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# EU - NATO COOPERATION IN THE CBRN FIELD

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*This paper examines the European Union Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence (EU CBRN CoE) initiative and NATO's CBRN defence policy, with particular emphasis on bilateral cooperation between the EU and NATO in addressing CBRN threats. The research traces the establishment of the EU CBRN CoE initiative and analyzes how it promotes international cooperation and synergy with other global actors, especially NATO. Through a historical review of NATO-EU security cooperation, the paper investigates both organizations' CBRN policies, defence capabilities, and current challenges. While focusing on bilateral cooperation, the study also explores how these organizations independently counter CBRN threats. The publication concludes with practical policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of EU-NATO cooperation in CBRN risk reduction, acknowledging the limitations of available public information regarding NATO's CBRN activities.*

**Key words:** *EU CBRN CoE; NATO CBRN defence policy; EU-NATO cooperation; CBRN risk mitigation; international security; bilateral cooperation; defence capabilities; security policy; risk reduction; chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This publication is dedicated to the European Union Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence (EU CBRN CoE) initiative, NATO's CBRN defence policy and NATO-EU bilateral cooperation in the CBRN field. It illustrates how the EU CBRN CoE initiative was launched and provides an analysis of how the EU CBRN CoE initiative promotes international

cooperation and synergy with other international actors, in particular with NATO.

The article also reviews the history of NATO-EU security cooperation and discusses their CBRN policies, defence capabilities and current challenges. The focus is on bilateral cooperation, but also on how these international organisations work separately to counter CBRN threats.

This publication also aims to contribute to the policy-oriented

discussion on how to improve EU-NATO cooperation and to better address CBRN risk reduction policy from a practical point of view. In this respect, this article proposes key recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of joint cooperation between these organisations.

In principle, NATO-EU cooperation in the CBRN domain is a broad and complex issue that cannot be fully covered in this article, especially considering that much of the information on NATO's CBRN activities is not publicly available.

## **2. GEOPOLITICAL CHALLENGES**

It is quite apparent that many of the security threats the world faces today, such as terrorism, cybercrime, pandemics, illicit trafficking, hybrid warfare, regional conflicts that have given rise to forced displacement and uncontrolled migration flows, are interconnected and increasingly complex in themselves. Besides, security risks associated with chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear materials threatens both developing and industrialised countries equally.

In addition to this, the EU's global leadership and security environment have deteriorated as a result of the financial crisis, a collapse of the management of

unexpected and extraordinary migration and the refugee crisis, rising Euroscepticism, and the crises spreading on the EU's frontiers [1]. Basically, after the Cold War, the international system was somewhat dynamic. Many positive events happened during this period of time. New opportunities have been arisen that might allow for a better and ambitious world.

Thirty years after the Cold War, however, it is clear that Europe continues to face increasingly complex threats and new challenges. Illegal immigration and, more recently, terrorism and organised crime have emerged as new dangers and threats [2].

In recent years, the world has been confronted with scenarios such as nuclear disasters like Fukushima, chemical warfare in Syria, the Ebola epidemic in West Africa and the COVID 19 global pandemic.

After the attacks of 11 September 2001, the international community increased their vigilance with regard to the possibility of the terrorist use of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons and subsequently came to the agreement that there was a high risk of use of the CBRN materials by terrorists.

With the 2001 "anthrax letter" attacks, as well as with the use of Sarin gas in a Tokyo subway, there was a clear illustration of this line of thought. It is important to note that

there are still attempts to obtain CBRN materials as well as to use them for terrorist purposes.

Several authors have described factors that make chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear terrorist events unique and demanding. What needs to be emphasised is that the IS terrorist attacks became the turning point with regard to changing Europe's security dimensions significantly and, currently, countering terrorist access to CBRN agents and materials is a currently top priority for the EU and NATO.

For instance, 21 August 2013 saw the most serious CBRN crisis since 2003. There was evidence of mass chemical weapon (CW) bombing of areas surrounding the Syrian capital that resulted in the deaths of 1,400 Syrians. It should be noted that it was the biggest chemical weapons attack since Saddam Hussein's bombardment of Halabja, Iran, in 1988 (with 5,000 deaths) [3].

Besides, the IS Paris attacks on 13 November 2015 showed an increased threat of new skills acquired by jihadists returning to their home countries, as well as radicalised groups and individuals.

Furthermore, recent war in Ukraine and policies enacted by Russia have reduced stability and changed the EU security environment. The use of the Novichok nerve agent in Salisbury

in March 2018 was the first such attack on European soil since World War II and subsequently resulted in the death of an EU citizen [4].

All these incidents demonstrate the importance of close cooperation among countries in the CBRN field at the regional and international levels, because the process of the globalisation and intensive industrialisation increase the potential risk of CBRN hazards.

From the analysis carried out by Bonfanti and Capone (2005), certain questions have arisen regarding addressing this issue, for instance: what kind of legal and political framework exists and which instruments have been developed to prevent and respond to this kind of emergency? Are the EU Member States up to this task? What is the state of the European security environment [5]?

These questions became actual and logical because they respond to the starting discussion point about the series of attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015, where terrorists attacked six places synchronously so as to split the targets of counter-terrorist forces [6].

In recent years, threats to European security have become more complex, hybrid, asymmetric, rapidly evolving and difficult to predict. As such, they are beyond the capacity of any single state and therefore require, more than ever, a

coherent, comprehensive, multi-faceted and coordinated response.

The evolution of global CBRN threats, and indeed the response to these threats, has been highly visible since the first use of chemical weapons in the First World War. In the last fifteen to twenty years, the threat of a terrorist group acquiring CBRN materials has somehow forced governments and international organisations to adopt relevant regulations and programmes to protect populations from CBRN risks and hazards [7].

