

'Peter Schmidt : ESDI: "Separable but not separate"?' from NATO Review

Caption: In summer 2000, commenting on the implications of a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI), Peter Schmidt, Head of the Department of European and Atlantic Security at the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Research Centre in Ebenhausen (Federal Republic of Germany), outlines the nature and the possible consequences, with particular regard to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), of the European Union's plans to absorb Western European Union (WEU) and to establish a rapid reaction corps by 2003.

Source: NATO REVIEW-WEB EDITION. [ON-LINE]. [Brussels]: NATO, [28.06.2007]. Disponible sur <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2000/0001-04.htm>.

Copyright: NATO / OTAN

URL: [http://www.cvce.eu/obj/peter_schmidt_esdi_"separable_but_not_separate"_from_nato_review-en-af525b13-bea5-456e-94d1-0dec7ccacf83.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/peter_schmidt_esdi_)

Publication date: 19/09/2012

ESDI: 'Separable but not separate'?

by Dr Peter Schmidt Head, European and Atlantic Security, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Ebenhausen, Germany

The development of a European Security and Defence Identity that is 'separable but not separate' from NATO took a new turn at the European Union's Helsinki summit in December 1999. But, as Peter Schmidt argues, the EU's plans soon to absorb the Western European Union and to create a rapid reaction corps by 2003 raise a tangle of membership issues, as well as questions of a more fundamental nature.

The decisions taken at the EU summit in Helsinki in December 1999 mark a significant change in the evolution of European security arrangements. The EU's intention to absorb the Western European Union (WEU) in the near future, to create a European rapid reaction corps of 50,000–60,000 troops by 2003 for operations such as peacekeeping and regional crisis management, and to set up the appropriate decision-making structures (including a Standing Committee on Political and Security Affairs, a Military Committee, and a military staff) indicate the Union's new determination to become a serious security actor in its own right.

With its Helsinki decisions, the EU not only goes beyond previous statements on European security and defence, it also moves significantly beyond the model of transatlantic partnership agreed at the 1996 NATO ministerial meeting in Berlin. The purpose of the Berlin decisions was to develop a 'separable but not separate' European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) within NATO. The WEU was to serve as a bridge between the EU and NATO, keeping these two institutions at arm's length of each other. This was important because four of the 15 EU members (Austria, Finland, Ireland and Sweden) are not signatories to the North Atlantic Treaty, whereas all members of the WEU belong to NATO.

With the prospective absorption of the WEU into the EU, this arrangement will no longer be valid, as the EU itself will take on the WEU's functions. Many observers may welcome these developments as a logical step — a long overdue 'tidying up' of Europe's complicated institutional landscape. However, they raise a number of questions of both an institutional and a more fundamental nature.

The institutional questions raised by the prospective merger of the WEU and EU are fairly obvious. For example, what is to be done with the WEU's official bodies and treaty legislation? In particular, will the mutual assistance clause in the WEU Treaty be incorporated into the EU Treaty? And, if that were the case, how is this to be done with four traditionally non-aligned countries in the Union?

Beneath these institutional questions, however, lurks a set of much more fundamental problems that still need to be resolved. One question concerns the enlargement processes of NATO and EU: how can these institutions continue the balancing act of continuing to pursue their still unfinished enlargement agenda, while preserving their ability to function effectively? Another question is raised with respect to the transatlantic partnership: how will it have to be redefined in the light of the Helsinki decisions to accommodate greater European independence of action?

Stabilising Europe: integration and cooperation

Both the Atlantic alliance and the EU are employing a dual strategy to promote stability in the wider Europe: integrating new members and offering comprehensive forms of cooperation to those states for which membership is not (yet) an option. This dual strategy reflects the need to carry enlargement forward, yet not compromise the internal functioning of the institutions.

NATO

NATO pioneered this strategy with its Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and the special consultation arrangements with Russia and Ukraine.

In 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined the alliance. Even this modest expansion led some to question whether a much-enlarged alliance could still remain functional. Moreover, from the start, NATO's enlargement process was burdened by the conflict of interest between integrating central and eastern Europe on the one hand, and the desire to develop a constructive relationship with Russia on the other.

Despite Russian criticism of NATO enlargement, however, it was possible to develop a NATO-Russia relationship, expressed in the 1997 Founding Act and the Permanent Joint Council (PJC). This suggests that as long as Russia does not opt for a strategy of confrontation with the West and NATO continues to show self-restraint, it should be possible to find some balance between these conflicting interests.

EU/WEU

In a move that to some extent mirrored NATO's outreach strategy, the WEU gradually developed a differentiated and far-reaching system of participation in its decision-making processes for states that are not full members (see diagram, right). As a result, it has evolved into a comprehensive forum for dialogue.

With the pending merger of the WEU and EU, however, this network of relationships could represent a problem rather than an asset. As the EU's ability to function requires it to maintain a clear distinction between members and non-members, the WEU's differentiated system of participation may no longer apply. As a consequence, the rights of non-EU members to participate in EU decision-making are likely to be limited. This poses a particular problem for those NATO members that are not in the EU, as they will suffer a net loss in relation to the status quo. These states have therefore been pressing for a comprehensive participation arrangement. The EU's Helsinki decisions have done little to accommodate this wish so far.

