on a stylised threat and historical resentments rather than on a carefully calculated risk. They also argue that the current situation can only be resolved by re-engaging Russia in a renewed de-escalatory dialogue.

The second section of this special issue concerns itself with the practical and operational level and investigates whether the nature of the relationship is demand driven and based on particular situations on the ground, supply driven and based on common EU–NATO goals, or some combination of the two. Daniel Fiott (2017) asks whether current institutional arrangements between the two organisations are best suited to address the challenges associated with defence globalisation. The EU and NATO are both fora through which European states can engage in European defence–industrial cooperation. Each organisation has developed a unique set of institutional tools through which to manage issues such as the high and rising costs of defence procurement (“techflation”), technological innovation, defence R&D, standardisation, multinational capability programmes and interoperability. In short, the EU and NATO are seen as institutional vessels through which European states can manage the positive effects and negative consequences of “defence globalisation”.

Chantal Lavallée’s (2017) article on NATO air policing in the Single European Sky argues that a new opportunity for EU–NATO relations has emerged due to military linkages with the EDA. In the last decade, NATO and the EU have put airspace firmly on their political agenda. In the framework of the Integrated Air and Missile Defence System, NATO’s Air Command and Control System programme has become a driving project of smart defence to improve civil–military interoperability and information-sharing among member states. The EU’s Single European Sky has been developed to harmonise civilian management of the European airspace in order to increase safety standards. In order to set new standards for air policing in Europe, both organisations promote close coordination between civilian and military users. The article conceptualises both institutions as “structures of power” that have interests beyond just making Europe’s skies safer and more secure. By assuming that inter- and intra-institutional power play is evident, the article presents the underlying convergences and differences of both initiatives. It identifies the actors involved and their logics of action, tools, means and resources to better understand the development of each initiative. Ultimately, it assesses the challenges, limits and the unintended consequences of actors’ behaviour in this emerging field of cooperation.

Sebastian Mayer (2017) takes the case of Georgia to assess both EU and NATO security strategies. Focusing on fragile Georgia since the mid-2000s, the article takes a country-centred perspective in its approach. With its two breakaway regions and frequent Russian penetration into its internal affairs, the country has long pursued a strategic orientation towards the West to escape pressure of its northern neighbour. While both organisations have excluded admitting Georgia to its ranks in the foreseeable future, they have devised multifaceted outreach strategies below full membership to help build stability. They include bilateral schemes within NATO’s Partnership for Peace and the EU’s Eastern Partnership as well as the large-scale CSDP Monitoring Mission arranged after the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008. The chiefly empirical contribution unpacks and compares these strategies to assess their potential for complementarity, possible overlap and institutional competition, as well as overall effectiveness.

The collection closes with Jolyon Howorth’s (2017) analytical synopsis of EU–NATO cooperation and the transatlantic relationship *writ large* as well as a reflection on the central conclusions of the articles brought together in this special issue. Howorth argues that EU–NATO cooperation is, in fact, the “Key to Europe’s Security Future”. By way of conclusion, he posits three divergent scenarios ranging from the “gradual