

## THE SECURITY POLICY DIMENSION OF TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UKRAINE CRISIS AND THE STRENGTHENING OF THE CSDP

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For decades, security cooperation has been a major or even key component of transatlantic relations. During the Cold War, NATO was the main guarantor of security for the free half of Europe. However, since the end of the Warsaw Pact politicians and experts alike have regularly called into question the role of NATO in particular and the future of security cooperation between the USA and Europe in general.

At its Lisbon summit in 2010, NATO decided to adopt a new strategic concept.<sup>1</sup> This decision set a course for making the organisation more effective at dealing with new security challenges such as cyber warfare and terrorist attacks. This seemed to shift the focus away from the alliance's traditional deterrent and collective defence role.



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At the same time, over recent years discussions about roles and burden sharing have been intensifying between the United States and their European NATO partners. In his famous speech in Brussels in 2011, former U.S. Secretary of Defence Robert Gates called on Europe to take its fair share of the responsibility for transatlantic security, both politically and financially. Gates also warned that future leaders in the USA who had not grown up during the Cold War might start to question the huge investment that the United

1 | NATO, "Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Active Engagement, Modern Defence", <http://nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf> (accessed 30 Apr 2015).

States was making in NATO.<sup>2</sup> His speech generated a great deal of media coverage at the time, but many observers believe there has been little change in the basic imbalance between the contributions made by the two sides since then. Indeed, many experts continue to refer to an atmosphere of mutual estrangement within the Alliance.<sup>3</sup>

The international situation has also changed significantly for the transatlantic alliance. A number of major security policy challenges have arisen in the immediate vicinity of Alliance territory. The war in Libya served to highlight the discord that existed between European partners and revealed the limitations of even “major” military powers such as Britain and France. The biggest shock to the Alliance in recent times, however, has been the conflict in Ukraine. Having said that, this conflict has also brought with it a growing recognition that the basic principles underlying the Alliance – some of which many experts believed had become obsolete – are in fact still relevant today, including the principle of deterrence and the contents of Article 5 on the collective defence of Alliance territory. While the issue of crisis management had long been the main topic for discussion within the Alliance, the resolutions passed at the NATO summit in Cardiff in September 2014 brought the issue of the defence of the Alliance firmly back into the spotlight. Former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen suggested the Ukraine crisis had been a “wake-up call” for the whole Alliance.<sup>4</sup> Within Europe, these crises have resulted in an intensification of efforts to strengthen the Common Security and Defence Policy.

But to what extent have these recent developments – the Ukraine crisis and a reconfirmation of the importance of the CSDP – resulted in greater cohesion within the Alliance? Or have they in fact led to (increased) estrangement?

- 2 | Robert Gates, “The Security and Defense Agenda (Future of NATO)”, 10 Jun 2011, <http://defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1581> (accessed 30 Apr 2015).
- 3 | Nikolas Busse, “Entfremdung im Bündnis”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 31 Mar 2011, <http://faz.net/aktuell/nato-entfremdung-im-buendnis-1610653.html> (accessed 30 Apr 2015).
- 4 | Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “Keynote Remarks at Atlantic Council’s Future Leaders Summit”, Newport (Wales), Atlantic Council, speech, 4 Sep 2014, <http://atlanticcouncil.org/events/webcasts/future-leaders-summit-opening-and-keynote-remarks-by-anders-rogh-rasmussen> (accessed 30 Apr 2015).



Return of a plane of the U.S. Air Force from Africa: The United States repeatedly called for a stronger EU involvement in the Libya intervention. | Source: Marc I. Lane, USAF, flickr © ⓘ

## **INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CHALLENGES TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC ALLIANCE**

