NATO and the EU: It does take two to Tango!

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The analysis that follows does not aim to refer to known facts and figures of the two international organizations which can be found in several sources and are mostly and widely known, but rather to underline existing substantial issues that restrict the cooperation between NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and the EU (the European Union). I wish to highlight options and propose solutions that if properly implemented would significantly improve their strategic cooperation of the most important international organizations of the West. This would, enabling them to create a better and more secure world that their people require and deserve.

NATO since its establishment on April 4, 1949 and in accordance to its strategic concept, has successfully addressed its three core tasks. As a security provider, NATO has managed to deter its adversaries and defend its allies. It also has managed to cope with crises collectively and in a comprehensive manner, it has conducted a persistent outreaching to its partners. Today, 30 countries belong to the Alliance. To the rhetorical question of if it his accomplished its mission, I would easily argue for yes!

The EU's official site, surprisingly, only contains a single last paragraph on security that is titled "The EU in the world." It states, "Diplomacy and security: The EU plays an important role in diplomacy and works to foster stability, security and prosperity, democracy, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law at international level." Although one of the goals and of the EU is to offer freedom, security and justice without internal borders, issues of collective defence are not addressed.

NATO is perceived to be the hard power of 30 allies possessing collectively the greatest military capabilities in the world.[1] The EU is considered as the soft power of 27 member states with substantial social and cultural profiles that include effective police, functioning judicial systems, competitive markets and economic growth.[2] That 21 countries are members of both organizations meanings it is only a matter of decision-making to set the provisions for exploitation of those military and civilian assets to a maximum extent, if and when both organizations independently and collectively decide

so! The framework for the NATO-EU cooperation has been set in 2003 when Greece had the presidency of the EU. It is consisted of 14 chapters and was communicated in the form of exchange of letters between the EU's Dr. Solnana (then High Representation of the Union for the Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) and Lord Robertson, (then Secretary General of NATO).

Bearing in mind the latest evolutions and the security challenges, and considering some important issues,[3] the requirement for NATO and the EU strategic cooperation is more essential than ever. The threat in our times should be sought at a 360° sector, including sector zero![4] This whole of space approach cannot be tackled by a single power, even by the greatest existing power in the world. It demands cooperation and synergies. This is another reason to reiterate that the importance for the strategic cooperation between NATO and the EU should be given the required attention and demands decisive course of action.

The set up and the provisions of the NATO-EU strategic cooperation, institutionally and as a matter of principle, is well placed. When it comes to implementation though, the real political problems are surfaced. Those well-known political problems (when referring to Cyprus in the NATO context and to Turkey in the EU context), pose practical restrictions and limitations which not only hamper the strategic cooperation of the two organizations, but literally preclude it. One of the chapters of the NATO-EU framework addresses and caters for the exchange of classified information between the two organizations. Since the Republic of Cyprus has no security agreement with NATO, Cyprus cannot acquire NATO's classified information and cannot take part in any classified discussions. Studying the case closely, it is easy to observe that only "classified" deliberations have been taken place over the years, excluding Cyprus from this "strategic cooperation" of the two international organizations (NATO and the EU). Some argue that this creates a "member-to-organization or organization-to-members-of-an-organization" dynamics instead of an "organization to organization" approach.

This practice has never been questioned. I must ask if we should keep allowing a procedure (i.e., the existence of a signature of the security agreement) to dominate a principle (i.e., exclusion of one sovereign country, a UN nation, an EU nation, namely "the Republic of Cyprus" a member state of several international organizations and in this case a EU member state). I argue that we should start questioning this "procedural approach", and instead of excluding Cyprus, let's have the two international organizations cooperate strategically together with the inclusion of all member states from both, and ask both international organizations to pay proper attention, for their own benefit, to avoid dissemination of "sensitive and classified" information to those that are not eligible to receive it. Should this proposal be implemented, only then the strategic cooperation between NATO and the EU will be promoted and tangible results will be achieved.

Those who really desire to see the strategic cooperation between NATO and the EU to flourish need to be aware that referring to the EU as the 'full" EU is not appropriate when Cyprus, a member state, has been excluded from critical institutional and structural matters. Without the full participation of Cyprus, the EU is not a European *union* but a scheme involving a number of countries who may or can discuss security concerns with NATO.

To emphasize the issue, I wish to bring to everybody's attention that due to the provisions of the framework of the NATO-EU strategic cooperation, formal meetings with the participation of all countries and member states (30 NATO +27 EU) are not conducted; thus, formal decisions cannot be made. What is happening so far, is that either the staffs of the two organizations come together to work at the lowest structural / organizational level, or the two leading bodies (NAC- North Atlantic Council and PSC-Political and Security Committee at ambassadorial level) gather together and discuss informally; it is easily and perfectly understandable that in either case, no decision can be made! I fear that we may need a tragedy, a worldwide tragedy to solve the issue!