So, bearing in mind the lessons learned from these terrible incidents, by 2005 the European Union had developed a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy which builds on four pillars, namely “prevent, protect, disrupt, and respond.” It should be noted that the second pillar of the EU counter-terrorism strategy, namely “protect”, deals with the issue of CBRN and highlights the importance of strengthening the cooperation with international organisations and partners, as well as offering technical assistance to third countries so as to prevent the proliferation of CBRN materials.

The fact is that Britain's exit, the US administration under Donald Trump and its statements on the EU and NATO, US relations with Russia and Turkey, and the migration and refugee crisis have all

played a positive role in this process and have subsequently led to the mobilisation of common political goals and objectives within the EU. The European Union is committed to a global order based on international law, including the principles of the UN Charter and the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty.

Given the global nature of security threats, CBRN risks cannot be addressed in isolation due to their multidimensional nature (health, environment, security, crisis management), as demonstrated by the Syrian chemical threat and more recently by the COVID-19 pandemic.

More than ever, there is a need for a stronger Europe that acts in a unified manner at the global level to address the many global challenges that directly or indirectly affect the security of individual states and their citizens.

The EU and NATO must therefore promote a culture of CBRN security in Europe and internationally. The aim is twofold: to prevent CBRN incidents and to strengthen the capacity of partners to respond to such incidents in order to protect people, the environment and critical infrastructure.

### **3. WHAT IS EUROPEAN UNION CHEMICAL, BIOLOGICAL, RADIOLOGICAL AND NUCLEAR RISK MITIGATION CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE (EU CBRN COE) INITIATIVE?**

As a global actor, the EU has always considered CBRN threats and risks to be a major challenge to security and peace around the world. For instance, disease surveillance, waste management, emergency planning, early warning, civil protection, export control of dual-use goods, cross-border trafficking of CBRN materials, retraining and alternative employment of former weapons scientists, are areas of concern both to the EU and its partner countries.

The EU CBRN Risk Mitigation CoE Initiative is the EU's largest civilian external security programme funded and implemented by the EU through the IcSP, with a budget of €130 million for 2014-2020. This is the EU's main instrument of international cooperation supporting security initiatives and peace-building activities in Partner Countries [8].

The EU Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence (EU CBRN CoE) were launched in 2010 under the European External

Cooperation Instrument for Stability (IfS), as an initiative of the European Union (EU). This initiative is implemented and funded by the European Commission in cooperation with the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI). The European External Action Service (EEAS) is also deeply involved in the follow up to the Initiative.

The EU CBRN Centres of Excellence (CoE) Initiative aims to mitigate chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats and risks from outside the EU that may create a threat to the EU.

The main objectives of EU policy in this respect are highlighted in Article 4.2 of the former Instrument for Stability (IfS), and of Article 5 1-b of the Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP, 2014). It should be noted that the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence, an innovative EU initiative, has been welcomed at the international level by the UN Security Council and the G8 Global Partnership.

The CoE Initiative has been developed with the technical support of relevant international/regional organisations, the EU Member States, and other stakeholders through coherent and effective cooperation at national, regional, and international levels. This approach involves multilateral partnerships between the European

Union and its 27 Member States with more than 63 countries worldwide and focus on regional cooperation.

For instance, the CoE Initiative covers the EU Southern and Eastern neighbourhood, the Middle East, the Gulf, Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. In total, these regions are covered by eight CoE regional secretariats worldwide. CBRN risk mitigation has now become a significant dimension of EU cooperation with other regions worldwide.

It was therefore started as a new methodology for providing technical assistance to countries outside the EU. Specifically, the CoE Initiative aims at assisting partner countries in the development of national CBRN policies/strategy and building capacities to effectively mitigate safety and security risks posed by chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear materials. The origin of these risks can be criminal (proliferation, theft, sabotage, and illicit trafficking), accidental (industrial catastrophes, in particular chemical or nuclear, waste treatment and transport), or natural (mainly pandemics but also be the consequence of natural hazards on CBRN material and facilities).

The 2014–2016 Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa and the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020, and also incidents such as the Fukushima

nuclear reactor meltdown in 2011, the use of sarin and chlorine gas in Iraq and Syria, and of the nerve agent VX at Kuala Lumpur airport in February 2017, are stark reminders of the dangers that can ensue when CBRN risks occur.

One of the main goals of the EU CBRN CoE Initiative is to respond to the increasing global public concern about chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear risks and to boost cooperation at national, regional, and international levels, and hence to develop a coherent CBRN risk mitigation policy. Such risk mitigation includes prevention, preparedness and post-crisis management.

It should be stressed that the CBRN Centres of Excellence can be considered a unified platform for all of the CBRN domains, such as border monitoring, illicit trafficking, export control, biosafety and biosecurity, etc.

In addition to the development of the National CBRN Action Plan/Strategy in CoE partner countries, the CoE has, for example, pursued improved CBRN risk mitigation policies in CoE partner countries through the tailored assistance packages (19 actions in five regions, €21.5 million in 2011). Currently, more than 100 CoE regional projects have been implemented and 24 are ongoing in the 8 regions.

Due to CBRN threats knowing no borders, the EU cannot restrict its actions to EU territories. Taking this into account, the European Council, the Council of the European Union, and the European Parliament [9] have systematically stressed the importance of linking the EU's internal and external security policies, which itself covers CBRN matters.

In practice, the initiative enhances the protection of partner countries and EU citizens against events that may have widespread and serious cross-border consequences. More generally, the Centres of Excellence promote the development of and focus on multilateral cooperation. Ultimately, the Centres of Excellence contribute to peace, security and prosperity.

#### **4. NATO AND ITS CBRN DEFENCE POLICIES**

In principle, the preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty sets out the basic principles that should guide NATO's security policy. For example, the peace, freedom, heritage, stability and prosperity of each NATO member are principles that NATO must collectively protect.