The North Atlantic Alliance has faced a number of major challenges in recent years. This has happened because of some fundamental changes to the international playing field. One of these challenges is Russia's unpredictability, which has effectively removed one of the cornerstones of peace within Europe. Another is the fact that the security policy preferences of some of the new actors on the international security stage, such as India, China and Brazil, are not necessarily the same as those of the Alliance itself.<sup>5</sup> A further challenge has been the "hybrid" way that Russia has waged war in Ukraine, where the actors in the conflict and their long-term goals are difficult to define. The security strategies which the EU and NATO have traditionally relied upon do not seem particularly well-equipped to deal with this new form of warfare. In light of these latest challenges, closer transatlantic cooperation has now become more important than ever. However, even before Gates made his speech, there was clear evidence of a growing disillusionment or even estrangement between the Alliance partners on both sides of the Atlantic:

5 | Johannes Thimm, "Herausforderungen für das transatlantische Bündnis: Die Ukraine-Krise und die NSA-Affäre", *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte (APuZ)*, No. 50-51/2014, 2 Dec 2014, <http://bpb.de/apuz/197165> (accessed 30 Apr 2015).

1. Representatives from the other side of the Atlantic have complained about the lack of a common security strategy within Europe. The Libya crisis, for example, served to highlight the very different security and foreign policy perspectives of the various European countries and brought home the limited ability of some EU countries to respond effectively. Although the 2001 Treaty of Nice laid the foundations for a common security and defence policy at EU level, Europe lacks a renewed European Security Strategy and the appropriate instruments or political will to implement such a strategy without comprehensive support from the USA. Indeed, in 2011 and in 2012 many experts had already given up on the Common Security and Defence Policy within the framework of the EU<sup>6</sup> and declared it to have failed.

**Europe still lacks a renewed European Security Strategy and the political will to implement such a strategy without comprehensive support from the USA.**

2. The United States have repeatedly accused European Alliance members of refusing to take leadership responsibility, especially for military operations – even during conflicts that were taking place in the immediate vicinity of Europe itself. During the Libya crisis, for example, they consistently asked Europe to bear a greater share of the burden. France and Britain quickly assumed a leadership role both politically and militarily, but most of the remaining European Alliance members held back. In the end, only nine European countries took part in the international military operations in Libya. It quickly became apparent at the time that the willingness of two of Europe's major military powers to get involved – Britain and France – was not sufficient in itself. Finally, NATO took command of the military operations in Libya in March 2011. The USA hoped that this would allow them to indirectly hand over control of operations to Europe. A U.S. Senator at the time, current U.S. Secretary of State John F. Kerry suggested that European NATO members in particular should take on a more active role in Libya.<sup>7</sup> The USA basically accused Europe of being a security consumer rather than a security provider. It believed that many European capitals were too focused on the civil aspects of combating the crisis and relied far too heavily on the USA when it came to

6 | Jan Techau, "Forget CSDP, It's Time for Plan B", Carnegie Europe, 26 Aug 2011, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/publications/?fa=45439> (accessed 4 May 2015).

7 | "Libya and War Powers. Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 112<sup>th</sup> Cong, 2011", Senate Hearing 112-89, proceedings, <http://gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112shrg68241/html/CHRG-112shrg68241.htm> (accessed 4 May 2015).

military operations. The financial and economic crisis had tended to foster an inward-looking attitude in Europe and forced many European countries to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of long-term foreign policy commitments against those of short-term domestic policy considerations.

3. The USA also called on its European partners to make a greater financial commitment to common defence policies. In his speech, Robert Gates pointed out that the USA had to bear 75 per cent of the financial burden within NATO. And this at a time when most EU states had actually significantly reduced their own defence budgets because of the financial crisis. Between 2011 and 2015, for example, Britain and

**At the NATO summit in Wales, the USA urged its allies to commit to spending two per cent of their domestic budget on defence expenditure.**

Germany cut their defence budgets by up to eight per cent, while other countries such as Spain made even more drastic reductions.

