



**Clingendael**

Netherlands Institute of International Relations

# Defence Cooperation in Clusters

Identifying the Next Steps

**Margriet Drent**  
**Dick Zandee**  
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**Clingendael report**

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This report is based on the input of a seminar which took place from 15-16 October 2014 in The Hague. The meeting was jointly organised by the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' and the Netherlands Ministry of Defence and involved civilian and military officials from Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands plus representatives from the European Defence Agency and think tanks.

### **Disclaimer:**

The organisation of the seminar was on commission by the Ministry of Defence. However, Clingendael is responsible for the contents of the report.

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# Table of Contents

Introduction	5
1. Politics of deeper defence cooperation	7
1a. Multi-year defence agreements	7
1b. Fostering trust and reliability among partners	8
1c. Adapting parliamentary procedures to rapid reaction mechanisms and multinational troop formations	9
2. Planning requirements for deeper defence cooperation	12
2a. Aligning defence policies	12
2b. Aligning defence planning	14
3. EU/EDA and NATO as facilitators and coordinators	16
3a. Strategy, roles and tasks of EU/EDA and NATO	16
3b. The EU 'Policy Framework' and enhancing the NDPP	17
Conclusions and recommendations	20
1. Politics of deeper defence cooperation	20
2. Planning requirements for deeper defence cooperation	20
3. EU/EDA as facilitators and coordinators	21
Summaries of keynote speeches	23

# Introduction

With the deteriorating security situation on Europe's borders, the need for countries to maintain and modernise the capabilities of their armed forces and to address the shortfalls identified by the EU and NATO is even more important than in the past. Financial austerity and the advantages of economies of scale require the development of joint approaches, as well as closer political cooperation. A number of like-minded countries, often neighbours, have adopted the approach of working together in groups of countries, or clusters. The Benelux countries and Germany and the Netherlands are among them.

In 2012 a Declaration was signed between the Ministers of Defence of the Benelux countries for structural cooperation in the area of defence, building on a decade-long defence cooperation tradition. This was followed in 2013 by the signing of a Declaration of Intent between Germany and the Netherlands to further enhance their bilateral cooperation in the area of defence. While cooperation within these two clusters has already progressed relatively far, they have the intention to further deepen their defence cooperation. At the moment, plans are being made or cooperation is already ongoing in the areas of training and education (e.g. defence academies, naval training, a common paraschool), procurement (e.g. Boxer, Fennek and likely the successor to the M-frigates), command (1st German-Netherlands Corps Headquarters) and on the operational level (e.g. Air Mobile Brigade and Division Schnelle Kräfte, Belgian-Netherlands combined air policing, various EU Battlegroups and NATO Response Force rotations, the police training mission in Afghanistan). The many initiatives across the board make these clusters among the most tightly-knit ones in Europe.

While the 2013 Clingendael report 'Bold Steps'<sup>1</sup> signalled which factors could benefit defence cooperation in broad terms, the current report takes this further and tries to identify what 'next steps' these partner countries can take to deepen their clusters of cooperation. Three areas were singled out that are key to making defence cooperation effective, efficient and politically-strategically beneficial. First of all, the political and parliamentary dimension is vital as it sets the political conditions for making clusters work and for taking them to a next level. Bottom-up practical efforts will remain indispensable, but need to be complemented and pushed on by governments, as well as being legitimised by parliaments. One of the issues that is relevant here is how countries that aim to continue on the path of defence cooperation will deal with sovereignty and mutual dependence.

A second area is the question of how to address planning requirements for deeper defence cooperation, which takes up one of the recommendations of 'Bold Steps' of 2013. Can increasingly close defence cooperation in clusters do without the alignment of defence policies and without synchronising defence and procurement planning? And finally, a third issue is how these clusters relate to the EU/European Defence Agency (EDA) and to NATO. Their role is understood as facilitators and coordinators, but it is less clear how these organisations should fulfil this role in practice. The European Council of December 2013 tasked the

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1 Margriet Drent, Kees Homan and Dick Zandee, Bold Steps in Multinational Cooperation – Taking European Defence Forward, Clingendael Institute, 2013, <http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/Bold%20Steps%20in%20Multinational%20Cooperation.pdf>

EU institutions with developing an EU 'policy framework' to enable systematic and longer-term defence cooperation, while the NATO Wales Summit endorsed the Framework Nation Concept. How can these initiatives help to enhance the roles of the EU/EDA and NATO as facilitators and coordinators of deeper defence cooperation in clusters?

This report wants to contribute to the continuous effort to strengthen defence clusters by addressing issues of politics, planning and multilateral coordination. It provides conclusions and recommendations on how clusters of countries can play their part in achieving more effective multinational cooperation in defence, thereby strengthening the EU and NATO. The shared goal is to optimise Europe's ability to take on the security challenges that are mounting on a global scale and which acutely manifest themselves in Europe's vicinity.

# 1. Politics of deeper defence cooperation

Parliaments are vital in enabling clusters of cooperation to function well. They provide a large part of the political legitimacy of defence cooperation and have to be able to hold the government accountable. To further deepen defence clusters and cooperation, it is important that also parliaments understand the political, strategic and military consequences. Therefore, greater parliamentary involvement in clusters of defence cooperation can be regarded as an indispensable element in making them work. Executives can sign Memoranda of Understanding, enter into multinational procurement programmes and assign troops to international rapid reaction forces, but without sufficient support from their legislatures, these efforts will amount to little. Moreover, parliaments have an important role in generating support among the general public.

In order to engage parliamentarians in deepening defence cooperation, they have to be involved from the outset. Moreover, as their role in some countries is crucial in deciding on the deployment of the military abroad (e.g. in Germany and the Netherlands), they have to be involved (while respecting the division of roles between the executive and the legislature) and informed during the whole process and not just at the point where they can accept or reject the operation. This also includes the phases from cooperation on defence and procurement planning to the readiness phase of forces and, naturally, the deployments themselves.

## 1a. Multi-year defence agreements

The extent to which sovereignty is infringed upon by defence cooperation is debated in many parliaments. The arguments used range between the need to 'be fully autonomous', on the one hand, to understanding sovereignty as the 'ability to act', necessitating close defence cooperation with third countries, on the other. However, parliaments can be involved in defence cooperation in a way that goes beyond the debate on the question of to what extent 'sovereignty' is at stake. A way for parliaments to create favourable conditions, requirements and incentives for deeper defence cooperation is through the method of a so-called '*defence agreement*'. Denmark and Sweden have set the example (although both in a different manner) to establish a multi-year consensus on defence encompassing coalition and opposition parties and governments, based on all stakeholders, including experts. The goal is to create stability and clarity for a number of years on the purpose of the armed forces and defence planning. A defence agreement would also transcend a change of government, because it involves as many political parties as possible.