As mentioned above, the dangers and threats posed by CBRN incidents are extremely serious. Therefore, not only states but also

international organisations should be prepared to deal with this problem properly. All these threats and dangers have a direct impact on the security of EU and NATO member states.

Actually, the situation in the case of a large-scale CBRN incident is critical. The definition of a large-scale incident is given by NATO (2019a, pp. 3-4), clarified it in the following way: a CBRN incident which is *“large enough to stress a nations capacity to respond effectively”* [10].

Generally, there are different types of CBRN incidents which can occur: first, attack by a non-state actor like a terrorist group, and second, a CBRN incident caused by a state actor like the 2018 Salisbury attack [11]. The incident within Salisbury shows that if states have sufficient capability and goodwill to counter CBRN incidents, at least on the local level, this does not require military assistance so as to put into operation Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty [12].

However, even if CBRN incidents do not have a serious impact on state security itself, such as the Salisbury attacks, they still pose a high risk to the general population, which is why any country can request NATO or EU assistance in this situation.

As a state actor, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its military

aggression against the Ukrainian people has created a new reality on the global security agenda.

Besides, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is still attempting to expand its nuclear arsenal and missile potentiality in violation of the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions. Kim Jong-Nam, who was poisoned by a nerve agent in Malaysia in 2017, shows that the DPRK is capable of using prohibited weapons outside its borders.

The evolution of the Syrian conflict has also raised massive concerns about the threat of chemical weapons. The use of sarin gas in the Syrian war (in the Ghouta area, a suburb of Damascus) on 21 August 2013 demonstrates the increasing need to plan and conduct military operations under CBRN conditions [13].

As for non-state actors, such as terrorists, there is international evidence that non-state actors have already used chemical weapons in Syria. Also, non-state actors will attempt to weaponize toxic industrial chemicals. Moreover, scientific and technological developments mostly have allowed increased access to CBRN materials and have reduced the barriers to acquiring such materials. So, the risk of the use of CBRN materials by non-state actors remains actual [14].

Thus, NATO today faces a security environment in which CBRN threats have become more numerous and diverse, in which state and non-state actors pose a major threat to the use of weapons of mass destruction, and in which technological developments are rapidly increasing these risks [15].

It therefore remains an open question whether NATO or the EU have sufficient resources and capabilities to deal adequately with CBRN incidents.

Thus, NATO's CBRN Defence is based on two complementary principles and obligations: the first embraces Alliance commitments to develop and maintain the necessary CBRN defence capabilities, including intelligence, personnel, equipment, policies, plans, exercises and training, whilst the second includes the protection of society and the necessary resilience against CBRN threats.

Remarkably, NATO's CBRN defence doctrine provides guidance and instructions on how to tackle CBRN threats. In practical terms, this document defines an applicable approach to addressing this issue. It can be stated that the policy encompasses different stages, *inter alia* the prevention of the proliferation of WMDs, protection against WMDs and CBRN attacks, and recovering from a WMD attack or CBRN incident. With respect to

each area, NATO take particular actions so as to prevent a WMD attack or CBRN incident.

Also, the focus is to ensure that NATO has sufficient ability to react to and recover from a CBRN incident or WMD attack [16]. In the case of WMD attack, NATO is ready to use its military capabilities so as to disrupt, deny, and defeat the use of WMDs, to protect Alliance populations and territories, and to assist partners.

NATO's CBRN Defence Policy covers complementary commitments to provide necessary military capacities and thereby enhance NATO's flexibility against CBRN threats [17]. This policy supports the goals presented in the new Strategic Concept. A new strategic doctrine adopted by the Heads of State and Government at the 1999 Washington Summit has committed NATO to 'actively contribute' to the development of arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation agreements, and reduce the threats arising from the proliferation of WMDs and their means of delivery [18].

NATO's CBRN Defence Policy is also in line with its Military Strategy and supports the implementation of this document, including the Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area and the NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept. It

further complements the Comprehensive Cyber Defence Policy, the Strategy on NATO's Role in Countering Hybrid Warfare, and the Coherent Implementation Strategy on Emerging and Disruptive Technologies [19].

NATO has taken an important step towards establishing a Senior Politico-Military Group on Proliferation (SGP). It has committed itself to an effective response to proliferation [20]. Furthermore, In May 2000, the NATO Weapons of Mass Destruction Centre was opened to provide a focal point for NATO expertise and to support the work of the SGP. Notably, the Centre itself comprises an interdisciplinary team with expertise in chemical and biological weapons, ballistic missiles, intelligence and the political aspects of arms control and non-proliferation regimes. Most importantly, the Centre has a special focus on Russia.

Notably, the process of overestimation and improvement of the role and objective of NATO missions began to be discussed at global level on the 13 September 2006 at the Allied Transformation Headquarters in Norfolk (USA).

Later, the Summit in Riga on 28-29 November, 2006 was dedicated to sufficient analysis of the organisation's transformation in terms of changing world security

and of post-bipolar system risks [21]. The most important fact in this context has been the adoption of the comprehensive political guidance at the Riga Summit. By its adoption, NATO took steps towards its military transformation for the next 10-15 years, determining the limitations of the organisation's transformation, its means and capabilities, as well as modification of the defence planning policy.

NATO's security environment has become more complex and challenging since 2009, when Allies approved *NATO's Comprehensive, Strategic-Level Policy for Preventing the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and Defending against Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Threats.*"

From the standpoint of M. Mureşan and D. Muresan, NATO's future role is very much defined by its transformation "*which makes it capable to fulfil new and complex missions for the 21st century, in a world globally threatened by terrorism and the mass destruction weapons and marked by unconventional and asymmetrical risk [...].*" [22]

In order to properly fulfil NATO's core missions and respond effectively to all these challenges, in particular to protect itself against a wide range of CBRN threats, the Alliance should enhance its CBRN

defence capabilities at the operational level.

