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# The European Air Transport Command: A Viable Model for Promoting European Military Cooperation?

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**About the Author**

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## Abstract

This paper begins with the observation that the top-down model of defence cooperation adopted for the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the European Union seems to be in a crisis. It then asks if there are alternative models available, arguing that one is represented by smaller, bottom-up initiatives such as the European Air Transport Command (EATC). By looking at the EATC, this paper shows that this type of initiatives provide a positive impact on the CSDP because they improve the overall level of European defence capabilities and because they show that it is possible for European countries to develop defence cooperation initiatives that are both efficient and effective. The EATC's small-scale sectoral cooperation presents several advantages, the main ones being an easier decision-making process and a higher possible level of ambition, but on the other hand such a model restricts both the number of countries and the size of the impact that it can have. By identifying the key characteristics of the EATC model, this paper tries to determine the areas where the EATC could expand, and those where its business model could be successfully replicated. It argues that the best candidates are domains that combine constancy of use and low political sensibility, such as training or surveillance.

## Introduction: European military cooperation at a standstill?[1]

The external action of the European Union (EU) is governed by the articles of Title V of the Treaty on European Union, as codified by the Treaty of Lisbon.[2] The whole last section of that Title is dedicated to the provisions regarding the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).[3] The CSDP is defined "an integral part" of the EU's foreign policy, that "shall provide the Union with an operational capacity drawing on civilian and military assets".[4] It shall also "include the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy. This will lead to a common defence, when the European Council, acting unanimously, so decides".[5]

Despite the Treaty of Lisbon becoming effective on 1 December 2009, few of these goals have been reached in the last seven years. To the contrary, it seems clear to most observers that European military cooperation is currently facing a crisis. There are many reasons for this situation, but they all ultimately fall into one of two categories: a lack of willingness to develop the necessary mechanisms to assure such a cooperation and a lack of willingness to use even those mechanisms that are already available. Faced with such a blockage, one must consider whether there are alternative ways to promote defence cooperation among European countries, different from the top-down approach followed until now for the CSDP.[6]

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[2] European Union, "Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union", *Official Journal of the European Union*, C202, 7 June 2016, Title V.

[3] *Ibid.*, Title V, Chapter 2, section 2.

[4] *Ibid.*, art. 42(1).

[5] *Ibid.*, art. 42(2).

[6] This is not a new argument and the debate on the subject is vast. Antonio Missiroli, for example, proposes a series of reforms – such as the creation, within the European Commission, of a Directorate-General for Defence headed by its own Commissioner – that aim to make better use of the current EU institutional framework without having to change its underlying treaties. Missiroli, Antonio, "Guest Editorial: In Europe's Defence", *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2013, p. 307. Tomas Valasek, on the other hand, presents a model that he calls "islands of cooperation", based on reinforcing and encouraging the development of those small clusters of regional military cooperation that already exist on the European continent. Valasek, Tomas, *Surviving Austerity: The Case for a New Approach to EU Military Collaboration*, London, Centre for European Reform, 2011, p. 1.

This paper aims to do so by looking at a specific case, that of the European Air Transport Command (EATC), which is often used as a positive example of what can be accomplished.[7] The questions I aim to answer are: to what extent does the EATC contribute to improving European defence cooperation? What are the advantages and limitations of this approach? And to what extent can the EATC serve as a tool to promote cooperation in other areas of the European defence sector?

In the first part, I will describe what the EATC is and what it does. In the second part, I will look at the specificity of the EATC model, trying to identify the elements that define it and make it different from other, similar initiatives. In the third part, I will then look at the question of going beyond the current status of the EATC. I will show that the EATC is indeed a successful and efficient initiative that does contribute to improve European military capabilities, but also that this model has inherent limits in its reproducibility. Furthermore, I will argue that there is a clear problem of scaling: while its governance system worked well with just four Participating Nations (PNs) and it has managed to adapt effectively to the enlargement to seven PNs, it would encounter many difficulties if that number were to increase significantly.[8]

## What is the EATC?

This section first introduces the creation of the EATC and then explains its structure.

*The establishment of the EATC*

The origins of the EATC can be traced back to a proposal made by France and Germany in 1999.[9] The aim was to improve Europe's strategic transport capabilities, which had been identified by a Western European Union (WEU) report as one of the main weaknesses of European militaries.[10]

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[7] Italian Ministry of Defence, *European Air Transport Command*, Rome, 2016 (unpublished), p. 1.

[8] Given the scarcity of sources, the core of this work builds on a series of interviews that I conducted with representatives of the EATC, the European Defence Agency (EDA), the EU Military Staff (EUMS) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), as well as with officials of the militaries and Ministries of Defence (MoDs) of several European countries, both participants and non-participants in the EATC. In addition, I acquired information from a series of briefings that I either attended or of which I was able to obtain the minutes.

[9] EATC Policy & Support Division, "A Successful Example of Pooling & Sharing", briefing, Eindhoven, European Air Transport Command, 16 March 2016.

[10] WEU Council of Ministers, "Council of Ministers, Audit of assets and capabilities for European crisis management operations", Luxembourg, 22-23 November 1999.

In 2006, the two countries, soon joined by Belgium and the Netherlands, signed a Letter of Intent to officially launch the EATC project.[11] This led to the drafting of a preliminary Concept, which was signed by the four Chiefs of Defence (CHoDs) on 11 May 2007. [12] The signing was followed by more than two years of detailed negotiations.[13] A key point of contention during this period was the question of where to base the new Command, as both Belgium and the Netherlands lobbied hard to have it on their territory.[14] In the end, it was decided to establish the EATC in the Dutch base of Eindhoven.[15] This had the added benefit of placing the EATC next to the seat of the Movement Coordination Centre Europe (MCCE), turning Eindhoven into a hub for European military transport.[16] With the finalisation of the last details, the Technical Arrangement (TA) officially setting up the EATC was signed by the four Defence Ministers on 30 June 2010, and the EATC was formally inaugurated two months later, on 1 September 2010.[17] In 2012, the EATC saw its first expansion with the accession of Luxembourg, and Spain and Italy both formalised their accession in 2014.[18] While the actual transfer of authority took some more time, the EATC has since 2016 control over the transport fleets of seven different PNs.[19]

The legal basis for the EATC is the 2010 Technical Arrangement in its 2014 consolidated version.[20] The TA specifies that the purpose of the EATC is

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[11] Brigadier General Alain Rouceau, Chief of Staff and Deputy commander of EATC, "A New Air Command", briefing, Brussels, European Parliament, 3 December 2010.