Overall, European defence budgets were cut by approximately a fifth between 2006 and 2013. As a result, the gulf in technological and military capability between the USA and its European allies has grown substantially over the last ten years, and initiatives to promote the common use of resources and to avoid duplication such as Smart Defence have not succeeded in narrowing the gap. At the NATO summit in Wales in September 2014, the USA urged the European members of the Alliance to commit to spending two per cent of their domestic budget on defence expenditure. Three months earlier during a press conference in Poland, President Obama said NATO members could not simply rely on their NATO membership when they needed defence while ignoring their responsibilities the rest of the time.<sup>8</sup>

### **EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN EUROPEAN CAPACITIES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CSDP**

Against the backdrop of these developments, the last decade has seen a fundamental change in the American view of the development of a Common Security and Defence Policy. Initially, the USA, and even other pro-Atlantic countries such as Poland, interpreted the CSDP as a potential threat to the transatlantic defence alliance.

8 | Barack Obama, "Remarks by President Obama and President Komorowski of Poland in a Joint Press Conference", 3 Jun 2014, <https://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/03/remarks-president-obama-and-president-komorowski-poland-joint-press-conf> (accessed 4 May 2015).

This was because the CSDP was seen as an attempt to counter the hegemony of the United States or even as a deliberate attempt to disrupt the unity of the NATO member states.<sup>9</sup> At the Munich Security Conference in February 2001, former U.S. Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld even warned of a European duplication of the NATO alliance. For his part, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair tried to reassure both the Clinton and Bush administrations that better defence cooperation in Europe would not present a threat to NATO.

Today, there are fewer people on both sides of the Atlantic who view the CSDP as a competing project. Indeed, in recent years the USA have increasingly tried to convince its European alliance partners of the actual benefits of implementing and expanding such a common European defence policy. In light of past elections in the UK, U.S. government officials have been trying to convince the Conservative government of the potential value of a European defence strategy. Experts have also noted a change in the language being used in Washington. While documents in the past would refer to “the USA and its allies”, now they increasingly refer to “the USA and the EU”, with all the higher expectations of Europe this implies. There has also been a noticeable shift in the views held by pro-Atlantic countries within Europe. In recent years, Poland, for example, has become one of the most vocal advocates of strengthening the CSDP. It launched several initiatives aimed at increasing levels of defence cooperation in Europe during its EU Presidency in 2011.

**Sceptical in the beginning, the USA now tries to convince its European alliance partners of the actual benefits of implementing and expanding a common European defence policy.**

The December 2013 summit of EU leaders was to prove pivotal to the strengthening of the CSDP, as defence policy was once again the subject of discussions following a five-year hiatus, and EU leaders agreed on a program to revitalise the CSDP. However, this program is first and foremost focused on the largely technical issues of capability development and the strengthening of the defence industry (including the development of certification procedures for defence-related products). There was no mention of a potential common white paper on security policy, although the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton was instructed to produce

9 | Stanley R. Sloan, “The United States and European Defence”, The Institute for Security Studies of Western European Union, *Chaillot Paper* 39, Apr 2000, p. 43 f., <http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/cp039e.pdf> (accessed 21 May 2015).

an analysis of security issues facing the EU by June 2015. It was interesting that the summit declaration made several references to the need for closer alignment with NATO.<sup>10</sup> In the run-up to the summit, both NATO Secretary General Rasmussen and the USA welcomed the idea of strengthening the CSDP. However, it seemed that the U.S. were less interested in the process of how an integrated security and defence policy could be further developed but were rather focused on the end result itself: an improved capacity to act amongst its fellow Alliance members. As a result, reaction to the December summit on the political front was somewhat muted.

Not surprisingly, implementation of the plans agreed upon in December 2013 has proven to be difficult, and a comprehensive debate that might lead to a common understanding on European security is unlikely to take place before June 2015. Nevertheless, the newly invigorated CSDP already contains some important provisions that could ultimately serve to strengthen the North Atlantic Alliance:

1. The measures aimed at strengthening common standards and certification processes, for example, are an important step towards developing a strong European industrial and defence base, something that is essential if Europe is to close the technology gap with the Americans in the long term.
2. Also, the decision to reform Europe's as yet unused rapid response forces (EU Battlegroups) in order to make them more suitable for use in civil-military operations, will make them a useful addition to NATO's military capabilities. Indeed, attempts are already being made to combine EU Battlegroup exercises with those of NATO: the Battlegroup from the four Visegrád countries, for example, is due to take part in NATO's major Trident Juncture exercises in autumn 2015.<sup>11</sup>

10 | European Council, "European Council 19/20 December 2013. Conclusions", 20 Dec 2013, [http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/140245.pdf](http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/140245.pdf) (accessed 4 May 2015).