To follow the examples of these two countries and create a national defence agreement in another country would require that such an agreement is shaped to fit the specific political, legal and defence idiosyncrasies and traditions of that particular country. In a country with a more fragmented political landscape, finding consensus on defence is more difficult, but at the same time it is more necessary. There is no one blueprint for each country, but others could learn a great deal from what has been achieved in Denmark and Sweden and perhaps other countries. More research on best practices and what can be learnt from that should be undertaken.

The idea shows potential, as there are clear possible benefits to such a defence agreement:

- it creates a common understanding on defence across multiple national stakeholders as well as improving predictability vis-à-vis partners in defence cooperation;
- it ring-fences multi-year budget allocations for defence, thereby ensuring continuity;
- it establishes a more stable horizon on multi-year defence planning, also allowing parliaments across a cluster to align defence and procurement planning, their procedures and decision-making cycles;
- it facilitates longer-term stability which is needed for successful defence cooperation, both in the alignment of procurement planning and cooperation on maintenance, training, education, exercises, up to and including the operational phase;
- it raises the threshold to turn back on defence cooperation; and
- it generates more public acceptance of and support for defence and defence spending.

Drafting a multi-year defence agreement would entail a *de-politicisation* of general policies on defence and the role of the armed forces for a number of years. It has to be acknowledged that these types of agreements cut through the traditional division of roles between government and parliament, which means that care has to be taken that the desired checks and balances remain intact and that it remains clear where the responsibilities lie in cases of acting in conflicts and crises.

One of the purposes of defence agreements is to make defence cooperation with other countries easier. Trustworthiness, predictability and a multi-year outlook on purpose, plans and available budgets are elements that contribute to successful defence cooperation. This purpose would be defeated if national defence agreements were made in isolation, not taking clusters of cooperation or the collective requirements of the EU and NATO into account. The international defence cooperation aspect of defence agreements can be improved by including representatives of strategic partners among the stakeholders negotiating the agreement. In addition, consultations should take place with EU/EDA and NATO at an early stage of the drafting.

## **1b. Fostering trust and reliability among partners**

Trust and reliability are key elements for further deepening defence cooperation between countries. Understanding which obstacles and motives concern and drive parliamentary decision-making in partner countries is important. The notion of sovereignty and the role of parliaments in international defence cooperation, procurement planning and the deployment of troops differs among the Benelux countries and Germany. Moreover, cultures and traditions with regard to the use of force, international political orientation, the sizes of the armed forces and a willingness to deploy armed forces to crisis areas seem to vary considerably among the Benelux partners, but also between Germany and the Netherlands. The political landscapes in the partner countries also need to be understood: which considerations towards the electorate come into play and what political dynamics are drivers for the various political actors?

If trust is such an important facilitator of deeper defence cooperation and of accepting dependencies, it is imperative to know how to build this trust, not only between governments, but also across legislatures. To build trust requires personal contact, reliability proven by practice and an understanding of the motives and obstacles of a partner country. Learning about each other's cultural-political attitudes and sensitivities as well as the formal and



material obstacles to cooperation are important. As a matter of course, policy makers and other officials from the governments of cooperating countries see each other regularly. The intensification of contacts among European policy makers, however, is not matched by increased contacts between parliaments. This should be remedied in order to bring both governments and lawmakers on board in the next steps of defence cooperation.

Increased interparliamentary engagement is identified as one of the possibilities to foster contacts and to build trust among parliaments. As defence cooperation in small clusters of countries is progressing more quickly and is more ambitious, the first priority of involving parliamentarians lies here. There are already a number of bilateral meetings taking place between defence committees of partner countries. However, these have an ad-hoc character and suffer from under-funded parliaments, full parliamentary schedules, but sometimes also from a lack of prioritisation on the part of the parliamentarians. There is scope for additional support by Ministries of Defence in providing knowledge and research capacity to the defence committees here, particularly for the smaller parliaments. An even better solution would be to increase the support capacity of parliaments themselves and to facilitate more opportunities for parliaments to commission independent research.

Particularly countries working together on a whole range of defence cooperation initiatives should consider adding a serious parliamentary dimension to this cooperation. Already existing interparliamentary ad hoc contacts should be strengthened and for Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, the Benelux Parliament should be reinvigorated and could be given a more substantial role in fostering defence cooperation. Moreover, in order to strengthen interparliamentary contacts and information exchange, parliaments can establish a parliamentary liaison in support of defence committees in parliaments of cluster countries. Liaisons from Ministries of Defence in partner countries are already well established. Why not follow up on this good practice by establishing liaisons in parliaments as well?

The Interparliamentary Conference (IPC) on Common Foreign and Security Policy and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly are also forums in which national parliamentarians (and Members of the European Parliament in the case of the IPC) come together regularly. The IPC, however, is still searching for its role and can be regarded as a much watered-down successor to the Assembly of the Western European Union (WEU). Cooperation between national parliaments and the European Parliament, as is occurring within the IPC, could have its advantages. In addition, European Party groups, such as the Party of European Socialists (PES), the European People's Party (EPP) and the Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) are forums in which national and European parliamentarians meet. On occasion, although not systematically, the security and defence field is the subject of discussions as well. The most established parliamentary dimension is the one of NATO. If parliaments are serious about becoming involved in defence cooperation from their specific role and perspective, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly should be used more actively and could also serve as a model for the fledgling IPC.

### **1c. Adapting parliamentary procedures to rapid reaction mechanisms and multinational troop formations**

The decision to deploy armed forces abroad is a key issue in circumstances of deeper defence cooperation as (parts of) units of partner countries are increasingly becoming integrated and the use of multinational troop formations and rapid response mechanisms is likely to increase. Examples are permanently integrated units such as the European Air Trans-

port Command (EATC), the German-Netherlands Corps Headquarters and ad hoc composed troop formations, such as the NATO Response Force (including the new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force) and EU Battlegroups. But also bilateral and trilateral examples are relevant: the Dutch Airmobile Brigade integration in the German Division Schnelle Kräfte (DSK), the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) and the Belgian-Netherlands naval cooperation (Benesam), for example.