Being aware that this situation is a disappointing one for the states concerned, the EU is apparently trying to make this situation more palatable. The assurance that it will accept new members from as early as 2002, and the decision to increase the number of candidates for EU membership to 13, including Turkey, could be intended to alleviate some of this disappointment. This may mitigate the problem for those candidates with prospects of relatively early membership. Turkey, however, cannot expect an early welcome. One reason is that the 'Copenhagen criteria' have again been made a condition of accession. ⁽¹⁾ Evidently, the EU is treading a fine line between the desire to stabilise Europe by enlarging the Union and the need to maintain or improve its own capacity for action.

On enlargement, however, as far as Russia is concerned, the EU is better placed than NATO. To date, Moscow has voiced no significant criticism of the EU's policy of expansion. Moscow's criticism is focused — witness the new military doctrine — on the perceived 'dominant position' of the United States within the international system. Only time will tell whether Russia's attitude will change with the EU's latest decisions. It is likely, though, that the greater the potential of the EU grows, the more disapproving Russia will become.

Redefining the transatlantic partnership

Squaring the strategic imperative of enlargement with the need to maintain institutional effectiveness is not the only challenge facing NATO and the EU after Helsinki. Another challenge is the impact of an emerging ESDI on the transatlantic relationship. Not many dispute that a Europe carrying more responsibility for security could be a net gain for a fairer transatlantic partnership. The official rationale, however, according to which a stronger Europe would automatically lead to a stronger transatlantic relationship, is overly simplistic. Some fundamental questions need answering:

What relevant tasks will the alliance perform in future if the EU becomes a significantly stronger force in security policy?

- Collective defence, although not of primary importance in the present strategic situation, is still described as one of the alliance's fundamental security tasks. By contrast, as the April 1999 Washington summit made

clear, regional crisis management by NATO will take place only on a case-by-case basis. For the EU, on the other hand, crisis management in Europe will be a permanent function. However, any division of labour between NATO and EU that would relegate the alliance to collective defence only, while leaving crisis management to the EU, would marginalise the alliance and its non-EU members.

- In terms of membership, the EU has admitted 13 states to its group of accession candidates. NATO launched a Membership Action Plan to help aspiring countries prepare their candidacies for possible membership and will review the enlargement issue in 2002. But we can assume that the number of EU members that are not part of NATO will continue to increase, perpetuating the lack of convergence between these institutions.

How can the transatlantic dialogue be successfully organised in the absence of the WEU?

At the April 1999 Washington summit, allied leaders raised the issue of a formal relationship between NATO and EU. Yet such a proposal is not without problems. The bureaucratic obstacles will be considerable, as it will be difficult to modify an EU position once it has been defined through a complex process of negotiation. In addition, four of the 15 EU states are not members of NATO. So there are strong arguments for leaving it to the EU states within NATO to continue representing Europe's interests within the alliance.

At the same time, we need to find ways to make sure that the necessary strategic dialogue on regional high-risk areas takes place smoothly and rapidly. There is scope for direct EU-NATO dialogue here: the EU's High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana (who is also the WEU Secretary General) and, when appropriate, the EU Commissioner for External Relations, Chris Patten, should consult regularly with NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson. Joint sessions of the NATO and EU councils should be arranged and chaired alternately by NATO and the EU.

How will the relationship between NATO and the elements of an EU military structure develop?

France and the United Kingdom have already offered national command centres to the EU. For political and economic reasons, it seems advisable to create, or retain, the closest possible links between these and NATO structures. This will emphasise the strategic ties between Europe and North America and limit the expensive duplication of structures. The intention is also for these European structures to be available for use in NATO-run operations.

No attempt should be made to stipulate the conditions under which the alliance will make resources available to the EU. Such decisions will be taken at the political level according to the circumstances at the time. It is more important that a 'strategic climate' develop between the EU and the United States in which this issue poses as few problems as possible.

How will the EU build up its defence capabilities given ongoing defence budget cuts in most member states?

EU states intend to develop collective capabilities as soon as possible in key areas, such as the command and control of operations, reconnaissance, and strategic transport capacities. But in spite of the ambitious objectives they have set themselves, the medium-term budget plans of the major EU states provide for further defence cuts. The extent to which the Helsinki goals will actually be achieved will therefore depend on what can be done to reverse this trend. Another critical factor will be how Europe's efforts are linked to NATO's plans to improve key allied capabilities through the Defence Capabilities Initiative.

ESDI: a juggling act

For NATO and the EU the next few years will be a juggling act, as both institutions try to tackle the two fundamental challenges that lie ahead: stabilising the European continent and redefining the transatlantic partnership. These goals are not inherently contradictory — provided both organisations keep focused on their common strategic objectives and refrain from engaging in petty rivalries.

1. 'Copenhagen criteria': a) stability of democratic institutions, rule of law, protection of minorities; b) existence of a functioning market economy and the ability to be competitive in the single European market; c) ability to comply with the obligations of membership, including membership of the political, economic and monetary union. In addition, the new members must set up the administrative machinery to ensure that European law can be effectively transposed into national law.