

Finabel



Possibilities and Challenges  
to the Creation of a  
**Cooperative  
European  
Defence System**

AN EXPERTISE FORUM CONTRIBUTING TO EUROPEAN  
ARMIES INTEROPERABILITY SINCE 1953



**FINABEL**

European Army Interoperability Center

**This paper was drawn up by M. Francesco Pettinari, European Defence Researcher, under the supervision and guidance of the Head of the Permanent Secretariat.**

**This Food for Thought paper is a document that gives an initial reflection on the theme. The content is not reflecting the positions of the member states, but consists of elements that can initiate and feed the discussions and analyses in the domain of the theme. It was drafted by the Permanent Secretariat of Finabel.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The European security environment has been subject to a large amount of changes within the last two decades. For this reason, the creation of a structured European defence system has become a primary necessity for European states. Being involved in a highly volatile security environment and facing a myriad of economic, political, and practical problems, European countries started to understand that the only way to form a structure that could give them sufficient means to guarantee their security must be cooperative in nature.

These countries have begun to organise themselves within clusters that are intended to empower them by providing enough resources to ensure efficient deterrence and defence capabilities and, therefore, to guarantee their security in broader terms. Despite the existence of well-structured international institutions such as the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) that play a leading role on the European stage, nations so far seem to be reluctant to gather together and to cooperate within these large institutions, preferring to maintain a leading role in the European defence integration process.

However, both the European Union and NATO can play essential roles in guiding and supporting this process, and have already launched many initiatives aiming to do so. The most crucial of these initiatives is repre-

sented by an approach to military cooperation among countries which has the potential to be a 'game changer' for the future of European defence. NATO launched this initiative in 2014: The Framework Nations' Concept.

This paper aims to give an overview of the current status of the cooperative system for guaranteeing European security and defence, addressing the essential requirements for the creation of an effective system, the principal obstacles to its creation, and the main features of what is considered to be one of the most successful examples of military cooperation, launched up to date. This paper is divided into four chapters.

The first chapter addresses the new requirements for the European defence system. It presents the three most urgent issues undermining European stability, and the new requirements this entails. The last part of this chapter lists the three most essential elements for the future of European defence, and outlines the effect of the new threats faced by Europe today.

In the second chapter, the focus moves on to the role of the European Union and NATO in organising and assisting the European defence integration process. This chapter addresses the main obstacles to an integration deeply guided by one – or both – these institutions, and

gives a description of the most probable way in which a structured and cooperative system for European defence will be created. The second chapter evaluates the current existing initiatives established by both the European Union and NATO.

The third chapter is devoted to presenting the Framework Nations' Concept. This section describes the main aims and features of this initiative, illustrating the status of the already existing initiatives created. The last paragraph of the third chapter presents and comments on the reasons that make the Framework Nations' Concept the most successful attempt so far to create an efficient European defence system. The fourth and fifth chapter of this paper contain the conclusion and some recommendations deriving from the analysis enclosed in the previous sections.

## **THE NEW REQUIREMENTS FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE**

After having experienced two decades of relative calm, in which European States' security did not seem to be threatened by external actors or transnational phenomena, the last ten years brought on the re-emergence of European Security and Defence. It has now become a forefront topic in the agenda of national governments and International Organisations. Indeed, if the end of the Cold War gave Europeans the illusion that they could decrease the attention placed on their defence and security systems, the emergence of transnational terrorism, the instability of the European Southern border and the consequent mass migration flows, as well as – more recently – the revival

of Russian assertiveness crushed these dreams and brought European governments back to reality. What appeared to become more and more clear to Europeans was that hard power – a concept which had remained out of the European public security debate for a long time – can no longer be underestimated, and in fact, will be needed to some degree.

This assumption does not aim to undermine the efforts that European countries – especially under the guidance of the European Union (EU) – made in critical areas such as the Balkans or the Horn of Africa where the situation could have been much worse had Europeans not intervened. In fact, the “soft military power” used by European states to carry out limited stabilisation missions has proven to be effective. However, it is now clear that the EU is seeking to achieve higher strategic autonomy, and greater capabilities to be able to act within and beyond its borders, as stated in the European Union Global Strategy released in June 2016<sup>1</sup>, and that this attempt will involve even non-EU members.

Another aspect of the utmost relevance is represented by the fact that the current political and economic environment has made it necessary to create new strategic, and operational thinking to ensure the required capabilities in order to guarantee European security. The establishment of this new way of thinking was – and still is – profoundly influenced by many issues, most notably by the divergences in threats perceived by states, as well as the continuous cut-off of military expenditure that affected Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the United States' request for fairer burden sharing in providing funds for European defence within NATO. While the U.S. has placed increased emphasis on European

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, “A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy”, Brussels, June 2016.

states developing an independent – or at least partially autonomous – defence system, diverging priorities and decreased budgets made it clear that the old ways in which nations used to increase their security are no longer suitable options. In this evolving scenario, the need for specialisation<sup>2</sup>, cooperation, and interoperability among national Armed Forces (AFs) is now in the spotlight.

## The New Security Environment: Different Threats and Countries' Priorities

Nowadays, European countries are facing a much more unpredictable and volatile security environment. The stability of Europe as a whole is potentially affected by a vast variety of factors. All these factors are not perceived in the same way by different countries. Countries will always be primarily interested in facing the threats they consider to be more immediate. Threat perception of a country is well entrenched in its geographical position, history, and geopolitical interests. Moreover, thanks to increasing relevance of the new means that guarantee an easier and broader participation in the socio-political life of a country, even the internal public opinion has gained an essential role in shaping national defence policies. In the next part, I will discuss the three crucial elements that jeopardize European stability, creating different reactions among states can be identified.

The first element behind the unstable nature of the European security environment is the

new transnational terrorism. Due to the unpredictable and non-territorial nature of this phenomenon, it is difficult to create military operations and capabilities to combat against it. Many countries have created special units and/or tasked already existing ones to prevent and challenge terrorist groups, but this did not considerably augment their military capabilities in this field. However, the countries that suffered the most from numerous terrorist attacks – namely the United Kingdom (UK) and France – have had to reduce the number of military personnel and means that could have been devoted to other actions or tasks, including the ones that historically represented the core capabilities of these states' armed forces (AFs). In particular, these two countries have always preferred “interventionist capabilities, rapidly deployable, supported by their own strategic reconnaissance assets and capable of delivering heavy firepower”<sup>3</sup>, and these qualities continue to strongly characterise both the *Forces Armées Françaises* and *Her Majesty's Armed Forces*.

A second factor that potentially undermines European stability is the migration flows and the migration routes that cross Europe. Land-based routes can be somewhat easily regulated, or at least patrolled through the employment of border police or – as already done in some European countries – with national AFs taking on a complementary role. The sea-based routes are much more controversial, and it can be quite difficult to regulate them. For example, the geographical position, together with an increase in debate and awareness of public opinion, forced Italy to be more and more concerned about its border security. As

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<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the word specialisation is used in a way that has a long tradition within the International Economic theories. For the aim of this paper, the term specialisation is intended to describe the tendency to make the armed forces more oriented towards some specific assets and capabilities, with the aim to make them perfectly suitable to face a limited number of issues.

<sup>3</sup> Zandee D. “Core Groups: The Way to Real European Defence”, in *Security Policy Brief No. 81*, Egmont Institute, February 2017.

as a result, the Italian Armed Forces appear nowadays more oriented towards naval operations and border patrol than in the past<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, since it is clear that the flow of migration will not cease unless the socio-political situations in the migrants' countries of origin are ameliorated, Italy has a high strategic interest towards stabilisation missions outside of its own borders, and the *Forze Armate Italiane* need to have the capacity to carry out such operations.

The third and more recent facet that jeopardizes European security – potentially even to the extent of territorial integrity – is renewed Russian assertiveness which worryingly increased after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. For clear historical and geographical reasons, Russia's new stance is perceived as particularly threatening in the Eastern European flank, especially in the Baltic States, and in Poland for example. This made it necessary for these countries to list territorial defence as a top priority in their National Security Strategies, immediately followed by other countermeasures to Russian interference in the democratic life of these countries.