[12] European Air Transport Command, *EATC Concept*, Brussels, 11 May 2007, p. 9.

[13] EDA official 2, interview, Brussels, 1 March 2016.

[14] *Ibid*. See also Lieutenant Colonel Gerd Finck, EATC Head of Employment Branch & acting Belgian Senior National Representative, interview, Eindhoven, 16 March 2016; and Colonel Jurgen van der Biezen, EATC Head of Functional Division & Dutch Senior National Representative, interview, Eindhoven, 16 March 2016.

[15] Van der Biezen, *op. cit.*

[16] *Ibid*. The MCCE acts as a brokering house for the exchange of military transport services on air, land, and sea among its 27 member nations. Gianvanni, Paolo, "MCCE: l'agenzia per il trasporto militare" ["MCCE: The Military Transport Agency"], *RID: Rivista Italiana Difesa*, year 2008, no. 5, May 2008, pp. 61-65.

[17] European Air Transport Command, *Technical Arrangement between the Minister of Defence of The Kingdom of Belgium, the Minister of Defence of the French Republic, the Federal Ministry of Defence of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Minister of Defence of The Kingdom of the Netherlands, concerning The European Air Transport Command, including the Note of Participation of the Ministry of Defence of the Italian Republic to the Technical Arrangement concerning the European Air Transport Command dated 30 June 2010, amended on 22 November 2012 and on 3 July 2014*, Eindhoven, 4 December 2014, p. 17 [Hereafter, "EATC TA"]. The inauguration date is from EATC Policy & Support Division, *op. cit.*

[18] European Air Transport Command, *EATC TA, op. cit.*, p. 17.

[19] Colonel Daniele Gaboli, EATC Deputy Head of Policy & Support Division & Italian Senior National Representative, interview, Eindhoven, 16 March 2016.

[20] European Air Transport Command, *EATC TA, op. cit.*

to integrate within EATC as a single multinational command all relevant national responsibilities and personnel [...] thus improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the Participants' military efforts.[21]

The EATC focuses on striving to harmonise and optimise the preparation and the use, including planning, of airlift capacities.[22]

Negotiations are ongoing to replace the TA with a more detailed international treaty, which will, among other things, give the EATC the status of an international organisation with its own legal personality.[23] The hope is to be able to sign it before the end of 2017.[24]

The EATC TA has established a governance system that sees at its top the Multinational Air Transport Committee (MATraC)[25]. The MATraC meets at least once per year at the level of Chiefs of Air Staff or their representatives, and requires the unanimity of its members to pass decisions.[26] Its role is that of a steering board, carrying out tasks like discussing any changes to the EATC's structure and approving the common budget.[27] The MATraC also appoints and issues directives to the Commander of the EATC (COM), a two-star general who is the ultimate responsible for the execution of the EATC missions.[28] The Commander is assisted by a Chief of Staff (COS, a one-star general) who also acts as the EATC's Deputy Commander.[29] Until now, the two positions of COM and COS have always been occupied by French and German generals.[30]

Another integral element of the EATC are the seven Senior National Representatives (SNRs).[31] The SNRs, one from each Participating Nation, have several roles connected with managing their country's participation in the EATC, among

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[21] *Ibid.*, section 3.
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] Colonel Frank Best, EATC Deputy Head of Operational Division & German Senior National Representative, interview, Eindhoven, 16 March 2016. A side effect of the signing of the treaty is that the EATC personnel will lose all the benefits related to the current Status of Forces Agreement, tax breaks included. Van der Biezen, *op. cit.*
[24] *Ibid.*
[25] European Air Transport Command, *EATC TA*, *op. cit.*, section 6.
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] *Ibid.*
[28] *Ibid.*, sections 6 and 7.
[29] Brigadier General Pascal Chiffoleau, Chief of Staff and Deputy Commander of EATC, interview, Eindhoven, 12 April 2016.
[30] EATC Policy & Support Division, *op. cit.*
[31] European Air Transport Command, *EATC TA*, *op. cit.*, section 9.

which is the enforcement of disciplinary actions among their national personnel.[32] In addition to these national tasks, each SNR has also to fulfil a role within the EATC hierarchy.[33] Except for the case of Luxembourg, which has sent a civilian SNR who is the Command's Chief Public Affairs Officer, all other SNRs are lieutenant colonels or full colonels and they serve as the Head or Deputy Head of the three Divisions that compose the Command: Operational, Functional and Policy & Support.[34]

The Operational Division

Starting with the planning of the missions up to the post-flight review, the Operational Division manages the aircraft under the control of the EATC.[35] This control is given via a Transfer of Authority (ToA) document that each Participating Nation has to write and keep up to date.[36] The ToA specifies the list of all the assets and associated personnel whose control has been handed over to the EATC, as well as any national caveats restricting their use.[37] The two key elements of the ToA are that it refers to each specific plane, identified by its tail number, and that it is a living document, which can be updated without any advance notice.[38] This means that a Participating Nation can, at any time, decide to add (ToA) or remove (Revoke of ToA, RToA) from the EATC pool any number of its platforms, from a single aircraft up to, potentially, its entire fleet.[39]

Another task of the Operational Division is to update each PN's Air Transport & Air-to-Air Refuelling and other Exchange of Services (ATARES) balance.[40] ATARES is a standardised system for managing the exchange of flight services among different air forces.[41] Its base unit is the Equivalent Flying Hour (EFH), which is the cost needed to fly a C-130 or C-160 aircraft for one hour.[42] Every time a country uses an aircraft belonging to another ATARES member to transport its own cargo, it contracts an ATARES debt corresponding to the EFH used for that flight.[43] Two provisions ensure a smooth running

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[32] *Ibid.* Since the power of discipline, a key element of command authority, has not been transferred to the EATC, each country needs to have a figure who has the authority to enforce discipline among its personnel stationed at the Command.

