

Keep calm and carry on (differently): NATO and CSDP after Brexit

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Abstract

This article investigates the impact that Brexit could have on the relationship between NATO and the Common European Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The relationship between NATO and CSDP has historically not been straightforward and Brexit seems to have intervened as an aggravating factor. In fact, the EU has launched a series of military initiatives and it has now renewed its ambition to create separate military headquarters from NATO. The UK will join countries such as Norway and Turkey in being a member of NATO but not of the EU, affording greater importance to NATO to the detriment of cooperation with its European allies. This article provides an analytical framework to analyse the possible effects of Brexit upon the EU-NATO relationship. In so doing, it lays out three distinct levels of analysis. These are the state level, the inter-organizational level and, finally, the personnel level. The levels of analysis allow us to generate empirical observations, which then lead us to suggest three scenarios for the development of the EU-NATO relationship beyond Brexit.

Policy Implications

- The European Union and NATO have been unable to exploit the full potential of their relationship. Therefore, EU policymakers need to appreciate that Brexit could aggravate this state of affairs and react accordingly.
- When evaluating the possible impact that Brexit could have upon the relationship between the EU and NATO, policymakers should recognize that Brexit might impact different levels of EU-NATO cooperation – namely, the state- inter-organizational- and practice-levels.
- When developing a future strategic document, it should be acknowledged that the impact of Brexit upon the EU-NATO relationship could be threefold:
 - Inconsequential, as the relationship between the EU and NATO could carry on as usual, having already been compromised by other disputes such as the Turkey-Cyprus one.
 - Problematic, as the UK would significantly re-orient itself towards NATO, which would remain the sole and most meaningful security provider in Europe, leading to a downplaying of the EU’s security ambitions.
 - Promising, as the EU could continue with its renewed ambitions to achieve strategic autonomy, this subsequently leading to a greater and more fruitful division of labour between the EU and NATO.
- Policymakers should be cognisant that effective and far-reaching debate should take place with a view to making sure policies have a better chance of leading to minimal disruption in the relationship between the EU and NATO.

1. Brexit and EU-NATO relations: a complicating factor?

Brexit, the process whereby the UK is leaving the European Union (EU), will have important effects for the relationship between NATO and the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).¹ Whilst uncertainty surrounds the development of the relationship between NATO and CSDP after Brexit, we argue that the outcome will likely resemble one of three scenarios. In the article, we will discuss the pros and cons of each scenario with a view to developing policy prescriptions. Borrowing the words of Joseph Lepgold, our work fits the category of case-oriented scholarship – i.e. an analysis aimed to ‘explain certain types of policy-relevant events or situations’ (Lepgold 1998, p. 49). Subsequently, answering our research question would also allow to present policy recommendations aimed at turning Brexit from a liability into an asset in inter-organisational relations.

It is worth recalling that, regardless of the emphatic political statements on the need for deeper inter-organisational cooperation (NATO 2018a) NATO and the EU are far from exploiting the full potential of their partnership (Duke, 2008; Schleich, 2014). Why is this so? As we will see, this is in no small part a consequence of the peculiar evolution of the two institutions. In fact, as the EU and NATO adjusted to the new security environment and tackled new challenges, they developed overlapping competences (most clearly in terms of crisis management) and capabilities (although NATO far exceeds the EU in this respect) (Hoffmann, 2011; 2013).

Therefore, both organisations came to have similar goals, structures and, perhaps most importantly, memberships. At a minimum, Brexit will change the third factor of commonality, but this would be hardly the only effect. So, how is Brexit going to impact upon the relationship between the EU and NATO? In order to answer this question, the paper proceeds as follows. The following section provides a brief overview of the current state of EU-NATO relations. Section three will then delve into the theoretical literature about Inter-Organisational Relations

(IOR), with a view to laying out different levels of analysis. Section four will subsequently illustrate the likely impact of Brexit depending on the level of analysis and finally, section five suggests three tentative scenarios.

2. The EU-NATO relationship amidst cooperation and rivalry

The current state of IOR between the EU and NATO is the result of long lasting trends (Varwick and Koops, 2009; Smith and Gebhard, 2017). In fact, as recognised among others by Joachim Koops (2017, pp. 317-18), the trajectories of European integration and transatlantic cooperation have continually crossed over time since the early 1950s. However, it was mostly with the decision – epitomized by an agreement, reached by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and former French President Jacques Chirac at the 1998 St. Malo summit – to abandon the traditional civilian identity that the EU came closer to NATO.² In so doing, the EU overlapped with NATO's main turf. On the other hand, NATO's evolution after the end of the Cold war led to an expansion of the alliance's tasks, to include crisis management operations (NATO, 1991). The progressive and increasing overlap of functions forced the EU and NATO to find out new ways to cooperate with one another.