In Germany, a parliamentary commission (known as the Rühle Commission) is currently reviewing the extensive role of the Bundestag in international deployments of the German armed forces. It is expected to report back in April 2015. In the Netherlands, parliament is wrestling with a de jure limited say in deployments, but the so-called 'Art. 100' procedure is in practice becoming increasingly extensive and detailed<sup>2</sup>. The Belgian parliament has a limited say in international deployments of its armed forces, while in Luxembourg, comparable to the Netherlands, parliamentary consent is needed. In recent debates the Dutch parliament has discussed a relaxation of the procedures to inform parliament up to a possible pre-clearance procedure for Dutch troop deployments as part of multinational military structures such as EU Battlegroups. However, the same procedure might apply to troops that are part of, for instance, the DSK or the JEF, as the purpose of these formations is swiftness as well. In Germany, ideas are being floated on the introduction of a yearly, general parliamentary decision on German participation in integrated military structures, such as AWACS<sup>3</sup>, EU Battlegroups and the NATO Response Force. However, the Rühle Commission does not seem to be heading in this direction. In interviews Rühle has pre-empted the question whether he wants to raise the threshold of saying 'no' to multinational deployments. His commission will not be advising a *Vorratsbeschluss* (pre-delegation) on deployments. Giving some form of prior consent to a possible deployment of multinational assets and/or rapid response forces is controversial, but various forms are being debated. Whether there is political support for these ideas and what such a 'pre-delegation' of consent actually entails (which time frame, types of scenarios and what kind of prerequisites) remains to be discussed.

It is not completely clear to what extent it is the parliamentary decision that takes the most time in the decision-making process for deployments. It has to be kept in mind that this differs from situation to situation and from country to country. It is also important whether armed forces are already able to start preparations before the formal parliamentary procedures have been finalised, because when the 'notice to move' comes without any preparations beforehand, it will be difficult to reach the rapid response times. An early involvement of parliament in what might be forthcoming and a clear sense of what the armed forces' purpose entails (through, for example, a defence agreement) will be helpful.

It takes months, if not years of military planning, training and conducting exercises in preparation for contributing to a rotation of the NATO Response Force or the EU Battlegroups. These preparations on the military side are not matched by comparable ones on the political side. For what kind of scenarios and contingencies are other troop-contributing partners likely to actually consent to the deployment of the rapid reaction mechanism? Are their

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2 Article 100 of the Dutch Constitution stipulates that 'the government shall inform the States General in advance if the armed forces are to be deployed or made available to maintain or promote the international legal order. (...)' The article 100 procedure has grown into the practice that the government will not deploy armed forces unless a comfortable majority within parliament support this.

3 Airborne Warning and Control System, the fleet of NATO-owned and multinationally operated reconnaissance aircraft.

parliaments supportive? If so, which types of deployments are most likely and are there provisions for rapid decision-making? These types of questions should be dealt with in advance of the rotation phase. To give an example: the EU Battlegroup consisting of the UK, Sweden, the Netherlands, Latvia and Lithuania of 2013 organised a political preparatory phase. So far, however, lawmakers have not been involved. A formula should be found to make this possible (for all rapid reaction mechanisms) while respecting the different roles of the executive and the legislature. This should not be limited to EU Battlegroups and the NRF, but also for multinational rapid response formations that can contribute to ad hoc coalitions. The purpose here is not only to speed up decision-making but also to muster the political will needed to actually deploy these formations.

## 2. Planning requirements for deeper defence cooperation

Defence cooperation in bilateral or regional clusters has notably advanced in the operational area, from common training and exercises to combining units of different nations into larger formations, such as the merging of the German Division Schnelle Kräfte and the Dutch Air Mobile Brigade. In other areas like the acquisition of new equipment cluster cooperation is moving forward more slowly, while the potential benefits are great. Armed forces using the same equipment can reach the highest levels of interoperability. Partner countries can also share training and maintenance facilities, thus reducing life-cycle costs. The Belgian-Netherlands naval cooperation (Benesam) with one school and maintenance facility for mine hunters in Belgium and vice versa in the Netherlands for M-frigates provides an example. Therefore, defence and procurement planning cannot be excluded from multinational defence cooperation. They need to be an integral part of cluster activities in order to realise deeper defence cooperation and to achieve economies of scale in terms of operational benefits and financial affordability.

The alignment of defence procurement programmes can be carried out on an ad hoc project basis. For exploring the full potential in good time a more systematic approach is needed, which has to start with defence planning. As defence planning cycles for the procurement of equipment take 10 to 15 years, the alignment of plans and programmes should now be explored; otherwise opportunities might be lost. However, defence policies, plans and acquisition programmes are predominantly developed and carried out on a national basis. Sometimes industrial interests also come into play. These are sensitive matters and it is unlikely that national planning will be replaced by international planning at the EU/EDA and NATO levels. Therefore, it is important to look at realistic options for aligning defence policies and planning at the cluster level. They can show the way ahead by offering solutions at the bilateral or regional level.

### 2a. Aligning defence policies

National defence policies are determined by a wide variety of factors, ranging from historical and geographic influences to the evolving international security environment and political considerations. Some countries have national security strategies, others do not. Security and defence policies 'translate' the objectives of a country's foreign policy into missions, tasks and levels of ambition for the deployment of armed forces. Aligning these security and defence policies in clusters will be very difficult. Decisions on deployment are always driven by 'the politics of the day', depending on particular political and other circumstances. Also, the definition of international levels of ambition – including the required level of forces, both quantitatively and qualitatively – is the primary responsibility of the EU and NATO. Clusters contribute to realising these objectives, but they should not compete with the EU and NATO in defining them.

However, when countries integrate capabilities and become dependent on each other for their deployment, the alignment of security and defence policies will become an issue. Therefore, cluster partners will have to engage in discussions on deployment options for

integrated capabilities. These are part of strategic military operational planning, which can take place at the level of the headquarters of integrated units. Decisions on deployment, however, will remain a national political matter.