The mechanism dealing with CBRN threats used by NATO is the so-called 'Clearing House Mechanism'. In case of any NATO Member State, partner country, or partner organisation, such as the UN, asking for assistance, their request is redirected to the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC). The Centre is obliged to send it on to all other NATO Member States. In response to this, a Member State that has sufficient resources and supplies at its disposal can assist the country requesting assistance. The EADRCC itself provide assistance in the delivery and deployment of such resources [23].

Actually, military CBRN defence capabilities make it possible for NATO forces to rapidly deploy for and quickly recover from the consequences of CBRN incidents, as well as to further support the recovery of affected populations, territories, and forces. The COVID-19 pandemic reaffirmed the importance of civil-military cooperation in a crisis.

In fact, in the instance of a large-scale CBRN incident when national first responders' response capabilities are overloaded or incapable of responding appropriately, national military capabilities are used. Nevertheless,

such military CBRN defence capabilities might be limited [24].

The Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defence Battalion was established in 2003 to provide CBRN defence capabilities in circumstances other than CBRN incidents, including during conflict. However, the battalion is also deployed in instances of natural disasters and industrial accidents. The CBRN Defence Battalion is *“capable of reconnaissance, monitoring, sampling, identifying and detection of CBRN-related subjects, as well as providing CBRN assessments and hazard management [25].”*

Important changes to the PCC were offered by the creation of a CBRN defence task force, entitled the “Combined Joint CBRN Defence Task Force” (CJ-CBRND-TF). It comprised a CBRN Joint assessment Team (CBRN-JAT) and a CBRN Defence Battalion (CBRN-Bn) tackling reconnaissance, monitoring, sampling, and detection of CBRN substances, as well as decontamination [26]. Both are well trained and experienced and are fully capable of operating effectively during military conflict [27].

It is therefore safe to say that NATO's CBRN defence capabilities are capable of preventing the development, possession, proliferation and use of WMD materials, technologies and means of

delivery. This pathos is also enshrined in the defence policy, according to which NATO forces *“will be ready to deny access to CBRN materials and their means of delivery, disable and dispose of WMD and CBRN materials in operational contexts, respond against the source of any WMD attack, mitigate the effects of CBRN use, and eliminate an aggressor’s WMD capabilities” [28].*

Moreover, NATO’s 2022 CBRN Defence Policy creates an appropriate framework through which the planning, exercising, training, equipping, and assessing of NATO capabilities to counter WMD proliferation and CBRN threats are available [29].

Today, one might ask whether NATO, as a major military organisation, has an important role to play in disaster response. The answer is simple. Although NATO plays an important role in this area, it is not a major humanitarian organisation.

The establishment of a NATO Rapid Reaction Corps underlined NATO’s need to become involved in crises management, peace keeping/building, and humanitarian assistance [30].

Nevertheless, if we take a historical perspective, we can see disaster response and humanitarian operations undertaken by NATO almost 60 years ago. In 1953, the

Alliance provided assistance to Belgium and the Netherlands [31]. Both countries had been damaged by floods. Besides, NATO has provided assistance to many countries, not only within but also outside NATO [32].

## **5. NATO NETWORK OF CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE (COES) - JCBRN DEFENCE COE**

What is NATO's Joint CBRN Defence Centre of Excellence (JCBRN Defence CoE)?

The mission of the JCBRN Defence CoE is to: “a) Provide advice in all CBRN defence related areas; b) develop CBRN defence doctrines, standards, knowledge to support improvement of interoperability and capabilities; c) provide opportunities to enhance education and individual training; d) directly support NATO's collective training; e) contribute to the relevant lessons learned processes and lead the CBRN portion; f) direct support to ACT's Training Requirements Analysis (TRA) process; and g) within a Programme of Work (POW) approved by the Steering Committee (SC), assist NATO, Sponsoring Nations (SNs), and other international institutions or organisations in their CBRN defence related efforts, including validation through experimentation [33].”

JCBRND CoE is based in Vyškov, Czech Republic, and is commanded by a Czech army colonel. It comprises a directorate and four departments. The Staff is multinational and 30 out of 81 positions are open to Allied personnel. There are twelve Sponsoring Nations and one Contributing Partner: Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, United Kingdom, and the United States [34].

It has been pointed out that JCBRND CoE plays an important role in CBRN capability development efforts [35]. Furthermore, NATO Centres of Excellence represent an expertise network for the Alliance. The JCBRN Defence CoE “*serves as a critical focal point for CBRN defence-related analysis, insight, and innovation.*” [36] The special training, capacity-building, CBRN defence concept and doctrines, as well as modelling and simulation, are provided by the NATO Centres of Excellence.

In addition, the JCBRN Defence CoE organise NATO CBRN “Reachback capabilities process” [37], which provides assistance to the deployed forces. This assistance can be seen as comprehensive advice on CBRN hazards and defensive countermeasures in the process of

dealing with WMD proliferation, protection, and recovery [38].

In 2018, the Joint Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defence Centre of Excellence (JCBRN Defence CoE) adopted a document entitled “Cross-border Cooperation in case of CBRN incidents”. This document includes “an analysis of civil military cooperation between NATO and individual nations in case of a large-scale CBRN incident.” (JCBRN Defence CoE, 2018).

This document is also the basis for the JCBRN Defence CoE Advisors Conference. The first Conference was held in Prague, Czech Republic, from 17 – 19 September 2019. This conference was attended by 39 participants from 10 countries as well as participants from international organisations. Participant countries included the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, and the United States of America. As for the participants from international organisations, these included NATO Headquarters – International Staff, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), and JCBRN Defence CoE [39].