[33] EATC Policy & Support Division, *op. cit.*

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] European Air Transport Command, *EATC Terms of Reference*, Eindhoven, 10 September 2015, p. 6.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] EATC Policy & Support Division, *op. cit.*

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] Gianvanni, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

[43] *Ibid.*

of the system. Because no country can accumulate a deficit of more than 300 EFH, in the long run each participant is forced to put in as many hours as it takes. [44] Furthermore, the account is kept with the community as a whole.[45] This means that a debt can be repaid by providing an equivalent service to any ATARES user, not just to the one with which it was incurred, turning bilateral exchanges into a true multilateral system. The effect of this element can be compared to the introduction of currency into a trading system that, until then, had been based on barter.

The Functional Division

The Functional Division is one of the main innovations of the EATC. It is tasked with promoting harmonisation and developing common policies among the different EATC Participating Nations.[46] These are very challenging goals, as they encroach on the domains of national bureaucracies and on the interests of local industries.[47] In order to offer a flexible solution to this challenge, the EATC Concept foresees three different levels of authority (Recommending, Coordinating, and Command) that the PNs can give the Command.[48] These are applied separately for each PN and for each domain, and are spelled out in each country's ToA document. [49]

This patchwork of differing authorities, while complex, has allowed the Functional Division to bring the PNs of the EATC together on several technical issues.[50] Such work has made the EATC the natural candidate to become Europe's centre of expertise for the airlift domain.[51] Especially if one considers that the EATC includes most of the users of the A400M transport and that it currently controls more than 60% of all European military air transport capacity.[52]

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[44] *Ibid.*
[45] *Ibid.*
[46] EATC Policy & Support Division, *op. cit.*
[47] Dutch military officer, interview, The Hague, 4 March 2016. This was a point raised by many of the people that I interviewed.
[48] European Air Transport Command, *EATC Concept, op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.
[49] *Ibid.*
[50] EATC Policy & Support Division, *op. cit.*
[51] *Ibid.*
[52] *Ibid.* All EATC PNs except Italy and the Netherlands have placed orders for the A400M, which has also been ordered by Malaysia, Turkey and the United Kingdom. Airbus Defence & Space, "Orders, Deliveries, In Operation Military aircraft by Country – Worldwide", February 2016.

The Policy & Support Division

Operative since the beginning of 2016, the Policy & Support Division constitutes the first main change in the EATC's structure since its founding.[53] It has collected under its aegis a series of departments that deal with the functioning of the EATC itself, such as the Legal Department and the Finance Section, which previously reported directly to the COS.[54]

There were two main reasons for creating this new Division. First, once the new treaty is signed and the EATC becomes an international organisation, the Command will have to take on many administrative responsibilities that are currently being shouldered by the Netherlands in its role as Host Nation.[55] The role of the support staff will then have to grow accordingly.[56] The main reason, in my opinion, is, however, related to the EATC's enlargement to Italy and Spain. The original agreement among the four founding countries of the EATC was that the roles of COM and COS would rotate between France and Germany, while Belgium and the Netherlands would have the heads of the two original Divisions.[57] While the addition of Luxembourg was relatively easy to absorb, the enlargement to Spain and Italy upset this institutional balance.[58] Furthermore, the two new military SNRs needed to be assigned positions commensurate to their rank.[59] The result was the creation of a third Division, which permitted the development of a new balance. All six military SNRs are now on a more or less equal footing, and the positions of Commander and Deputy Commander are potentially open to any PN.[60] A side effect of this new balance, however, has been to make the appointments for those two top positions more politically complex than before.[61] Tellingly, the two MATraCs that have been convened during 2016 have both failed to find a common position on this subject.[62]

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[53] EATC Policy & Support Division, *op. cit.*
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] Van der Biezen, *op. cit.*
[56] Finck, *op. cit.*
[57] *Ibid.*
[58] Gaboli, *op. cit.*
[59] *Ibid.*
[60] *Ibid.*
[61] *Ibid.*
[62] Massucci, *op. cit.*

## An Analysis of the EATC

This section identifies the specific elements that define the EATC model.

*A European initiative*

No military cooperation initiative can survive for long without some measure of political backing.[63] In the case of the EATC, an element to consider is its European matrix. Officially, the EATC is an independent organisation with its own rules and statute. Yet the fact that all its PNs are at the same time also members of both the EU and NATO cannot be ignored.

The perception of a link between the EATC and the EU was a clear pull factor in the decision by Italy and Spain to join the Command. The higher echelons of the two countries' militaries were tepid if not sceptical about a possible participation, and it was their political masters who ultimately promoted the decision.[64] In Spain, which had the additional pull factor of being an A400M operator, the leaders of the *Ejército del Aire* were willing to cooperate, but they were against any kind of integrated command.[65] The politicians, instead, were very much in favour of an initiative connected with furthering European defence capabilities.[66] The latter ultimately carried the day, but the intensity of the dispute can be inferred by the fact that it took seven years, from 2007 to 2014, before Spain decided to join the EATC as a full member.[67]

The case of Italy is perhaps even more evident. Initially, Italy had chosen to remain out of the EATC.[68] In mid-2013, however, after several preliminary studies, a letter was sent to the MATraC to begin negotiations for Italy's accession.[69] At this juncture, the European political angle played an important role. Italy was scheduled to hold the rotating presidency of the EU Council during the second semester of 2014, and there was therefore political pressure to conclude the negotiations quickly, in

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[63] Valentin, *op. cit.*
[64] For Italy, Major General Gianni Candotti, Head of the Aerospace Planning Division, Italian Air Force, interview, Rome, 24 March 2016; for Spain, Colonel Rafael Sánchez Gómez, EATC Deputy Head of Tasking Branch & Spanish Senior National Representative, interview, Eindhoven, 16 March 2016.
[65] Sánchez Gómez, *op. cit.*
[66] *Ibid.*
[67] *Ibid.*
[68] Candotti, *op. cit.*
[69] Italian Ministry of Defence, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

order for the signing ceremony to take place during that period.[70] The political deadline was ultimately, if just barely, respected, as the signing ceremony took place in Rome on 4 December 2014.[71] In her speech, Italian Defence Minister Roberta Pinotti made an explicit reference to the perceived link between the EATC and the EU, by describing the event as one of the successes of the Italian semester.[72] The concomitant press release added that with this action Italy showed its commitment to apply the decisions taken by the European Council of December 2013.[73]

