



Between Competition and Cooperation Strategizing the EU-NATO Partnership for the 21st Century

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the European continent has faced the emergence of new challenges, while being subject to renewed threats. The security environment of Europe has evolved quickly, with security threats taking more and more a hybrid form. Simultaneously, disagreements among European states have increased, and European values have been more and more questioned through the rise of Euroscepticism and nationalism. The EU and NATO both have the same interest in the security of the European continent since the end of WWII. They share common values and common members; hence they are usually considered as natural partners. The EU-NATO relationship is thus essential for the security and defense of Europe and is studied in this thesis through the Resource Dependence theory as a theoretical framework.

During the 2000s, many obstacles have prevented the two organizations to cooperate and a period of “frozen conflict” has occurred, without any formal interactions between them taking place, except for the discussions held as part of the Berlin Plus framework. The staffs of the two organizations have circumvented these obstacles by engaging informally with each other when the two organizations were active in the same location and at the same time.

After years of informal contacts, in 2016 and 2018, the EU and NATO have signed two joint declarations, marking the beginning of a new era for EU-NATO relations. On these occasions, both organizations have expressed their willingness to relaunch their “strategic partnership”. Mechanisms for increasing their cooperation have thus been created and contacts between them are now occurring on a daily basis. But what can be observed for now remains far from being “strategic”, more focused on an ad hoc exchange of information than on a long-term cooperation.

The form that will take the EU-NATO partnership in the coming years remains uncertain. Some people have called for a clear delineation of the two organizations’ activities in the form of a formal division of labor. However, this suggestion is far from being adapted to the reality of the two organizations, which need flexibility in their relations to be able to react in an appropriate way to the threats they are now facing. Only a strong EU-NATO relationship will reinforce the transatlantic relations as a whole and ensure that the European continent is secured.

Two case-studies are examined in this thesis: the EU-NATO cooperation which has taken place in the Horn of Africa between 2009 and 2016, and the EU-NATO cooperation occurring in the Mediterranean Sea since 2016. In both cases, the two organizations are performing a similar maritime operation in close location and at the same time. The study of the two cases shows that if cooperation has increased between the two organizations, it is far from being enough to be considered as strategic today.