The main outcomes of this conference can be seen as the development of a joint-military concept for NATO coordination on CBRN consequence management

issues, the review of NATO's Advisory Support Teams (AST) and Rapid Reaction Teams (RRT), the introduction of biological and chemical incidents into scenario-based discussions (SBD) at the North Atlantic Council (NAC) level, and the introduction of large-scale incidents into NATO's major exercises [40]. The most important recommendation of the conference was to strengthen NATO-EU cooperation concerning civil-military cooperation in the CBRN domain [41].

In order to further develop CBRN defence capabilities, the JCBRN Defence CoE developed the network of partner organisations including international organisations, governmental and non-governmental organisations, nations, and other institutions. Moreover, the NATO JCBRN Defence CoE's cooperation with the EU CBRN CoEs continues to be a high priority for both NATO and the EU.

In addition to the Joint CBRN Defence CoE, there are other NATO CoEs and education and training facilities which play important role in CBRN defence, for instance, the Defence against Terrorism CoE, Military Medicine CoE, Maritime Security CoE, Explosive Ordnance Disposal CoE, Strategic Communications CoE, and the

NATO Maritime Interdiction Operational Training Centre.

## **6. NATO-EU CBRN BILATERAL COOPERATION: COMMON AND DIVERGENT INTERESTS**

The EU and NATO have shared interests, both strategically and operationally, especially to support international peace and security in crisis management and to develop their defence capabilities [42].

It is important to bear in mind that CBRN incidents require coordination at many levels in order to respond effectively. Historically, the EU and NATO have worked well in the Balkans and in Afghanistan, even though formal relations are not fully defined. Both therefore need to strengthen their strategic partnership at the operational level, while fully respecting the decision-making autonomy of each organisation.

At the strategic level, both NATO and the EU have approved their non-binding guidelines or plans to ensure cooperation and CBRN defence/risk mitigation. NATO's non-binding guidelines and the EU Action Plan can be mentioned in this regard.

It is notable that the "EU Action plan to enhance preparedness against CBRN security risks", adopted in 2017, focused on building stronger

internal and external links with key regional and international EU partners (preparedness and response) and enhancing knowledge on CBRN risks [43]. Because these plans embrace the individual vision of each organisation, there is a need to enhance mutual cooperation despite the differences in their operating procedures [44].

According to the paper "EU preparedness against CBRN weapons", there are ongoing efforts to strengthen cooperation between NATO and the EU, including in the CBRN domain [45]. As reported in the above paper (drafted by the Policy Department for External Relations), "*The CBRN Action Plan stresses the need for close cooperation with key partners and organisations. However, some European Member States made it clear that the European Union's own capacity-building initiatives should not compete with those of NATO. Taking into account political considerations, available resources but also challenges related to CBRN threats, it is thus crucial to develop closer cooperation with the Organisation and avoid duplication.*" This is why active communication and close partnership between NATO and the EU is crucial.

In fact, because of military organisation and due to the main objective of NATO is collective

defence, it is countering vast range of threats by strengthening its deterrence and defence, helping to prevent and manage crisis situations and encouraging cooperative security, as enshrined in the 2022 Strategic Concept. As for the EU, the main objective of this organisation is to promote peace, follow the EU's values, and improve the wellbeing of nations.

It should be pointed out that the Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation adopted by the Heads of State and Government in Lisbon on 19 November 2010 underlines the importance of cooperation with the EU in the view of the fact that the EU is both a 'unique' and 'essential' partner to NATO [46].

NATO's Strategic Concept outlined that the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and their means of delivery, threatens incalculable consequences for global stability and prosperity [47]. It also declares that NATO would commence to deal with all stages of such a crisis [48].

Furthermore, NATO's Comprehensive, Strategic-Level Policy for Preventing the Proliferation of the WMD and Defending Against CBRN Threats, planning for CBRN consequence management represents a

multidimensional effort. It requires not only coordination within the organisation at all levels, but also with other international organisations [49].

As far as the European Union is concerned, the European Council decided to deepen defence cooperation with NATO through the adoption of an EU-NATO Joint Declaration on cooperation on hybrid threats, operational cooperation, cyber security, defence capabilities, industry and research, exercises and capacity building.

NATO follows a partnerships format for which CBRN defence and resilience are focus areas. It can be noted that CBRN defence is a main element of engagement with regional partnership groupings such as the Partnership for Peace, Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. Bearing in mind the transnational factors of CBRN threats, NATO realised that "*strengthening the CBRN defence of its partners helps to sustain the overall security of the Alliance* [50]."

In addition, staff-to-staff communication between NATO and the EU is essential. Usually, both organisations organise *ad hoc* meetings, if needed. In addition, there are different channels used by both NATO and the EU in the realm of CBRN/risk mitigation, including workshops, meetings, and

conferences. For instance, the workshop “Resilience and cross-sectoral cooperation in responding to CBRN threats with hybrid elements” took place in July 2019 [51].

Also, structured Dialogue meetings are conducted at least twice a year in which NATO International Staff (IS), International Military Staff (IMS), and different bodies of the EU, such as the European External Action Service (EEAS), gather together to discuss CBRN defence/risk mitigation and NATO-EU cooperation as well. Also, liaison officers are periodically contribute to communication and cooperation between NATO and the EU [52].

In addition to formal agreements, there are informal channels of communication that have played an important role in the development of NATO-EU relations (Græger, 2016) [53]. Such forms of cooperation include personal relationships among staff.

Also, the NATO Secretary General took part in an informal meeting between EU foreign ministers, especially concerning the annexation of Ukraine (NATO, 2014) [54]. In addition, numerous formal and informal cooperation have been organised within the operation of Concordia. From these few examples, it can be seen how important informal cooperation has been for both organisations.

