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The security dimension of the transatlantic relations after EU-enlargement



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Abstract:

The global political landscape is currently facing an era of reshaping international relations. New powers are emerging in Asia, Russia is trying to regain its former role as an important global actor, and old established powers and alliances are affected by political debates concerning the right way of responding to the ever fast changing strategic environment. The transatlantic relations and NATO as the key security alliance between the United States and Europe are both trying to deal with the consequences of this reshaping process. At the same time the relationship between the two sides of the Atlantic is undergoing a substantial change as well. Compared to the times of the cold war era, when one major focus of international relations lay on the confrontation of NATO and Warsaw Pact forces in the heart of Europe, the current development is characterized by a whole network of interdependent centres of gravity. This paper takes a closer look at the security dimension of the transatlantic relations in order to show that it is not enlargement alone that makes the current security co-operation between Europe and the United States so difficult. It rather seems to be a combination of a changing strategic environment, increasing stability within Europe and the consequences for American awareness of the European interests, and old security concerns of the Central and East European states that have led to different views on the world.

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1. Introduction

Strategic Environment

The global political landscape is currently facing an era of reshaping international relations. New powers are (re-)emerging in Asia, Russia is trying to regain its former role as an important global actor, and old established powers and alliances are affected by political debates concerning the right way of responding to the ever fast changing strategic environment. The transatlantic relations and NATO as the key security alliance between the United States and Europe are both trying to deal with the consequences of this reshaping process. At the same time the relationship between the two sides of the Atlantic is undergoing a substantial change from loyal allies to pragmatic partners of common interests.

The growing dynamics of globalization together with the increasing vulnerability of states and societies due to the global interdependencies on the economic and political level demand new solutions for the growing risks and threats evolving from the professionalization of transnational terrorism, asymmetrical warfare, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the consequences of state failure. This traditional approach to security related issues is broadened by economic, ecologic and social aspects affecting stability and security, e.g. the high energy dependency of emerging markets, growing migration pressure, or climate change. The changing strategic environment challenges *“not only Europe or the US alone, but also the economic, financial, political, cultural and social ties between the two continents. Europe and the US need to define their role in an ever-changing world, in which the EU-US relations are no longer at the heart of the international system.”*¹

Security Challenges

Compared to the times of the cold war era, when one major focus of international relations lay on the confrontation of NATO and Warsaw Pact forces in the heart of Europe, the current development is characterized by a whole network of interdependent centres of gravity. The fight against transnational terrorism, stabilization efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, the chaotic situation in Gaza, multilateral approaches to prevent Iran and North Korea from developing military nuclear capacities, all of these are but a fraction of the most urgent security challenges the international community has to take care of. This has fundamental implications for the transatlantic security

partnership, both inside NATO as well as in the relationship between the European Union and the United States.

The United States from the beginning of the cold war era wanted a strong European partner and ally in order to secure stability, democracy and prosperity in Western Europe. Europe's defence was synonymous with North Atlantic and US defence. One principle change of the EU-US relations in recent years is that the United States need a strong European partner to help manage the new security threats. But most of these threats and challenges emanate from beyond Europe's borders and no longer from within. Security of the United States therefore is no longer connected to Europe's security but rather to stability and peace in other parts of the world. Washington needs Europe to share the burden of providing civil and military crisis-management capabilities as well as sustainable stabilization for unstable regions. *"At the same time, Washington does not want to see ESDP evolve in a way that would undermine NATO and has reacted strongly to any attempt by the EU to develop an autonomous capability not closely linked to NATO"*²

Shifting Focus

Even though the dispute over the war in Iraq may be a prominent example for increasing diverging views on security challenges and possible solutions between the two continents, the reasons for the cooling off of the transatlantic relations lie deeper. It is in some way also connected to the enlargement of NATO and the EU and a shift of the American political focus from Europe to the Middle East and the Central and East Asian region. While the United States had to cope with its role as the only remaining superpower after the cold war, the Europeans were engaged in multidimensional problems arising from the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the increasing regional instabilities resulting from ethnic conflicts and transformational efforts in East and Southeast Europe. Despite the successful accession of new member states, the additional number of different political and economic interests in a Union of 27 has led to an increasingly complicated consultation and decision making process. This paper will take a closer look at the security dimension of the transatlantic relations in order to answer the question whether enlargement of the EU has affected Europe's partnership with Washington.