Aligning defence policies can also be approached from a different angle. Countries have an overall approach to multinational defence cooperation. Such an approach could be called a *defence cooperation policy*. Synchronising these policies would certainly help to align defence and procurement planning. The first step could be to compare these defence cooperation policies of cluster partners. Promoting commonality between them would logically follow. It could at least encompass the following four elements:

- (i) Cluster partners would agree *to change their underlying planning principle from national to multinational solutions*. So far, national thinking has dominated in defence planning. Increasingly, countries have arrived at the conclusion that multinational defence cooperation is no longer a luxury but a necessity. A single country might have great difficulties in maintaining a capability or might even lose it as has happened in several cases (e.g. the Netherlands had to disband its maritime patrol aircraft and tanks). Such thresholds, below which a country cannot sustain the capability on its own, should be recognised earlier in order to explore cooperation potential with cluster partners before it is too late and the collective output of clusters suffers. So, multinationality should become the point of departure in defence planning, which is already the case to some degree in some countries (for example, the defence policies of the Netherlands and Sweden specifically state this).
- (ii) Cluster partners would explicitly *recognise each other as their preferred partners*. While countries might have more partners (for cooperation on a specific issue), systematic deeper defence cooperation requires from cluster partners that they give each other a special status. This will channel the alignment of planning requirements in clusters of countries that are really seeking to engage in deeper defence cooperation.
- (iii) Cluster partners would strongly *steer their defence apparatus with a top-down approach* in order to speed up defence cooperation and to seek consistency and coherence. The bottom-up approach (multinational cooperation at the initiative of single services or specific departments such as procurement planning) has produced good results in many cases. Yet, it can also lead to diverging, competing or even contradictory initiatives and projects. Top-down steering and direction will help to overcome bureaucratic resistance, to bring about a unified approach and to book practical results more quickly.
- (iv) Cluster partners will find themselves *more embedded in their defence cooperation* and thus easy 'walk outs' will be avoided. History shows many examples of political initiatives in multinational defence cooperation which received limited or no follow-up when they had to be put into practice. Equally, there are cases of multinational projects, well-prepared by lower levels over a long period of time, which were cancelled when reaching the highest military and political levels. When cluster partners are deeply engaged, the lack of follow-up or the danger of withdrawal can be minimised.

When cluster partners would agree on these four elements (and perhaps a few more) as the key factors of their approaches to deepening multinational defence cooperation it should be possible to take the next step: to identify the commonality and to agree on a *cluster defence cooperation policy*. Cluster partners would then sing from the same sheet of music. This would help to create harmony in the cluster orchestra.

## 2b. Aligning defence planning

Defence planning is the art of combining uncertainties on the input side with concrete deliverables on the output side. Political change but also economic factors can lead to a sudden adjustment of budgets, priorities and plans. The international security environment can evolve in an unexpected direction and pose new challenges to defence departments. On the other hand, the restructuring of armed forces takes time and the procurement cycles of complex weapons systems take years or even decades before delivery. It is a rare occasion when a defence plan is fully executed and without any change. Per definition, defence planning is also the art of constant adjustment.

So far, defence planning has been carried out at the national level. As a result, multinational procurement projects have been conducted on a case-by-case basis. This has often subsequently led to an adjustment of national defence plans as procurement programmes have had to be aligned between the partner countries due to budgetary or industrial factors. When moving towards deeper defence cooperation countries should address the question of to what extent the sequence can be reversed. Align defence plans first in order to converge procurement programmes and, by doing so, to introduce a systematic method instead of continuing the old case-by-case approach. The Benelux and German-Netherlands clusters have started to systematically compare their defence plans in order to identify *matches* for deepening defence cooperation. The method reflects the methodology of the Collaborative Data Base (CoDaBa) of the European Defence Agency, which, however, has had limited results as many member states were not willing to insert their medium to long-term (procurement) plans. In the more trustful environment of clusters there is clearly a better chance of succeeding. It is important to use the CoDaBa's focus on the medium to long term, as often the near-term plans (4-5 years) offer little scope for cooperation as acquisition decisions have already been made and procurement contracts might have been signed.

Another issue is process. Cluster partners have their own national planning and procurement cycles, as well as procedural and other steps to be taken – often related to parliamentary approval. One approach would be ‘to allow theory to follow practice’, in other words to align process and procedures as a result of the practical alignment of plans. But perhaps there is also scope for ‘theory-driving practice’ and to explore the potential for the alignment of process and procedures among cluster countries in order to promote the convergence of defence planning.

Four topics require closer attention when aligning defence planning:

- (i) Cluster partners should be *transparent in their defence planning*. Without sharing all vital information with cluster partners the full potential for cooperation cannot be explored. Opportunities might be discovered too late or might even be lost. Maximum transparency should apply to five areas:
  - a. capability development processes: openness on which capabilities partners are intending to preserve or acquire is an important prerequisite to identify capability-based cooperation potential;
  - b. procurement processes: openness in this area is needed to align procurement planning; it includes milestones for decision-making (also related to the involvement of parliament which, for example, is at an earlier stage in the Netherlands than in Germany);

- c. budgetary cycles: openness is required in order to align as much as possible the planning and decision-making on the allocation of finances (again including the parliamentary procedures);
  - d. organisation and processes: openness is also needed on the defence organisation and the division of responsibilities as the defence ministries and armed forces of cluster partners have different structures and processes;
  - e. industrial capacities: openness on what industry can contribute is important and early involvement in the planning will help to guide industry (but clearly, an industry-driven approach to defence planning should be avoided).
- (ii) Cluster partners need a *common methodology* in order to maximise the potential for deeper defence cooperation. When transparency on defence plans is assured cluster partners can compare them – with the focus on the medium to long term – in order to identify as early as possible *matches* where requirements and timing overlap. This method helps to avoid wasting time on potential failures and to prioritise cooperation initiatives and projects. It leads to prioritised or ‘lighthouse projects’ to be elaborated by the relevant experts in detail. However, at this stage it is very important to seek commitment by the highest military and political level in order to prevent any withdrawal from a project later on (ref. element iv of the defence cooperation policy).
- (iii) Cluster partners should focus from the start on the potential for deepening *cooperation in through-life management*. So far, (political) attention is mainly focussed on common procurement, while approximately two-thirds of the costs of the full life-cycle of weapons systems are spent on in-service support (maintenance, the acquisition of spare parts, upgrades, etc.). Common procurement can bring economies of scale, but the biggest savings will be made during the in-service period.
- (iv) Clusters should remain *relatively small in terms of the number of partners*. The complexity of working closer together will most likely lead to insurmountable problems and show-stoppers when the number of cluster partners is large. The deeper partners want to cooperate, the greater the chance of success will be when the cluster is small. The more specific (single issue) the cooperation is, the larger the cluster can be. Equally, clusters of deeper defence cooperation should be careful in opening up their group to new partners. At the minimum new partners will need to be assessed on the basis of the added value they will bring to the cluster. Free riding should be a ‘no go’ criterion.

