

May 2021

# EU foreign, security and defence policy co-operation with neighbours Mapping diversity

By Senem Aydın-Düzgit, Ian Bond and Luigi Scazzieri

# EU foreign, security and defence policy co-operation with neighbours: Mapping diversity

By Senem Aydın-Düzgit, Ian Bond and Luigi Scazzieri

- ★ The EU's neighbours are diverse, and include countries that are candidates for membership like Albania and Turkey; countries that are NATO members and are not seeking EU membership like the UK and Norway; and countries that aspire to both EU and NATO membership like Georgia and Ukraine.
- ★ The EU and its partners consult on foreign policy in various formats and with varying frequency, and co-ordinate their foreign policies to different degrees. Some countries align very closely with EU foreign statements and actions, while others do so more rarely, and Turkey currently has a confrontational relationship with the EU. The EU's neighbours have also made contributions to Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operations, and some contribute to building Europe's military capabilities.
- ★ The overall degree of co-operation between the EU and each partner depends on how closely their views align. Being a candidate for EU membership, or a NATO member, does not necessarily lead to a close foreign policy partnership, as exemplified by the case of Turkey's relations with the EU.
- ★ The EU's partners do not always feel that the EU takes into account their views. Many have signalled they would like deeper and more frequent consultations with the EU, and more of a say over how the CSDP operations that they participate in are set up and run. But the EU is wary of formally giving partners more influence, concerned that this could compromise its decision-making autonomy or create unhelpful precedents by giving one non-member significantly more influence than others.
- ★ Working more closely with partners, even informally, would not undermine EU decision-making autonomy. It would allow the EU to benefit from their specialist knowledge and make the EU's foreign policy actions more effective and legitimate. Closer dialogue with partners would strengthen bilateral relations and increase the chance that they will support EU foreign policy. Deepening foreign policy co-operation with partners would also reduce the risk that some member-states might co-operate with partners outside the EU framework, potentially undermining European foreign policy.

- ★ The EU should hold more frequent and broad-ranging consultations with partners at both senior and working levels and allow close partners to second staff to the European External Action Service to facilitate policy co-ordination. The EU should also informally involve its partners at an earlier stage of planning for CSDP missions. This could make them more willing to contribute personnel to EU missions, potentially allowing for more ambitious and effective EU action.
- ★ The primary aim of recently launched European tools like the European Defence Fund and Permanent Structured Co-operation is to buttress the European defence industrial base, and it will not be easy for the EU to involve third countries more closely in these initiatives. In principle, the European Defence Fund and Permanent Structured Co-operation are both open to participation from third countries, but with strict rules that could make participation unappealing or impractical. In implementing these rules, the EU should avoid too restrictive an approach, which would risk cutting off the industries of close partners like the UK and Norway, ultimately making it harder for the Union to develop the defence capabilities it needs.

---

When the European Union speaks and acts on foreign, security and defence policy issues, the effectiveness and legitimacy of what it does is increased if other countries, particularly its neighbours, align themselves with the 27 member-states. At least, that is the theory. This policy brief focuses on how EU co-operation works in practice, given that there is no single model for how the EU co-operates with its neighbours in foreign, security and defence policy, and the level of co-operation varies greatly.

The brief looks at ten partners drawn from three groups of countries neighbouring the EU. The first group are candidates for EU membership: Turkey, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The second group are European NATO members that are not currently seeking EU membership: Norway and the UK. The third group are Eastern Partnership countries that have EU Association Agreements: Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine. These countries are plugged into the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) to different degrees and in different ways. The brief assesses the

formal and informal arrangements that each partner country has to co-operate with the EU in foreign, security and defence policy. It looks at when, how and why countries with differing relationships with the Union align themselves with CFSP, and how co-operation works in CSDP missions and operations and in the defence industrial field. It analyses how effective and sustainable the different co-operation arrangements are. The brief concludes with recommendations on how the EU and its partners can strengthen their co-operation, increasing its effectiveness and improving its sustainability.

---

## Turkey

EU-Turkey co-operation in foreign and security policy goes back to Turkey's associate membership of the Western European Union (WEU) in 1992. Turkey participated in the meetings of the WEU Council, its working groups and subsidiary bodies, but without voting rights. It could appoint liaison officers and take part in WEU operations on equal terms with full members. Given its NATO membership, Turkey as an associate WEU member had the right to be consulted on WEU operations, and to be involved in operations using NATO assets.