2. Enlargement of the European Union

Bigger Union

With the accession of ten new member states in 2004 and Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 the European Union has increased both in size and population.³ With close to 500 million EU-citizens, the Union accounts for one quarter of the global gross national product (GDP). At the same time the borders have been stretched out to the East and Southeast of Europe. On the one hand enlargement worked as a stabilization measure for the accession countries from that region, but at the same time it brought the EU closer to fragile states and unstable regions, e.g. the Black Sea region and the Western Balkans.⁴ For the majority of the new member states joining the European Union was due to merely economic reasons. From their point of view the access to the European Internal Market and the possibility to get support and subsidies from the EU common budget for restructuring their economies were the main focus. Concerning security issues the new member states intended NATO accession to be of greater importance, because they regard the Alliance as the principal instrument of collective defence.⁵

That is why some of the Central-Eastern European states joined the transatlantic alliance even before the European Union.⁶ Especially for Poland the membership within NATO and the link to the United States was seen as a security guarantee against Russia and Belarus. From the beginning the government in Warsaw worked on establishing a special relationship with Washington in order to ease security concerns.⁷ That is why an enlarged Union is believed to be less attracted to establish a comprehensive ESDP as an alternative to the Alliance.

Iraq-Dispute

The consequence of this special relationship became obvious with the Iraq-dispute in 2003, when several new member states signed the so-called *letter of the eight* and a letter by the so-called *Vilnius 10 countries* assuring their support for US military action against Iraq.⁸ The states involved in this move did not intend to damage European integration or the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the Union. They rather feared a possible break in the transatlantic relations if Europe as a whole would have voted against U.S. military action. From their perspective "*European unity is severely weakened without a strong transatlantic link, and conversely, transatlantic relations become fractured when EU is divided*"⁹. The internal dispute in the European

Union and also within NATO resulting from this development therefore was a more than unpleasant consequence for the at that point of time prospective new member states. The Bush administration was in some respect also responsible for this division in Europe. It preferred the support for their strategy by a rather small coalition of willing states instead of trying to find a compromise with an international community of as many states as possible in order to gain legitimacy and unity for their action – even if the build-up of a coalition of the willing would mean dividing the European partner. *“Instead of supporting European integration, the administration sought to disaggregate Europe, dividing it between old and new Europe. This effort, however, was largely counterproductive. It alienated some of America’s closest friends in Europe – including members of new Europe who did not want to be forced to choose between the United States and Europe – while at the same time strengthening the hand of the Euro-Gaullists”*¹⁰.

3. Development after Iraq

However, the Iraq crisis proved to have a healing effect on Europe as well. *“First, it confirmed for Europeans the priorities and methods of US foreign policy and thus the attractiveness of an alternative European crisis-management capability for use in areas, such as the Balkans, of declining US interest. Secondly, ESDP became an object of greater priority to both old and new member states by way of compensation for the battering that CFSP had endured”*¹¹.

Progress and Doubts

Despite the turmoil due to the European division over the U.S. Iraq strategy the further development of European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) continued. The acceding states contributed to the military and police operations in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. They agreed to the European Security Strategy (ESS) in late 2003 and committed themselves to the civil and military Headline Goal process of the Union. Consequently, the new member states now also participate in the EU Battlegroup Concept. These Battlegroups represent the smallest force package capable of stand-alone operations, including the ability to contribute to an initial entry force. They are comprised of approximately 1.500 troops, based on a combined arms, battalion-sized force package with appropriate combat support and combat service support, including operational and strategic enablers.¹² Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia will contribute to two different EU Battlegroup in the second half

of 2007. The Czech Republic will lead one Battlegroup in late 2009, Poland another one in the first half of 2010.

However, not all steps concerning ESDP are regarded as being positive for Central and Eastern European (CEE) states. Permanent structures in the field of planning and command of ESDP operations would enhance EU capabilities when it comes to streamlining the preparation and implementation of Council decisions related to civil and military actions. But such permanent structures are regarded as a duplication of NATO assets, in this case the alliance's structures in SHAPE, a development pro-Atlanticist states from old and new Europe want to prevent at any cost – which, however, undermines the efficiency of EU civil and military operations.

Operation ALTHEA

At the same time the co-operation between EU and NATO developed in a positive way. Especially on the Balkans the coordination between NATO and ESDP operations has proven to be of great importance for providing stability and security. The EU military operation ALTHEA has taken over NATO tasks in Bosnia-Herzegovina and is currently planning to do the same in Kosovo as soon as the United Nations is able to define a new mandate based on the implementation of an international supported solution for the future status of Kosovo.

But ALTHEA also mirrored the ambivalence of the United States about ESDP progress. *“On the one hand, the United States wanted to reduce its role in Bosnia, and was looking for a convenient way to do it. On the other, it was wary of turning full control of the Bosnia operation over to the EU, fearing this would weaken NATO”*¹³.