Following a widely accepted historical review (see for instance Varwick and Koops, 2009; Schleich, 2014), we can capture the evolution of IOR along three phases. The first one, originating with the demise of the Soviet Union and terminating in 1998, was marked by the concomitant struggle of both the EU and NATO to adjust to the post-Cold war scenario. The crises in the Balkans did not only prove that NATO could still play a role beyond deterring Russia, but they also made clear that European states were not able to provide for their own

security without NATO's – i.e. American – support. As confirmed soon thereafter by the war in Kosovo, Europe faced two issues: lack of political resolve and lack of capabilities.

Militarising the EU came to be seen as the solution to transform Europe into an autonomous security provider and to reassure the US of its determination to contribute to burden sharing (Treacher, 2004). However, in its search for military capabilities, the EU could follow different institutional paths: it could do so within NATO itself, or beyond the NATO framework, either internally or via the Western European Union (WEU).³ While the first option was warmly suggested by the US and some European states like the UK, the second one was actively promoted by France (Locatelli, 2012). In the end, an agreement was reached in June 1996, at the Berlin NATO ministerial meeting, whereby a set of conditions were defined that would allow NATO assets to be 'borrowed' by the WEU. With a key phrase destined to become a catch-all mantra, NATO assets were then *separable*, but not *separate* (NATO, 1996).

However, the Berlin agreement explicitly implied that the European ambitions had to be conceived as a European pillar of NATO. The 1998 St. Malo summit and the EU Cologne summit, in June 1999, marked the beginning of a new era for both the EU and its relationship with NATO. Beyond the political aspirations laid out in 1999, the EU set a list of ambitious goals in terms of capacity building (Flournoy and Smith, 2005). Moreover, in 2001 the Treaty of Nice established new agencies within the EU, such as the Political Security Committee (PSC), EU Military Committee and EU Military Staff, which paved the way for an inter-organisational communication with the NATO counterparts.

Finally, formal negotiations between NATO and EU Member States were launched. At the December 2002 EU Council summit in Copenhagen, an overly ambitious document was

presented, namely the agreed framework for ‘EU-NATO permanent relations’ (European Council 2002, p. 13). Afterwards, the partnership was formalised under the label of the Berlin Plus Agreement, which came into action with Operation *Concordia* and, lastly, with Operation EUFOR *Althea*, launched in 2003 and 2004 respectively. The main goal of the initiative was to foster a strategic partnership between the EU and NATO, with a view to ensuring ‘the coherent, transparent and mutually reinforcing development of the capability requirements common to the two organisations, with a spirit of openness’ (Reichard 2006, p. 275).

In a nutshell, the clauses contained in the Berlin Plus (that, it is worth recalling, are classified) defined technical protocols aimed at granting the EU access to NATO assets and capabilities for EU-led crisis-management operations, as well as increasing communication, consultation and transparency. More in detail, the bulk of the agreement concerned ‘assured access to NATO operational planning capabilities (essentially the services of SHAPE at Mons); the presumption of availability to the EU of NATO capabilities and common assets; and NATO European command options for EU-led operations [under the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR)]’ (Howorth 2005, p. 185). With this aim, the EU Military Staff came to host a NATO liaison team and set up an EU cell at SHAPE. Subsequently, at least on paper, the EU and NATO have the institutional wherewithal to cooperate effectively and to implement a beneficial division of labour in crisis-management operations.

However, things unfolded in unexpected ways. The implementation of the Berlin Plus agreement and, more generally, the mixed record of cooperation between the EU and NATO are at the core of the third phase under investigation. Ironically, the early record of the 2002 agreed framework was substantially successful: albeit quite limited in scope and sheer troop contribution (350 personnel taking over a previous NATO crisis management mission), and

despite some coordination challenges, there is broad agreement on the fact that Operation *Concordia* was successful (Mace, 2004; Gross 2009, pp. 175-179). Likewise, Operation *Althea* fulfilled the expectations of increased inter-organisational cooperation under the Berlin Plus agreement (Kupferschmidt, 2006). Moreover, as Simon Smith (2011, p. 255) pointed out ‘It has allowed the EU to carefully expand its nascent ESDP structures and to test-run its military crisis management capabilities with a relatively soft introduction in this area’.