The same analysis, but leading to different conclusions, can be made concerning the position of the United Kingdom (UK) vis-à-vis the EATC. As the owner of one of the largest military transport fleets in Europe, which includes notably eight C-17 heavy lifters, and as the only non-PN European user of the A400M besides Turkey, the UK would find many reasons to benefit from a participation in the EATC.[74] In July 2013, about the same time as Italy was finalising its own decision to join the EATC, a British fact-finding mission led by the Deputy CHoD visited the Command.[75] The different choices made by these two countries can probably be attributed, at least in part, to their different vision concerning the role of the EU.[76] Many of my interviewees mentioned that they believed the Royal Air Force was quite interested in the EATC, but that the British politicians find it very difficult to consider participating in something that contains the words 'European' and 'Command' together in its name. This tendency will probably be reinforced by the UK's decision to leave the EU, as the UK is expected now to focus more on NATO and on bilateral ties with select European countries rather than on multilateral cooperation.[77]

*A pooling and sharing initiative*

As I have shown, the EATC is built on two pillars: the operational pillar of managing the national fleets together as a single entity, and the functional pillar of promoting

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[70] It is a fact that the negotiations for Italy's joining took much less time than those needed for Spain, even though the latter had the advantage of having been an observer since 2007. See Gaboli, *op. cit.*

[71] "Trasporto aereo europeo: l'Italia aderisce all'accordo. Pinotti: massimizzare sinergie per risparmiare", *Ministero della Difesa*, 4 December 2014.

[72] *Ibid.*

[73] *Ibid.*

[74] Valentin, *op. cit.*

[75] *Ibid.*

[76] *Ibid.*

[77] De Briganti, Giovanni, "Brexit Could Reinforce UK-French Defense Ties", *Defense-Aerospace.com*; 27 June 2016.

harmonisation and developing a common expertise.[78] It is at the operational level that the benefits brought by a country's participation in the EATC are at the same time more apparent and less controversial.[79]

The first benefit derives from the sheer size and variety of the EATC fleet, which, as of January 2016, has operational control (OPCON) over 175 aircraft of 17 different types.[80] This spectrum, which is much broader than what any single European air force can field, greatly increases the chance to find the right match between the Air Transport Requests that are received and the platforms that are available.[81] When combined with the possibility of loading the same aircraft with cargo from multiple PNs, the result is a general decrease in the number of flights conducted with aircraft that are either empty or only partially laden.[82] This more efficient use of the fleet reduces in turn the overall number of flights that are required to provide the same service, decreasing the wear and tear of the aircraft and, most importantly, increasing the time available to the parent units to conduct maintenance and training exercises.[83] It also reduces the need to resort to outsourcing contracts, with benefits in terms of economic savings and quality of service.[84] To give a measure of the impact of these changes, the Belgian SNR claimed that the annual funding that his country had saved thanks to the EATC was already higher than the EATC's entire budget.[85]

The benefit of access to a larger and more varied fleet is, in theory, already available to all participants in the ATARES exchange system managed by the MCCE. The added value of the EATC, however, is that it has the authority to manage its fleet as a single entity. This makes it much easier to use its services than the MCCE, which functions as a broker where the individual countries have to invest time in finding a correspondence to each specific need.[86] The Italian SNR remarked that, just two months after his country's aircraft had been put under EATC OPCON, the number of flights they had conducted using ATARES exchanges had already been much higher than expected.[87] The Dutch SNR also remarked that, since the founding of the EATC,

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[78] EATC Policy & Support Division, *op. cit.*
[79] Badia, *op. cit.*
[80] EATC Policy & Support Division, *op. cit.*
[81] Italian Ministry of Defence, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
[82] *Ibid.*
[83] Finck, *op. cit.*
[84] Italian Ministry of Defence, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
[85] Finck, *op. cit.*
[86] Van der Biezen, *op. cit.*
[87] Gaboli, *op. cit.*

the PNs had started to help each other out. [88] If, for example, one of them was forced to incur a temporary ATARES deficit due to technical problems, once such problems were resolved, the others would prioritise the use of that country's aircraft in order to bring its ATARES account back into balance.[89] This is an indicator of the socialisation potential of the EATC, that is, its capacity to influence and modify in a permanent manner the behaviour of its PNs.

*A permanent command*

What defines the EATC is not just the fact that it is an integrated command. It also has a permanent peacetime establishment that operates every single day of the year.[90] Furthermore, barring RToAs, the units it controls are assigned to it on a permanent basis.[91] These are key elements, as they mean that the expertise that is developed remains in the common institutional memory, influencing every successive dealing, and that the dealings are continuous and not occasional.

The permanence of the EATC also allows for a further development. One of the problems identified with pooling and sharing initiatives like the EATC is that they do not always produce economic savings, as they are often added on top of already existing structures, creating duplications and increasing the complexity of the whole system.[92] In the case of the EATC, however, another choice is available. The Technical Arrangement allows for the setting up, when needed, of a national planning cell headed by that country's SNR and composed of personnel already assigned to the headquarters (HQ).[93] Because this national cell possesses all the resources required to plan national missions with national assets, there is no longer a need to maintain a duplicate structure in the national capital.[94] In fact, in 2011, as part of a wider reorganisation of the whole structure of its armed forces, Germany made the choice to close down its Air Force Transport Command and to transfer its entire tasks to the EATC and its national personnel working there.[95] The result has been that, with a contribution to the HQ in Eindhoven that currently numbers 53 people, Germany has

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[88] Van der Biezen, *op. cit.*
[89] *Ibid.*
[90] Valentin, *op. cit.*
[91] *Ibid.*
[92] Candotti, *op. cit.*
[93] European Air Transport Command, *EATC TA, op. cit.*, section 9.
[94] Best, *op. cit.*
[95] *Ibid.*

been able to replace a national command staff that employed more than 200 persons, while at the same time having access to the wider fleet of the EATC.[96]