The Benelux and the German-Netherlands cluster are already applying some of these four elements in their ongoing efforts in harmonising their defence and procurement planning. However, a systematic approach encompassing all levels, all areas and all players in defence and procurement planning is missing. The four elements mentioned before are certainly not the only ones necessary to realise such a systematic approach, but they may form the basis to begin cluster defence planning.



### 3. EU/EDA and NATO as facilitators and coordinators

Defence cooperation in clusters has also raised the issue of the relationship of the clusters with the EU/EDA and NATO. Concerns have been expressed that overall coordination is missing. As a result clusters could perhaps set the wrong priorities when compared to the collective needs of the international organisations, or they could duplicate each other. The EU/EDA and NATO are now addressing the relationship between the clusters and their own roles and tasks in capability development. For this purpose a policy framework is under development in the EU. Recently, the EDA has also reviewed the Capability Development Plan. In NATO a new round of the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) review is ongoing. The NATO Wales Summit has endorsed the Framework Nations Concept. Both organisations seem to be somehow connected to the clusters, though the precise relationship still needs to be determined. In this context transparency deserves special attention. While there is a large degree of openness concerning NATO and EU operations and missions, the capability development efforts of these organisations still seem to suffer from a lack of transparency.

#### 3a. Strategy, roles and tasks of EU/EDA and NATO

NATO's core function of collective defence has been strongly reaffirmed at the recent Summit in Wales, in particular in view of the Ukraine crisis. Several measures have been announced, amongst them the establishment of a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force which can be deployed to defend the Alliance's borders at short notice. The NATO Strategic Concept of 2011 is still valid, but it is clear that the Alliance's old function of deterrence and defence needs to be given a new meaning in view of the deteriorating security situation at its borders. In its December 2013 Conclusions the European Council has invited the High Representative to assess the impact of the changes in the global security environment and to report in 2015 on the challenges and opportunities arising for the Union. This is widely seen as a tasking to draft a new EU Security Strategy, which has become even more urgent due to the evolving security situation in and around Europe in 2014. Therefore, the issue of the alignment of strategies between the EU and NATO is a relevant matter. Strategy should drive capability development. EU-NATO coordination in solving shortfalls and improving Europe's capabilities will fail if the strategies and defence policies of both organisations are not aligned.

Probably, the time is not (yet) ripe for a combined NATO and EU security strategy, because of the respective missions of these organisations and the difference in their membership. On the one hand, it is crucial that the commonality of the strategy of NATO and that of the EU is as high as possible. Only then will the political choices and capability requirements of the two organisations converge to the maximum extent possible. On the other hand, the differences between the EU and NATO have to be taken into account. The EU has more tools at its disposal to make the process more comprehensive and compulsory (via the Commission and/or Council). In this respect the EU is therefore better capable of taking security co-operation and integration a step further; for instance, the Commission can play its role in the regulation of defence markets and the restructuring of European defence industries. It could be argued that, when the Europeans take this issue seriously, they should first improve the European level of capability integration, and then do the same in NATO. A serious disadvantage of such



an approach is that it would perhaps push (some) member states further than they want to go; they could be inclined to opt out.

Both the EU/EDA and NATO have important responsibilities in capability development. Naturally, these are related to military operations that both organisations should be able to carry out. These are defined in operational ambition levels which are 'translated' into collective military requirements. Shortfalls can be deduced from comparing collective requirements to the capabilities member states are willing to make available. Priorities for capability improvement can equally be deduced from this process.

However, the next step – moving from collective shortfalls and priorities to member states' defence planning – is a different matter. The NDPP can be described as an accountancy system, measuring the progress that member states are making in carrying out their defence plans. The Capability Review, part of the NDPP, assesses the progress made against the defined ambition level of the Alliance. The EU has only a collective assessment tool through the Headline Goal process. There is no accountability for individual member state efforts. The EDA's Capability Development Plan is not a "Plan" in the true sense of the word; it rather informs the participating member states on which capability priorities they should focus in their planning.

Defence planning in the real sense is neither conducted by the EU nor by NATO. The 'steering of national defence plans' would probably be a more accurate description of the roles of both organisations. In the foreseeable future this is unlikely to change, even when countries take the first steps in aligning defence plans in multinational clusters. But the role of the EU/EDA and NATO could be adjusted in view of the need for 'clustering the clusters'. Monitoring and assessing is not enough. Facilitation, coordination and checking have to be reinforced if member states truly want the EU and NATO to conduct more systematic and longer-term capability development.

### **3b. The EU 'Policy Framework' and enhancing the NDPP**

Both in the EU/EDA and in NATO the existing systems for capability development are under review. The EDA has already updated the Capability Development Plan (CDP), in full coherence with the NDPP and in particular by sharing available information. The review of the CDP has produced 16 priority actions, among which are information collection, countering improvised explosive devices, expeditionary capabilities and sea-lines of communication. However, the role of the CDP remains the same, i.e. to support national defence planning processes. The CDP does not provide for a mechanism to connect participating member states in together addressing capability shortfalls and seeking solutions. In the past EDA has already tried to create a mechanism for comparing the participating member states' medium to long-term plans in order to seek synergies between them – known as the Collaborative Data Base (CoDaBa, see also section 2b). The new CDP establishes a better connection to the (revitalised) CoDaBa.

The European Council of December 2013 tasked the High Representative to produce a Policy Framework for more systematic and long-term co-operation. The aim is to seek Council approval for the policy framework in November 2014. The Framework will contain high-level guidance to shape and facilitate co-operation; no extra bureaucracy is intended. The co-operative endeavours will not only focus on investments, but include a through-life approach, joint use and must be incentive-oriented. Synergies are much encouraged with

clusters (such as the Benelux). The Policy Framework will make use of the CDP and is complementary to the NDPP (but does not 'harmonise' the two).

The question remains how transparency and information-sharing in defence planning can be brought forward, taking into account the CoDaBa experience. The cluster approach might help to overcome the resistance to sharing relevant information beyond immediate partners. It would allow EDA to collect medium to long-term plans and seek additional partners to join cluster projects as early as possible. The latter is extremely important in order to converge military requirements and to synchronise timelines for investment and procurement.