Still, no other EU mission has been launched under the Berlin Plus framework. In fact, since the launch of *Concordia* and *Althea* the EU has launched some nine other military operations, without requesting NATO’s support (EEAS, 2016a). This is clearly indicative of a political stalemate among EU Member States, and more broadly between the EU and NATO. In fact, in the past decade the EU and NATO have launched parallel missions in places such as Kosovo and Afghanistan, where they deployed troops with different tasks (see *infra*, pp. 17ff). Moreover, in the case of maritime operations in the Gulf of Aden, NATO launched Operation Ocean Shield, while the EU launched Operation *Atalanta* – i.e. two missions with almost identical goals. This does not mean mere rivalry between the EU and NATO – even if sometimes, like the experiences in Chad and Congo suggest, they seem to compete in some kind of ‘beauty contest’ (Varwick and Koops 2009, p. 125). On the contrary, informal cooperation has been taking place at various levels, ranging from officers on the ground to individuals in high-rank positions (Gebhard and Smith, 2015; Graeger, 2016; Smith, 2011; Smith et al., 2017).

The main reason for the current political stalemate is to be found in the so-called participation problem (Smith, 2011; Biermann, 2008), especially involving Turkey and Cyprus. Turkey is part of NATO but not of the EU whereas Cyprus is part of the EU but not of NATO: this has

led to a mutual exchange of vetoes. Therefore, on one side Turkey impedes Cyprus' access to formal NAC-PSC meetings, as well as admission to the Partnership for Peace. On the other side, Cyprus has hindered formal cooperation between the EU and Turkey, and has also limited the scope of discussions in NATO-EU meetings to Berlin Plus issues (so excluding issues of common interests like the fight against terrorism, ISIS, and hot spots like Syria and Ukraine).

A second factor that erodes the potential for further cooperation concerns the diverging stances of other EU Member States towards NATO (Varwick and Koops, 2009, p. 118). In particular, the French insistence for an autonomous European military capability has led Paris to promote the European over NATO defence initiatives (Schleich, 2014, p. 190). For example, by championing the EU Battlegroups concept, France (and the other European states that followed suit) invested resources and credibility on an asset that substantially duplicated the NATO Rapid Reaction Force (RRF). Likewise, in the case of the 2005 crisis in Darfur, France joined countries such as Germany and Greece, that preferred to intervene within the EU framework, while others – most notably the UK and Italy – opted for NATO (Touzovskaia, 2006, p. 252).

Furthermore, since most European states have limited military resources, they would probably be forced to prioritise one at the expense of the other, so undermining the EU commitment to a 'strategic partnership' with NATO. This problem is strictly related to the burden sharing issue: both NATO and CSDP demand significant contributions – most evidently, as concerns NATO's guideline for member states to dedicate 2% of their GDP on defence (Mesterhazy 2018). While the UK is one of the few European countries fulfilling this commitment, its involvement in CSDP operations has been traditionally limited. This trade-off is even worse for the majority of EU states, as they fall well below the 2% threshold: for them, especially in cases of concurrent deployments, opting for the EU in place of NATO is a hard and risky

decision. Only those countries which have contingent interests and a strong peace-keeping tradition have done so (Haesenbrouk and Thiem, 2018).

Finally, despite the paltry record of structured inter-organisational cooperation between the EU and NATO, a new momentum for increased cooperation took place in 2016. Of notable importance was the EU-NATO Joint Declaration released on July 8, 2016⁴, followed by a new EU-NATO joint declaration on July 10, 2018, where it was promised that the EU and NATO would review progress on a yearly basis (European Council, 2018b). It is obviously premature to assess whether this is a major turning point in the EU-NATO partnership, or just another example of rhetorical entrapment. For our purposes, however, these are examples of the complexity of the issue at stake – a complexity made worse by the prospect of the UK joining the ranks of non-EU NATO members.

