

# Weathering the storm: Transatlantic security in insecure times



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Roundtable report. 03 October 2018, Martin's Hotel, Brussels.

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The EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), in collaboration with the Netherlands Institute of International Relations (Clingendael Institute) and the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) organised a roundtable with the purpose of shedding light on recent developments in European and global security and their impact on transatlantic relations. These are the main conclusions and discussion points raised during the event.

## Transatlantic security: Europe steps up

In the first panel, the discussion revolved around the European Union's (EU) renewed defence cooperation efforts and their impact on the transatlantic relationship. European panellists highlighted how Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the European quest for strategic autonomy should not be interpreted on the other side of the Atlantic as a form of protectionism or isolationism, but rather as a way for Europe to take on its fair share of responsibilities and become a more serious and reliable partner in defending the European continent. Yet the speakers also warned that, despite these ongoing efforts, there is still little perception of common threats to European security among EU member states and no shared European perception of US foreign policy and the current US administration.

American panellists, on the other hand, explained how, despite the Trump administration's 'schizophrenic approach' – it is pushing hard for Europe to do more on defence, but then when Europe does so the White House's response is one of suspicion about the EU's motives - Washington does value what the EU is doing in defence. For example, the EU is playing a vital role in improving military mobility across the European continent and maritime security to contain the migration crisis. However, much like many other administrations Washington fears that, rather than reinforce the NATO alliance, EU security and defence efforts will end up pulling forces away from it. Recalling former Secretary of State Madeline Albright's famous 'three Ds', American colleagues stressed the need for PESCO to avoid duplication, decoupling from NATO and discrimination against non-EU members, starting with the United States (US). They also signalled that sadly support for NATO in Washington is increasingly becoming a partisan issue. Overall, there was agreement that more clarity is needed on the EU's and NATO's complementary roles and tasks.

## Global security challenges: sharing the workload

In the second session, a discussion about burden sharing emerged and it was argued that the EU and its member states contribute to burden sharing well beyond NATO's 2% GDP spending pledge. For example, the EU is actively trying to remove obstacles to military mobility, an issue that was first raised by NATO following the annexation of Crimea by Russia. The alliance could not concretely

address the issue as effective mobility rests on civilian, not military infrastructure. To this end, the EU has proposed to allocate €6.5 billion to update the current transport infrastructure under the next Multi-annual Financial Framework. Furthermore, sanctions are another way in which the EU contributes to burden sharing. If one considers sanctions against Russia, for example, despite their necessity the sanctions entail larger economic costs for the EU than for the US. Last but not least, the EU is playing a key role through its neighbourhood and enlargement policies. Take, for example, the role the Union is playing in the Western Balkans and how enlargement would further stabilise a region surrounded by several NATO members.

With regard to possible areas of cooperation, panellists emphasised how the EU and NATO are two very different entities that rely on very different tools. Some panellists argued that it is time for Washington to acknowledge the soft power instruments that the EU brings to the table and the complementarity of CSDP to NATO. However, panellists acknowledged that President Trump's perception of Europe as a foe and his preference for bilateral talks is significantly hindering EU-US cooperation. There is the feeling in Europe that this administration has an interest in undermining the Union. On this basis, some panellists stated that the possibility of a lasting structural shift in American foreign policy away from Europe cannot be excluded. To avoid such a situation from occurring, one panellist volunteered a method for how the EU could cope with the current US administration. Using the term the 'three Cs' it was explained how the EU could: 'conciliate' on issues of common interest; 'confront the US on contentious issues such as trade, the Iran nuclear deal and climate change; and 'circumvent' issues the Americans are not interested in.

### North Korea: in the eye of the storm

In the third session, audience participants learned how the EU position on North Korea reflects its global ambition to strengthen the global non-proliferation regime and the international rules-based order. The main difference with the US is that for the EU diplomacy is the only way to achieve that objective. The EU believes it can bring North Korea to the negotiating table, and will maintain pressure on Pyongyang to this end. However, other speakers observed that for North Korea denuclearisation is not an option and therefore this strategy could not have the desired effect. It was noted that Pyongyang would like to see the EU more involved in the negotiations as it considers the EU 'neutral' – in the sense that it has less historical baggage in North Korea than other parties – and the Union is experienced in overcoming conflicts through peaceful means.

Asked about a potential EU role in the region, it was argued that the EU should support the US and North Korea in their respective efforts and explore North Korea's interest in an economic opening. In this respect, the EU strategic partnership agreement with Japan could give it buy-in in the region. When discussing a way forward, panellists considered whether it is best to first wait for North Korea to denuclearise and then lift sanctions or rather lift sanctions first and expect denuclearisation in return. The panel agreed on a middle ground strategy in order to achieve both at the same time. In fact, they observed that Trump did not get anything in return for cancelling military exercises, so a cautious approach should be taken.

### The storm within? Turkey's posture in transatlantic security

In the final session, audience members learned about Turkey's strained relations with Europe and the US. It was explained that resentment relates to the delayed response of the Europe and the US to the Turkish coup attempt and, in the specific case of the US, also with its cooperation with the People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria and the financial sanctions it imposed in retaliation for the mistreatment of detained American pastor Andrew Brunson. Furthermore, the issue of the Turkish

purchase of the Russian S-400 complicates the NATO-Turkey relationship. Turkey claims it needs the system to complement its air defences, but it cannot be integrated into NATO missile defence. The potential risk of the advanced S-400 could be (Russian) electronically hacking the F-35 fighter aircraft platform. , The chances that Turkey will change its course on NATO are slim for the foreseeable future.

Unlike the US, whose approach to Turkey has become particularly heavy-handed since Brunson's arrest and failed release by Ankara, the EU cannot afford to lose Turkey as a strategic partner for geopolitical reasons. This is why, despite the stalled accession negotiations, cooperation with Turkey under the radar is ongoing in all areas (especially on the economy, migration and energy). During the debate it was suggested that the EU move from enlargement to partnership with Ankara, as enlargement seems to be poisoning relations between the two. There is also an appetite from EU member states to modernise the Customs Union, yet this could be perceived in today's political atmosphere as a 'gift' to Erdogan.

Panellists agreed that there is high probability of a financial crisis in Turkey in the near future. This means that the Turkish government will have to seek a bailout but there was disagreement over who would support Ankara. One idea was an International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout of US\$50-100 billion but this was deemed an unlikely scenario because of Erdogan's distaste for the IMF and the US' veto power. Here, the audience learned that Turkey's problem is not fiscal and therefore IMF adjustment programmes would only allow the banking system to do corporate debt restructuring rather than bailout the country's debt. Another comment focused on whether Europe would have the financial resources to bailout Turkey, but the EU does not appear to have the institutional vehicles or political will to do so. China could also see this as an interesting opportunity to do something it has never done before. Yet, Chinese and/or Russian intervention is not really an option for Turkey.