This changed with the EU's decision to dissolve the WEU in 1999, after which Ankara was increasingly anxious about being left out of EU security and defence policy. Turkey vetoed the establishment of a formal EU-NATO co-

operation framework until its key demands were met with the 2003 Berlin Plus arrangements, which stipulated that non-EU NATO members could participate in EU missions using NATO assets. This paved the way to sizeable contributions by Turkey to nine EU-led missions and operations, mainly in the form of troops and personnel, making it the largest contributor after France, Germany and the UK.<sup>1</sup>

Intensified co-operation lasted until Cyprus joined the EU in 2004. In order to alleviate Turkish concerns regarding Cyprus's involvement, Berlin Plus did not allow for the inclusion of non-NATO states in NATO-EU co-operation unless they were members of NATO's 'Partnership for Peace' (PfP) programme for non-members (which Cyprus was not). Nonetheless, after Cyprus's EU accession, the

1: Meltem Müftüler-Baç, 'Turkey's future with the European Union: A model of differentiated integration', *Turkish Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2017.

EU insisted that Cyprus become party to EU-NATO co-operation. Turkey, in turn, vetoed a NATO-Cyprus security agreement that would have led to Cyprus's inclusion in PfP and thus in EU-NATO co-operation. Turkey's veto was matched by Cyprus's veto of the EU-Turkey security agreement on the exchange of classified material and of Turkish membership of the European Defence Agency (EDA).

*“There are growing frictions between the EU and Turkey, most notably on the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria, and Russia.”*

This double veto, still in force, led to the freezing of EU-NATO dialogue and prevents substantial EU-NATO co-operation beyond Berlin Plus. At the operational level Turkey often turns a blind eye to EU-NATO co-operation, but at the strategic and policy levels co-operation is more difficult. Nonetheless, Turkey continues to take part in the EU's EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina with 242 personnel, making it the second largest contributor to the operation.<sup>2</sup> Ankara also wants to resume contributing to EU civilian missions in Ukraine and Kosovo after it suspended its participation following the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey.<sup>3</sup>

In 2017 the EU launched Permanent Structured Co-operation (PESCO) as a way to allow willing member-states, and potentially also third countries, to integrate further in defence. This led to some, albeit very limited, discussion in Turkey on whether this could or should be a way to return to formally co-operating with the EU on security and defence.<sup>4</sup> The prevailing perception across the Turkish political elite that PESCO is a weak initiative, and the fact that Cyprus can veto Turkey's participation, quickly ended the debate.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, officially Turkey “continues to request to be involved in EU defence initiatives”, namely PESCO as well as the European Defence Fund (EDF). According to a Turkish diplomat we interviewed in December 2020, the EU does not want to discuss the matter, however.

As a country negotiating EU accession, Turkey is expected to align with the EU in all policy areas, including foreign and security policy, signing up to EU statements and copying the substance of EU foreign policy. Between 2006 and 2011 Turkey's alignment rate

was high, with Ankara signing up to between 74 and 98 per cent of Council decisions and declarations made by the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Union's behalf. Turkey's alignment rate has declined considerably since then and stood at 21 per cent in 2019.<sup>6</sup> Formal EU-Turkey discussions on foreign and security issues take place in the high-level political dialogue between the EU High Representative, the EU Commissioner for neighbourhood and enlargement, the Turkish foreign minister and the Turkish minister for EU affairs. Foreign policy and security-related issues are also covered in meetings between the Turkish foreign ministry's political director and their European External Action Service (EEAS) counterpart. Yet, as the low rates of alignment attest, there are growing frictions between the EU and Turkey, most notably on the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria, and Russia. Following the July 2019 Council conclusions, the EU has suspended the high-level political dialogue and no meeting of the EU-Turkey Association Council has been held since. However, a political directors' meeting took place in September 2019 and contacts at the presidential and prime ministerial level have continued: most recently European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen visited Ankara for meetings with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on April 6<sup>th</sup>.

There are two points about Turkey's foreign and security relationship with the EU over which there seems to be widespread agreement across the Turkish political spectrum. The first is that the EU is a relatively weak foreign and security actor.<sup>7</sup> The second is that the EU does not treat Turkey fairly in foreign and security policy issues involving Cyprus and Greece. Although Turkey's main opposition is critical of the government's unilateralism and over-reliance on hard power, it does not contest the substance of the Turkish government's claims.<sup>8</sup>

When Turkey had friendlier relations with the EU, the Union was able to benefit from Turkey's diplomatic weight and its considerable contributions to CSDP operations and missions. But Turkey was not very satisfied with co-operation, given that the EU has been unwilling to involve Ankara in its defence structures. Although closer EU-Turkey co-operation in CFSP and CSDP is theoretically feasible, with the possibility of Turkey's involvement in PESCO projects, the EDF and the EDA, this does not seem plausible unless relations greatly improve.

2: 'Contribution of the TAF to peace support operations', website of the Republic of Turkey ministry of national defence, General Staff, accessed on May 5<sup>th</sup> 2021.

3: European Commission, 'Turkey 2020 report', October 6<sup>th</sup> 2020.

4: Senem Aydın-Düzgüt and Alessandro Marrone, 'PESCO and security cooperation between the EU and Turkey', Global Turkey in Europe working paper 19, April 10<sup>th</sup> 2018.