3. The EU-NATO Relationship: A Theoretical Puzzle

The multitude of challenges and the seemingly intractable hurdles to the EU-NATO relationship have generated a wealth of theoretical analysis that shed light on how the relationship works and whether prospects exist for it to improve. Simon Smith (2011), for instance, looked at the EU-NATO blockage by applying a differentiated analysis involving three levels: state actors, international staff and military personnel. In his works, Smith (2011, 2014; Gebhard and Smith, 2015) notes that while cooperation between the EU and NATO has been hampered by the lack of political agreement, more informal and ad hoc cooperation has developed.

Nevertheless, without political agreement, long-term cooperation between the EU and NATO beyond Berlin Plus remains difficult to envisage. Clara Egger (2013) applied a multi-level analysis framework to explain how the EU-NATO relationship evolved from institutionalised cooperation to clear inter-organisational rivalry due to states' changing preferences and developments within the organisations. These multi-level analyses have the merit of uncovering the processes whereby cooperation can develop despite the absence of a far-reaching political agreement.

Most, if not all, multi-level analyses take as a primary analytical perspective the state. In particular, studies that look at the influence of powerful member states in developing the evolution of NATO and the EU have combined in recent years with other studies, which have sought to apply principal agent theory to EU-NATO relations. Caja Schleich (2014), for instance, advanced a combined principal (states) and agent (institutions) centred approach to explain the inter-institutional cooperation between the EU and NATO. The insights of principal agent theory give rise to a set of questions: why do states delegate tasks to international organisations? Which organizations do they choose as agents? Are states still able to control their agents once they have delegated power and tasks (Fahron-Hussey, 2018)?

Yet, other scholars such as Nina Graeger (2016; 2017) have zoomed out from high politics with the purpose of focusing on the practical and inarticulate social interactions, which embody the organisations under investigation. This approach has a lot of value as it allows us to appreciate how EU and NATO officials work together on a daily basis transcending fundamental disagreements. The logic of practicality is at place here: diplomats' and security officials' practical sense lends itself to the peaceful settlement of disputes (Pouliot, 2008). EU and NATO staff are therefore able to engage with each other informally at different levels

because of their knowledge of practices, their shared background and education as well as their common training.

The ‘Grounded Theory’ framework pursued by Simon Smith et al. (2017) to make sense of the understudied relationship, or lack of, between the North Atlantic Council and the Political Security Committee (PSC) provides an empirical extension of the practice approach. Smith et al. (2017, p. 374) show that the PSC and the NAC take decisions for their own organisations; joint PSC-NAC meetings occasionally take place and they can favour institutional cooperation via informal process. However, they observe that there is no ‘actionable joint decision-making’ governing PSC-NAC meetings.

The Practice approach deserves credit in several respects. Firstly, it allows us to appreciate that there is more to EU-NATO cooperation than an analysis mainly based on efficient performance would lead us to believe. Admittedly, should one assess the EU-NATO IOR based only on the aspects, which hamper the relationship, the conclusion would be that the potential of inter-organisational cooperation is still underdeveloped. However, the merit of the practice approach can also be a disadvantage: by focusing on the so-called practical aspects of the relationship, the risk is to move too far from theory-guided approaches. Furthermore, while moving away from high politics is a welcome addition to the debate, it remains unclear how this approach can help us make sense of the ‘static’ element in the EU-NATO relationship, namely the lack of considerable progress since the Berlin Plus agreement.

Moving on, the relationship between the EU and NATO could also be influenced by factors beyond high politics and common practices. In this vein, Hanna Ojanen (2006) has explained how developments of the EU and NATO depend on how they relate to one another and on their

own internal characteristics. Such elements could make the EU and NATO more and more similar to one another. Ana Juncos (2007) explained this by focusing on inter-organisational ‘isomorphism’: organisations become similar in design over time and are able to build on each other’s experiences.

Nevertheless, greater similarity could lead to a strain in the relationship. Put differently, focusing on the same tasks and having a similar institutional set-up could lead to competition and even mutual irrelevance. Joachim Koops (2012), for instance, explained EU/NATO decoupling by means of NATO acting first as a model for the EU, then as an enabler, and lastly as a negative *other*. Stephanie Hoffmann (2011; 2013) explains the creation of CSDP with reference to the European security architecture. She asserts that the possibility, but also the lack of, inter-institutional cooperation stems from institutional overlap, which is understood across three dimensions: membership, mandate and resources.