It is reasonable to highlight that one of the most active channels in cooperation and communication between the two institutions in CBRN domains has been set up within the framework of the EU CBRN CoE Initiative. For example, NATO assists the EU CBRN CoE Initiative in developing their training curriculum and, from a practical perspective, invites participants from the EU CBRN CoE partner countries to participate in NATO’s training as organised through the NATO joint CBRN Defence Centre of Excellence (Vyškov, Czech republic).

So, this is an excellent opportunity for CBRN practitioners from the EU CBRN CoE regions/partner countries to participate in advanced CBRN training with live agents and to accordingly enhance professional knowledge and skills on how to tackle CBRN incidents. This is also a practical implementation of an idea of networking EU and non-EU CBRN training facilities.

The first training course, where practitioners and relevant national experts from EU CBRN CoE partner countries from the Southeast and Eastern Europe CoE Regional Secretariats (SEEE), and from the Gulf and Middle East CoE Regional Secretariat participated, was held on 2-6 October 2017.

Selection of participants from the NATO JCBRN CoE and the EC on the basis of the CVs of the proposed trainees after receipt of the candidatures from the respective CoE partner countries. Following sessions of the Live Agent Training (LAT) at the NATO Joint CBRN Centre of Excellence in Vyskov were held in 2018 and on 30 September - 4 October 2019. The CoE countries of the EU CBRN CoE Initiative were again invited to participate.

In addition, Horizon 2020 can be seen as a good example of successful cooperation between NATO and the EU while working on the e-NOTICE project [55]. Also, the joint work within the framework of the Joint CBRN Defence Capability Development Group, the Joint CBRN Defence CoE, and the Nations Concept Cluster CBRN Protection should be mentioned in this respect. So, it can be stated that NATO, together with its partners, organises joint exercises and shares CBRN defence-related expertise, knowledge, and information.

As can be seen, the security of both organisations is interrelated. However, there are differences in the interests and approaches of EU Member States in the CBRN field. Moreover, certain facts show that the cooperation between NATO and the EU is limited. Therefore, their cooperation in the CBRN field needs

to be modified in order to work comfortably.

As argued by Juncker, Soltenberg and Tusk (2016), there are still some obstacles between the two organisations that hinder successful cooperation [56].

As stated by Elizaveth Tamara Janette Bijl, “*there are no systems, mandates or procedures for the common cooperation between NATO and EU, which are accepted by all members and at all levels of NATO and EU* [57].”

In her view, today, NATO-EU cooperation is not good enough, “*which was wanted during the signing of the Joint Declarations [--].*” [58] She believes that there are many reasons for this. According to her, one of the barriers to cooperation between NATO and the EU is a lack of trust which “*leads to other obstacles of cooperation such as communication problems, lack motivation to cooperate [---.]*” [59]

As believed by E. Tamara Janette Bijl, NATO-EU cooperation should continue in a permanent manner rather than just being occasional in nature. So, she evaluates this cooperation “*as partially unprepared, especially if action has to be taken quickly and effectively* [60].”

In view of the fact that both organisations operate in the same geographical area, similar threats can be characterised by each. The

fact is that NATO and the EU share twenty-one Member States, where NATO have nine non-shared Member States and the EU have only six. Nevertheless, both organisations have particular peculiarities that influence their key objectives and tasks. Basically, there are several factors that can influence the dissimilarities in the EU Member States' policies and interests regarding CBRN policy, particularly WMD non-proliferation.

The fact is that some EU Member States are members of NATO and others are not, and this can indeed influence their nuclear weapons policies. For this reason, the EU's relationship with NATO has experienced some obstacles.

For example, France's policy towards the NPT was initially negative, especially before the 1990s. The main reason for this was that France was seeking to develop its own nuclear capabilities. After developing its own nuclear arsenal, France eventually became a party to the NPT (1992), and its subsequent contribution to EU non-proliferation policy has been particularly visible [61].

Besides, EU Member States have different energy interests, which surely affects their policies in this regard. The fact is that some Member States want to use their nuclear capabilities for purely peaceful purposes. Some EU

Member States are against using such capabilities at all.

In general, those EU Member States which are also members of the NATO Alliance are actively supporting the Alliance's nuclear policy in accordance with the defence commitments within this framework [62].

Another is the use of NATO's military force in a crisis. According to Lindstrom and Tardy, for example, this difference can be seen in NATO's position on the use of military force. Moreover, political obstacles existed between certain members (Greece, Turkey) of NATO and/or the EU that may additionally reflect on their cooperation.

None of this, however, has had a significant impact on the mutual understanding and bilateral cooperation between NATO and the EU as a whole. Moreover, together they have the capacity to mobilise a wide range of instruments and resources to address the challenges that remains.

In general terms, to set up successful cooperation between two powerful international organisations is an ambitious and complex issue that requires a lot of effort in order to deal with the disagreements and obstacles between them in a satisfactory way.

### 6.1. Joint Declarations

NATO and the EU signed joint declarations on their partnership in 2016 and 2018. The first addressed the “unprecedented challenges” to both organisations. Actually, it encompasses hybrid- and cyberthreats, increasing resilience, defence industry, coordination on exercises, education, training, information sharing, and migration. The key objectives of cooperation are set out in the Joint NATO-EU declaration of 2016, namely, *“In light of the common challenges we are now confronting we have to step up our efforts: we need new ways of working together and a new level of ambition; because our security is interconnected; because together we can mobilise a broad range of tools to respond to the challenges we face; and because we have to make the most efficient use of resources. A stronger NATO and a stronger EU are mutually reinforcing. Together they can better provide security in Europe and beyond.”*

The second strategic partnership declaration signed in 2018 revised the previous one with a view to addressing more issues than were enshrined in 2016. It reaffirmed the importance of a continued cooperation and states: *“NATO and the European Union are strengthening cooperation in a range of areas, including military mobility, counter-terrorism,*

*resilience to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear-related risks, and promoting the women, peace and security agenda.”*

The second declaration demonstrated that there was an important development concerning nuclear risks as well as progress in the CBRN realm. This document covers staff-to-staff dialogues, workshops, scenarios-based discussions and, most importantly, cooperation between CBRN Centres of Excellence of both organisations/NATO and the EU. Also, in order to counter hybrid threats, NATO and EU set up hybrid analysis offices at the cooperative level. For instance, NATO established the Hybrid Analysis Branch, and the EU created the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell [63].