11 | Visegrád Group, "Visegrad Countries May Turn EU Battlegroup into Permanent V4 Rapid Reaction Force", Atlantic Council, 3 Jul 2014, <http://atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/visegrad-countries-may-turn-eu-battlegroup-into-permanent-v4-rapid-reaction-force> (accessed 4 May 2015).

Today, the U.S. tend to view a Europe with stronger security and defence policies as a reliable partner rather than a potential competitor within the North Atlantic Alliance. Above all, this becomes obvious in the fact that the CSDP is barely discussed in its principles. Rather, the questions of the allies revolve around issues of the alliance's arrangement – such as the relevance of the creation of permanent command structures within the CSDP. So while for some the creation of the CSDP 15 years ago may have appeared to be a potential threat to transatlantic relations, its strengthening may actually provide these relations with long-term stability.

### **THE MANAGEMENT OF THE UKRAINE CRISIS AS A TURNING POINT?**

The former Secretary General of NATO Anders Fogh Rasmussen suggested that the Ukraine conflict had served as a wake-up call for the Alliance.<sup>12</sup> But to what extent can Europe's role in the Ukraine crisis be considered a new beginning for the transatlantic partnership?



At the NATO summit, the USA called on its European partners to make a greater financial commitment to common defence policies. | Source: Arron Hoare, MoD, flickr ©①③④.

The USA and its European Alliance partners have been affected by the conflict in the Ukraine in very different ways and therefore see it from very different perspectives. Because of their close ties with Russia on the economic and energy supply front the conflict has forced some European NATO members such as France and Germany to adopt fundamentally different policies towards Moscow.



Meanwhile, other Alliance members, and especially those that are Russia's immediate neighbours, perceive that the conflict poses a very real threat to their security. This is especially true of the Baltic States, but also of Finland, Poland and Romania. For its part, however, Washington is more concerned about the implications for the global balance of power, including the impact the crisis may have in Asia, for example. While some observers stress that the USA now regard Russia as little more than a medium-sized player on the world stage, they recognise that it also has the potential to have a disruptive effect, not only in Eastern Europe, but also in Asia. Washington will also be carefully analysing the annexation of the Crimea and Russia's war in Eastern Ukraine from the perspective of how these events and the West's reactions to them are being perceived by their Asian Alliance partners.<sup>13</sup>

**At the beginning of the Ukraine crisis, many experts feared that it might actually lead to greater misunderstandings between the transatlantic partners rather than to a renaissance of the partnership.**

At the beginning of the crisis, many experts feared that it might actually lead to greater misunderstandings between the transatlantic partners<sup>14</sup> rather than to a renaissance of the partnership itself. Up to the summer of

2014 there were repeated complaints – including from the United States – that the European response to Russia's aggression had been too slow, that the EU had not shown itself to be capable of adopting a common approach and that the necessary leadership in dealing with the crisis had been lacking. These complaints were also certainly directed at Germany, which had been expected to make a much firmer response on account of the strength of its economic and political position within the EU. In the meantime a number of developments have pointed to a shift in the dynamic of the transatlantic partnership, even though some fundamental problems have still not been fully resolved:

13 | Jo Coelmont, "Cardiff: Birthplace of a new Transatlantic Narrative?", *Security Policy Brief*, No. 57, Jul 2014, <http://egmontinstitute.be/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/SPB57-jo-Coelmont.pdf> (accessed 4 May 2015).

14 | Stewart M. Patrick, "NATO: Suddenly relevant, deeply divided", *The Internationalist*, 28 Aug 2014, Council on Foreign Relations, <http://blogs.cfr.org/patrick/2014/08/28/nato-suddenly-relevant-deeply-divided> (accessed 21 May 2015); Jan Techau, "How to take the pains out of transatlantic relations", Carnegie Europe, 24 Jun 2014, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=55987> (accessed 21 May 2015).