4. Will Brexit affect the EU-NATO relationship?

Having showed how the current literature has investigated various aspects of the EU-NATO relationship, we aim to develop at least three different analytical perspectives. The latter could, in turn, be used as levels of analysis. By combining the insights of Smith (2011) and Koops (2012; 2017), we will take into consideration the state level, the inter-organisational level, and the personnel level. As shown in Table 1, for each level we can find a number of empirical observations on the likely effect Brexit might have on EU-NATO IOR and their expected outcome.

Table 1. Analytical framework

Level of analysis	How will Brexit affect...	Expected outcome
State actors	other states' preferences about EU-NATO relations?	- new momentum in EU foreign policy integration - differentiated <i>disintegration</i>
	Principal-agent considerations in EU-NATO relations?	- functional division of labour between EU and NATO - EU doomed to irrelevance
Inter-organisational relations	Institutional adjustment of both EU and NATO (e.g. isomorphism)?	No impact on Institutional isomorphism
	functional overlap between the EU and NATO (due to change in membership)?	for the EU it could be even harder to compete with NATO on certain tasks, particularly at the higher end of the spectrum of conflict However, functional overlap remains in crisis management operations
Military personnel	on-the-ground practices in parallel EU-NATO operations (e.g. Afghanistan, Kosovo, Indian Ocean)?	No impact expected on on-the-ground practices.

The role of key member states and the influence they can exert remains key to assessing the consequences of external shocks such as Brexit upon the relationship between the EU and NATO. As such, Brexit could give rise to further differentiation – i.e. the process that ‘allows some EU member states to go further in the integration process, while allowing others to opt not to do so’ (Chopin and Lequesne 2016, p. 531) – among European states, as they would need to find a way to safeguard their own interests in an altered institutional framework.

In some respect, this scenario seems confirmed by the current efforts made by some EU states to implement the previously dormant Permanent Structured Cooperation. Differentiation is not necessarily a negative feature when it comes to integration: indeed, differentiated integration (Leruth and Lord, 2015) has been part of the evolving process of European integration and of

the European security architecture. This could continue after Brexit: the UK could maintain different levels of integration with the EU. Therefore, it is plausible that when it comes to security and defence the UK will keep some kind of commitment, as many non-EU states have participated in CSDP missions since the first mission was launched in 2003 (Tardy 2014). While the final agreement has not yet been set in stone, both parties expressed some optimism in terms of a future security relationship between the UK and the EU. In September 2017, for instance, the UK government stated its objective to pursue ‘a future relationship that is deeper than any current third country partnership’ (HM Government 2017). In May 2018, the EU’s Directorate General for External Policies published a study in which it was asserted that ‘London could be motivated to cooperate with Brussels more and better than it did before Brexit. This would allow the Europeans to benefit from a more constructive and engaged partner’ (Santopinto 2018).

However, differentiation could also give rise to further fragmentation: member states could find it more difficult to assert their interests in a modified institutional architecture. In this scenario, Brexit would constitute an added layer of complexity to increasing differentiation within EU-NATO relations. In fact, Brexit could give rise to differentiated *disintegration* rather than integration (see in particular Chopin and Lequesne, 2016; Schimmelfennig, 2018). Therefore, if differentiated integration eventually leads to further integration, we might expect a positive effect on EU-NATO relations; otherwise, should fragmentation prevail, the EU-NATO IOR would be negatively affected.

The repercussions of Brexit in the application of principal-agent theory to EU-NATO relations are also worth investigating: as shown by recent analyses (Fahron-Hussey 2018, pp. 241-242), the principal’s (i.e. the state’s) choice to delegate functions to an agent (i.e. NATO, the EU, or

both) depends on the agent's capabilities and preferences. After Brexit, the UK will opt by default for NATO (Dunn and Webber, 2016) – admittedly not a significant re-orientation in British foreign policy, given its special relationship with the US. However, the UK could lose an ability that other member states have, namely to choose which organisation better fits its preferences. On the other hand, the impact of Brexit for the remaining EU member states is harder to predict: Brexit would negatively affect the EU's capabilities, but it could make national and EU preferences converge. Subsequently, it is fair to expect that for these countries, NATO will remain key in high intensity operations. However, the EU could be favoured in less demanding missions as the two organisations continue to build cooperation whilst avoiding duplication and competition (European Council 2018a; NATO 2018b). Summing up, from a state-centric perspective, Brexit holds the potential to affect EU-NATO relations both positively or negatively: in fact, it could give the EU new momentum in its foreign policy integration process, or it could spark differentiated disintegration. Likewise, from a principal-agent perspective, it could promote a functional division of labour with NATO, or it could doom the EU to irrelevance.

