



# Trans European Policy Studies Association

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### European Security Development – Leading Where?

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#### *Abstract*

*This brief seeks to illustrate how European security is now developing in several directions. The relations between the EU and NATO give evidence both of increasing closeness and of efforts to the contrary. Furthermore, member states, particularly the larger ones, are gaining power at the expense of the organizations. Altogether this gives a picture of increased division, the opposite of what Europe now needs.*

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#### **Introduction**

During a period of less than a decade the European security situation has undergone huge changes. The new aggressive policy of Russia has brought back the importance of territorial security, especially for the countries in its vicinity. In addition, the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States, and the unpredictability of his policies, have made Europeans less sure that they will be able to count on NATO's Article 5 in a crisis. As described in this brief, these two substantial

changes have led to two different strands of development. The reaction to the new Russian policy has brought about a large number of cooperation initiatives among neighbouring countries, many of them across institutional borders. The transatlantic problems, on the other hand, have underlined the same institutional borders as Europeans seek a militarily stronger EU in order to lessen their exposure to American policies. A specific feature in this new development is that many of the new initiatives emanate from individual countries, whose role is also prevalent in some of the projects connected to organizations. This brief brings up examples of these changes and elaborates on the impact that they may have on the European situation. Many examples relate to the northern part of Europe in which the differences between the two different strands of development are most obvious.

#### **Geography takes precedence**

The Nordic neighbourhood has changed much in strategic relevance over the years. During the Cold War, the Arctic was a region of high strategic importance. After a period of good relations, this area is again highly militarized.

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Similarly, the Baltic Sea region has, for some time, and until only a few years ago, enjoyed peaceful cooperation with Russia.

The new aggressive Russian policy starting around 2014 served as a wake-up call. Nordic countries realized that as a complement to NATO and the EU they needed to give their own cooperation, the NORDEFECO, a stronger focus on territorial defence. Increasingly taking place across institutional borders, it is based on the belief that a war in the north would involve all Nordic countries.<sup>1</sup> The strengthening of transatlantic ties is likewise important, shown by the fact that Finland and Sweden have signed Host Nation Support agreements with NATO and are part of the NATO Response Force (NRF). The Nordic countries, furthermore, act as hosts to extensive exercises involving the United States and many European countries.

Bi- and trilateral cooperation are important parts of these efforts. Cross Border Training of the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish air forces is pursued on an almost weekly basis in the airspace above the northern part of their countries. The very close Finnish-Swedish cooperation has also crossed a previous borderline since these two non-aligned countries are now building up their

cooperation with the aim to act and conduct operations even during war.<sup>2</sup>

## Nordic-Baltic Cooperation

While the Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, see their security as primarily based on their NATO membership, there is also a regional perspective in their security thinking and a closeness to the Nordic countries which is not related to any organization. Within the framework of *Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8)* the defence ministers of these states meet for discussions on the security situation in the region. Nordic and Baltic countries furthermore cooperate within the EU (*NB6*).

## Northern Group

The Northern Group, initiated by the UK in 2010, deals with the particular security and defence issues common to the Northern European states. In addition to the Nordic and Baltic countries, it includes Germany, the Netherlands, Poland and the United Kingdom. It meets regularly on ministerial, strategic and expert meetings, underlining the need for a strong NATO-EU partnership<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Iceland, Denmark and Norway are members of NATO, whereas Finland and Sweden are members of the EU only. While Denmark is member of the EU as well, the area of security and defence is part of the Danish opt-outs. Iceland, having no military forces, participates in the political but not the military parts of Nordic cooperation.

<sup>2</sup> Sweden and Finland (2019): "Sweden and Finland Sign Military Strategic Concept for the Deepened Defence Cooperation", Helsinki 18 Dec. 2019, <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/news/2019/12/sweden-and-finland-signs-military-strategic-concept-for-the-deepened-defence-cooperation/>; Swedish and Finnish Armed Forces (2019): *Final Reports on Deepened Defence Cooperation between Finland and Sweden. Report by the Finnish Defence Forces and the Swedish Armed Forces*, 20

Jan. 2019, <https://www.government.se/49baf3/globalassets/government/dokument/forsvarsdepartementet/final-reports-on-deepened-defence-cooperation-between-finland-och-sweden.pdf>; Lunde Saxi and Friis (2018): Lunde Saxi, Håkon and Friis, Karsten, "After Crimea: The Future of Nordic Defence Cooperation", *NUPI Policy Brief* 6, 8 Oct. 2018.  
<sup>3</sup> Northern Group (2016): Joint Statement from the Northern Group Meeting of Defence Ministers, Copenhagen, 9 November 2016, <https://www.regeringen.se/4af90e/globalassets/regeringen/dokument/forsvarsdepartementet/nordefco/joint-statement-northern-group-9-november-2016.pdf>.