Focus has been especially placed on the cyber domain and the prevention of the spread of fake news and propaganda. The states that feel threatened by Russia recently started to concentrate on the modernisation of their land forces (mostly Poland) and special forces (particularly the Baltics). This will to modernise and improve land forces does not apply solely to Poland. Indeed, the German *Bundeswehr* is following a similar path, even if Germany's general wish is to maintain a spectrum of capabilities as large and complete as possible<sup>5</sup>.

What appears clear is that European countries are trying to specialise and to give their military apparatus a more concentrated and specialised spectrum of capabilities, to better cope with the most immediately perceived threats and/or to achieve certain geopolitical interests, alongside decreased budgets. European governments long ago gave up on attaining full-spectrum capability for their national AFs. The new threats to European security sped up a process of specialisation that was already underway as a necessary consequence of the military spending cuts made by almost every European government after the end of the Cold War, further reinforced after the outbreak of the economic crisis that reached Europe in 2009. *Specialisation* is then the first keyword that can be derived from this analysis, and one of the most essential elements that is currently influencing the European defence integration process.

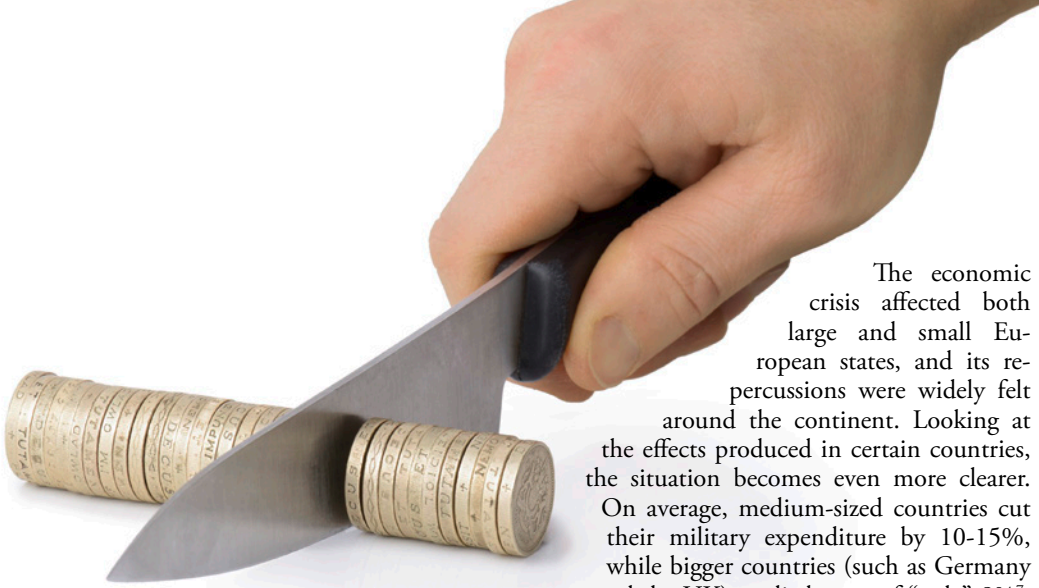
## The Long-Term Effects of Military Budget Cuts

For more than two decades the national military structures of most European countries have had to face an implacable internal enemy, presenting itself in the form of budget cuts. Indeed, after the fall of the Berlin Wall that signified the end of the Cold War, the investments that European national governments pledged to the military experienced a continuous and marked decrease. As reported by the United Nations, the military expenditure of the whole European area fell from 2.5% of the area's gross domestic production (GDP) in 1991 to 1.5% of the area's GDP in 2016<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Drent M., Wilms E., Zandee D., "Making Sense of European Defence", in *Clingendael Report*, Clingendael Institute, December 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Zandee D. "Core Groups: The Way to Real European Defence".

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, *Military Expenditure (% of GDP)*, available at <http://data.un.org/>



At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the low-threat level perceived by many European countries could justify this decreasing trend, yet another plausible explanation for the continuous decline in military spending can also be found in the repercussions of the economic crisis that reached Europe in 2009. Yet, even if the emergence of the threats mentioned above could have justified a consistent increase in military spending, this would seemingly still not have occurred due to a lack of economic resources. Internal public opinion could also be seen to have contributed to this downwards trend, as public opinion in certain areas was decidedly against the possibility of increasing military defence spending. In fact, in Italy and Germany, public opinion firmly opposed every attempt to increase the military budget, arguing that, in a time of crisis, the government should firstly guarantee the economic wellbeing of its citizens.

The economic crisis affected both large and small European states, and its repercussions were widely felt around the continent. Looking at the effects produced in certain countries, the situation becomes even more clearer. On average, medium-sized countries cut their military expenditure by 10-15%, while bigger countries (such as Germany and the UK) applied a cut of “only” 8%<sup>7</sup>. Immediately after the outbreak of the crisis, smaller countries such as Latvia and Lithuania implemented huge cuts to their military budget (21% and 36% respectively), but these cuts were recovered in part by the substantial increase in their military expenditure following the Russian annexation of Crimea.

One of the most direct effects of the budget cuts implemented by national governments after 2009 was the reduction of military personnel. As many as 160,000 soldiers were discharged between 2009 and 2011. For many European countries, the cuts have also taken on the form of missed acquisitions of new capabilities, or in the attempt (not always successful) to scale-back outdated military programmes, such as the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter aircraft or the Typhoon fighter jets. However, “the largest equipment cuts have taken place in small and medium-sized EU states, some of which have cancelled entire military capabilities. For example, the Netherlands and Den-

<sup>7</sup> Mölling C., “The Implications of Military Spending Cuts for NATO’s Largest Members”, *Center on the United States and Europe at Brookings*, July 2012.

mark are eliminating their main battle tanks. Denmark is also getting rid of its submarines and land-based air defences”<sup>8</sup>.

The consistent reduction in the share of government budget allocated to the military field, experienced by almost every country in Europe, reduces the military capabilities at their disposal, with a consequent decrease in the countries potential to initiate military operations. However, these cuts also opened a window of opportunity for cooperation among European states. Indeed, being forced to select which of their military capabilities had to be maintained (and in more than one case, reinforced) and which ones had to be reduced, or completely dismantled, European countries faced an additional need for specialisation, which resulted in closer cooperation among neighbouring and allied nations. Examples of this cooperation flourished all over Europe, and many countries have grouped themselves into so-called clusters, as we shall look at below.

These clusters are characterised by different purposes and present various grades of interdependence. For instance, a joint declaration made by the Ministries of Defence of the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg) in April 2012 stressed the need to “increase military efficiency by bringing national forces together, sharing costs where possible and increasing the output of operational capacities”<sup>9</sup>. Within this cluster, the already existing naval cooperation (BeNeSam) was used as an example for following actions such as the establishment of the NH-

90 helicopter project, common air policing, the creation of a combined Benelux Arms Control Agency, and the initiation of a Benelux Para Training Centre. The level of collaboration reached by the Benelux nations is a strong one, and it seeks to bring the militaries of the participants closer together.

A similar level of close cooperation can also be identified when looking at the German-Dutch tank battalion and the Strategic Airlift Capability. In these clusters, the operational divisions are deeply integrated and there is a mutual dependency in their potential deployment. A lower level of bilateral cooperation can be identified in the binational Franco-British Combined Joint Expeditionary Force, in which the parties are free to withdraw their contribution and to deploy forces nationally. The military capabilities placed under the control of bi- or multinational joint headquarters such as the Eurocorps, the 1<sup>st</sup> German-Netherlands Army Corps, or the German-Polish Multinational Corps Northeast create links that are similar to the abovementioned Franco-British’s one. In fact, these formations usually train and exercise together, but their joint deployment is not guaranteed, as it is dependent on the countries’ political will. However, these clusters often represent the core capabilities for EU or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) operations<sup>10</sup>.

Clusters among European states formed as a consequence of the specialisation process triggered by the military budget cuts. The necessity to renounce parts of national military

<sup>8</sup> Mölling C., “The Implications of Military Spending Cuts for NATO’s Largest Members”, p.6.