NATO and the EU possess different capabilities but quite similar military capacity with the exception of the overwhelming power of the United States. By implementing the strategic cooperation in accordance with their true wish and following a comprehensive approach at any field of their mutual engagement, the two organizations would be able to enjoy remarkable achievements. The key word here is *cooperation* and not *coordination*. I emphasize the point because it introduces a potential misperception. Instances have been observed in the past when not using the proper word (cooperation) hampered the desired end result. The perception by each organization when the word *coordination* is used, is that there is a unilateral attempt to take a lead in this combined effort, thus trigging reflections on the other who simply doesn't want to be coordinated. In reality, the implementation of the strategic cooperation as decided by both NATO and the EU, will enable the two organizations to achieve savings in resources and make full use of the existing capabilities where and when are really needed. Under any other approach, the development and/or the disposition of means and capabilities are doubled, and the overall cost is raised, making it neither affordable nor wise to bare. In NATO, only few allies comply with the pledge to allocate 2% of their GDP as their defence. This issue has been deliberated over the last decade and is explicitly reflected at all NATO summits communiqué, as a reminder to the allies of their security bill obligations. Adding to that their enhanced cooperation will deter Russia to further conduct assertive actions towards European soil. Europe, however, depends on Russia's energy sources. This alone may introduce security risks and challenges for Europe and eastern Europeans countries in particular. Strengthening the existing NATO – EU ties would minimize the security concerns of the EU, enabling NATO to focus on the third pillar of its strategic concept i.e., "outreaching to partners."[5]

Another challenge to the NATO-EU relationship is Turkey. As the latest political evolutions indicate Turkey has introduced a series of problems for both NATO and the EU to cope with. President Erdogan's autocratic neo-Ottoman behaviour and his strategic choices to come closer to Russia, to engage severely in Syria and Libya,[6] Nagorno-Karabakh and to continue violating the sovereign rights of a UN and EU member state (i.e., drilling in Cyprus's continental self and conducting illegal activities in Cyprus's exclusive economic zone). Erdogan seeks the role of leader of all Muslims[7] which obviously is not accepted by other Muslim countries and leaders (i.e., Saudi Arabia, Egypt, UAE and others), creating a gap among cultures and religions, and introducing bias in the Muslim world towards Christians. This particular behaviour cannot be tolerated in international organizations, but since Turkey is a member of NATO, and since the EU has not shown the proper solidarity for reasons too complex to be analysed here, the result is that NATO-EU relationship may be hampered due to Turkey political choices. In the midterm, significant evolutions in both organisations may be observed, but at the end, both will lose and their opponents (including Russia) will be benefitted out of these diminishing effects and unrealized solutions.

New challenges have been introduced at the NATO's seventy years anniversary communiqué issued after the last NATO summit in London. For the first time ever, there is a reference to China, the "5G" technological evolution, and of course, problems posed by cybernetics which have been persistently reiterated. I estimate that soon, the EU will follow by making similar statements.

Concluding my short analysis on the NATO and the EU relationship as regards their strategic cooperation, considering in parallel the security challenges and the latest political evolutions, I must assert, it really "takes two to tango" and it is better performance if the two partners are from the West and share common values, principles and history.

The NATO-EU framework for their strategic cooperation is well in place. It builds confidence and ensures transparency at all levels of their cooperation. A stronger NATO and a stronger EU could be mutually reinforced. Together they can better deliver security and cater for prosperity in the Euro-Atlantic area and even beyond. It is in their hands to make decisions that ensure and maximize this potential!

This strategic cooperation should continue to take place on the basis of the following guiding principles: openness, transparency, inclusiveness and reciprocity, in full respect of the decision-making autonomy and in full compliance of the procedures of both organisations without prejudice to the specific character of the security and defence policy of any part. Proper attention should be paid on any potential interpretation (or better misinterpretation) of the substantial issues of their strategic partnership, if we really want to see the two organizations effectively working side by side. Unfortunately, current political evolutions (introduced explicitly by Russia and Turkey) will cause consequent challenges for the strategic relationship of NATO and the EU, hampering their resilience

to the benefit of potential opponents, and leaving free grounds for risks for Euro-Atlantic security.

[1]NATO member states: Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States

[2]Twenty-one of the 27 EU member states are also members of NATO. Four NATO members are EU applicants: Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Turkey. Iceland and Norway have opted to remain outside the EU but participate in the EU's single market.

[3] NATO countries have not fully committed to their defence obligations (2% of GDP and 20% of this budget for research and development of new capabilities); the defence budgets in most countries follow a declining curve; there is shortage in provision of critical capabilities for real world operations; there is a significant gap (which constantly widening) in the possession of high end capabilities among the allies which at the end hampers the interoperability among the forces; the requirements of the existing operations and missions are not fully covered (issue of political will); the US being the most capable ally has shifted its interest to the east; that Europe should take its security burden into its own hands and not leave this burden to the other side of the Atlantic; and most importantly the latest evolutions in Syria, East Mediterranean and Libya in since 2011.

[4] Sector Zero refers to internal national security (terrorism, cyber, migration flows) should be considered very carefully because it touches sovereignty issues.

[5] Russia is and should remain a strategic partner for NATO. Even after Russia's invasion of Crimea, the NATO-Russia Council continued its political dialogue at the highest level when every military cooperation had stopped. The reality indicates that the relationship progresses, either due to the American and Russia leaders' unique relationship and leadership, either through NATO's collective approach towards Russia (and vice versa) as strategic partner.

[6] In both cases Turkey violated UN resolutions and special agreements such as the Berlin conference for Libya, January 2020.

[7] An example is his personal choice to convert "Hagia Sophia," an UNESCO and world heritage site "to a mosque even though Hagia Sophia is of particular importance to all Greeks, to Orthodox all around the globe, and to all Christians.