The NDPP encompasses five steps: political guidance; the determination of requirements; the apportioning of requirements and the setting of targets; implementation and, finally, the review of the results. In particular the determination of requirements and the establishment of national target packages should be improved. The so-called 'unfettered' military judgment concerning the capabilities required for the (political) level of ambition sometimes leads to unrealistic calls for additional efforts in certain areas. The rule that no nation should provide more than 50% of a specific capability is not very helpful in this respect (though understandable from the American perspective). In a certain sense the NDPP is disconnected from (national) defence planning. Therefore, it would be advisable to match the proposed target packages to the capability profiles of member states (or, in the future, of clusters). The outcome will certainly be more balanced and realistic. At the same time national planners should be more indebted to the NDPP (and the CDP). Both provide the international picture, the collective shortfalls and offer options for co-operation.

The Framework Nation Concept is another approach for improving the NDPP<sup>4</sup>. Germany is the framework nation for capability areas like logistics support, cbrn<sup>5</sup> protection, fire-power and deployable headquarters. The (bigger) framework nations are supposed to maintain a broad spectrum of forces and capabilities (though not necessarily sustainable), many of which offer opportunities for co-operation with (regional) partners. The Framework Nation Concept has yet to mature. A peculiarity is that there are different interpretations of the Concept. The German approach is focussed on capability development, while the British interpretation aims at operational deployment; Italy is oriented towards stabilisation and reconstruction. It is also unclear how clusters and framework nation groups will relate to each other. There is a danger of the proliferation of groups. Member states, in coordination with the EU/EDA and NATO, should make clear 'what will happen in which group or cluster' in order to avoid duplication, a waste of energy and unnecessary bureaucracy.

Contrary to the EU/EDA, the NDPP mainly focuses on the near term, mirroring the national four to five-year national defence plans. Where NATO is involved or leads longer-term procurement projects, basically these take place outside the NDPP context on an ad hoc basis. For the Alliance the first question is how to extend the horizon of the NDPP beyond the near term. Here, the EDA approach could perhaps inspire, if not influence and steer the NDPP adaptation. The next question is how to transform the NDPP from its current bean-counting character to a real defence planning coordination mechanism, capability-based and focussed

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4 The Wales Declaration has endorsed this concept, based on a German initiative. According to the Declaration it envisages that "Groups of allies come together for the joint development of forces and capabilities required, facilitated by a framework nation."

5 Chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear.

on the synchronisation of plans between member states rather than on individual member state efforts.

In terms of planning processes there is also some overlap, but one should recognise that the Headline Goal/CDP and the NDPP show considerable differences. A very important area of overlap, in particular for member states, is information sharing. By adapting the NDPP information collection tool (NDPass) for Headline Goal application, the issue has been addressed for short-term information distribution. There is no such arrangement for ensuring that both organisations receive the same information on medium to long-term plans. This would clearly be an area of attention for the EU/EDA and NATO when establishing new mechanisms for more systematic and longer-term capability development.

In doing this, a productive dynamism could be created by combining the best parts of national, multilateral, EU and NATO processes and planning methods. There is no longer any choice: cooperation in the field of capabilities is needed. While ‘voluntary’ keeps on being the buzzword, this is no longer a feasible *modus operandi*. This urgency should also be felt at the highest political level and, although it is not a ‘sexy’ subject, it should be placed high on the agenda. As already foreseen, the European Council discussion on defence co-operation should be turned into a more structural and regular process (for instance biennial), as is already done at NATO Summit meetings.

Transparency and mutual trust continue to be key issues for clusters (see section 2b), but also in the EU/EDA and NATO. Given the urgency of security and defence co-operation, a reluctance or an outright unwillingness to share all relevant planning information is an anomaly. The cluster approach and the Framework Nation Concept will hopefully provide the setting for enhanced openness. To set an example the German-Netherlands and the Benelux defence clusters should invite representatives of NATO and the EDA to their co-operative meetings and report periodically to these organisations on the progress made in capability development measured against the collective shortfalls and requirements. Perhaps these clusters can serve as test cases for other clusters or framework nation groups.

# Conclusions and recommendations

## 1. Politics of deeper defence cooperation

- A way for parliaments to create favourable conditions, requirements and incentives for deeper defence cooperation is through the method of a so-called '*defence agreement*', which is a multi-year consensus on defence encompassing coalition and opposition parties and governments, based on all stakeholders, including experts.
- The goal of defence agreements should be *to create stability and clarity for a number of years* on the purpose of, and planning for, the armed forces. It would transcend a change of government, because it involves as many political parties as possible.
- Defence agreements can make defence cooperation with other countries easier by *enhancing reliability, predictability* and a multi-year outlook on purpose, plans and available funds.
- National defence agreements should not be made in isolation, but should *take clusters of cooperation and the EU and NATO into account*. This can be done by including representatives of strategic partners among the stakeholders negotiating the agreement. In addition, consultations should take place with the EDA/EU and NATO at an early stage of the drafting.
- *Parliamentary involvement is vital* for providing incentive, legitimacy and public support for defence cooperation. It needs to be intensified on the national government-to-parliament level and on the level of cluster parliamentary cooperation.
- *Already existing interparliamentary ad hoc contacts should be strengthened* and for Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, the Benelux Parliament should be reinvigorated and could be given a more substantial role in fostering defence cooperation.
- To strengthen interparliamentary contacts and information exchange, parliaments can establish *a parliamentary liaison* in support of defence committees in the parliaments of cluster countries.
- Parliaments should *be involved in the political preparatory phase* of (multinational and multilateral) rapid reaction mechanisms.

## 2. Planning requirements for deeper defence cooperation

- Clusters should *shift their focus* from low-hanging fruit (education, training, exercises) *to aligning defence and procurement planning* in order to reach economies of scale in operational and financial terms. Deeper defence cooperation implies a convergence of defence planning and acquisition programmes.