<sup>9</sup> Joint Declaration of the Ministries of Defence of the Benelux Countries, *BENELUX-verklaring over samenwerking op defensievlak. (BENELUX declaration on cooperation in the framework of defence.)* Brussels, 18 April. Available at <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/convenanten/2012/05/14/beneluxverklaring-over-samenwerking-op-defensievlak.html>.

<sup>10</sup> See also Drent M., Wilms E., Zandee D., “Making Sense of European Security”.

assets, coupled with the need to maintain specific capabilities standards forced countries to find new and innovative ways to fulfil their needs in the military domain. This also means that the European defence integration process likely acquired a new and perhaps decisive impetus. Thus, *cooperation* is the second keyword that must be taken into account when looking at the European defence integration process. The recent increase in defence spending in many European countries is expected to increase the capabilities of many European AFs. Thanks to the aforementioned specialisation process, the countries would be able to rely on ameliorated and a larger range of military capabilities that could be used in a more effective manner through this increasing awareness of the effectiveness of this cooperative way of organising armies.

### U.S. Partial Disengagement: The Call for Europe

Since the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, European security and defence have been primarily guaranteed by external actors. During the Cold War, the west was led by NATO, spear headed primarily by the U.S., and the East was led by the Warsaw Pact, spear headed primarily by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). These two powers were at this time the most important actors and providers for European defence capabilities. European nations were only able to garner partial contribution, as they struggled to recover from the enormous expenses and devastation suffered during the Second World War, and this trend never fully changed throughout the Cold War

era. After the collapse of the USSR at the beginning of the 1990s, NATO started to increase its Alliance, to its current composition of twenty-nine countries, most of which are European. For a while, the United States did not give up its role as the first contributor to European defence through NATO, politically supported by the direct involvement of U.S. political leaders such as President George W. Bush<sup>11</sup>. Nonetheless, the request for fairer burden-sharing has always been present in regards to NATO. In recent years however, especially after the election of U.S. President Donald Trump, and the current Presidency's declarations on this topic, Europeans have begun to perceive this request as a more pressing issue.

An essential official NATO stance towards fairer burden-sharing and the solicitation for European States to become the leading provider of their own security was taken at the NATO Wales Summit held in Newport in 2014. The Allies, NATO's Member States, agreed on the 2% guideline which requires NATO Member States to invest at least 2% of their GDP in defence expenditure within a decade<sup>12</sup>. However, at the beginning of 2018, only eight out of twenty-nine Allies reached – or were close to – this benchmark. This request for a higher defence spending was primarily intended to make sure that the whole Alliance would maintain appropriate means to provide concrete and credible defence and deterrence capabilities. It also revealed the Alliance's concerns regarding the vacuum created in the European defence system by the gradual disengagement of the U.S. (sped up by the new Presidency's declared stance). This is coupled with the inability of European

<sup>11</sup> A clear example of this tendency is the one represented by the speech made by President G. W. Bush in Vilnius (Lithuania) in November 2002.

<sup>12</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Wales Summit Declaration", Newport, Wales, September 2014.



countries to replace the U.S.'s previous primary role without working together<sup>13</sup>.

An even more relevant signal of NATO's, and indirectly the United States', desire to see a stronger and more capable European defence system is the one represented by the so-called 50 percent guideline. This concept was initially introduced by the former NATO Deputy Secretary General, Alexander Vershbow, in a speech at the Annual Security conference of the Norwegian Atlantic Committee that took place in Oslo in 2013. During his speech, Ambassador Vershbow explicitly expressed the aim to achieve a fairer burden-sharing among the Allies<sup>14</sup>. According to the 50 percent guideline, more than 50% of the assets required for each NATO capability cannot be provided by one single NATO country. The NATO Defence Planning Process is the mechanism responsible for making sure that the 50% quota is respected and that all the required defence capabilities of the Alliance are represented, coming from contributions from all Alliance members. The limitation of the assets provided by a country clearly encourages European Allies to contribute to NATO's tasks and capabilities, in a deeper and more profound manner, moving away from the time in which the United States were the primary asset contributors, for the vast majority of NATO assignments and tasks.

The two aspects explained above show how the gradual U.S. relinquishment of their previous primary role as provider for European security and defence requires European states to take concrete actions towards an increase in their military responsibilities, which can only be achieved through specialisation, co-

operation, and deep military interoperability. In fact, the call for European states to provide assets for NATO's tasks and remits must include the operational side, and this, in turn, cannot exclude deep military interoperability. European contributions should ideally be made primarily in a cooperative manner through increasingly coordinated allocation of specialisation of national AFs, in the interest of efficiency and effectiveness. Hence, *military interoperability* is the third key phrase that must be taken into account whilst analysing the current state of the European defence integration process.

## **THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN THE EUROPEAN DEFENCE INTEGRATIONS PROCESS**

The issues described in chapter one makes it clear how it is necessary for European states to develop an integrated defence structure that should be based upon cooperation between countries. In a world where this is existing, vital international organisations, that count most European countries amongst their members – namely the EU and NATO – roles would need to be addressed and evaluated by the institution.

Defence and security policies are of the utmost importance for many countries and, therefore, it is highly unlikely that decisions in these fields will ever been taken solely and entirely at an EU or NATO level. Within the statutes of the two institutions, it is clearly stated that defence and security policies shall

<sup>13</sup> See also Techau J., "The Politics of Two Percent: NATO and the Security Vacuum in Europe", Carnegie Europe, September 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Ambassador Alexander Vershbow, former NATO Deputy Secretary General, "Closing the Gap: Keeping NATO Strong in an Era of Austerity", speech at the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Security conference of the Norwegian Atlantic Committee, Oslo, Norway, February 2013.

remain in the hands of the members, remaining resolutely under their jurisdiction. It is clear then that international organisations will not try to encroach upon this area of Member States' sovereignty. Under the EU framework, defence and security policies are exclusive competences of Member States, with the EU being able to play only a supportive or advisory role. NATO, as a military alliance, is by nature composed of independent parties that voluntarily agreed to support and defend one other using the means they consider to be most appropriate. However, as the decision to participate in joint and mutually dependent defence architectures will ultimately remain in the hands of the Member States, both the EU and NATO can use their supportive and advisory roles to consistently contribute to, and encourage, the achievement of a functioning integrated structure.

## The Theoretical Frameworks and Concrete Actions Introduced by the EU and NATO

The will to develop a cooperative European defence structure that takes into account the countries' priorities and the specificities of their national AFs, whilst aiming for a more efficient allocation of military budgets was recently underlined by the EU. The EU elaborated its own theoretical framework, aiming to point to the primary needs for an effective defence integration process as well as solutions for guaranteeing the maintenance of an appropriate set of responsibilities and corresponding capabilities for European countries.

In a declaration from the Council of the EU in December 2010, EU Member States defined the "Pooling & Sharing" (P&S) approach as a way to improve the efficiency of their already existing military responsibilities and capabilities and to encourage satisfactory results in a cooperative manner<sup>15</sup>. As defined by the European Defence Agency (EDA), P&S is an "EU concept which refers to Member States-led initiatives and projects to increase collaboration on military capabilities. The pooling of capabilities occurs when several Member States decide to use capabilities – either nationally owned or multi-nationally procured – on a collective basis. Sharing or more precisely role-sharing is when some Member States relinquish some capabilities with the assumption or the guarantee that other countries will make them available when necessary"<sup>16</sup>.

Theoretically, the P&S approach should enable EU Member States to develop full-spectrum military capabilities, with the primary objectives being "improved sustainability, interoperability, and cost-efficiency"<sup>17</sup>. However, as yet the concrete outcomes remain unsatisfactory, at least at an EU level. Indeed, there is the question whether or not, bi- and multilateral cooperation, already described above, can be considered to be a successful application of the P&S approach, as often cooperative initiatives are used to achieve national objectives, while the role of the EU remains marginal. The EU Battlegroups provide a strong example of this. These battlegroups were established in January 2007 as military units adhering to the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), placed under the direct control of the Council of the EU. So

<sup>15</sup> Council of the European Union, "Conclusion on Common Security and Defence Policy", 3130<sup>th</sup> Foreign Affairs Council Committee, Brussels, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2010.