## Joint Expeditionary Force

The British Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) is again an example of cooperation with a geographic rather than an institutional basis, focused on northern Europe. Launched in 2014 as a NATO Framework Nations Concept (FNC), since 2017 it includes two non-NATO members - Finland and Sweden.<sup>4</sup> The general background of the FNC was the lack of capabilities even among major countries at a time when the situation deteriorated. Countries are to form clusters in which the large (lead) ones provide the backbone whereas the small ones plug in their special capabilities.<sup>5</sup>

JEF is a national expeditionary force built up around the rapid deployment capability already existing within the British forces, which its partners may join. Useful for crisis management missions or bridging operations, it may act independently or in cooperation with the UN, the EU or NATO. Formed as a group of likeminded countries and initially having a global focus, JEF now increasingly focuses on Russian threats.<sup>6</sup>

## Other National Initiatives

Other national initiatives have had a wider and less focused geographical extension. *The*

*German Framework Nations Concept (FNC)* was, like its British FNC equivalent, launched at the NATO Summit in Wales in 2014. Primarily about capability creation, it now includes more than 20 countries in northern, eastern and south-eastern Europe. The FNC has 24 capability clusters, together providing a full range of capabilities. Like the JEF, the FNC has included non-NATO countries and the choice of clusters is aimed to address both NATO and EU shortfalls.<sup>7</sup> The German view is that the FNC is a link that unites NATO and the EU in their common capacity building.<sup>8</sup>

The French *European Intervention Initiative (EII)*, unveiled by President Macron in September 2017, has a character of its own. The declared aim is to create a European strategic culture and to reinforce the European ability to act together in various scenarios of military operations. The EII is said to distinguish itself from NATO, the EU and other projects by its ambitious operational vocation.<sup>9</sup> Germany, in particular, has been critical about the fact that the EII was set up outside the EU, fearing that it would undermine EU efforts to seek increased autonomy.

Furthermore, it has a focus on operations in Africa, which the traditionally-cautious Germany is not positive to undertake. In the end, however, Germany decided to join, one

<sup>4</sup> In addition it includes Denmark and Norway, the three Baltic countries, the Netherlands and the UK.

<sup>5</sup> Hagström Frisell and Sjökvist (2019): *Military Cooperation Around Framework Nations. A European Solution to the Problem of Limited Defence Capabilities*, Hagström Frisell, Eva and Sjökvist, Emma, FOI (Swedish Defence Research Establishment), FOI-R-4692-SE, Feb. 2019, <https://www.foi.se/rappportsammanfattning?reportNo=FOI-R-4672-SE>.

<sup>6</sup> Lunde Saxi (2018): "The UK Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF)", Lunde Saxi, Håkon, *IFS Insights* 5/2018, Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, Oslo 2018, [https://www.nupi.no/nupi\\_eng/Publications/CRISTin-Pub/After-Crimea-The-future-of-Nordic-Defence-Cooperation](https://www.nupi.no/nupi_eng/Publications/CRISTin-Pub/After-Crimea-The-future-of-Nordic-Defence-Cooperation).

<sup>7</sup> Hagström Frisell and Sjökvist, see footnote 5, p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.p. 17 and Bundesministerium der Verteidigung (2018): *Konzeption der Bundeswehr*, Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 20 July 2018, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Ministère des Armées (2019): "Aims and Implementation of the European Intervention Initiative", Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy, Ministère des Armées, 26 Feb. 2019, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/dgris/international-action/l-ieii/l-initiative-europeenne-d-intervention>.

important reason being that as a close partner to France, and previously having been rather negative to a number of French initiatives, it would have been difficult not to do so.<sup>10</sup> Other countries also noting a certain focus on Africa chose to join when invited by France. Africa is an important area for other countries as well and actually it is not the only region of relevance for the EI2.

A French argument, which has received some positive responses, is that the national character is necessary for the initiative to include both non-EU countries like Norway and (soon) the United Kingdom, as well as Denmark, whose opt-outs include the area of security.<sup>11</sup>

## The EU and Strategic Autonomy

A contrast to the close and intertwined way in which the EU and NATO sometimes work can be seen in the wish to increase the capabilities that are strictly European. There are, however, different views on the level of independence and strategic autonomy that the EU should try to achieve, which is evident in the debate on whether certain NATO resources should be duplicated or not. In order to fulfil this goal, a large number of initiatives were included in the global strategy decisions of 2016-2017 and are now being pursued in order to increase European capability. The following are some examples.