5: Senem Aydın-Düzgüt, Jan Kovář and Petr Kratochvíl, 'How does identity relate to attitudes towards differentiation? The cases of France, Germany, Czech Republic and Turkey', EUIDEA research paper No. 6, September 2020.

6: European Commission, 'Turkey 2020 report', October 6<sup>th</sup> 2020.

7: Videoconference interview with Turkish MP 1, December 2020.

8: Videoconference interview with Turkish MP 2, December 2020.

## Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia

Co-operation between the EU and the four candidate countries in the Western Balkans is based on the Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs) that the EU has concluded with each of the four. These commit the signatories to deepening foreign and security policy co-operation as they make progress towards EU membership. Within the framework of the SAAs, the EU and each partner country hold regular exchanges on foreign and security policy.

Every year a Stabilisation and Association Council takes place between the EU and each of the four countries individually. This normally involves the country's foreign minister and the High Representative and the Commissioner for neighbourhood and enlargement on the EU's side. Each of the Western Balkan countries has more informal and ad-hoc contacts with EU officials, and Serbia has a yearly political dialogue with the EU at the political directors' level. All these consultations cover both regional and global issues.

*“As candidates for EU membership, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia are obliged to mirror EU foreign policy.”*

The four Western Balkan countries also meet with the EU as a group. Their foreign ministers have taken part in informal meetings of EU foreign ministers to discuss issues of mutual interest. And the EEAS Deputy Secretary General meets with the political directors of all the Western Balkans candidate countries plus Bosnia and Kosovo twice a year for collective consultations. Finally, Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia also hold regular meetings with the EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC – the committee of member-states' ambassadors dealing with CFSP and CSDP issues).

As candidates for EU membership, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia are obliged to mirror EU foreign policy. Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia very largely meet this obligation. Albania and Montenegro had an alignment rate of 100 per cent in 2019, while North Macedonia's was 92 per cent.<sup>9</sup> Notably, however, North Macedonia has not signed up to the EU's restrictive measures against Russia.<sup>10</sup> The three countries also regularly align with EU statements at international organisations like the UN. Serbia's level of alignment with the EU is significantly lower, at 60 per

cent in 2019.<sup>11</sup> Serbia has not signed up to EU sanctions on Russia, Venezuela, Myanmar and Iran or declarations by the High Representative on Hong Kong. Nor has it imposed sanctions on Belarus as the EU has done, although it aligned itself with declarations by the High Representative on the presidential elections and the escalation of violence in the country. Serbia has also promised to move its Embassy to Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2021, going against the EU's position. More broadly, while Serbia aspires to EU membership and has been forging closer relations with NATO, it has also built closer ties with Beijing, both economically and in the security field, with joint police exercises and purchases of surveillance equipment which the EU views with concern. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Belgrade praised China for its assistance to Serbia, while criticising the EU. At the same time, Serbia has close relations with Russia – including joint military drills and purchases of arms.<sup>12</sup>

Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia have each concluded an agreement to exchange and protect classified information with the EU. All four countries have concluded Framework Participation Agreements with the EU, allowing them to contribute personnel to CSDP missions, without, however, having a say in the missions' planning. All four countries are currently participating in several CSDP missions and operations. Of the four, Serbia makes the biggest contribution: it is participating in EU training missions in Mali (EUTM Mali), the Central African Republic (EUTM RCA) and Somalia (EUTM Somalia), and to the EU's mission to counter piracy off the Horn of Africa, EUNAVFOR Atalanta.<sup>13</sup> Serbia is keen to emphasise its participation and would like to have regular consultations with the EU on CSDP issues. Albania provides personnel to the EU's operation EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to EUTM Mali. Montenegro is participating in EUNAVFOR Atalanta and EUTM Mali. North Macedonia is taking part in EUFOR Althea in Bosnia, and in 2021 it will deploy officers to participate in EUTM RCA.<sup>14</sup> As far as participation in the EU's battlegroups is concerned, North Macedonia has participated in the past and plans to contribute in 2023; Albania plans to contribute in 2024; and Serbia is currently contributing and will also contribute in 2023.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia have military-to-military contacts with EU military bodies. Their Chiefs of Defence have taken part in some sessions of EU Military Committee meetings, and North Macedonia's military academy is a 'network partner' to the European Security

9: European Commission, 'Albania 2020 report', October 6<sup>th</sup> 2020; European Commission, 'Montenegro 2020 report', October 6<sup>th</sup> 2020.

10: European Commission, 'North Macedonia 2020 report', October 6<sup>th</sup> 2020.

11: European Commission, 'Serbia 2020 report', October 6<sup>th</sup> 2020.

12: European Commission, 'Serbia 2020 report', October 6<sup>th</sup> 2020.

13: European Commission, 'Serbia 2020 report', October 6<sup>th</sup> 2020.