<sup>16</sup> European Defence Agency, "EDA's Pooling and Sharing", 30<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

far, eighteen multinational battlegroups have been established through the joint efforts of all the EU Member States (with the exception of Denmark and Malta), as well as five non-EU countries such as FYROM/Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Turkey, and Ukraine. Yet, despite their wide multinational nature and their supposed role as the “military branch” of the European Union, these battlegroups have not yet been actively deployed, and many experts have questioned their operational capacities<sup>18</sup>.

Another relevant example of the EU’s wish to boost a coordinated and multinational system for European defence in line with the P&S approach is represented by the introduction of the European Defence Fund. First introduced by EU Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, in September 2016 and accepted by the European Council three months later, this fund was officially established in 2017. The aim of this fund is to “coordinate, supplement and amplify national investments in defence research, in the development of prototypes and in the acquisition of defence equipment and technology”<sup>19</sup> in order to “support Member States’ more efficient spending in joint defence capabilities, strengthen European citizens’ security and foster a competitive and innovative industrial base”<sup>20</sup>.

Due to the very recent establishment of this fund, we cannot yet evaluate its effective-

ness, although positive outcomes are expected. From an operational point of view, the establishment of this fund can facilitate the potential future amalgamation of military operators thanks to the fact that they would – at least partially – rely on the same equipment and training facilities provided by the joint use of the financial resources coming from the Commission. Similarly, at a strategic level, the European Defence Fund can be perceived as a highly welcome first step towards the “strategic independence” the EU is aiming for. Yet, the achievement of this goal would surely imply increased investment from the states, with supervision coming from Brussels intended to make sure that duplication and ineffective budget allocations are avoided<sup>21</sup>.

Just as this development is ongoing in the EU, NATO has also developed a theoretical framework. The Smart Defence concept aim is to achieve a better allocation of resources and to empower allies to rely on shared capabilities. It also aims at increasing the possibility of facing the potentially emerging threats in this new and uncertain security environment. An additional reason that lies behind NATO’s motivation for this framework is its wish for achieving fairer burden-sharing within the Alliance, as mentioned before, which is part of its attempt to close the enormous military spending gap existing between the United States, and European Allies.

<sup>18</sup> On this point see, for instance, Reyckers Y., “*EU Battlegroups: High Costs, No Benefits*”, in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Volume 38 Issue 3, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> European Commission, “*A European Defence Fund: €5.5 Billion per Year to boost Europe’s Defence Capabilities*”, European Commission – Press Release, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

<sup>20</sup> European Commission, “*European Defence Action Plan: Towards a European Defence Fund*”, European Commission – Press Release, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Both the operational and the strategic considerations are partially inspired by the ones of Camporini V. and Zandee D. contained in Camporini V., Hartley K., Maulney J.-P., Zandee D., “*European Preferences, Strategic Autonomy and European Defence Fund*”, Ares Report 22, November 2017.

Introduced at the 2011 Munich Security Conference by the (at that time) NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the Smart Defence concept can be considered as a “pooling and sharing” initiative at a NATO level. Indeed, as defined by NATO, Smart Defence is “*a concept that encourages Allies to cooperate in developing, acquiring and maintaining military capabilities to meet current security problems following the new NATO strategic concepts. Therefore, NATO smart defence means pooling and sharing capabilities, setting priorities and coordinating efforts better*”<sup>22</sup>. Through this concept, “allies are encouraged to work together to develop, acquire, operate and maintain military capabilities to undertake the Alliance’s core tasks”<sup>23</sup>.

The concept of Smart Defence works as a guideline for the defence planning of NATO members and partner nations, and it is based on the three primary needs for European national Armed Forces identified in the first chapter: *specialisation, cooperation, and military interoperability*. Therefore, the European Union clearly stated its will to coordinate the operations conducted within the Pooling & Sharing framework with the NATO Smart Defence concept.

## Main Obstacles to a Defence Integration at an EU/NATO Level

Although both the Pooling & Sharing and the Smart Defence concepts have great potential to boost the European defence integration process, the potential for the EU and NATO to lead an in-depth European defence

integration process suffers from numerous issues. Indeed, there are many political and practical barriers that prevent the creation of a fully cooperative system for European defence.

The political barriers are mostly a part of countries’ unwillingness to give up part of their sovereignty in the military field. This attitude from national governments has deep historical roots, as does the maintenance of the capability to defend themselves, as well as the power to decide either to deploy or not to deploy their national armed forces, have always been considered as primary rights of national decision makers, if not the most important ones. Therefore, the partial loss of these powers and the increasing interdependence with other countries represent key concerns for national governments. However, with the changing security environment, coupled with the long-term effects of the economic crisis as described in chapter one, the chances of overcoming the political barriers appear higher nowadays than at any other time in the past. Without this, it is almost impossible to find a common ground for all members of the EU and NATO. Nonetheless, at least cooperation among like-minded countries that share some common strategy priorities seems to be becoming easier.

Two of the most critical factors that influence Member States’ inclination to rely on shared and interdependent capabilities are trust and reliability. These elements are affected by a large variety of factors such as “cultures and traditions with regard to the use of force, international political orientation, the sizes of the armed forces and a willingness to deploy

<sup>22</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, “Smart Defence”, in *NATO Review Magazine*, available at <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/topics/en/smart-defence.htm>

<sup>23</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, “Topic: Smart Defence”, available at [https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics\\_84268.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics_84268.htm)



armed forces<sup>24</sup>. A clear example of the will to establish cooperation with their counterparts can be identified in the French interest for creating the European Intervention Initiative (EI2)<sup>25</sup>. The primary aims of the EI2 were to establish a common European defence doctrine capable of bringing together the planning, support, and intelligence dimensions, whilst also giving the signatories the possibility to rely on rapidly deployable and efficient multinational battlegroups to be used for actions such as natural disaster relief, military intervention in a crisis scenario, and evacuation of citizens from hotspots. The nature of EI2, which is completely independent of the

EU's CSDP, allows the participation of non-EU members. This means that, with the UK being a member of EI2, the spectre of Brexit will not be reason for concern for their membership. The primary interest is to rely on partners that, sharing common interests and cultures, would not prevent the fulfilment of the mission the coalition was created for, aided by the fact that it is independent from participation in already existing international bodies.

The practical barriers to the creation of a more cooperative defence structure for European countries are mostly connected to

<sup>24</sup> Drent M., Zandee D., Casteleijn L., "Defence Cooperation in Clusters. Identifying Next Steps", in *Clingendael Report*, Clingendael Institute, October 2014.

<sup>25</sup> The European Intervention Initiative was signed firstly introduced by the French President, Emmanuel Macron, in 2017, and was later officially signed on Monday 25th June by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of nine EU Member States. The signatory countries were Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

the difficulties in harmonising the defence planning processes (DPPs). The DPPs, as an integral part of the national defence policy, are mainly carried out at a state level and are quite unique, differing from case to case. The defence policies adopted by the countries are designed to translate strategic national objectives into practice and are strongly dependent upon multiple factors, such as the present international and internal political climate, and the relevant country's culture and capabilities. As a consequence, it is not yet possible to aim for a true alignment of defence policies since the situation in each country differs widely and could potentially undermine the authority of certain states, depriving national governments of one of their most important powers. However, countries that share strategic objectives and priorities would still be able to pursue similar defence policies, facilitating the creation of clusters in relation to DPPs.

National DPPs can be adjusted in order to establish military cooperation. Indeed, DPPs are constantly affected by considerable changes due to a shift in internal political and economic developments. This flexibility could make it easier to align certain DPPs and bring them under the umbrella framework of these clusters. Notwithstanding the multiannual nature of the DPPs, they can be jointly adopted by clusters in order to considerably increase their efficiency. For instance, relying on the same equipment and training facilities, armed forces can reach the highest level of interoperability and carry out joint operations more effectively. The Benelux and the German-Dutch cooperation already described in chapter one, provides two good examples of progressive alignments of national DPPs.

The countries participating in these clusters – motivated as they are by similar strategic objectives – quite recently started to systematically review and compare their DPPs, using these opportunities to deepen their cooperation. This method is based on the data collection of national priorities, that is subsequently made available to the relevant partners. This resembles the initiative the EDA tried to adopt in 2014: the EDA's Collective Database (CoDaBa). CoDaBa was intended to collect information from the EU Members participating in the activities of the EDA in order to use potential windows of cooperation. However, the reluctance of countries to provide their medium to long term plans negated the efficiency of this program.