American Recollection

Even former US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, who generated the division of old versus new Europe with his speech at the 2003 Munich Security Conference, has returned to a more multilateral approach. In his guidelines for the preparation of the 2006 Quadrennial Defence Review he stressed the importance of revitalization of old alliances. Some experts considered this move to be the beginning of a new strategic triangle between the United States, the EU and NATO. Transatlantic co-operation in the field of security and defence policy is working quite well – at least on the operational level. Despite the success in states and regions where both EU and NATO contribute with a substantial amount of forces the strategic debate has diminished inside NATO, which is not in the interest of the Central-Eastern European states, which

view “NATO as the glue that holds the North Atlantic together”¹⁴. There has also been the attempt of gaining support from NATO’s NC3A agency in The Hague for evaluating EU military capabilities, but due to some EU member states this approach has not been implemented.

4. The Dispute over Missile Defence

Diverging Threat Perception

The transatlantic debate concerning the U.S. plan of a limited missile defence capability including the stationing of interceptors and radar sites in Poland and the Czech Republic is a good example for the current dilemma the partnership between Europe and the United States is facing. Some people argue the whole program would be the initial point of a new arms race in Europe, others fear the political consequences in regard to the harsh Russian criticism. The debate shows the different and in some cases even diverging threat perception American and European politicians display when it comes to future missile threats. There is no common position on whether or when trouble states like Iran will be able to politically blackmail Europe or the US with medium or long-range ballistic missiles equipped with nuclear warheads. U.S. experts believe Iran could possess a long-range missile until the year 2015.¹⁵

Russian Power Game

In February 2007 Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the United States during his speech at the Munich Security Conference to destabilize the international system by unilaterally pushing forward the build-up of missile defence sites in Poland and the Czech Republic. The plan would affect the Russian military nuclear capacity and force Moscow to respond in an adequate manner. Both points of criticism have meanwhile been refuted. Neither have the USA made it a secret that they were planning to build up limited missile-defence capacities within Europe in the recent years, nor is the planned missile defence system in any way directed against Russia.

Lt. General Henry Obering, Director of the American Missile Defence Agency at the U.S. Department of Defence, declared that he has repeatedly informed Russian officials about the U.S. plans in recent years.¹⁶ And U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that it would be anachronistic and unrealistic to call the stationing of ten interceptors and one X-band radar site a threat to Russia’s still huge nuclear arsenal.¹⁷ Interestingly, the already known involvement of the UK as a base for

additional parts of the missile defence system has up to now not been part of the debate, which underlines the assumption that Russia's criticism is not directed at the system as such but at the involvement of states of the former Warsaw Pact zone of influence.

Additional Concerns

The heat of the debate increased with the Polish administration asking the USA to provide them with Patriot PAC-3 missile defence systems against a possible threat from Russia, which immediately was refused by Washington.¹⁸ The USA from the beginning had made it clear that the new sites in Poland and the Czech Republic were not directed against Russia but against a limited ballistic missile attack from the Middle East region. Poland's intention to use the U.S. plan for missile defence to protect itself from Russia turned out to be a more than unpleasant sideswipe at the American efforts to ease Moscow's concern.¹⁹

However, Washington has also to some respect provoked this development. The support by Poland for the US Iraq engagement has not turned out to be a door-opener for American service or payment in return. Poland is not a first-class partner for the US. There has been no substantial investment by US companies in Poland despite a six billion offset treaty with Washington when Warsaw decided to procure American F-16 fighter jets instead of European systems. The US have not moved their bases from Germany to Poland. President W. Bush didn't even find the time to meet with Poland's Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski when he visited the Central European ally. The once positive view of the Polish public on the United States has diminished from 62 percent in 2006 to 38 percent in 2007, a development best described as "*a symptom of unrequited love*"²⁰.

NATO divided

German Chancellor Angela Merkel in her position as President of the EU-Council in the first half of 2007 from the very beginning has shifted the topic to NATO, stressing the importance of consultations with Russia on the level of the NATO-Russia Council. Both the Minister for Foreign Affairs Frank-Walter Steinmeier and the German Defence Minister Franz Josef Jung supported her in this move. But NATO itself has not proven to be a magic potion for solving the dispute. This is not only due to Russia's refusal to discuss this matter within the NATO-Russia Council, but also due to various layers of interest in Western NATO members. In contrast to the official statements after the

recent NATO-meetings there are still unanswered questions within the alliance. One group of member states – e.g. Belgium, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and Luxembourg – is not satisfied with the overall strategy to implement the system as such. They are worried about possible negative consequences for the NATO-Russia relations in the case that Moscow's concerns should be neglected during the further steps. Other states – e.g. Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Turkey – are not satisfied with the current procedures because their territory won't be covered by the current U.S. Missile Defence plan.²¹

No EU Position

The EU's High Representative Javier Solana suggested that the European Union should also discuss this matter even though he agrees that the Union won't play a vital role during the decision making process.²² It has turned out that handing over the issue to NATO has not lead to a satisfying answer in order to solve the dispute between Russia and the West because there are frictions between NATO members as well as inside Europe concerning the efficiency of the whole programme, its interoperability with NATO's own Allied Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence (ATBMD) development, the involvement of Russia, and even the threat it is targeted against.