14: European Commission, 'Albania 2020 report', October 6<sup>th</sup> 2020; European Commission, 'Montenegro 2020 report', October 6<sup>th</sup> 2020; European Commission, 'North Macedonia 2020 report', October 6<sup>th</sup> 2020.

15: EU Military Staff, 'EUMC report to PSC on the outcome of BGCC 2/19' December 10<sup>th</sup> 2019.

and Defence College and co-operates with it in providing training and education courses.<sup>16</sup>

In the defence industrial sphere, co-operation between the four countries and the EU is relatively limited. Serbia is the only country out of the four to have an Administrative Arrangement with the EDA and is involved, for example, in the agency's work on countering improvised explosive devices and on helicopter training. By working with the EDA Serbia aims to improve the capacity of its forces, spur modernisation and build trust with the EU. There is some interest in participating in PESCO, but the hurdles to participation are significant, with the rules stipulating that third countries have to be invited and must provide substantial added value to a project. Despite these obstacles, Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia are working with the EU on countering hybrid threats like cyber attacks. The three have taken part in an EU survey

of the hybrid risks they face. On the basis of responses they provided, the EEAS and the Commission prepared a report identifying their main vulnerabilities and providing recommendations on how to increase resilience.<sup>17</sup>

Whether co-operation between the EU and the Western Balkan accession candidate countries can be sustained depends largely on whether they continue to be interested in EU membership and politically aligned with the EU. If countries lose interest in membership, perhaps as a result of the accession process losing further momentum, foreign policy co-operation could become patchier. If, however, the EU shows that it is still interested in enlargement and accelerates the accession process for Western Balkan candidate countries, then co-operation is likely to deepen. Then the EU's partners could become more involved in PESCO, the EDA and the EDF.

---

## Norway

Norway does not have a formal co-operation agreement with the EU in foreign and security policy. Instead, the two work together on a flexible and ad-hoc basis. Co-operation is partly based on the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement, which calls for strengthening foreign policy dialogue. There are informal exchanges at the ministerial level at the annual meeting of the EEA Council. Norway, together with the other EEA states, also holds regular meetings with the EEAS on issues of mutual interest. At the same time, Norway has extensive bilateral dealings with the EU. There is a biannual dialogue on foreign policy between Norway's foreign minister and the foreign minister of the EU's rotating presidency. Norway's foreign minister has regular meetings with the High Representative, and every six months the secretary general of the Norwegian foreign ministry meets with the EEAS secretary general.

*“Norwegian ministers have argued that greater decision-shaping ability would make participation in CSDP missions more attractive to Norway.”*

There are also a range of ad-hoc contacts with EEAS officials at senior and working levels and Norway has sometimes been invited to brief the PSC. Norway has seconded staff to the EEAS to work on projects in which it has interest. The EU invites Norway to align with its

statements and restrictive measures, and Norway usually does so. The EU and Norway work together closely in development assistance, mostly on the ground. Norway contributes to the EU Trust Fund for Africa and has regularly organised donor conferences with the EU.

In the defence field, Norway signed a Framework Participation Agreement with the EU in 2004 to participate in CSDP missions and operations and has participated in a dozen operations since then, most notably EUNAVFOR Atalanta. It is up to Oslo to show interest in participating in a given mission, and Norway is excluded from the early stages of planning. However, the more active Norway is in the lead-up to a mission, the more information the EU is willing to share with it. Norwegian ministers have argued that greater decision-shaping ability would make participation in CSDP missions more attractive to Norway.<sup>18</sup> Norwegian units have also participated in EU battlegroups.

Norway has concluded an agreement to exchange classified information with the EU, and Norway was the first country outside the EU to sign a co-operation agreement with the EDA in 2006. This allows for the exchange of information and for Norway to promote its views in the agency. It also allows Norway to participate in EDA projects, which Norway does, albeit without decision-making rights.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, member-states do not want non-members to influence the development of military capabilities. Norway is therefore currently

16: European Security and Defence College, partner institutes, 2021; EEAS, 'EU chiefs of defence met in Brussels for their final military committee meeting of 2019', November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2019.

17: European Commission, 'Albania 2020 report', October 6<sup>th</sup> 2020; European Commission, 'Montenegro 2020 report', October 6<sup>th</sup> 2020; European Commission, 'North Macedonia 2020 report', October 6<sup>th</sup> 2020.

18: Tone Skogen, 'Speech to the EU parliamentary subcommittee on security and defence', February 27<sup>th</sup> 2018.

19: Videoconference interview with Norwegian diplomat, January 15<sup>th</sup> 2021; Norwegian government, 'Norway's relations with Europe: Cooperation on foreign and security policy', 2021.

excluded from the two main EU defence processes to identify capability gaps and opportunities for member-states to co-operate in acquiring them: the Co-ordinated Annual Review of Defence led by the EDA, and its Capability Development Plan.