As already seen when looking at how to overcome the relevant political barriers, cooperation amongst a small number of like-minded countries is far easier than cooperation at the EU/NATO level. This assumption is only reinforced by the numerous bi- and multilateral cooperation which already exist.

## The Role of the EU and NATO in Facilitating Cooperation

Even if Member States are to remain the most prominent actors within the European defence system, the role of the EU and NATO cannot be underestimated since “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”<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, one of the most important issues regarding the creation of clusters of like-minded states is represented by the fact that they could be used to pursue strictly nationally defined objectives,

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<sup>26</sup> Drent M., Zandee D., Casteleijn L., “Defence Cooperation in Clusters. Identifying Next Steps”.

thus undermining the participation of international organisations or reducing efficiency through unnecessary duplication. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance for these institutions to develop mechanisms to avoid duplication and to make sure that, through the capabilities developed on a single state level, it would be possible to rely on sufficient capacity to attain the strategic objectives. Both the EU and NATO have developed specific mechanisms for this purpose.

The European Union, through the European Defence Agency, endorsed a Capability Defence Plan (CDP) in 2008. As defined by the EDA, the CDP *“is the ‘overall strategic tool’ in the package of the four long-term strategies. It defines future capability needs from the short to longer term”* with the final aim being *“to contribute to improving the military capabilities needed for Common Security and Defence Policy operations in the future”*<sup>27</sup>. However, the EDA clearly stated that the CDP is not a supranational defence planning process. It is intended to inform national decision-makers on the needs and actions taken by the Union to prevent duplication. Moreover, the CDP was intended as a tool to discover opportunities to pool and collaborate among Members, establishing a capability-based approach to force and capability planning<sup>28</sup>.

The NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) acts in accordance with the NATO Strategic Concept and is intended *“to provide a framework within which national and Alliance defence planning activities can be har-*

*monised to enable Allies to provide the required forces and capabilities in the most effective way”*<sup>29</sup>. The main aims of the NDPP are to encourage the acquisition of the necessary capabilities by Allies, while minimising duplication and maximising efficiency. Similar to the EU’s CDP, the NDPP can be considered as a framework that facilitates the harmonisation of national defence policies and DPPs among NATO Member States, without undermining their national sovereignty.

From this analysis of the two frameworks developed by the EU and NATO, which do not attempt to substitute or impose directives on national decision-makers, these institutions are clearly interested in supporting national DPPs, leaving rooms for independent cooperation within clusters. As a matter of fact, the cooperation in clusters tends to be usually easier and more effective. Therefore, the EU and NATO have shown interest in carrying out operations with the goal of “clustering the clusters”<sup>30</sup>, assuring efficiency, and coherence, whilst avoiding unnecessary duplication.

As of yet, the form that a cooperative European defence system will assume has still not been concretely defined and decided upon. Nonetheless, the primary role played by the states that wish to decide to either cooperate or not, as well as the choice to select their partners, means there is a danger that there would be a lack of space for a true supranational entity, such as the long-discussed European Army.

<sup>27</sup> European Defence Agency, “Strategies: Capability Development Plan”, available at <https://www.eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/our-current-priorities/strategies/Capabilities>

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, “Topic: NATO Defence Planning Process”, available at [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49202.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49202.htm)

<sup>30</sup> Drent M., Zandee D., Casteleijn L., “Defence Cooperation in Clusters. Identifying Next Steps”.

## THE NATO FRAMEWORK NATIONS CONCEPT: THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN DEFENCE?

As seen in the previous chapters, the new volatile security environment and the consistent military budget reductions experienced by most European countries has made it necessary to adopt innovative and cooperative methods to provide for the guarantee of security and defence of European countries. Faced by these issues, countries did not turn to international institutions such as the European Union or NATO – or, at least, these institutions did not suddenly take on a leading role. Instead, what was preferred was the free establishment of cooperation among partner countries which were considered to be like-minded and reliable.

This preference led to a situation in which countries selected their partners on an ad-hoc basis, sharing with them only the capabilities needed to accomplish a specific mission. This, in turn, is motivated by the nation's interest in avoiding the creation of multinational agreements that include a large number of participants as this could involve too many states with differing strategic priorities and military and/or political culture. Within this kind of coalition, the possible – and probable – result is an unreachable consensus over every kind of deployment or action, including the provision of capabilities. Therefore, the role of the international organisations influencing the European political and military scenarios – namely the EU and NATO – is relegated to a purely supportive one, while voluntarily created clusters of like-minded countries are expected to lead an integrated and cooperative European security and defence system.

In this scenario, it is possible to expect that EU and NATO efforts towards the establishment of a European defence architecture will be mainly oriented towards the overall control of cooperation among countries. Particularly,

the international organisations' efforts will be devoted to organising and encouraging the creation of collective capabilities and their joint use, as well as to ensure military interoperability among national armed forces within clusters. Furthermore, both the EU and NATO will likely be interested in coordinating the collaboration among clusters in order to make sure that the organisations would be able to rely on adequate capabilities to pursue their strategic objectives.

NATO has more experience in coordinating military cooperation among states than the EU. This is clearly shown by the fact that the most successful example of multilateral cooperation among European countries, is taking place under the aegis of this Alliance. In fact, the Framework Nations' Concept (FNC), which was first introduced to NATO by Germany in 2013, with the aim of bringing the topic of defence cooperation among allies to the forefront, has continuously increased its members and efficiency.

### The NATO's Long Tradition in Supporting Cooperation among Allies

NATO has a long tradition of support and coordinated cooperative efforts among its Member States. Indeed, both during and after the Cold War, the Alliance encouraged its members to form clusters that share some of the key features of the ones created within the Framework Nations Concept.

Immediately after the creation of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in 1951, some multinational military formations that presented the "framework nation" features were established. These formations



were mostly devoted to the defence of West Germany and were built around the two NATO military superpowers of the time: the United Kingdom and the United States. The UK led two joint initiatives: the Northern Army Group (NORTHAG) with the participation of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany after the establishment of the *Bundeswehr* in 1955; and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Allied Tactical Air Force (ATAF) which saw the same participants of the NORTHAG, as well as the United States (albeit with a limited role). The U.S.-led initiative related to the defence of West Germany was named Central Army Group (CENTAG) and resembled more a bilateral cooperation between the U.S. and France. For marine forces, the U.S. played the role of a framework nation for a truly multilateral initiative named STRIKFLTLANT which brought together fleets from Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, and the United Kingdom. The cooperation created in this early stage of the Cold War were put under the direct control of the NATO Command Structure through the actions of specific multinational headquarters. The development of common capabilities was not a primary aim. However, due to practical necessities, this aspect was often considered, and the acquisition of compatible and interoperable capabilities came as an almost natural outcome.

After the end of the Cold War era “framework nation arrangements among Allies gradually became the norm for organising multinational headquarters and force structures, as a means to ensure that the Cold War’s legacy of cooperation would endure in Europe’s new security environment”<sup>31</sup>. In 1992, NATO created the first post-Cold War joint initiative with

the Allied Rapid Reaction Force that, under the guidance of the UK, brought together divisions from sixteen different countries. Afterwards, examples of NATO multinational cooperation created around the efforts of a framework nation flourished and initiatives led by Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States were agreed upon at the 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit.

The country that serves as a framework nation usually has certain duties. It must contribute to almost two thirds of the peacetime budget, as well as host the headquarters and provide command facilities, information systems, and logistical support. The cooperation among NATO Allies organised under the guidance of a framework nation proved to be very effective, allowing the possibility to avoid consistent cuts that would have followed the reunification of Germany, which made the NATO “forward defence” outdated. Moreover, this configuration promotes military interoperability and a familiarisation with the Allies’ military cultures and procedures, as well as the acquisition of shared capabilities.