Both Joint Declarations underline the need, importance, and willingness for cooperation between the two organisations. They declare that daily communication is crucial and becoming the norm [64].

So, in accordance with the declarations, both organisations state that EU efforts will be complementary to NATO in its tasks. Indeed, nobody can replace NATO in the security realm on the European continent, but the EU should become a partner with the purpose of establishing itself as a security provider, despite having less means and tools than NATO [65].

It is reasonable to highlight that one of the objectives enshrined in the EU Global Strategy is about the synergy and consolidation of the NATO-EU partnership. More specifically, the EU Global Strategy concludes: “*while NATO exists to defend its members, most of which-European countries, from outside attacks, Europeans need to be better prepared, trained and organised, to be able to contribute decisively to these collective efforts, and act independently if and when it is needed. For Europe to promote peace and to guarantee security on its territory and beyond is of extreme importance to have the necessary ambition and certain level of strategic autonomy [66].*”

According to the Council Conclusions on implementing the EU Global Strategy and the European Defence Action Plan, the essential element of broader cooperation is to strengthen “*the Union’s ability to act as a security provider [67].*”

## **6.2. Joint Declaration on ESDP**

It is important to note that the first declaration which encompass the possibilities of NATO-EU cooperation was the EU-NATO Declaration on European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), signed in 2002. The document declared that the relationship between the

European Union and NATO would be based on the strategic partnership. It stated the need for: “*ensuring that the crisis management activities of the two organisations are mutually reinforcing, while recognising that the European Union and NATO are organisations of a different nature; Effective mutual consultation, dialogue, cooperation and transparency; Equality and due regard for the decision-making autonomy and interests of the European Union and NATO; Respect for the interests of the Member States of the European Union and NATO [68].*”

So, the ‘EU-NATO Declaration on ESDP’ is based on shared values. Furthermore, the strategic partnership established between the European Union and NATO in crisis management addressed the challenges of the new century [69].

As can be seen, the most important thing is that the decision-making procedures should be based on the principles of reciprocity, without prejudice to the specific features of the security and defence policy of any Member State. Indeed, both organisations have specific characteristic features based on their own interests. So, it is very important that they should cooperate in full respect for each other’s autonomy.

Also, it needs to be taken into account that, in accordance with this

declaration, the European Union is ensuring the fullest possible involvement of non-EU European members of NATO within the ESDP, which is very important. NATO itself, in coordination with the partners, supports the ESDP as a significant part of European integration in terms of European Security. In addition, the High Representative and Vice President of the European Commission have established a direct channel in cooperation with NATO, which places “the EU in a favourable position [70].”

### **6.3. Berlin Plus Agreement**

In the partnership between NATO and the European Union, the Berlin Plus Agreement (BPA) must be mentioned as an important document signed in 2003. This agreement once again reaffirmed that NATO and the European Union would work together to prevent and resolve crises and armed conflict in Europe and beyond. They have both also decided to develop cooperation to combat terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction [71].

Berlin Plus covers the main elements of cooperation, *inter alia*: a) assured access of the EU to NATO planning capabilities with a view to effective use in the context of military planning of EU-led crisis

management operations; b) assured access to NATO’s collective assets and capabilities (communication units, headquarters, etc.) for EU-led crisis management operations; and c) integration into NATO’s longstanding defence planning system regarding the military requirements and capabilities which may be needed for EU-led military operations, in order to guarantee the availability of well-equipped forces trained for either NATO-led or EU-led operations, etc [72].

As claimed by Simon J. Smith, Berlin Plus can be reproduced from the agreements of 1996 between NATO and the Western European Union (Smith, 2013) [73].

De Hoop Scheffer argued that the BPA can be considered a milestone in NATO-EU relations (de Hoop Scheffer, 2007) [74]. However, he outlines that the BPA is only one which better match a situation in which the EU operate, especially when NATO is out of the same area (de Hoop Scheffer, 2008) [75]. In accordance with the document, NATO can provide support for EU operations even if NATO, as an organisation, is not directly involved [76].

Later, de Hoop Scheffer (2008) concluded that the BPA limits certain activities and has been seen “*too often [as] a straitjacket rather than a facilitator.*” Smith agrees with him as he considers the formal

arrangement to be constraining, rather than enabling [77].

Since the BPA, NATO and the EU cooperated with each other through Operation Concordia, which has been the first operation led by the EU, under the BPA. Operation Concordia has operated under the mandate of the EU and the command system and rules was managed by the EU. It is noteworthy that, on the strategic level, the Political and Security Committee (PSC) of EU and NATO's North Atlantic Council (NAC) (Mace, 2004) were responsible for the cooperation [78].

From the perspective of Lynch and Missiroli, it can be outlined that the objective of operation Concordia has been one of supporting a stable and secure environment and ensuring successful implementation of the Ohrid framework [79] since 2001 [80].

## 7. SUMMARY

The following conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of the documents/treaties and CBRN policies of both organisations: NATO and the EU share similar values, as enshrined in their Founding Treaties and reflected in their two Joint Declarations. Thus, their CBRN policies cover common principles, norms, values, defence

and security policies, as well as common member states.