The key vulnerability of the EATC is the same as every other initiative that involves more than one country: what happens if the PNs are in disagreement?[97] The structure of the EATC is such that the units it controls belong each to a single country.[98] In other words, at the operational level, because there are no mixed units, the impact of possible disagreements is limited to the platforms belonging to the specific nations involved: should Belgium not wish to participate in an operation, that would not block the deployment of Dutch planes, and *vice versa*.[99] It is at the multinational HQ level that problems would arise, as the limited amount of staff means that if even a single country prevents its personnel from working, it could, potentially, block the operations of the whole EATC.[100] The compromise mechanism that has been developed to prevent such an occurrence is contained in section 3 of the EATC Technical Arrangement.[101] While the PNs recognise that the EATC might participate in operations in which not all of them wish to take part, they can always prevent their personnel from being engaged "in any activity in the context of this operation".[102] The wording of this text is very important: it specifies that while a country that does not wish to participate in an operation can ban its personnel from having any role in it, it can neither block the action of the EATC as a whole, nor prevent its EATC personnel from being given tasks not related to that operation.[103] This leads back to the importance of the EATC being a permanent command in continuous use. The variety and amount of missions to be planned on a daily basis is usually enough to absorb the work of personnel subject to national caveats.[104]

The flexibility of this arrangement was put to the test less than a year after the EATC became operational, during the allied intervention in Libya.[105] In that specific case, the intervention was spearheaded by one of the EATC PNs, France, while another, Germany, had abstained in the United Nations Security Council vote and did

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[96] Badia, *op. cit.*
[97] EDA official 2, *op. cit.*
[98] *Ibid.*
[99] *Ibid.*
[100] *Ibid.*
[101] European Air Transport Command, *EATC TA, op. cit.*, section 3.
[102] *Ibid.*
[103] *Ibid.*
[104] *EDA official 2, op. cit.*
[105] EATC Policy & Support Division, *op. cit.*

not wish to participate in the operations.[106] The solution found was that, while French cargo planes under EATC OPCON provided logistic support for the bombing campaign, German planes under EATC OPCON took over most of the intra-European transport tasks that constitute the bulk of EATC missions.[107] Such a compromise allowed every PN to remain within its national caveats, without disrupting the operations of the EATC or requiring specific RToAs.[108]

*The functional pillar*

The previous sections have shown how the EATC fits the classic model of pooling and sharing, as it is based on the dual elements of a centralised control of a pool of nationally-owned platforms, and of the possibility of the use of a single aircraft to be shared among several participants. What makes the EATC go beyond the basic pooling and sharing model is, however, the presence within its structure of a second pillar, the one represented by the Functional Division.[109]

Located at the junction of the interests of politics, industry, and militaries, the Functional Division is the component of the EATC that is best placed to promote structural change in the way in which the Participating Nations deal with each other.[110] For such change to take place, however, two conditions need to be met.[111] The first is that the countries involved perceive the need for change, that is, that they are convinced that altering the *status quo* is going to benefit them in some way.[112] The second is that they are willing to spend political capital to go against interests that are often entrenched at the highest levels of the armed forces themselves.[113]

This is where the permanence of the EATC offers another advantage: as its multinational fleet is in constant use, the benefits offered by reforms, such as introducing a common, fleet-wide, diplomatic clearance system, become readily apparent and measurable.[114] Furthermore, many of the aircraft types under EATC OPCON are in service with more than one PN, a situation that can encourage the

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[106] Brockmeier, Sarah, "Germany and the Intervention in Libya", *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, vol. 55, no. 6, December 2013, pp. 63-90.
[107] EATC Policy & Support Division, *op. cit.*
[108] *Ibid.*
[109] Van der Biezen, *op. cit.*
[110] Kolm, *op. cit.*
[111] Dutch military officer, *op. cit.*
[112] *Ibid.*
[113] Finck, *op. cit.*
[114] EATC Policy & Support Division, *op. cit.*

launch of joint initiatives to support them.[115] France and Germany, for example, have agreed to share the use of the A400M Pilot Training Centre of Orleans, with Belgium and Luxembourg also considering their participation.[116]

The fact that the EATC controls more than 60% of the whole European transport capacity, also makes it very likely that any standard agreed among its PNs would become the *de facto* European standard.[117] Bulgaria has for example already adopted in its national system some regulations that were developed by the EATC.[118] The official EATC policy concerning the work of the Functional Division, which is not classified and can be consulted and adopted freely by any actor, further helps to diffuse norms beyond the circle of the Participating Nations.[119]

What really tips the balance in favour of the EATC, however, is the sheer size of the Functional Division.[120] No single European country or organisation has 60 people tasked with finding the best and most efficient way to use their airlift fleet.[121] As a comparison, the European Union Military Staff has a total of two officers dealing with the same subject.[122] This makes the EATC the main repository of expertise on the subject of air transport and air-to-air refuelling in Europe, and the natural place where to develop the future doctrines and regulations concerning those domains.[123] Such a status has recently been recognised by the EU Military Staff, which signed at the end of April 2016 a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commander of the EATC to gain access to the expertise of the Functional Division.[124]

## The way forward

Having described the past and present of the EATC, this section looks at its possible future developments.

*Enlargement*

The first question is whether it is likely, or useful, for the EATC to take on further members. I argue that such an enlargement is unlikely, at least in the short term, for three main

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[115] *Ibid.*

[116] "A400M Training Centre Now Operational", *European Air Transport Command*, 28 April 2014.

[117] Badia, *op. cit.*

[118] Kolm, *op. cit.*

[119] Best, *op. cit.*

[120] Badia, *op. cit.*

[121] *Ibid.*

[122] *Ibid.*

[123] *Ibid.*

[124] *Ibid.*

reasons. The first reason is that the EATC is currently suffering from what can be called 'enlargement fatigue'. In little more than a year, it has expanded first to Spain and then to Italy. These two countries now provide about one third of the EATC's budget and staff.[125] It takes time for a relatively small organisation like the EATC to absorb such a large influx.[126] It takes even more time for the newcomers to adapt their procedures, and especially their mindsets, to the way things are done at the EATC.[127] Especially if one considers that even the founding nations have yet to fully adapt to the existence of a permanent multinational command that their national chains of command have to relate to.[128]