Through its membership of the EEA, Norway is part of the EU single market, including in the defence field. Norway implements EU defence directives aimed at creating a more open defence market in Europe. The EEA Agreement also means that Norway is formally associated with the EDF, and participated in the precursor to the EDF, which ran from 2017 to 2019. Norway will contribute 2.5 per cent of the EDF budget, will have speaking rights and be able to make proposals and voice objections, but will not have a vote. Norway will also be able to participate in PESCO projects, and it is about to join the project on military mobility which is aimed at removing physical and regulatory barriers to moving troops and equipment across European borders and is a focus of EU-NATO co-operation.

Norway wants to further deepen its foreign policy relationship with the EU. Its 'Strategy for co-operation with the EU 2018-2021' says it wishes to: i) deepen political dialogue and co-ordination; ii) strengthen practical co-operation; and iii) promote favourable conditions for its defence industry. Norway seeks early and continuous dialogue with the EU, for example early exchange of information when the EU is deciding on sanctions. Norway also wants to be involved earlier when the EU is planning a CSDP operation, for example taking part in the EU's Military Planning and Conduct Capability.<sup>20</sup>

Whether the EU is willing to grant the kind of closer co-operation that Norway is seeking remains to be seen, since Oslo already has what is in effect a privileged status among EU partners. Nonetheless, because of their shared values and foreign policy outlook, Norway and the EU are likely to remain closely aligned in foreign policy, and despite Oslo's occasional frustration with the limits on its influence, EU-Norway co-operation seems highly sustainable.

---

## The UK

The UK-EU foreign policy relationship is unique given that it starts from a process of disintegration. The UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement does not cover foreign policy co-operation. Initially both the UK and the EU believed reaching an agreement on foreign and defence policy co-operation would be easy. The Political Declaration alongside the 2019 Withdrawal Agreement talked of "ambitious, close and lasting" security co-operation. Based on this, the EU produced a draft agreement similar to the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement. EU officials argued that in some areas, like sanctions, the agreement gave the UK a lot of influence. The draft agreement also foresaw intensified information exchanges during the planning stages of CSDP missions and co-ordination of development assistance, allowed for the UK's involvement in the EDA's activities, and facilitated the exchange of intelligence.<sup>21</sup>

*“In the immediate future, the extent to which the UK and EU work together is likely to be limited.”*

Boris Johnson's government, however, unlike Theresa May's, was uninterested in institutional foreign and security policy co-operation with the EU. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab limited contacts with the EU, preferring to build up bilateral ties with member-states. He also sought to show that the UK's security interests

were not limited to Europe – a theme also highlighted in the 'Indo-Pacific tilt' announced in the government's 'Integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy'.<sup>22</sup> The UK thought that the EU's proposed agreement did not reflect its political importance and that most European foreign policy co-ordination happened outside the EU anyway, in NATO or in small groups like the E3 (which has led the EU's diplomatic engagement with Iran and the negotiations to end Tehran's nuclear programme). Johnson's government was also sceptical that EU defence initiatives such as the EDF would be successful, and the EU was only willing to offer British firms limited access to these initiatives anyway.<sup>23</sup> According to UK officials we interviewed, the UK did not want to appear subordinate to the EU by being invited to sign up to foreign policy actions that the EU had already decided upon.

In the immediate future, the extent to which the UK and EU work together is likely to be limited. The British government is unwilling to have formal links with the EU. But the door to future co-operation is not completely closed. In December 2020 the UK and the EU concluded an agreement on exchanging classified information. This should (for example) make co-ordination on sanctions easier. On March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2021 Canada, the EU and the UK imposed identical sanctions on China in relation to human rights abuses in Xinjiang (the US simultaneously applied similar sanctions).

20: Norwegian Government, 'Strategy for cooperation with the EU 2018–2021', May 9<sup>th</sup> 2018.

21: Ian Bond, 'Brexit and external differentiation in foreign, security and defence policy', EUIDEA policy brief No.2, September 2020.

22: HM Government, 'Global Britain in a competitive age: The integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy', March 16<sup>th</sup> 2021.

23: Ian Bond, 'Brexit and external differentiation in foreign, security and defence policy', EUIDEA policy brief No.2, September 2020.

The effectiveness and sustainability of such limited co-operation arrangements are doubtful, however. The EU will find it difficult to co-ordinate with the UK and will be unable to count on the UK for added diplomatic, military and defence industrial weight. But the UK is also unlikely to be satisfied. Without regular dialogue with the EU, it will have to work harder in bilateral contacts to find out what member-states and EU institutions think and to influence them. Member-states are only likely to involve London when it is in their interest. And if EU defence tools like the EDF become more successful, British defence firms may find it harder to operate in the European market, even if in theory they could also participate in EU-funded projects.