## 1. The development of a common security policy

If nothing more, the Ukraine conflict has helped to bring the European allies' views on the Alliance closer together. Before the crisis, many countries viewed the defensive nature of the Alliance as somewhat out of date and felt its role as a deterrent was no longer relevant. The regular warnings by representatives from the Baltic States in particular, but also from Poland, were often seen as largely exaggerated. But, as the NATO summit in Cardiff clearly showed, Russia's aggression in Ukraine created a notable consensus within the Alliance with respect to retaining NATO's deterrent and common defence elements.

There was also a growing consensus when it came to adopting a clear position towards Russia. The Russian annexation of the Crimea actually served to strengthen the cohesion of the Alliance itself.<sup>15</sup> According to well-informed observers, a learning process has been taking place since June last year – as evidenced by the discussions held within the European Council, for example. European heads of state and government are now no longer under any illusions when it comes to the motivations and reliability of the current Russian government on the international stage. To a certain extent they have been able to agree on a common European approach and, for the time being at least, to put this approach before national economic and energy interests. Or, as the President of the European Council Donald Tusk put it following the meeting of heads of state and government in February 2015: "This is not just about the independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine. The whole geopolitical order in Europe after 1989 is at stake."<sup>16</sup> For now at least, it would appear that the European tendency to look inwards is diminishing.<sup>17</sup>

**In the context of the Ukraine crisis, the European countries managed to agree at least temporarily on a common European approach.**

In this context it is also interesting to note how Europeans and Americans have very similar perceptions of Russia. In 2014, 71 per cent of Americans and 68 per cent of EU citizens had a negative

15 | Thimm, n. 5.

16 | Cf. Peter Ludlow, "December 2014: A New Beginning? Juncker's Investment Plan and Ukraine", Preliminary Evaluation 2014/6, EuroComment, <http://eurocomment.eu/preliminary-evaluation-20146> (accessed 22 May 2015).

17 | Donald Tusk, "Press statement by President Donald Tusk after the informal meeting of heads of state or government", 12 Feb 2015, <http://consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/02/150212-remarks-tusk-after-informal-euco> (accessed 4 May 2015).

perception of Russia's role in the world – although there are still noticeable differences of opinion within Europe itself.<sup>18</sup>

## **2. The willingness of the European allies to take a leadership role**

For years, European heads of state and government avoided discussing foreign policy issues at their meetings in Brussels. Now, however, the search for a solution to the Ukraine conflict has become the main focus and an absolute priority at these meetings.

Despite some initial disagreements, Europe has shown itself to be increasingly willing to take on a leadership role in the Ukraine crisis and to act as an important mediator on a range of key issues. This willingness to take the lead was largely down to the heads of state and government, and in particular the German Chancellor. In contrast to earlier crises – such as the Arab Spring and the Libya conflict – the heads of government chose to act within the official European mandate and in close consultation with the President of the European Council and EU High Representative. At various key stages during the efforts to settle the conflict in the Ukraine, it was European actors and not U.S. representatives who played the decisive role. A good example of this is the joint mission undertaken by the three Weimar Triangle foreign ministers, initiated within the framework of the EPP, who went to Kiev in February 2014 to mediate between Janukowicz and representatives of the Euromaidan. The compromise agreed upon during these negotiations was the spark that led to the victory of the democratic forces. The second Minsk Agreement aimed at finding a solution to the conflict in Ukraine, which was also recognised by Washington as being the key instrument for resolving the crisis, was negotiated by two European heads of government – German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande. The EU Commission also played a decisive role in mediating between the two countries on the issue of gas supplies. At the same time, EU institutions demonstrated an unprecedented willingness to approve financial and administrative support for what is a third country in EU terms. Unofficially, Vladimir Putin and Petro Poroshenko both view the German Chancellor as the key interlocutor in the crisis.