5. Concluding Remarks

Strategic Incoherence

It seems that with the end of the cold war the common transatlantic view of the world has diminished. While the enlarged European Union is busy with creating and defining its role as an international security actor, the United States has shifted its focus from Europe to other parts of the world. Hence there has been no common strategic debate, neither within NATO nor between the EU and the United States. The development of the NATO concept in the early 1990s and on the 1999 Washington summit of the alliance were merely a reaction to changes that had already taken place. Despite the fact that almost all allies have managed to agree on a common view on the threats and challenges to stability and security at the beginning of the 21st century, the alliance has not developed a common answer to the question of where and when to commit itself to crisis management operations.

The same accounts for the EU-US relations. Security and defense issues are limited to a dialogue within NATO. The annual EU-US summits concentrate rather on economic

issues. The US still cannot decide whether they should regard ESDP as competitor or as a companion. On the one hand Washington is in need of a partner for burden-sharing, on the other hand this partner should not develop in contrast to US interests. The longer the United States fail to fully support the build-up of an effective, capable and willing European partner the deeper the strategic gap between both sides of the Atlantic will be which will have to be filled if the transatlantic security alliance is to survive. *“Many of the premises that governed the relationship between Europe and the United States during the Cold War have changed or disappeared. Even the often-invoked community of values is no longer immune to doubt”*²³. Despite this negative view one should be sceptical whether these are symptoms of a fading Alliance, or if it is just a period of structural and strategic recalibration due to the increasing regional stability within Europe, which stands in contrast to the demanding security environment of other parts in the world. However, both the United States and Europe have up to now not managed to find an alternative to the fading security system of the post-Cold War period.

Strategic Deficit

Europe's strategic deficit, resulting from an enlargement without deepening the integration process, is clearly a great disadvantage for the transatlantic partnership, making it almost impossible to find a common approach towards the pressing challenges in international relations and security policy. The main issue remains to be the impact of globalization on the international struggle for power. The central dilemma in this struggle is that the process of economic interdependence that conduces to the mutual prosperity in the West also leads to the creation of capacities and capabilities that aggravate strategic competition. Nevertheless, Washington is also counting on the pacifying effects of economic interdependence and democracy. Problems between the United States and the EU occur because of the different, if not even diverging, perceptions concerning threats and possible solutions to counter them. For Europe, it is considered best to abandon the arrogance of the weak and try to regain new strength, while at the same time it should overcome the incoherence of the interests of its main actors and finally define itself as an international actor, which deserves to be taken seriously.

Failing Instruments

Today it is not the new member states that provide uncertainty in the transatlantic relations, but rather national interests and differences in the political-strategic culture of

both old and new members concerning their influence on the European level, the role of Europe in the world, and the relationship with NATO. One example for that is the current status of the Berlin-plus arrangement, which provides the opportunity for ESDP to have access to NATO assets if the North Atlantic Alliance as a whole does not contribute to a military operation. While on the side of NATO it is mainly Turkey which prevents further use of Berlin-plus, it is Greece, Cyprus but also France and Spain on the EU-side, which want to build up autonomous capacities instead of falling back on NATO assets. Of course the CEE states prefer the approach of enhancing the Union's military capabilities, but not at the expense of the transatlantic co-operation with NATO and the United States.

The lack of strategic unity is therefore the real threat to effective development of ESDP and good working transatlantic relations in the field of security and defence policy. The enlargement of the European Union underlined the importance of and necessity for further integration efforts in order to streamline the consultation and decision making process. This is not the cause for the current questionable status of the transatlantic security relations that stand at a turning point. EU as well as NATO found themselves *"all but overpowered by major differences of view among its key players and strained by bureaucratic demands of enlargement"*²⁴. It seems therefore possible to reanimate the security co-operation as part of the transatlantic relations, if both organisations manage to free themselves from the bureaucratic weight of enlargement and simultaneous transformation. Common visions and common projects are needed in order to define a new basis for a more pragmatic strategic partnership in the triangle of United States, NATO and the European Union.

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