The lack of a formal UK-EU agreement means that for the foreseeable future the UK will have to rely on informal consultations with member-states to influence European foreign and security policy. The UK will try to deepen bilateral partnerships. The UK will also continue to be involved in co-operation formats involving small groups of member-states. The most prominent example is the E3, but the UK is also involved in France's European

Intervention Initiative, designed to foster a common strategic culture and made up of 12 EU member-states (including Denmark, which has an opt-out from CSDP), plus the UK and Norway. The UK also has longstanding links with the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and the Baltic states, which form the UK-led multinational Joint Expeditionary Force.

Such small-group informal co-operation outside the EU can be effective for the UK and for those member-states involved. It risks undermining EU foreign policy, however, especially if the largest member-states find that acting through the EU is difficult and ineffective and turn to co-operation with the UK in informal frameworks like the E3 instead. This would generate disunity: smaller member-states were not happy about being excluded from the E3 even when the UK was an EU member. While the EU is keen on closer co-operation with the UK, the UK has so far been unwilling. Nevertheless, a future British government might take a different view. And, depending on the overall state of the UK-EU relationship, the EU might be willing to offer the UK a deeper relationship than it did in its original draft agreement.

---

## Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine

Though there are six countries in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), only Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are actively seeking EU membership. Co-operation between Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and the EU is based on the Association Agreements (AA) the three countries signed in 2014. These commit them to convergence with CFSP. On the basis of their AA, each of the three countries has an annual Association Council with the EU, where they are usually represented by their prime ministers, and the EU by the High Representative and the Commissioner for neighbourhood and enlargement.

*“Each of the three countries has an annual Association Council with the EU.”*

Alone of the three, Ukraine holds an annual summit with the EU in addition to the Association Council. Ukraine's foreign minister is sometimes invited to meet EU Foreign Ministers when Ukraine is on the Foreign Affairs Council agenda. There are also frequent bilateral contacts at senior levels with the EEAS and the Commission.<sup>24</sup> The Ukrainian foreign ministry's political director meets the EEAS political director and the PSC chair twice yearly

to discuss Crimea and the Donbas, and Ukraine's First Deputy Foreign Minister holds annual consultations with the EEAS and the Commission on the occupation of Crimea.<sup>25</sup>

Georgia has a regular security dialogue with the EU on regional conflicts, cyber security and hybrid warfare, involving the EEAS deputy secretaries general for political affairs and for common security and defence policy and crisis response and senior representatives from the Georgian foreign, defence and interior ministries.<sup>26</sup> Moldova has sought such a dialogue, but the EU has not agreed so far.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, EaP countries individually or in groups have meetings with the EEAS, particularly on CSDP missions. For example, the Georgian defence ministry holds talks with the EEAS.<sup>28</sup>

As far as alignment with CFSP is concerned, the EU interprets references to “convergence” in the Association Agreements to mean that the EaP countries should align with EU declarations and sanctions, but – unlike candidate countries – they are not expected to explain their decisions if they fail to do so, and the EU rarely if ever lobbies them to align with particular decisions.<sup>29</sup> In the first five months of 2020 Ukraine aligned with 81 per cent of CFSP declarations; in the first ten months of 2017 (the

24: Videoconference with Ukrainian officials, January 12<sup>th</sup> 2021.

25: Videoconference with Ukrainian officials, January 12<sup>th</sup> 2021.

26: Videoconference with Georgian official, December 30<sup>th</sup> 2020.

27: Videoconference with an official from an EaP country, December 18<sup>th</sup> 2020.

28: Videoconference with an official from an EaP country, December 18<sup>th</sup> 2020; Written interview with a Georgian defence official, January 13<sup>th</sup> 2021; Videoconference with a Georgian official, December 30<sup>th</sup> 2020.

29: Video interview with an official from an EaP country, December 18<sup>th</sup> 2020.

last period with comparable figures) with 88 per cent.<sup>30</sup> Moldova aligned with 68 per cent of declarations in 2018 and 69 per cent in 2017.<sup>31</sup> Georgia aligned with 61 per cent in 2019, an increase from 56 per cent in 2018.<sup>32</sup>

The three also align on an ad-hoc basis with EU statements in international organisations. According to the authors' calculations, in 2020 the EU issued 63 declarations. Georgia aligned itself with 36; Moldova with 42 and Ukraine with 50. When countries do not align with EU actions, there are sometimes obvious reasons. For example, neither Georgia nor Ukraine aligned with EU sanctions on Turkey, because both see good relations with Ankara as important given their conflicts with Russia.<sup>33</sup>

*“Overall, there is some dissatisfaction among the three EaP countries over the quality of their dialogues with the EU.”*

Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine all have Framework Participation Agreements with the EU governing their participation in CSDP. All three have been involved in CSDP operations. None has contributed on a scale justifying them in asking for a command role, or for influence over the concept of operations: they take part in the committees of contributors for the operations and accept their junior role there. Ukraine contributed to EU operations in Bosnia in the early 2000s and to the EU's anti-piracy operation off Somalia in 2014. It took a break from deploying forces to EU operations after Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of the Donbas but will send troops to the EU's Operation Althea in Bosnia later this year. According to Ukrainian officials, participation in CSDP operations is a way for Ukraine to show it can contribute to the EU's security and offers a learning opportunity for its personnel. Ukraine has also provided personnel to EU battlegroups and maintained its commitments despite the fighting in the Donbas.<sup>34</sup> Moldova is contributing to the EU missions in Mali and

30: European Commission and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 'Joint staff working document: Association implementation report on Ukraine', SWD(2017) 376 final, November 14<sup>th</sup> 2017; European Commission and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 'Joint staff working document: Association implementation report on Ukraine', SWD(2020) 329 final, November 27<sup>th</sup> 2020.

31: European Commission and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 'Joint staff working document: Association implementation report on Moldova', SWD(2018) 94 final, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2018; European Commission and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 'Joint staff working document: Association implementation report on Moldova', SWD(2019) 325 final, September 11<sup>th</sup> 2019.

32: European Commission and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 'Joint staff working document: Association implementation report on Georgia', SWD(2020) 30 final, February 6<sup>th</sup> 2020.

33: Videoconference with EU official, December 21<sup>st</sup> 2020; Videoconference with a Georgian official, December 30<sup>th</sup> 2020.

the Central African Republic.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, Georgia is currently the largest contributor per capita to the EU operation in the CAR and has attached troops to the EU training mission in Mali and to the EU Advisory Mission to Ukraine.

Alone of the three, Ukraine has an Administrative Arrangement with the EDA. Ukrainian officials say they are satisfied with the development of relations with the EDA and want to learn from the EU's approach: Ukrainian experts take part in three specialised working groups and will join the EDA's standardisation committee and its logistical support group. Ukraine is likely to ask to take part in PESCO projects that are of interest to it and where it has expertise. Georgia is seeking an agreement with the EDA like Ukraine's and hopes to participate in PESCO projects after 2026.<sup>36</sup> Moldova's defence industry is small, and it does not expect to be involved in PESCO unless a member-state invites it for political reasons.

Apart from the official co-operation formats between the EU and the three countries, there are informal frameworks involving some or all of them and groups of member-states. Each year Visegrád foreign ministers meet with their counterparts from the six Eastern Partnership countries, with the Commission and the EEAS invited. Lithuania holds meetings on security and defence with the three, inviting the EEAS, the Commission and some member states.<sup>37</sup> And Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine formed the 'Lublin Triangle' in July 2020 to co-ordinate on foreign policy and bring Ukraine closer to the EU and NATO.<sup>38</sup> The three countries also formed a Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian brigade.

Overall, there is some dissatisfaction among the three EaP countries over the quality of their dialogues with the EU – some feel that the Union sets the agenda, and the partners are expected to report on how they are following it. Some partners complain that their meetings with the chair of the PSC, which used to be held at least annually, have lapsed in the last couple of years. Because all three countries have Russian-backed breakaway

34: Leigh Turner, 'Ukraine joins EU battlegroup', Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office blog, July 11<sup>th</sup> 2011; Mission of Ukraine to the EU, 'Military co-operation in Central and Eastern Europe', presentation by Colonel Serhii Rechych, defence adviser, Mission of Ukraine to the European Union, to the SEDE Committee of the European Parliament, January 25<sup>th</sup> 2017; Videoconference with Ukrainian officials, January 12<sup>th</sup> 2021; EU Military Staff, 'EUMC Report to PSC on the outcome of BGCC 2/15', EEAS (2015) 1466 ADD 1 REV 1, October 27<sup>th</sup> 2015; EU Military Staff, 'EUMC Report to PSC on the outcome of BGCC 2/17', EEAS(2017) 1307 REV 1, October 25<sup>th</sup> 2017; EU Military Staff, 'EUMC Report to PSC on the outcome of BGCC 2/19', EEAS(2019) 1150 ADD 1 REV 1, December 6<sup>th</sup> 2019.

35: Videoconference with an official from an EaP country, December 18<sup>th</sup> 2020.

36: Written interview with a Georgian defence official, January 13<sup>th</sup> 2021.

37: Videoconference interview with a Georgian official, December 30<sup>th</sup> 2020.

38: Jakub Borno, 'Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine inaugurate 'Lublin Triangle'', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 17 no. 115, August 5<sup>th</sup> 2020.

regions or Russian-created entities on their territory, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have a particular interest in deepening co-operation with the EU; their support for the EU on issues of less direct concern to them needs to be seen in that light. In particular, Ukraine would like to be more closely involved in EU discussions on foreign and defence policy, and specifically to have more discussions on regional issues such as Belarus and the

conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, with a view to co-ordinating responses to events. However, the EU has so far been unwilling to agree. In general, the EU is not always comfortable with the implications for its wider relationship with Russia of aligning itself entirely with the policies of the three, though it is broadly supportive of their wish to restore their territorial integrity.