18 | The German Marshall Fund of the United States, "Transatlantic Trends: Key Findings 2014", [http://trends.gmfus.org/files/2012/09/Trends\\_2014\\_complete.pdf](http://trends.gmfus.org/files/2012/09/Trends_2014_complete.pdf) (accessed 4 May 2015).

Central to Europe's decisive role in the Ukraine crisis is the fact that Germany has been willing to take on the leadership role that the USA have been encouraging Europe to adopt for so long. The Federal Republic has adopted this role in close cooperation with other countries such as France, Britain and Poland and regular close consultation with the U.S. President. There is general agreement on how things should now be taken forward, including the implementation of the Minsk Agreement and the strengthening of the OSCE Mission.



A combined training conference in Oberammergau in 2014: Joint exercises of squads from more than 35 countries were conducted in the framework of the Readiness Action Plan. | Source: Jesse Granger, U.S. Army Europe, flickr ©.

### **3. Choice of instruments for resolving the crisis**

So far, there has been close consultation and agreement between the USA and the EU on the civil instruments to be used (sanctions) as well as on the issue of potential military support for Ukraine. One of the reasons why the sanctions<sup>19</sup> against Russia have been so effective has been the regular consultations between the EU and USA. The most important steps in the sanction process have for the most part been carried out in parallel, while the EU has taken on the necessary leadership role on these issues. The decision made at the European Council meeting in March 2015 to link

19 | The joint sanctions are widely seen as a powerful signal, see Roland Freudenstein/Ulrich Speck, "The Renaissance of the West: How Europe and America Can Shape Up in Confronting Putin's Russia", Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, Brussels, 17 Mar 2015.

the lifting of economic sanctions to the fulfilling of the terms of the Minsk Agreement shows that the European allies are prepared to stick to their agreed joint approach. So far, sceptics who assumed the EU would back down on the issue of sanctions and that this would lead to the partners on either side of the Atlantic drifting apart have been proven wrong. However, this should not blind us to the fact that there are still fundamental differences of opinion on the strategy adopted towards Russia. Many countries such as Italy, Hungary, Greece, Cyprus and Slovakia are not particularly in favour of the sanctions policy, while others such as Sweden, Poland and the Baltic States would like to see a tougher response.

**The vast majority of government heads on both sides of the Atlantic agree that the solution to the conflict must be a political one.**

So far, however, there has been no significant dissent when it comes to the issue of military support for Ukraine. The vast majority of government heads on both sides of the

Atlantic agree that the solution to the conflict must be a political one. However, there is some disagreement on the issue of supplying arms to Kiev. Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the U.S. Army and John Kerry, U.S. Secretary of State, made it clear at the beginning of March that they were in favour of supplying arms to Kiev,<sup>20</sup> and on this issue they count on at least the tacit approval of a number of their European allies, especially the Baltic States and possibly also Poland and Britain. However, for France and Germany the idea of supplying arms remains a taboo subject. It is still unclear what line both sides would need to see crossed before lethal military materials could be delivered to Ukraine. Russian attacks on Kharkiv or Mariupol could lead to this becoming a much more urgent subject of debate.

#### **4. The question of burden-sharing**

At the NATO summit in Cardiff in 2014, agreement was reached on a number of measures to support NATO countries that border Russia. According to observers, it was the European representatives, and especially those from Germany, who were the driving force behind forming the appropriate resolutions.<sup>21</sup> One of the key elements of the reaction to the Ukraine crisis was the passing of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP). This includes strengthening assurance measures, such as air-policing patrols over the Baltic,

20 | Cf. *Europe Diplomacy & Defence*, No. 775, 4 Mar 2015.

21 | Claudia Major, "Die strategische Anpassung der Nato", *SWP-Aktuell* 20, Feb 2015, [http://swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2015A20\\_mjr.pdf](http://swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2015A20_mjr.pdf) (accessed 4 May 2015).

more marine patrols and joint exercises as well as measures to enhance the Alliance's operational readiness and response capability. Raising the capabilities of regional command and control centers should also allow these enhanced readiness levels to be extended over a much larger sphere of influence. A key aspect of these plans is the enhancement of rapid response capabilities, including the creation of a very quick reaction force of up to 4,000 troops, the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). The new force should be in place by the time of the NATO summit in Warsaw in 2016 at the latest.