Beyond questions concerning the role of key member states and the influence they can project, research is also necessary in terms of how the EU and NATO will influence each other in the aftermath of Brexit. Is Brexit going to initiate a process of convergence or divergence between the EU and NATO? On the one hand, we could expect institutional isomorphism to continue even after Brexit for at least two reasons. Firstly, while the EU and NATO remain different political bodies, their membership will continue to overlap considerably, with 21 countries remaining members of both institutions. Secondly, as noted above, the EU and NATO have recently promised to deepen their relationship in a number of areas (NATO 2018a).

Yet, on the other hand, as concerns functional overlap, the departure of the UK from the EU could also lead to profound changes for the EU as a security actor, which could further lead to changes in the relationship between the EU and NATO. As Richard Whitman (2016, p. 260) reminds us, ‘the loss of a member state with the diplomatic and military resources of the UK would [...] diminish the capabilities that could be at the disposal of EU foreign and defence policy initiatives’. Put it differently, CSDP after Brexit would miss critical capabilities: some are just on paper (like those assets that the UK Armed Forces have and other EU member states do not), but others are currently operational, like the British and UK-Dutch Battlegroups. In light of these considerations, the future European Armed Forces will probably lack critical assets for force projection and operations at the higher end of the spectrum of conflict. Therefore, Brexit may prevent a functional overlap with NATO on conventional missions. However, considering the EU’s and NATO’s insistence on crisis management, it is hard to expect any significant deviation from the current trajectory: just a cursory look at the current military operations is enough to show how the main tasks performed by EU and NATO soldiers revolve around crisis management and peace support.⁵

So, it is apparent that the inter-organisational perspective also leads to mixed conclusions. Brexit will likely leave institutional isomorphism unaltered, but it could have an impact on functional overlap. The quality and intensity of such an impact is hard to foresee: for the EU it could be even harder to compete with NATO on certain tasks, particularly at the higher end of the spectrum of conflict. However, at least for the time being, both the EU and NATO remain highly committed to crisis management operations, so a good deal of functional overlap is likely to remain.

Finally, the third level of analysis concerns military personnel. As we have seen, despite the Berlin Plus agreement, EU-NATO military cooperation remains a missed opportunity, as epitomized most clearly by concurrent EU- and NATO-led operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Nonetheless, informal cooperation has taken place at various levels of the civilian and military apparatus. Could cooperation on the ground between the EU and NATO continue to be possible after Brexit? For reasons of space, we will focus on two key areas of interest for the EU and NATO, namely Kosovo and Afghanistan. The EU and NATO already run parallel missions in a number of areas and the UK participates in all of them.

In Kosovo, the EU runs the EULEX mission, which is supported by all EU member states plus five contributing states (Canada, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States). EULEX has an authorised strength of 800 staff, headquartered in Priština (Kosovo) and a mandate, which will run until 14 June 2020 (EEAS, 2018). Following Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, the EU deployed a rule of law mission in the country. The EU took over the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in December 2008 (Graeger and Todd, 2015).

With a peak of 1268 units (currently 503), EULEX Kosovo is the largest EU civilian mission. NATO's KFOR mission was stationed in Kosovo before EULEX, as it began in June 1999 on the basis of UN Resolution 1244 (NATO, 1999). EULEX is therefore a civilian mission, which runs with the international military presence of KFOR (Greicevci, 2011; Dijkstra, 2011). As of February 2018, NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR), mandated by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244, is ongoing and 28 nations contribute to the overall strength of 4,031 personnel. The British contribution to both operations is minimal, amounting to a mere 8 units

in the case of EULEX and a few dozens in the KFOR. Consequently, it is reasonable to expect a minimal impact of Brexit upon these missions.