- When cluster partners have merged capabilities and become dependent on each other for deployment, *strategic military operational options will have to be aligned*. The decision to deploy the capability will remain at the national political level.
- Cluster partners should align their policies on multinational defence cooperation in order to synchronise their defence plans. They should aim for a *cluster defence cooperation policy*.
- A cluster defence policy should at least encompass four elements:
  - (i) the principle that *cluster solutions come before national solutions*;
  - (ii) the identification of each other as *preferred partners*;
  - (iii) the need for a *top-down approach* to steer bottom-up activities in order to create consistency and to speed up work;
  - (iv) to create an *embedded environment* for cluster activities in order to prevent 'easy walk outs' at later stages.
- Clusters should replace the ad hoc comparison of defence and procurement plans by *systematically aligned defence and procurement planning*.
- As procurement cycles take 10 to 15 years, it is of the utmost importance to *start right now* with the cluster alignment of defence planning. Waiting might bring the risk of losing opportunities for coordinated or combined procurement.
- For such an alignment four factors are of importance:
  - (i) the *transparency of defence and procurement plans* is an absolute prerequisite for exploring the full potential of deeper defence cooperation; it has to encompass capability development, procurement processes, budgetary cycles, organisational responsibilities and industrial capacities;
  - (ii) cluster partners should *agree on the methodology* for converging defence and procurement plans; this is best done by comparing the medium to long-term planning and identifying *matches* which will be turned into projects; early commitment by the highest military and political levels is needed;
  - (iii) from the start *in-service support* should be included when identifying aligned defence and procurement plans; as through-life management consumes on average two-thirds of the costs of major weapons systems, most savings can be made in this phase;
  - (iv) the *number of cluster partners should remain low* in order to have the best chances for successful deeper defence cooperation; for specific cooperation topics groups of cooperating countries can be larger.

### 3. EU/EDA as facilitators and coordinators

- While EDA and NATO have different agendas, the *commonality of the strategies* of the two organisations should be *as high as possible* as a prerequisite for optimising coherence and consistency in capability development.
- Strategy has to be translated into military requirements. The EU and NATO have *to take the defence plans of nations (and in the future of clusters) better into account*. This will make it easier to connect the proposed targets of NATO and EDA planning with the

capability profiles of the nations (or clusters) in order to avoid unrealistic calls for additional capabilities and/or forces.

- The EU/EDA and NATO are unlikely to conduct multinational defence planning. But clusters need clustering. The role of the EDA and NATO as *coordinators and facilitators* has to be reinforced in order to conduct more systematic and long-term capability development.
- The EU and NATO planning procedures both have their advantages. NATO and the EU/EDA should *combine* the best parts of the national, multilateral, EU, and NATO processes and methodologies.
- In addition, the dynamics of *cluster co-operation* and the Framework Nation Concept, adopted by the Wales Summit, could help *to bridge* the shortcomings of the planning processes of NATO and EU. Clusters should share their experiences and the results should be made public.
- There is a *danger of the proliferation of clusters and framework nation groups* with the risk of duplication, a waste of effort and unnecessary bureaucracy. Within the EU/EDA and NATO context clarity should be provided concerning 'what each cluster or group will do'.
- *Transparency and trust are essential*, not only for well-functioning clusters but also for their relationship with the EU/EDA and NATO. The German-Netherlands and the BENELUX cluster partners should *set an example* by inviting representatives of NATO and EDA to their meetings. Moreover, they could report to EDA and NATO on the progress of their co-operation measured against the existing shortfalls and requirements.

# Summaries of keynote speeches

## European Security Trends: Implications for European Defence

*Sven Biscop, Director Europe in the World Programme, Egmont Royal Institute, Brussels*

European defence planning uses scenarios for which we are unlikely to deploy our forces individually: article 5 (collective defence) and crisis management operations. We only deploy our forces together. What is more, defence capabilities will not be generated by individual nations but by groups of states as well. Even if the operations are not conducted by NATO or the EU as a whole, we will still operate together in smaller groups. Yet, our planning is not adjusted to increase the effectiveness of such smaller groups.

The United States has pivoted towards Asia. This is not a temporary phenomenon. Despite the surprise of the Russian actions in Ukraine, the Americans see the current situation in Eastern Europe more as a distraction than as an issue requiring its full attention for a longer period. Russia is not a global competitor of the US; China is. Washington will continue to look towards Europe for taking the initiative, in particular with regard to security matters in its own neighbourhood.

Therefore, our focus for defence cooperation should be 'the European bloc': the European Allies and Partners / EU Member States. The questions are: which responsibilities should be taken, on what should we focus, what should we do? We probably already know the answers:

1. We have global interests which we have to guard, as has been recognised in the EU Maritime Security Strategy (June 2014).
2. We should focus on the wider neighbourhood, which goes beyond the European Neighbourhood Policy and includes the Sahel, the rest of Africa and the Gulf area; and we need to discuss how far east our neighbourhood will stretch. This is where Europe has to take the lead.
3. We have to make contributions to global security through stabilisation in the UN context.

We know all this but we do not spell it out in an official and explicit statement. That would give us more confidence and, while spelling out our ambitions, we would better communicate to our citizens, parliaments, partners and neighbours on what we stand for and what we are willing to do.

It implies that we have to adjust our capability planning. The Headline Goal (HG) of deploying 60,000 troops is not sufficient for Europe's ambitions which have just been described. We need to be able to deploy these amounts of forces over and above ongoing operations. I would therefore argue for a double HG. Also, Europe needs to acquire all the necessary enablers (strategic lift, ISR, air-to-air refuelling, etc.) in order to operate 'autonomously' as 'the European bloc'. In the case of the Libyan intervention we relied on American support, but this will not always be guaranteed.

For capability development we should keep in mind the needs of Europe as a whole (the European bloc), but smaller clusters can contribute by realising deeper defence coopera-

tion. So far, the real integration of capabilities has been skin-deep. We should consider our national forces as a part of a single force at the cluster level and no longer as a single force at the national level which contributes to a larger force at the cluster level. Furthermore, we should be careful not to create a large number of clusters. Permanent Structured Cooperation under the Lisbon Treaty foresaw a smaller group of member states going forward, but only one group. The NATO Summit in Wales has endorsed the Framework Nation Concept, but already three groups (under the lead nations of Germany, Italy and the UK) have been announced. We must be careful not to create large autonomous clusters each around one big country with coherence between these clusters being lacking.

So, for coherence we need 'the European bloc' approach in capability development. I am not advocating an EU Defence Planning Process, but we have to translate European needs into required European capabilities. These can be inserted into the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) in order to realise a coherent and effective European set of capabilities. As Europeans we should have the ambition to have the ability to deploy (to the wider neighbourhood) a force of Headline Goal size, next to ongoing operations. Such a capability would serve both as a deterrent and as a strategic reserve.