NATO’s long tradition in facilitating, supporting, and even guiding cooperation among Allies under the guidance of a framework nation helped generate a climate in which it was possible to push for a more ambitious approach, resulting in the Framework Nations Concept agreed in 2014. Indeed, thanks to the many positive outcomes derived from the cooperation established in the past, European Allies started to consider gathering together in a more structured way to achieve the goal of ensuring an effective European defence system. This cooperative system – in accordance with NATO’s priorities and objectives –

<sup>31</sup> Ruiz Palmer D. A., “*The Framework Nations’ Concept and NATO: Game-Changer for a New Strategic Era or Missed Opportunity?*”, NATO Research Paper No. 132, NATO Defence College, July 2016.

would ensure the acquisition of capabilities, guaranteeing the fulfilment of the Alliance's strategic objectives and the partial strategic independence of the European Allies<sup>32</sup>.

## The Framework Nations Concept: Main Features and Aims

After Germany first introduced the Framework Nations Concept (FNC), it was officially adopted by NATO in the run-up to the 2014 Wales Summit. The principal aim that motivated Germany in proposing FNC was to make sure that existing capability gaps within the Alliance would be addressed – and eliminated in the long-term by creating clusters of European NATO members, wherein the necessary capabilities are made available in a cooperative manner. Operating in this way, Germany wanted to achieve fairer burden sharing among the European Allies and the United States, as well as a more efficient allocation of resources. This would ultimately allow Europeans to develop full-spectrum military capabilities, that could also be made available for attaining NATO's strategic objectives. The capabilities provided by the different clusters would follow the requirements stated in the NATO Defence Planning Process and, therefore, could present higher certainty of avoiding overlap and unnecessary duplication, and the inefficient allocation of resources. Moreover, the FNC also aims to create or make available combat formations for military operations that can be conducted by NATO, as well as by the countries participating in the different clusters.

The FNC represents a key element in the creation of a truly cooperative European de-

fence system, and the clusters created within this framework follow a pragmatic approach. Indeed, even if NATO officially adopted the FNC, it would still be funded, organised, and driven by single countries. These nations can “cooperate voluntarily in a highly agile format while retaining their full sovereignty wherever they choose to do so and – in the best-case scenario – they do so with NATO coordination and while adding the greatest possible value for the Alliance”<sup>33</sup>.

The form of the clusters created within the FNC is unique and deserves closer analysis. Intended to reduce the inequalities in burden sharing among European states, the FNC calls for the participation of larger and smaller countries that can together provide and/or develop the required capabilities or combat formations. Larger states serve as “framework nations” within the clusters, providing the group with the essentials in regard to logistics, infrastructures, controls, and personnel, etc., while smaller countries usually contribute their specialised capabilities, providing engineers, technical facilities, and the like. Larger European countries can decide to become framework nations for a cluster that is oriented towards the provision of certain capabilities and military personnel devoted to specific objectives. Not all of NATO's Allies have to participate in every cluster. They are free to decide to join one, whilst opting out of others. Up until now, only European NATO Allies have agreed to take part in a cluster created within the Framework Nation Concept while the United States and Canada have not participated. Participation in the activities of the clusters is not restricted to solely NATO's official members, as NATO Partners can also join the activities of the clusters.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>33</sup> Glatz R. L., and Zapfe M., “NATO's Framework Nations Concept”, in *CSS Analysis in Security Policy* No. 218, December 2017

## The Current Existing Applications of the Framework Nations Concept

After its introduction in 2014, three initiatives based on the Framework Nations Concept approach have been launched. Three of the biggest European members of NATO (Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy) decided to act as framework nations for clusters that were created, each following a different path. The differences in the introduction of the three groupings were partially due to the different aims that motivated their creation, which reflect the strategic priorities of the leading country, as well as the ones of the participants.

The cluster that has Germany as the leading nation is of a broader nature, and as many as fifteen NATO Allies decided to join. The countries participating in the activities of this cluster are Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Luxembourg, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. Composed of a large amount of countries, the German-led cluster foresees a dualistic approach in its activities. Indeed, while the supervisory body is formed by Ministries of Defence from all of the participants, at a working level it is organised in a “sub-cluster” manner. Within this broad group of nations, specific “task forces” have been introduced, to guide the activities in capability development, and the provision of interoperable military capabilities and personnel. Only countries interested in the attainment of specific objectives and capabilities – represented by national Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) – participate in the activities of the sub-clusters, which also allowed the involvement of some observers among non-NATO countries (like Austria

and Finland that later actively joined some of the initiatives). The activities carried out by this cluster regarding capability development have been divided into four categories: Deployable Headquarters; Joint Fires; Air and Missile Defence; and Joint Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance.

After signing the official document that brought this cluster into being (the Letter of Intent signed by the Ministries of Defence of the participating nations at the 2014 Wales Summit), focus was placed on the creation of multinational formations. Participating nations were invited to contribute to the establishment of combat formations and smaller specialised units. According to the declaration of intent from the different Ministries of Defence participating in this cluster, by 2032 it should be possible “to build up three multinational mechanised divisions, each capable of commanding up to five armoured brigades”<sup>34</sup>. The inclusion of some formations of the Dutch Army within the *Bundeswehr* divisions is a clear example of the effectiveness of this approach.

The UK-led cluster was created in 2014, in order to allow the participation of eight countries in the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), already existing within the British Army. The countries participating in this group are Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Norway. Sweden, which is not a NATO country, has also cooperated within the UK-led cluster. The main aim of the JEF is to conduct high-responsiveness expeditionary operations, and it is supposed to reach full operational capacity by 2018. The UK, acting as the framework nation, provides the operational headquarters and has the right to direct any potential engagement. The other

<sup>34</sup> Glatz R. L., and Zapfe M., “NATO’s Framework Nations Concept”.

participants are encouraged to provide military personnel, as well as staff officers, and to support the operations of the JEF.

According to the Memorandum of Understanding signed by representatives of the participating nations in 2015, the creation of multinational forces for the JEF is driven by a JEF Development Board, and by specialised working groups, that are dealing with issues such as communication within the group, and the sharing of information. Although not a pure NATO structure, the JEF represents the UK's core contribution to the NATO Response Force, and its orientation is strongly in accordance with NATO standards. The UK has another bilateral cooperation with France (the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force) which is intended for similar purposes to that of the JEF, but the participation in this initiative is limited to the two countries.

The third and last cluster created within the FNC is the one led by Italy. Four NATO members (Albania, Croatia, Hungary, and Slovenia) have joined the Italian-led cluster, as well as Austria, which is not part of NATO. Following an initial meeting among the Ministries of Defence of the participating nations held in Venice in 2014, participants signed a Letter of Intent one year later, agreeing to two main aims. The first objective of this cluster is to develop capabilities to carry out stabilisation missions, and to support local police authorities, and/or armed forces in third countries. This makes it clear that the efforts of the Italian-led grouping are mostly oriented to the Southern European border, and the Middle East. The second objective of this cluster, is to build up a rapidly deployable multinational force. The creation of this cluster is rooted in the already existing Defence Cooperation Initiative, which was signed by all the participants to this FNC grouping (with the exception of Albania). This cluster

is guided by a Coordination Board that brings together representatives from all the participants, as well as three specific working groups that concentrate on training, exercises, and stability policing.

## The Potential of the Framework Nations Concept

The Framework Nations Concept has the potential to be a template for the development of an efficient European defence architecture. Indeed, through this approach it can be possible to overcome many of the difficulties listed in the previous chapters, increasing the efficiency of an integrated and cooperative system that can guarantee European security and defence.

The first positive aspect of the FNC is its ability to put into practice the concepts of Pooling and Sharing Concept created within the European Union framework and the Smart Defence Concept created within NATO's framework. These two concepts have remained at a theoretical level, whilst the FNC has a relatively strong practical side, allowing the possibility to develop concrete initiatives following its guidelines. The P&S, the Smart Defence, and the FNC have similar roots. Indeed, all these concepts were established to address issues related to military budget cuts experienced by many European countries, and the related implications for military capabilities. The FNC can be considered as a means to apply the principles of the Pooling & Sharing and Smart Defence Concepts, whilst aiming to give a practical answer to the problems faced by the various national armed forces.