In Afghanistan, the EU and NATO also run parallel missions. The EU became involved in Afghanistan in 2007 with the EU Police Mission (EUPOL), its activities focusing on three main pillars: 1) institutional reform of the Ministry of Interior, 2) professionalisation of the ANP and 3) connecting police to justice reform (Holtje and Kempin, 2013). NATO was already involved militarily in Afghanistan, first with ISAF, which was concluded in 2014, then with Resolute Support, with a troop strength of 15,623 and 39 contributing nations (NATO 2018c) (one may also add NATO's Training Mission – Afghanistan, NTM-A, which had a very similar function to EUPOL). EUPOL Afghanistan is a civilian CSDP mission. However, it became the first civilian mission to be deployed in a war-like environment, with a total strength of about 300 international and local staff (about 14 from the UK), which ended in December 2016 (Tardy, 2017; EEAS, 2016b). Total expenditure for EUPOL Afghanistan was approx. 450 million, making it the second most expensive civilian mission after EULEX Kosovo (Tardy, 2017).

As openly stated in a 2011 document released by the British Parliament, the lack of a formal cooperation agreement between ISAF and EUPOL challenged the safety of the military personnel on the ground, let alone the effectiveness of the two operations (House of Lords 2011, p. 26). For this reason, the British government was committed to improve cooperation at the operational level, mostly in the form of an action plan agreement and a memorandum of understanding, as well as practical cooperation on the ground (UK Government 2011, p. 8). However, it remains hard to ascertain whether these laudable targets have been achieved or not. Similar to what we observed in the case of Kosovo above, the British contribution to the

EU mission in Afghanistan cannot be held critical. As a result, the prospect of Brexit hardly justifies concern for the future of the EU-NATO relationship.

Regardless of Berlin Plus, it is reasonable to expect that the EU and NATO will continue to run parallel missions in the same theatres of operation. This may open avenues for research into practices of cooperation beyond Berlin Plus (Graeger and Todd, 2016). Yet, beyond the patterns of cooperation that may emerge between the EU and NATO officials and soldiers on the ground, there could be continuity in terms of tasks performed by the EU and NATO. As such, Brexit could influence at most the future UK contribution to the CSFP budget, which finances autonomous EU civilian operations (European Parliament, 2016). The UK's net public sector contribution to the EU was an estimated £8.9 billion in 2017 (Keep, 2018). We could therefore expect the UK to continue to contribute to EU military operations in the short term but the willingness to contribute to the CSFP budget will be dependent on future negotiations.

5. Conclusion

In the previous section, we laid out three levels of analysis aimed at providing a broad assessment of the effects of Brexit on the EU-NATO partnership. As suggested in table 1, each level of analysis can be articulated in more precise questions, leading up to five possible empirical observations. Few of these allow us to clearly foresee the impact Brexit is going to have on EU-NATO relations (see table 1, column 3). At the state level, the rosy perspectives for further integration are balanced by the risk of differentiated disintegration; similarly, from the perspective of principal-agent theory, on the one hand we might optimistically infer that the EU could develop a functional division of labour with NATO. On the other hand, the EU could be doomed to irrelevance. The Inter-organisational perspective leads us to expect

substantial continuity in EU-NATO relations after Brexit, both in terms of institutional and functional isomorphism. However, the EU could not be able to compete with NATO in high intensity conflicts. Finally, Brexit is unlikely to be consequential as far as on the ground practices are concerned.

Since no clear indication has emerged in terms of the future relationship between the EU and NATO, we suggest that it may follow one of three scenarios. The first one downplays the impact of Brexit and suggests that EU-NATO IOR will likely drag itself along for the time being. In this vision, which follows from the expected outcome of isomorphism and on-the-ground practices, Brexit will not fundamentally alter the current state of affairs. At the state actor level, issues such as the Turkey-Cyprus dispute hinder cooperation. The UK leaving the EU would add another member to the list of non-EU NATO countries. As such, it would hardly be a problem per se. It might certainly have an indirect impact on the EU, as it might re-orient EU states' foreign policies towards less or more cooperation – so fuelling the process of differentiated integration discussed above; however, it would not make the current problems neither harder nor easier to solve. Likewise, at the inter-organisational and military personnel level, one might expect that without the UK, EU civilian and military bodies might lose a relevant point of contact with NATO. However, as we noted above, EU and NATO joint operations already rely on informal cooperation and the broader functioning of the institutions would not be at stake.