The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) will allow EU members to develop jointly defence capabilities, invest in shared projects and enhance the operational

readiness and contribution of their armed forces. 25 of the present EU Members States participate in PESCO, which thus far includes 47 projects.

The European Defence Fund has two strands, one of which deals with research, offering grants for collaborative research in innovative defence technologies. The other one is about development and acquisition, seeking to create incentives for member states to cooperate through co-financing from the EU budget and practical support from the Commission.

The Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) is a voluntary procedure with the objective to improve capability development by identifying shortfalls etc. in order to ensure more optimal use of defence spending plans.<sup>12</sup>

## Consequences

In various ways all activities described here can be seen as answers to perceived needs. They may concern a geographically precarious position, a lack of military resources, or a need for rapid intervention. To the extent that they can meet those needs, the initiatives will have a positive impact. They may, however, also in other ways have an impact on European security and cooperation.

The two different strands of development, one serving to diminish the borderline between the EU and NATO and the other to underline it, are, in spite of this, not each other's opposites. All EU countries have supported the Global Strategy which outlined a stronger EU and none is in principle against countries seeking to

<sup>10</sup> DW (2018): "Germany Cautious as France Leads European Defense Initiative", DW, 8 Nov. 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/france-and-germany-dream-up-ambitious-eu-reforms/a-46383897>.

<sup>11</sup> The EI2 currently includes 12 member states across Europe, constituting a mix of small and large countries: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland,

France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Italy has also declared its willingness to join.

<sup>12</sup> Fiott (2019): *Yearbook of European Security*, Fiott, Daniel, EUISS, 86 – 9, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISFiles/yes2019.pdf>

raise the threshold for Russian aggression. The differences lie rather in the details of the definition of strategic autonomy, the litmus test being the views on whether the EU should abstain from duplicating assets now available through NATO or not. A similar issue is whether non-EU-owned companies should be eligible for PESCO or not.

Cooperation between the EU and NATO is at the core of these considerations. It is of high value and even a necessity in the northern part of Europe. It may, however, become problematic when cooperation approaches Article 5 tasks, since giving non-NATO countries the same protection as members is not possible. Cooperation between the EU and NATO is furthermore increasing in width as well as depth, covering areas such as hybrid warfare, military mobility, counter-terrorism, etc. Yet, European efforts are made to increase its independence from NATO. The growth of European capabilities can be seen as a natural development of the organization and well compatible with NATO's role. The statements by President Trump as regards Article 5 and the general unpredictability of his policies have, however, made many Europeans feel the need to be prepared for an unwanted scenario of being on their own in a situation of crisis.

Nations assuming leadership is a recently increasing phenomenon seen in the examples given above, such as NATO's Framework Nations Concept. While adding to the capabilities of all participants, for the smaller countries it also has the consequence of being dependent on the lead states' choices of policies. As pointed out, in the German FNC others will be dependent on the strict German *caveats*. Germany might also want to support its own industrial base (which is certainly true

for other states as well). In addition, states will only with great difficulty be able to withdraw their national capabilities if they would prefer

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to deploy them in an operation.<sup>13</sup> If continued on a wider scale (apart from Germany, only Italy and the UK are now in this position), the result will be a renationalization of NATO's European defence in favour of major states.

The establishment of the European Intervention Initiative (EI2) is a unique event. Certainly, national bi-, tri and multilateral groups have existed for many years but only to deal with issues within their own territories or related to issues of their immediate concern. The question is what will happen if the EI2 pursues an African country that is different from that of the EU, NATO or UN. May also other national groups be formed, potentially with other policies, as a response to the EI2?

While this brief has emphasized the distinction between nationally and institutionally run projects and groups, the distinction is not always clear. In the selection process of the EU's PESCO or European Defence projects major states have a strong influence and they are also the ones which have the resources to come up with ideas for projects and to carry them out. The question about the future development of national versus institutional

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<sup>13</sup> Major and Mölliing (2014): Major, Claudia and Mölling, Christian, “The Framework Nations Concept. Germany's Contribution to a Capable European Defence”, *SWP Comments* 52, Stiftung

Wissenschaft und Politik, Dec. 2014. [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2014C52\\_mjr\\_mlg.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2014C52_mjr_mlg.pdf).

influence is for this reason not easy to answer. Foreseeing the future is difficult also since Europe is highly dependent on external forces. However, to the extent that it shapes its own future, the examples of this brief show that, albeit small, it is a divided continent for which increased cohesion should be a high priority in order to be able to take on its many challenges.

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