The second aspect to consider, as well as another advantage of the Framework Nations Concept, is the voluntary nature of participation. This aspect is crucial because – as seen in chapter two – countries are usually reluctant

to start cooperation with a large number of counterparts. The possibility of forging closer cooperation with only those countries that are considered to be like-minded and/or that share similar strategic priorities, means states are more interested in cooperating. The FNC also gives countries the chance to take on an active role in military activities (from capability development, to potential active deployment) which are aimed solely at pursuing strategic objectives they considered to be of the utmost importance. It is only natural that nations are far more interested in contributing to the development of military capabilities that address the issues they consider to be more pressing. This, in turn, can make it easier to develop full-spectrum military capabilities that could empower Europeans to reduce their dependency upon the U.S., achieving fairer burden-sharing within NATO.

Moreover, within the clusters created following this approach, the participants maintain their full sovereignty, but the guidance from an international organisation such as NATO aids in avoiding the inefficient allocation of resources or unnecessary duplication. Following the FNC approach, it could be possible to develop a European defence system which can be accepted by countries; without losing the benefits derived from a centrally planned cooperation. To give an illustrative example, we shall look at the case of the German-led cluster. Through this cooperation, Germany – as well as the other participants – can make concrete use of their existing specialised military capabilities, whilst cooperatively providing new ones. This gives the participants the capacity to confront the threats they perceive to be most immediate (e.g., the Baltic States and Poland can contribute to the creation of combat formations that can be used for deterrence and defence in NATO's Eastern flank), without losing resources in actions they are perhaps not interested in.

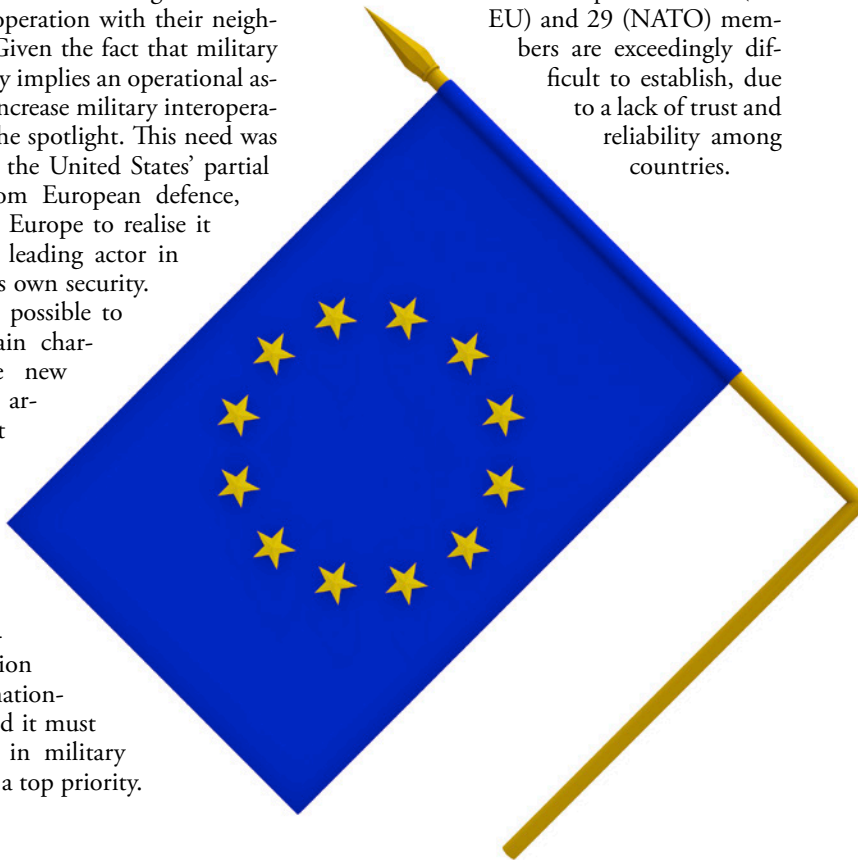
The European defence system can benefit from the FNC in a third aspect. The cooperation within clusters can boost military interoperability in a unique manner. Acquiring and providing capabilities cooperatively can give Europeans the chance to rely on the same equipment and training facilities, allowing the creation of a shared military culture. This can increase the effectiveness of military operations carried out by European states on a multinational basis, as well as the ones guided by both NATO and the European Union.

## CONCLUSION

The new threats to European security and stability forced European countries to specialise and tailor their military capabilities, in order to still be able to properly face the threats they consider as more immediate. Threat perception differs considerably among countries, and this, in turn, influences the military capabilities that different countries maintain and the ones they are ready to dismantle. The impossibility of maintaining full-spectrum military capabilities is reinforced by the military budgets cuts, as we saw. Europeans are realising that the only way to guarantee the maintenance of certain military capabilities, and safeguard their strategic interests is through the cooperation with their neighbours and peers. Given the fact that military cooperation usually implies an operational aspect, the need to increase military interoperability has gained the spotlight. This need was also reinforced by the United States' partial disengagement from European defence, which has pushed Europe to realise it must become the leading actor in the provision of its own security. Thus far, it seems possible to describe three main characteristics of the new European defence architecture: it must be cooperative in nature; the cooperation must be established by countries that have already started a specialisation process for their national armed forces and it must place an increase in military interoperability as a top priority.

The existence of renowned and well-structured international institutions operating on the European stage, such as the EU and NATO, can encourage cooperation among European countries to take place within the framework provided by one, or both, of these institutions. This has not yet happened because of certain political and practical impediments. States do not always look at every country as a potential partner, deciding to establish cooperation only with those nations that are considered to be like-minded and which share the same strategic objectives.

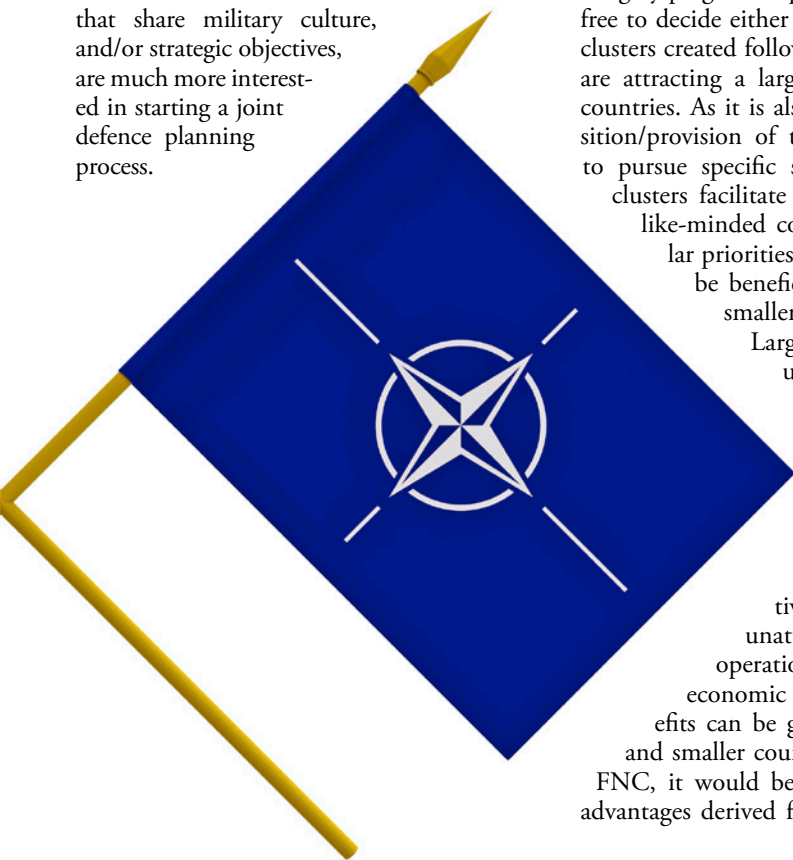
Collaboration within institutions that are comprised of 28 (the EU) and 29 (NATO) members are exceedingly difficult to establish, due to a lack of trust and reliability among countries.