The second scenario evokes a problematic trajectory. Following our theoretical framework, this outcome would stem from the differentiated disintegration of the EU, dooming it to irrelevance. Here, as suggested by Jolyon Howorth (2017, p. 457), Brexit results in 'Europe's triple crisis of legitimacy: money, border and defence'. The result should not necessarily

amount to the sinking of the European integration process, as Howorth implies, but, nonetheless, it would be momentous for both NATO and the EU. Despite the fact that it would be impossible to foresee the end of an EU downgrading trajectory, for one thing the foreign and defence dimensions would fade away, so leaving NATO as the only security provider for Europe. What we might expect in this case – in light of the analytical framework discussed above – is a significant impact of Brexit at the state level. This scenario suggests that Brexit would not only result in the UK reorienting towards the US (i.e. NATO), but it would also cause a fatal blow to the credibility of the European security ambitions. This scenario could be more likely if a no deal scenario materialised. In that case, the UK would have to withdraw from EU missions and operations and continue to act through multilateral fora such as NATO and the UN (HM Government 2018). So, both directly (on UK foreign policy) and indirectly (on EU states' cooperation), Brexit would make IOR irrelevant, as there would be no serious alternative to NATO. For this reason, the second and third level of analysis would become irrelevant, so cancelling out any progress in terms of isomorphism, functional overlap and informal cooperation.⁶

The third scenario expects that EU-NATO cooperation might improve after Brexit. This is a counter-intuitive argument, especially if one takes into consideration only the state actor level. Compared to other scenarios, this one depends more on EU states' willingness to invest in the EU. In fact, it would require a new momentum in EU foreign policy integration, as well as a shared consensus on a functional division of labour with NATO. Nonetheless, some evidence suggests that this is still an option. Put simply, for this scenario to materialise, two conditions are necessary. Firstly, EU and NATO leaders need to implement their commitment to deeper cooperation in critical areas (NATO 2018a). Secondly, Europe should further strengthen its strategic autonomy (Howorth 2017, p. 458). If these conditions were met, IOR could improve.

In a nutshell, should the EU become a credible security provider – at least on a given section of the spectrum of conflict – it could complement NATO in a better way. Following this logic, then, the twin effect of deepening EU-NATO cooperation – perhaps even by just formalising existing practices – and a more autonomous European capability would be beneficial for both organisations, insofar as it would promote a clearer division of labour between the EU and NATO (Locatelli and Testoni, 2009).

It would be unrealistic to claim that evidence is pointing in the direction of our third scenario. However, there are good reasons to believe that this third scenario would be beneficial for both the EU and NATO. On the one hand, as concerns inter-organisational cooperation, this is the realm where the current achievements in terms of shared practices and informal cooperation have been more substantial, albeit less visible. On the other hand, in light of the current EU initiatives, it seems that defence integration has gained new momentum. Future progress on the EU front will require an increased commitment to political cooperation and a clear conviction that gaining autonomy within NATO would not mean growing independent from it. Should Brexit contribute to pushing the EU along this path, future historians might retrospectively conclude that it was beneficial for the EU-NATO partnership, albeit indirectly.

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Notes

¹ CSDP refers to the activities that the EU undertakes in the areas of defence and crisis management. CSDP is a component of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The latter encompasses the foreign policy and security affairs, which member states of the EU coordinate, define and implement.

² At the Franco-British summit held in St.Malo on 3 and 4 December 1998, Blair and Chirac agreed on the need for the EU to have the capacity for autonomous action, backed by credible military forces, in order to respond to international crises when NATO is not involved.

³ One should recall that at the time the EU was still devoid of any military capability, being the defence dimension under the competence of the WEU. As we will see, until 1998 we cannot properly consider a direct EU-NATO relationship to be in place, since it was mediated by the WEU.

⁴ The document outlined seven key areas of cooperation: 1. Hybrid threats. 2. Operational cooperation. 3. Cyber security and defence. 4. Defence capabilities. 5. Defence industry, 6. Coordination on exercises. 7. Capacity.

⁵ NATO is currently leading non-combat operations in Afghanistan, Kosovo and the Mediterranean. It is also supporting the African Union (AU) in its peacekeeping missions in the African continent (NATO 2019). The EU is currently engaged in 6 military operations and 10 civilian operations in the Balkans, Middle East and Africa. The objectives of the missions encompass peacekeeping, conflict prevention, strengthening international security, supporting the rule of law, prevention of human trafficking and piracy (EEAS 2019).

⁶ As concerns isomorphism, we should expect that CSDP-related agencies would either be dismantled or robbed of any actual use. Likewise, in such scenario the EU would not be willing or able to launch missions on its own; finally, the same personnel currently involved in both NATO and the EU would eventually remain as a NATO-only community.

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