## Parliamentary Dimensions of Defence Cooperation

*Angelien Eijssink, Chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Netherlands House of Representatives*

The Dutch Parliament has been active in shaping parliamentary involvement in defence cooperation over the past year. In particular, we have been putting the matter of parliamentary procedures regarding the deployment of EU Battlegroups on the agenda in Europe. During the Interparliamentary Conference in Athens last spring, the Dutch delegation started an effort to map the decision-making processes of the member states' national parliaments. When we do so, we can take steps in this area and come to a better mutual understanding. Parliaments can review their procedures and ask themselves: can procedures be made quicker? Is it conceivable that we negotiate some kind of pre-permission for specific types of missions with an incoming government? If we are serious about multilateral and multinational rapid reaction forces, this might be inevitable.

We all know: no country can now do it alone, neither operationally nor financially. This means that cooperation is inevitable, or positively phrased: the logical way to go. This applies to our ambition to have smart defence and it makes sense if we want to make the pooling and sharing of resources work. That is why I have been considering how to take a different approach to the potentially polarising and confusing discussion around the abstract term 'sovereignty'. I would like to explore the role of 'defence agreements' and venture into what that could look like on a European level.

Since 1988, Denmark has a 'Defence Agreement'. It is a four-year political agreement that outlines the consensus on the purpose, planning, budget and structure of defence policy and the armed forces. The agreement has been drafted by a council consisting of ministers, members of parliament, military personnel and experts. It has been adopted by a wide majority of parties.

In May 2014, the Swedish Defence Commission, which is a forum for consultations between the Government and representatives of the political parties in the Riksdag, has issued a



defence report. The Commission wanted to achieve as broad an agreement as possible on the formulation of Sweden's security and defence policy. On the basis of the report the Government formulates its proposals to the Riksdag on a defence bill for 2015.

In both cases, there is a broad consensus on the topic of defence. The advantages are that the governments and parliaments of the two countries have a firmer grip on the planning process and expenditure. The process becomes depoliticised as government changes will affect the planning process less since the coalition partners are likely to have been part of the previous plans, be it as coalition or as opposition parties. The results of the process are less controversial politically.

The difference with the Netherlands is substantial. Defence priorities may be amended as coalition governments change. Should you ask a Dutch MP the same question you may hear what the MP thinks should be the defence priorities. If you happen to be speaking to a coalition MP, you may wonder how much of the answer will still be valid as governments change from time to time.

I can personally testify that this is a real problem in the practice of Inter-parliamentary Conferences on defence policy. How can members of parliament have a meaningful role in further developing European (or international) military cooperation, if their mandate keeps changing? How can parliaments consider a member state as a potential partner for deeper defence cooperation if its defence policy is subject to regular change? To phrase it more constructively: long-term agreements could really facilitate cooperation, even more so when planning cycles are brought into sync.

I would like to take this exercise a step further and imagine what the benefits could be if many (or all) EU member states would adopt this practice. Would many member states become more predictable partners? And would this bring us closer to reaching similar political decisions? And if so, will that make defence cooperation and cooperation among various forms of multinational rapid response forces easier?

EDA could play a role in advising or evaluating such processes and could spot potentials for cooperation. Conceivably, the European Council could evaluate planning cycles every two years. This would create a degree of peer pressure in defence planning. No head of government would want to come to the European Council unprepared.

To sum up, I would like to take this opportunity to put the idea of multi-year defence agreements on the table for your consideration. For the Netherlands, the idea is new and I am well aware that the road towards it is riddled with many obstacles. One of the most important purposes of a national defence agreement is that bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation (be it on planning or deployments) function more smoothly.

## **Deepening Defence Cooperation: Implementing the European Council and NATO Summit Conclusions**

*Henning Riecke, Head of Transatlantic Relations Programme, German Council of Foreign Relations, Berlin*

The security landscape in Europe has been changed by new tactics and new politics to our East. Nevertheless, many elements will also remain: defence budgets will still be small and

no new major expensive equipment programmes can be expected. The German Minister of Defence has already downplayed the commitment made at the NATO Summit in Wales in terms of net dollar investment in defence. For Germany, spending 2% GDP on defence would mean an enormous increase which would be hard to sell politically. Germany rather looks for more efficiency. In short, not much new money should be expected for European defence.

The situation in the East has given an ugly face to Article 5 scenarios, which are no longer theoretical. The question is how prepared are we for such scenarios? Our success rate in out of area operations has not been great over the past few years and the appetite for large-scale comprehensive operations (such as in Afghanistan) is very low at this point in time. There is a growing sense of urgency: our current capabilities are not sufficient to meet the challenges posed by hybrid warfare or transnational extremist groups like ISIL. The onset of such challenges also interferes with ongoing planning and procurement efforts.

In Germany, support for defence cooperation is slowly growing. It is no longer only rhetoric that cooperative procurement is needed. It is becoming clear that we do not have to wait for the emergence of a European army. However, Berlin is aware of the mistrust of countries which have to take the lead in the Framework Nation Concept, because of parliamentary co-decision. Also, there are different ideas as to what the aim of the Framework Nation Concept should be. Germany wants to focus on creating joint planning capabilities for long-term procurement, but the United Kingdom wants to focus on operational cooperation.

Germany can provide an impulse through the Framework Nation Concept, but might bring in its civilian attitudes to defence cooperation. Berlin is looking towards more flexible, small-scale, more civilian structures in the EU, and its focus is on training and education, also of its partners. Hence, German support for the Enable and Enhance Initiative (E2I). The German government is using parliament as an excuse for not engaging in military operations. One could say that the problem is more a reluctant government than a reluctant parliament. Yet, although we might see parliamentary waivers for joint capability development, we will not see pre-delegation for the deployment of joint capabilities.

The German armed forces are in a poor state. Efficient procurement is necessary, but this might also negatively affect the willingness to engage in Pooling & Sharing, since it may burden national capability development. However, Germany still sees the need for fulfilling the obligations of Pooling & Sharing and Germany will do so. Defence cooperation is necessary for an effective Europe as well as for keeping the Americans in NATO and interested in Europe.

Although the EU's and NATO's planning processes differ, they should produce joint strategic outlooks and start planning accordingly. They must act more as facilitators and constant factors, rather than just as note takers. There is an overlap between NATO and the EU in certain capability areas, and it would be better if there was an agreement on the division of labour. Greater degrees of transparency and exchanges between the two are also needed. On the working level this is already the case, but it also needs to occur on the political level. For better EU-NATO cooperation to take place we first need to convince the capitals of this.