On the one hand, the Cardiff summit served to underscore the usual reflexes, divides and limited readiness for military deployment of some European Alliance members, but also demonstrated a willingness on the part of Europeans to take a larger share of the Alliance's military burden. There is currently no consensus within the Alliance on the permanent stationing of NATO troops in the Baltic States. While the Baltic States themselves, together with Poland, are in favour of such a move, Germany and the majority of European NATO member states are against a permanent deployment. Either way, the USA sent 3,000 troops to the Baltic States in March this year in order to carry out military exercises over the coming months. Moreover, in a much-publicised visit to Estonia, President Obama declared that the security of the Baltic States was just as important as that of Paris, Berlin or London.



In a much-publicised visit of President Obama to Estonia in 2014, he declared that the security of the Baltic States was just as important as that of Paris, Berlin or London. | Source: Johan Viirik, flickr ©<sup>1</sup>.

By creating the VJTF the European members of the Alliance also demonstrated an increased willingness to shoulder their share of the military burden. Germany will take on the leadership of the new task force this year, make a major contribution to building it up and play an important role in the other measures agreed upon by providing financial and material support.<sup>22</sup> After that, leadership of the task force will pass to other European allies. The European Alliance members will also be called upon to make a higher contribution to strengthening regional bases in Central Eastern and Southeast Europe.

At the moment, it is still too early to say what influence the Ukraine conflict might ultimately have on the transatlantic partnership. What can be said however is that, contrary to what many experts were suggesting in the first half of 2014, the conflict has at least served to strengthen people's awareness of the importance of the Alliance when it comes to security issues.

**While it seems unlikely that Sweden and Finland will become members of NATO in the next few years, the signing of Host Nation Support Agreements by both countries was a step towards closer cooperation.**

The growing attractiveness of the Alliance can be seen in some of the discussions in Sweden and Finland about their neutral status. However, while it seems unlikely that the two countries will become members of NATO

in the next few years, the signing of Host Nation Support Agreements by both countries in the run-up to the Cardiff summit<sup>23</sup> was a step towards closer cooperation and is evidence of a desire to work more closely with the Alliance in future.

## CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

Will the development of the CSDP and in particular the Ukraine crisis lead to a transatlantic partnership of equals in the medium term and to a lasting renaissance of the importance of the Alliance in security matters, as has been demanded by so many? This will no doubt depend on a number of important factors over the coming years. What is certain is that it is going to be a long haul for all concerned.

22 | Ibid.

23 | NATO, "Finland and Sweden sign Memorandum of Understanding with NATO", 5 Sep 2014, <http://aco.nato.int/finland-and-sweden-signing-a-memorandum-of-understanding-with-nato-for-operational-and-logistic-support.aspx> (accessed 4 May 2015).

For a start, it will be necessary to stick with the strategy put in place by the Europeans to deal with the Ukraine and Russia, including strictly linking the lifting of sanctions with the fulfilment of the terms of the Minsk Agreement and maintaining a united front. There will be an ongoing need for European and German leadership on general strategies for dealing with Russia and on the issue of arms supplies to Ukraine in close consultation with Alliance partners. It remains to be seen whether this tendency for Europe to take the lead will become a permanent feature and whether it can survive potential political changes in key European countries. The willingness of the European allies to continue to pull in one direction will also have a significant influence on whether Europe continues to take a leading role in the conflict in the future. Several member states such as Slovakia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary and Italy have close economic ties to Moscow or have a dependency on Russia for energy supplies and feel their own security is not necessarily being threatened by the Russians. As a result, they are currently toeing the European line with some degree of reluctance.

In the years to come, some kind of NATO presence – even if it is simply more military exercises on the Alliance’s north eastern flank – will be of central importance. Guaranteeing the security of NATO’s north-eastern flank will be a major test of the Alliance’s credibility and therefore of the transatlantic partnership itself.