The second reason is related to governance.[129] The EATC functions also because, so far, the number of PNs has remained limited and it is therefore relatively easy to find an agreement among them.[130] The complications posed by a consensus-based steering mechanism are, however, always present, and the complexity has increased since the enlargement to seven PNs.[131] This enlargement has already resulted in the need to create a third Division and the negotiations in the MATraC to find an agreement on the allocation of rotational positions or for the eventual creation of a position for a third general have become much more difficult.[132] Any additional enlargement would further increase this strain, which raises the question of whether the current governance system puts a *de facto* limit on the number of countries that can join the EATC before it becomes ungovernable.[133]

A third reason, that should not be underestimated, are the differing views of the PNs in respect to the quantity and quality of places that they need to have for their nationals at the EATC.[134] Every balanced air force needs to have in its upper echelons officers who come from different branches, including the transport sector, and who can therefore represent to the military and political leaders the expertise and interests of their sector.[135] If, however, as in the case of Germany, a country takes the step to close down its national transport command and replaces it with a smaller staff

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[125] European Air Transport Command, *EATC TA, op. cit.*, p. 18.
[126] Finck, *op. cit.*
[127] Van der Biezen, *op. cit.*
[128] *Ibid.*
[129] Candotti, *op. cit.*
[130] Best, *op. cit.*
[131] *Ibid.*
[132] Gaboli, *op. cit.*
[133] Best, *op. cit.*
[134] *Ibid.*
[135] *Ibid.*

assigned at the EATC, such a country needs to make sure that its transport officers still have a margin to progress in their career.[136] This is why Germany feels that it needs to have a general's slot at the EATC always available to one of its nationals.[137] However, were all seven PNs to make the same choice and express the same requirement, the system would break down, as there are only two positions available for generals. On the opposite side, for smaller countries like Belgium or the Netherlands, it is already very difficult to find staff with the right qualifications to cover the position of SNR, and they could not afford to spare a general for a rotation at the EATC.[138]

The current problems would be further exacerbated by an expansion to another large country, as the new PN would also add its requirements in terms of command positions.[139] Furthermore, the new PN would want to bring in its own personnel to an extent equivalent to its financial participation.[140] As the size of the EATC's staff is determined by its operational needs and does not increase linearly with each enlargement, the effect of each expansion is a reduction in the amount of EATC personnel belonging to each single PN.[141] If one extrapolates this trend, further enlargements would keep reducing the size of each country's national staff up to the point where it drops below the number required to form a fully-functioning national planning cell.[142] Such a staff would also be too small to offer a viable career path to its personnel, or to ensure that the corresponding PN feels any ownership of the EATC programme.[143] A solution to this dilemma would be the development of a common European armed force with its own career path, similar to the common career of European Union personnel.[144] Even though Commission President Juncker has repeatedly called for the establishment of an "European army", it is unlikely that such a measure will be implemented, at least in the short-to-medium term.[145]

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[136] *Ibid.*

[137] *Ibid.*

[138] Dutch military officer, *op. cit.*

[139] Badia, *op. cit.*

[140] *Ibid.*

[141] *Ibid.*

[142] *Ibid.*

[143] *Ibid.*

[144] *Ibid.*

[145] Marrone, Alessandro, "Europa della difesa, avanti adagio" ["EU Defence, ahead slow"], *AffarInternazionali*, 16 November 2016

*Alternatives to enlargement*

Given that a further enlargement seems unlikely to occur in the near future, the logical consequence is to consider alternatives to full membership, which would allow the EATC to develop a relationship with third countries. During my research, I came across proposals for at least four different ways to develop such an arrangement.

The first option is a two-tiered system where a country could sign an agreement with one or more EATC PNs to share the use of its aircrafts and/or to place a portion of its aircraft under EATC OPCON without joining the Command.[146] The third country's requests would be transmitted via its sponsoring nation(s), who would take care of them within the EATC structure. As a non-member of the EATC, the third country would not have to pay its share of the common budget or send personnel to the integrated command.[147] It would just need to assign a liaison, something that is already foreseen in the Technical Arrangement and which has the advantage of providing the EATC with additional manpower at no cost for the Command.[148] Such an arrangement would be particularly appealing to smaller countries.[149] However, the country in question would not have a seat in the MATraC or staff in the Functional Division and it would therefore be unable to influence the future developments of the EATC.

A reverse of this first arrangement could be envisaged for countries that do not wish to put their aircraft under EATC OPCON, but which are interested in the work of the Functional Division. Depending on the interest of the third country, it could just assign a liaison. If it wants something more, an arrangement could be found where, for example, the third country sends a small staff to augment the personnel of the Functional Division and takes over a corresponding share of the common expenses.[150]

A more ambitious alternative is that of developing regional EATCs.[151] Instead of concentrating everything in Eindhoven, a 'franchising' system could be developed, where a series of additional Commands based on the EATC model are set up in different areas of Europe.[152] Each regional EATC would have OPCON of the fleets of its local participants and it would coordinate its planning with those of the other

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[146] Van der Biezen, *op. cit.*
[147] *Ibid.*
[148] European Air Transport Command, *EATC TA, op. cit.*, section 10.
[149] Best, *op. cit.*
[150] *Ibid.*
[151] Kolm, *op. cit.*
[152] *Ibid.*

regions, while the Functional Division would remain centralised in Eindhoven.[153] Such a system would have three main advantages: while the total number of Participating Nations could be quite high, each regional EATC would still only have a small number of PNs, reducing to a minimum the governance problems described in the previous section. Furthermore, a regional perspective would facilitate the relationship of the EATC with other initiatives at the regional level. Finally, such an arrangement would further improve the efficient use of the transport fleets, as the aircraft under each Command's OPCON would be based in a relatively small area, facilitating their shared use among different PNs.[154] On the negative side, such a multi-tiered and distributed structure would be more complex than the current, centralised one and it would probably require a correspondingly higher amount of staff. The setting up of regional EATCs would also require the presence in the area of a minimum number of countries that are willing to participate, creating problems for those nations that are interested in such a scheme, but whose neighbours are not.

At the other end of the ambition and complexity spectrum, the simplest arrangement would be that of selling flight hours on EATC aircraft to third countries.[155] This could appeal in particular to smaller countries with regional needs.[156] It would also complement effectively the push for regional EATCs, because it could be offered as a temporary solution to third countries that are interested in the scheme, but which have not yet found enough partners to merit the creation of a regional branch.