As for the dissimilarities, they can be seen in their crisis management and CBRN plans that regulate procedures on how to tackle CBRN incidents. Also, differences can be seen in non-shared Member States interest and in the ambitions to preserve the autonomy of their country at the international level. In addition, it is important to bear in mind that decisions are taken by consensus in NATO and by consensus (sanctions) and qualified majority of countries in the EU. It depends mostly on the issues under discussion.

It can be stated that communication remains one of the most critical aspects of cooperation and coordination. As mentioned previously, basically, communication between these two organisations is ongoing in the form of *ad hoc* communication or via a mediator such as UN OCHA [81].

However, regardless of a few exceptions, generally speaking the members of NATO and the EU stand ready to intensify cooperation not only within the framework of these organisations but also beyond, in other formats of cooperation [82].

As already mentioned, the main issues with bilateral cooperation between NATO and the EU are related to hybrid threats, terrorism, migration, cyberthreats, and a large-

scale CBRN incident. So, both institutions require support from each other as well as assistance from other institutions in order to properly address any of the abovementioned challenges.

It is important to note that the benefits of sharing resources, capabilities and knowledge are remarkable and provide the advantage of being able to address hybrid issues that neither institution can do unilaterally. However, CBRN defence is an issue that should be addressed by NATO as the superior institution.

It is noteworthy that the lessons learned from NATO's operations in Afghanistan and the Western Balkans make it clear to both organisations that a comprehensive political, civilian and military approach is required to enable effective crisis management [83]. Moreover, it remains an open question as to whether NATO and the EU can increase and upgrade their level of cooperation. It must be stressed that several necessary steps remain to be taken in this regard.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is reasonable to point out that there are some areas and directions of bilateral cooperation between NATO and the EU that still need to be improved.

First, the state of cooperation between two organisations needs to be enhanced, especially in the case of CBRN incidents. Because some major CBRN incidents have demonstrated that it is not fully clear how both organisations would respond to the emergency in synchrony and a collective manner. Second, terrorism can be seen as a serious challenge requiring close cooperation with specific actors such as Europol, because terrorism is an internal European security problem. Moreover, there is a growing recognition of the destabilising effect of terrorism on the security of the EU and NATO.

Third, NATO should continue to strengthen its partnerships with international actors to improve common understanding of regional and global CBRN risks and threats and areas of shared responsibility and activity.

One of the recommendations can be seen as the creation of a common framework for cooperation. Both organisations need such a format to avoid overlap and duplication of their efforts in the CBRN field. This will allow them to share certain information about their plans, actions and exercises, and will make bilateral cooperation much more operational and well-organised. All of this will strengthen the synergy between NATO and the EU in

responding adequately to CBRN threats.

NATO and the EU, together with their partners, should identify efforts that can enhance the security of both organisations in the areas of building CBRN defence capabilities, organising joint exercises and training, implementing security-related programmes and reforms, and civil preparedness. Bilateral relations can be developed through the organisation of joint events and other formats of dialogue between NATO and EU staff. Another possibility would be to invite each other to similar CBRN events.

However, these activities are not sufficient in themselves. There is also a need to share their objectives and, where possible, to identify common goals in the field of security in general and in the CBRN field in particular.

Communication continues to be seen as an important mechanism for building confidence and strengthening the partnership between NATO and the EU. As mentioned above, this can involve various channels, including communication between the CBRN focal points of both organisations. Other related actors and stakeholders may also be included in a crisis management communication platform in general.

Most importantly, both institutions must enhance the

security not only of the shared, but also their non-shared Member States, which is essential for strategic purposes.

The best way to achieve the objectives of countering CBRN threats on a practical level is to organise many more joint exercises, where it is easier to identify caps, successes and capabilities. Testing technologies and training curricula in a real-life situation would be helpful for future objectives. In this context, the regular use of the capabilities of the joint NATO CBRN Defence Centre of Excellence (based in Vyškov) for the EU CBRN CoE initiative would be one of the recommendations for improving NATO-EU cooperation at the practical level.

Other recommendations deal with the harmonisation of the training curricula of both organisations, as well as the training itself. Of course, both the EU and NATO have their own CBRN training curricula and modus operandi, but there is a need to synchronise them. This would allow the CBRN personnel of each organisation to know what the other is doing and who is doing what. However, any cooperation should also take into account any institutional interests and respect the autonomy of both institutions and individual Member States [84].

Indeed, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

remains the main pillar against the spread of nuclear weapons. NATO and the EU should therefore continue to support the policy and objectives of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty Organisation, and the International Atomic Energy Agency, and to strengthen the implementation of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.

Effective cooperation with the UN as a global actor in global security, including in the CBRN domain, is also crucial for both NATO and the EU.

Today's world is interlinked with common security challenges. For example, NATO and the EU should always be able to adapt to such significantly changed CBRN threats from both state and non-state actors, including challenges to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation regimes, and to the risks posed by uncontrolled technologies.

In principle, NATO and the EU have a wide range of instruments at their disposal to respond adequately to CBRN challenges. To achieve this goal, both organisations should build up capabilities that can be used effectively in a CBRN incident. The idea is to create a single CBRN force (proposed by Tamara J. Bijl) by combining the CBRN defence

capabilities of both organisations. This is an interesting idea that at least needs to be discussed. The rationale for this recommendation reflects the situation that the modern world would face in the case of a large-scale CBRN incident and, especially, with the COVID-19 epidemic.

In conclusion, it is safe to assume that the crisis in the realm of nuclear arms control will continue to pose challenges to European security, especially in light of the current security situation in Europe. Russia's decision to undermine the international order and the European security system through its aggression against Ukraine violated international law, including a number of arms control agreements.

That is why the effective partnership between NATO and the EU is so important. Together, NATO and the EU can play a mutually reinforcing role in supporting world peace, where only such cooperation can guarantee a secure international political and security system.

## ENDNOTES

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