In the long-term, a transatlantic partnership of equals is essential and can be achieved by Europe taking a political lead and through the implementation of the decisions made in Cardiff. According to a number of experts, this must necessarily include the commitment to spend two per cent of GDP on defence. So far, however the enthusiasm of the European allies has been somewhat limited when it comes to this issue. Immediately after the end of the summit, a major debate started on both sides of the Atlantic as to just how binding this commitment to a two per cent goal really is.

**One major test for the European allies will be the creation of the quick reaction force. This will no doubt involve a long-term restructuring of national armed forces.**

Poland and Estonia, who are both looking to increase their defence budgets in 2016, were the exceptions. One major test for the European allies will be the implementation of the Readiness Action Plan and particularly the creation of the quick reaction force. This will no doubt involve a long-term restructuring of national armed forces. The Alliance members will also have to juggle the new tasks and responsibilities defined in their 2010 strategic concept



and traditional security measures, whose ongoing relevance has been brought into sharp focus by the current crisis.

As the new NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stressed when addressing the European Parliament at the end of March this year, NATO and the EU are facing the same threats and challenges, including how to deal with new forms of warfare, strengthen the resilience and stability of NATO members and increase European investment in defence.<sup>24</sup> There also needs to be close consultation and agreement between both parties on a joint strategy for dealing with Russia.

One main area of focus will therefore need to be an improvement in EU-NATO relations – in spite of some well-known sticking points, such as the Turkey-Cyprus problem. Some voices<sup>25</sup> are calling for a clear signal in the form of a joint official declaration on the strengthening of relations at one of the upcoming summit meetings. What would be more important, however, would be closer cooperation on specific projects, such as how to deal with the challenge of new types of hybrid warfare, where there is a definite need for closer transatlantic cooperation and consultation. Meetings between NATO and EU representatives to discuss this matter at the end of March were an important first step in this direction.

**Coming to an agreement on the main security challenges in June would put in place a key foundation on which to build a European strategy for the future beyond the current Ukraine crisis.**

The strengthening of the CSDP would also be an important step towards putting the Alliance members on both sides of the Atlantic on an equal footing. Coming to an agreement on the main security challenges in June would put in place a key foundation on which to build a coherent, European strategy for the future beyond the current Ukraine crisis. Increased efforts to create joint military capabilities, especially in the Baltic region, would also send an important signal.

Many observers also believe that Germany's commitment will be a deciding factor in creating an effective transatlantic partnership for the future. Germany's willingness to play an active role, especially militarily in the implementation of the Readiness Action Plan, but also at political level, would appear to be of major importance.

24 | Europe Diplomacy & Defence, No. 783, "NATO and EU must raise three challenges together, says Stoltenberg", 1 Apr 2015.

25 | Freudenstein/Specck, n. 19.

The successful rejuvenation of the transatlantic security alliance will also depend upon closer cooperation in other political areas. Many experts believe that concluding a transatlantic free trade agreement could be decisive in strengthening future transatlantic relations.<sup>26</sup> In addition to the added value created, such a political project would also send a clear message on the cohesion and stability of the international alliance. Politicians are well aware of the importance of such an agreement and have once again set themselves the goal of concluding the necessary negotiations with the USA this year, whatever obstacles may stand in the way.

In light of the many common challenges that have to be faced, it would seem that regular consultation and exchange between the partners will be essential in order to continue to strengthen cooperation within the Alliance in the long term.

The mentioned steps could lead in the long run to the often invoked “renaissance” of the transatlantic alliance. The approaches of the revitalization of the CSDP are still too recent to already affect the transatlantic alliance. However, this development would have the potential to strengthen the Alliance sustainably. By contrast, the joint management of the Ukraine crisis appears already today to contribute to an enhancement of the Alliance – despite the still widespread skepticism of many experts. However, this positive trend is not irreversible; a failure in dealing with the Ukraine crisis would be a serious blow to the Alliance as a whole.

26 | Judy Dempsey, “Entering 2015, Europe Is Losing America”, Carnegie Europe, 19 Dec 2014, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=57569> (accessed 22 May 2015).