*Functional expansion*

In addition to the inclusion of more countries, either as full members or with other kinds of arrangements, there is another type of 'enlargement' to be considered: that of the EATC expanding its activities into other domains. This concept is nothing new in itself. In fact, the EATC of 2016 has already a broader role than the one of 2010.[157] Its original focus, as its name implies, was mainly on air transport, but the neighbouring fields of air-to-air refuelling and medical evacuation, which were of limited importance during the first years, have recently gained more importance.[158]

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[153] Kolm, *op. cit.*
[154] Kolm, *op. cit.*
[155] Badia, *op. cit.*
[156] Koski, Arto, Senior Specialist for European Defence Agency & armaments co-operation at Finland's permanent representation to the European Union, interview, Brussels, 20 April 2016.
[157] EATC Policy & Support Division, *op. cit.*
[158] *Ibid.*

Looking at further such expansions, one should not forget the example of the MCCE, which shows that logistics is an inherently multimodal world.[159] In this field, what the user needs is that a specific item is delivered to a specific place on a specific time at the lowest possible cost.[160] The type of platform that is used to answer this need, whether it is a ship, a truck or an airplane, is not as important as getting the job done.[161] There are indeed no technical reasons why the EATC should focus itself only on air transport.[162] In a similar way to how the predecessor of the EATC, the European Airlift Centre, led to the creation of the Sealift Coordination Centre, with the two then merging four years later to give birth to the MCCE, one could therefore envisage the setting up of a sealift and/or land transport cell within the EATC.[163] Over time, the EATC could then be given the responsibility of managing the whole military transport chain of its PNs.[164]

A different direction would be that of expanding the EATC into the sector of maintenance. Once the new treaty is signed, the EATC will acquire legal personality and it will be able to conduct its own procurement. At that point, the conditions would be set for it to be able to also engage in common procurement on behalf of the PNs. One could envisage for example the development of a common framework contract for procuring spare parts for aircraft, like the A400M or the C-130, that are in service among several PNs. There are, however, three factors working against the development of such a measure. The first is a history of reticence of the PNs in engaging in collective procurement.[165] The second is the fact that, while different PNs have in service the same types of planes, in many cases those aircraft have been modified to respond to specific national requirements, reducing the potential pool of common spare parts.[166] Finally, there are other organisations beside the EATC, like the European Defence Agency, that already have a history of managing common procurement and which are probably better equipped, in terms of staff and experience, to engage in this type of initiatives.[167]

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[159] Kolm, *op. cit.*
[160] *Ibid.*
[161] Sometimes, though, the nationality of the platform is important, especially when a country needs to 'show its flag', for example to publicise its participation in a humanitarian operation. Van der Biezen, *op. cit.*
[162] Kolm, *op. cit.*
[163] *Ibid.*
[164] *Ibid.*
[165] Finck, *op. cit.*
[166] Koski, *op. cit.*
[167] EDA official 1, interview, Brussels, 1 March 2016.

*The EATC as a model*

The final element to consider is whether, instead of directly expanding the role of the EATC, its business model could be applied successfully in other areas of the military domain. As shown previously, there are five elements that comprise the EATC model: (1) the presence of a permanent peacetime establishment with units that are used constantly and assigned to it on a long-term basis; (2) a governance structure where the Commander has operational control over said units, while the steering is assured by a consensus-based committee; (3) a pooling and sharing system whereby the different units are managed as a single fleet and the use of an individual platform can be shared among several PNs; (4) the fact that any one unit, or even just a single platform, can be returned at any time under national control should the need arise; and (5) the presence of a Functional Division that can promote harmonisation and function as a repository of expertise. Taking into account these elements, what are the domains where such a model would work effectively?

A first remark to make is that the EATC deals with logistics. While logistics is a key domain that no modern military can afford to ignore, it is also something that rarely receives public attention.[168] Most of the people that I interviewed agreed that one of the elements that favoured the establishment of the EATC was that sharing the use of airlifters is much less politically sensitive than sharing the use of something like an aircraft carrier. In military jargon, the EATC deals with tasks that are non-kinetic, that is, tasks which do not result in direct physical attacks.[169] The closer one gets to the kinetic domain, the more relevant are the questions concerning national interests and responsibility.[170] The creation of a combat command would also run the risk of duplicating structures that already exist within NATO, something which would be neither cost-efficient, nor acceptable to many countries.[171] If one goes a step further and considers the possibility of sharing combat platforms, each participating country would then need to be fully convinced that it could still make use of those shared capabilities to cover the needs of its own national defence.[172] Such a scheme would

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[168] Dutch military officer, *op. cit.*
[169] "'Kinetic military action' is still hell", *The New York Post*, 26 March 2011.
[170] Finck, *op. cit.*
[171] Gaboli, *op. cit.*
[172] Koski, *op. cit.*

also raise important legal questions: if, for example, a Belgian pilot on a Dutch fighter shoots down an aircraft, which country bears the ultimate responsibility for their act?[173]

As a result of all these legal and political challenges, one can safely assume that the further one is from kinetic actions, the easier it is to develop cooperation models. Which are then the domains where replicating the EATC model could bring a true added value? A first candidate is clearly the world of military logistics. If enlarging the EATC's responsibilities to cover also sea and/or land transportation was, for any reason, to prove unfeasible, one could instead envisage the creation of sectorial duplicates, like a European Sea Transport Command and/or a European Land Transport Command.[174]

Moving away from the logistics domain, other areas to consider are the ones originally identified in the so-called 'Ghent Initiative', a 'food for thought' paper released by the German and Swedish governments in November 2010 that started the debate in Europe concerning pooling and sharing.[175] Such domains are, in addition to logistics and air transport,

> those support structures required for education, training and exercises […] such as military academies, test and evaluation facilities and pilot training, as well as capabilities related to tasks such as aerial and maritime surveillance […], or other niche capabilities.[176]

All those domains further share with the EATC two characteristics that are key for the functioning of its model: a constancy of use and the possibility of sharing their facilities and/or platforms among different countries. In the field of pilot training, furthermore, there is already a long history of bilateral cooperation, as exemplified by the fact that the training of Belgian pilots now takes place on French soil.[177] That same domain, however, has also already seen the failure of the Advanced European Jet Pilot Training