This does not mean that there is no existing cooperation within these institutions (NATO is after all a military alliance, by definition a cooperation among countries), but at a practical level it is easier to establish collaboration amongst a smaller number of states that voluntarily decide to cooperate. This is reinforced by the fact that it is difficult to overcome the practical barriers to military cooperation, especially concerning the provision and/or acquisition of shared capabilities. Indeed, since this latter aspect is deeply rooted within the national defence planning process, an integral part of the national defence policy, it is highly unlikely that it would be possible to substitute or harmonise these elements at a significant number of countries. States that share military culture, and/or strategic objectives, are much more interested in starting a joint defence planning process.

The EU and NATO can play a supportive role to the formation of these clusters, guaranteeing a centralised overview of the process in order to avoid duplication or the ineffective allocation of resources. Following this, the new cooperative European defence system could then be guided by single countries with the international institutions serving as overall supervisors.

The Framework Nations' Concept introduced to NATO in 2014 seems to have the potential to solve most of the issues presented in this paper, and it could represent the general architecture upon which it would be possible to create the future European defence system. As a highly pragmatic approach that leaves states free to decide either to cooperate or not, the clusters created following the FNC directives are attracting a large number of European countries. As it is also devoted to the acquisition/provision of the capabilities required to pursue specific strategic interests, these clusters facilitate the cooperation among like-minded countries that share similar priorities. The FNC's clusters can be beneficial for both bigger and smaller European countries. Larger countries can make use of their remaining capabilities, using them more efficiently thanks to the participation of smaller states that can, in turn, aim to attain strategic objectives that would be utterly unattainable without this cooperation. Additionally, from an economic point of view, the benefits can be great for both the larger and smaller countries since, through the FNC, it would be possible to exploit the advantages derived from increased efficiency



and burden-sharing. Through this kind of cooperation, countries can further specialise their armed forces as they can rely on their partners to provide missing assets, allowing access to a larger spectrum of capabilities. Military interoperability will also be increased to a considerable degree. Armies that have to cooperate in specific missions and work towards particular objectives can rely on the same equipment and training facilities, with the possibility to train together and familiarise themselves with different military cultures and procedures with their comrade in arms. This can boost interoperability immensely. This bottom-up approach, as entailed in the FNC will ultimately facilitate cooperation among highly specialised national armed forces, with increased military interoperability as a natural outcome; whilst also avoiding duplication and the ineffective use of resources thanks to the general overview provided by the international institutions.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations derive from the analysis conducted in this paper.

1. The general supervision of NATO should remain. Due to its long tradition in supporting and facilitating joint efforts of its members, NATO can adequately provide guidelines and suggestions. Yet, it should not aim to become the exclusive leader as cooperation with the EU is needed, due to its intense political ties with most of the European governments.
2. The European Union, through the European Defence Agency, should take on a more active role in the European defence integration process. Therefore, the Capability Defence Plan should be reinforced, and conducted in cooperation with the NATO Defence Planning Process, to guarantee complementarity and avoid duplication. The reinforcement of the Capability Defence Plan would entail more structured cooperation amongst European countries participating in the activities of the European Defence Agency. The creation of additional clusters can represent the core capabilities of the EU Battlegroups as a potential outcome. In the long-term, these clusters would ultimately allow the EU to rely on efficient and interoperable means of hard power that could be used for pursuing the CSDP's and EU's Foreign Policy goals. However, it should be made clear that these clusters among states, that voluntarily accept to pool, and share specific capabilities, would be no means result in the implementation of a European Army.
3. Countries should avoid the creation of initiatives which are entirely independent of a central institution that could guarantee efficiency. This means that the European

Intervention Initiative can be seen as a potentially dangerous element. Although this initiative can enact positive impacts on military interoperability among European states as a fast and effective way to intervene in the case of a crisis, the lack of a central supervisor is problematic. Indeed, if the participating countries would acquire or develop specific capabilities that were already made available by another joint initiative, these efforts would be made redundant. All European countries have certain ties to the NATO Defence Planning Process and/or the EDA's Capability Defence Plan, allowing for the possibility to avoid duplication *ex-ante*, but this is not guaranteed to happen. Therefore, even though the complete absence of a central and general supervisor would considerably speed up the decision process, the possibility of unnecessary expenses and efforts represent an unnecessary risk.

4. The funds provided by the European Union to develop and/or acquire further military capabilities jointly amongst Member States should be reinforced in order to give a considerable impetus to the European economy. Therefore, both the EU Capability Development Plan and the EU Defence Fund could be seen as welcome initiatives, and these funds should be reinforced and expanded.
5. Since the clusters created following the Framework Nations' Concept approach proved to be effective, other European countries should take part in these initiatives, as well as create new ones. Ideally, larger countries such as Spain, and France should guide clusters that can be oriented to the attainment of some of their strategic priorities. The form that these new clus-

ters would assume can be arranged on the priorities and means of the countries that would serve as the “framework nation”. Spain would probably be more interested in naval patrolling (complementing the Italian-led cluster), while France would likely be more interested in pursuing aims that are similar to the ones of the European Intervention Initiative (complementing the UK-led cluster). Moreover, Turkey could become a “framework nation” for a cluster that can partially resemble the Italian-led one (but with a more interventionist nature in relation to operations in third countries, especially in the Middle East). On the other hand, smaller countries that share some of the strategic priorities with states already participating in clusters should take on a more active role (Greece for instance could add its efforts to the Italian-led cluster).

6. In order to build trust among countries, to allow a real and deep defence integration process, the involvement of national political authorities should be reinforced at each stage of the negotiation process and for all the decisions taken at a multinational level. National parliaments and government authorities will retain the national sovereignty, in the military field, and the decision to cooperate or not, shall of course strictly remain within their jurisdiction. Ensuring each phase of the integration process is as transparent as possible, will ultimately create a more profound sense of trust between countries, facilitating cooperation.
7. Also, non-traditional military domains, the cluster approach could have additional positive impacts. For instance, in the cyber and hybrid domain, the creation of clusters although difficult, could reap benefits. Countries that currently have the lead in these domains could act as framework na-

tion regardless of their size (Estonia is a good example of a framework nation for cyber-related activities). In these domains, the required investments, personnel, or military means are not unduly high, as there is more a need for specialised units, engineers, and so forth. The creation of clusters guided by countries specialised in the cyber and hybrid domain could ultimately allow a consistent increase in the efficiency of European states’ ability to face these new threats, allowing a better allocation of resources and the sharing of best practices and defensive systems. Although cyber and hybrid threats are supposed to affect most of the countries in a similar manner, states that share similar critical infrastructures or that are the most probable targets of illegal activities (such as fake news and foreign propaganda) could gather together to achieve higher defence capabilities and resilience.

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Created in 1953, the Finabel committee is the oldest military organisation for cooperation between European Armies: it was conceived as a forum for reflections, exchange studies, and proposals on common interest topics for the future of its members. Finabel, the only organisation at this level, strives at:

- Promoting interoperability and cooperation of armies, while seeking to bring together concepts, doctrines and procedures;
- Contributing to a common European understanding of land defence issues. Finabel focuses on doctrines, trainings, and the joint environment.

Finabel aims to be a multinational-, independent-, and apolitical actor for the European Armies of the EU Member States. The Finabel informal forum is based on consensus and equality of member states. Finabel favours fruitful contact among member states' officers and Chiefs of Staff in a spirit of open and mutual understanding via annual meetings.

Finabel contributes to reinforce interoperability among its member states in the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the EU, and *ad hoc* coalition; Finabel neither competes nor duplicates NATO or EU military structures but contributes to these organisations in its unique way. Initially focused on cooperation in armament's programmes, Finabel quickly shifted to the harmonisation of land doctrines. Consequently, before hoping to reach a shared capability approach and common equipment, a shared vision of force-engagement on the terrain should be obtained.

In the current setting, Finabel allows its member states to form Expert Task Groups for situations that require short-term solutions. In addition, Finabel is also a think tank that elaborates on current events concerning the operations of the land forces and provides comments by creating "Food for Thought papers" to address the topics. Finabel studies and Food for Thoughts are recommendations freely applied by its member, whose aim is to facilitate interoperability and improve the daily tasks of preparation, training, exercises, and engagement.



Tel: +32 (0)2 441 79 38 – GSM: +32 (0)483 712 193  
E-mail: [info@finabel.org](mailto:info@finabel.org)

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