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[173] Van der Biezen, *op. cit.* Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands are currently in the process of ratification of an agreement to conduct joint policing of their airspaces. Exactly in order to avoid such legal problems, the project foresees that each pair of fighters will be composed by one Belgian and one Dutch F-16, while Luxembourg has excluded the possibility of those aircraft using lethal force over its territory. *Ibid.*
[174] Kolm, *op. cit.*
[175] Germany and Sweden, "European Imperative. Intensifying Military Cooperation in Europe. 'Ghent Initiative'", Berlin and Stockholm, November 2010.
[176] *Ibid.*
[177] EDA official 1, *op. cit.*

System (AEJPT) project. [178] Launched in 1997 and effectively abandoned since 2012, the AEJPT aimed to create a European-wide school to train future fighter pilots.[179]

The failure of the AEJPT project illustrates another key requirement for the success of such an initiative: the need to have the defence industry on board. It is evident that the creation of the EATC dovetailed with the industrial interests of Airbus, the producer of the A400M.[180] Similarly, France and Germany lost most of their interest in the AEJPT project once Airbus (then known under the name of its parent company, European Aeronautic Defence & Space Co., EADS) [181] abandoned its plans to develop a new jet trainer, called the Mako.[182]

Ultimately, however, the success of a cooperation initiative is determined by the will of its participating states. This in turn requires first and foremost that those states develop a high enough level of trust and confidence in their partners, which is why the initiatives that do last are the ones that have a built-in mechanism to foster such confidence.[183] Even with the best business model available, however, if the countries to which it is proposed feel that it will compromise their national security, or encroach too much on their sovereignty, the project will never be adopted. A first step is to convince the higher echelons of the armed forces, as it is difficult – though not impossible, as shown by the case of Italy and Spain's participation to the EATC – for a political leader to see the advantages of such an initiative when its military counsellors are against it.[184] Having the backing of the CHoD, or some other high-placed figure, is also important when facing the internal resistance of the military bureaucracies: being the person in charge, the CHoD can ultimately simply order the recalcitrant parties to comply.[185]

The backing of the militaries and the support of the industrial sector are, however, only pre-conditions for the success of an initiative of military cooperation. The ultimate deciding factor remains the political will to see this initiative through. If

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[178] Pocock, Chris, "T-346 Introduction Prompts Italian Air Force Training Offer", *AIN Online*, 16 March 2012.
[179] *Ibid.*
[180] Dutch military officer, *op. cit.*
[181] EADS was created in 1999 by the merger of most of the companies that controlled the Airbus group. Having acquired the remainder of the shares in 2006, EADS officially adopted the name Airbus for the whole holding as of 1 January 2014. Michaels, Daniel, "How EADS Became Airbus", *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 January 2014.
[182] "Advanced European Jet Pilot Training System (AEJPT)", *Globalsecurity.org*.
[183] Badia, *op. cit.*
[184] Valentin, *op. cit.*
[185] *Ibid.*

there is enough will, then solutions are ultimately found. The existence of the North American Aerospace Defense Command, founded by Canada and the United States in 1958 to oversee something as inherently fraught with sovereignty issues as the common defence of their respective airspaces, has been proving this point for more than half a century.[186]

## Conclusions

This paper has explored the following questions: to what extent does the EATC contribute to improving European defence cooperation? What are the advantages and limitations of its approach? To what extent can the EATC be used as a tool to promote cooperation in other areas of the European defence sector?

Concerning the first question, my analysis finds that the EATC is a successful example of pooling and sharing that has contributed to improving the overall level of European military capabilities. Its success shows that it is indeed possible for European countries to develop military cooperation initiatives that are both effective and efficient. Combined with the socialisation effect of the multinational HQ and the work of the Functional Division, the overall impact is that of making the EATC PNs better disposed to cooperate with each other. Such an impact, however, should not be overestimated. The EATC remains, at least for the moment, a sectoral initiative that deals with a single domain, that of air transport and associated tasks.

Moving to the second question, the main advantage of an EATC-style approach is that it only includes those countries which are really interested in its success. This makes it easier for them to cooperate and to attain higher levels of ambition. The EATC's small size and sectoral approach also both favour the reaching of decisions, even when faced with a consensus-based decision mechanism. Those same elements, however, constitute the EATC's main limiting factors. It is improbable that the EATC will be able to grow much beyond its current size. At least, not without implementing radical changes that are not even part of current debates, such as moving away from consensus or establishing a common European military force with its own career paths.

The third question has been addressed in detail in the last part of this paper. I have shown that the EATC model is based on the following characteristics: (1)

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[186] "NORAD History", *North American Aerospace Defense Command*, 31 December 2012.

presence of a permanent peacetime establishment that is in constant use; (2) a governance structure where the Commander has operational control over its units, while the steering is assured by a consensus-based committee; (3) a pooling and sharing mechanism to effectively distribute the tasks; (4) The possibility for units to be added to the pool or returned to national control at any moment; (5) the presence of a Functional Division. I have also shown that these characteristics make the model flexible enough to be replicated in other areas of the military domain. At the same time, the model tends to lose its advantages the further one moves away from logistics and the closer one comes to activities directly involving combat. The best possible candidates would be therefore areas such as sealift, training, or surveillance.

Could a proliferation of these sectoral, bottom-up initiatives offer a true alternative to the top-down approach that has so far been followed for the CSDP? This would follow the argument made by Tomas Valasek with regard to 'islands of cooperation'.[187] Answering such a question goes, however, beyond the scope of this paper and would require further research. I have limited myself to showing that, at least within certain parameters, this kind of initiatives can and do provide a positive benefit by increasing the overall capacities of European countries. In a way, such an approach can trace its roots to the functionalist theories that have accompanied the European project since the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951: start with a specific sector, and the spill-over effect will then gradually push the participants to also integrate in other areas. The debate on whether that is actually true or not has divided the academic community ever since.[188]

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[187] Valasek, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
[188] Saurugger, Sabine, *Theoretical Approaches to European integration*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 19-20 & 34-53.

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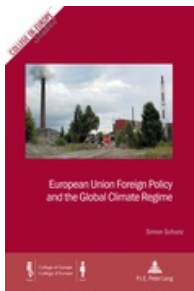
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