---

## Mapping diversity

The relationships between the EU and its partners vary between the almost completely informal, in the case of the current EU-UK relationship, to highly institutionalised, in the case of the EU's relationships with Albania, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Ukraine. Meanwhile, the EU's relationship with Turkey is an example of an institutionalised relationship that has suffered severely from broader disagreements. However, despite their different characteristics, all of the arrangements are based on the principle that non-members cannot undermine the EU's decision-making autonomy.

*“The degree of foreign policy co-operation between the EU and its partners depends above all on the closeness of relations.”*

From the EU's perspective, co-operating with partners is a way to increase the effectiveness and legitimacy of its own foreign policy. Through consultations with partners the EU ensures it is aware of what they think and maximises the chances that they will be aligned with its own foreign policy. The EU also directly benefits from its partners' expertise, and from their material resources when they contribute to CSDP missions and operations. Consultations are also a way for the EU to make partners feel that their views are being considered, and therefore strengthen bilateral ties, even though partners do not always feel the Union takes their views seriously. From the point of view of the EU's partners, co-operation is a way to have regular structured discussions to make the EU aware of their views and to strengthen bilateral relations by signalling aligning with the EU. For countries that aspire to join the EU, alignment is a strong signal of their commitment to obtaining membership. Meanwhile, participation in CSDP missions is a way for the EU's partners to increase the capability of their own military forces, to gain interoperability with EU forces and to become familiar with EU institutional procedures.

The degree of foreign policy co-operation between the EU and its partners depends above all on the closeness of relations and the extent to which they share foreign policy perspectives. Co-operation does not necessarily reflect the degree to which a given relationship is

formalised and does not necessarily depend on whether the partner is formally a candidate for EU membership or a NATO member. Turkey is a NATO member and is negotiating EU membership. But in practice Turkey-EU relations have deteriorated so much that Ankara is subject to EU sanctions. Albania, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine have very similar arrangements for co-operation with the EU. But in recent years the EU has consulted more frequently with Ukraine than other countries, due to Ukraine's size and political importance, even though it is not a NATO member or an accession candidate. Ukraine also has more frequent consultations with the EU than Georgia or Moldova, even though in theory the three have the same status. Meanwhile, Serbia's often difficult relationship with the EU means foreign policy co-operation is less intense than one might expect from its status as a relatively large candidate country. Finally, while Norway does not formally have a deeper foreign policy relationship with the EU than countries in the Western Balkans or the Eastern Partnership, Oslo's foreign policy expertise, diplomatic capacity and close political alignment with the EU mean that Norway has more frequent consultations than most membership candidates. Norway is also the only one of the countries considered that second staff to the EEAS.

When it comes to security and defence co-operation with the EU, NATO members and accession candidate countries also do not have a significant advantage. To participate in CSDP missions the EU requires its partners to conclude a Framework Participation Agreement, and there is no inherent advantage to being a NATO member. Influence depends on how much a partner country is willing to contribute to a mission. The more a country adds politically and in terms of capabilities, the more the EU is willing to consult with it informally. Countries that seek EU membership have the greatest incentive to make substantial contributions to EU operations. This allows them to signal they want closer ties to the EU, to acquire valuable experience and to ensure the interoperability of their military with EU forces. Conversely, countries that do not seek EU membership are more likely to judge whether to take part in a mission solely based on whether they think it is aligned with their security aims. Even for these countries however, participating in EU missions can be a way to raise their international profile by portraying

themselves as engaged stakeholders in international peacekeeping and crisis management.

*“Member-states also have their own relationships with partners, in parallel to those of the EU.”*

NATO members also do not have an advantage when it comes to defence industrial co-operation with the EU. For example, Ukraine and Serbia have concluded an Administrative Arrangement with the EDA – unlike NATO members Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Turkey and the UK. The criteria for participation in PESCO projects also mean that being a NATO member does not per se put a country at an advantage, as participation depends on fulfilling stricter criteria such as alignment with EU values and making an important contribution to an individual project. As far as the EDF is concerned, the key distinction is between countries that participate in the EU single market and others. Norway, which participates in the

single market through the EEA, is formally associated to the EDF. This is a status that is not currently available to countries that are not EEA members, and their defence firms face limits on their access to the Fund, which makes participation difficult for many of them.

Member-states also have their own relationships with partners, in parallel to those of the EU. Many of these frameworks relate to the UK's involvement in European security. The most prominent example is the E3, which sometimes also includes the EU High Representative. Co-operation between the UK and groups of member-states also takes place in groups like the French-led European Intervention Initiative and the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force. But the UK is not the only third country involved in co-operation with groups of member-states, as shown by Visegrád group's co-operation with Eastern Partnership countries or by the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian 'Lublin Triangle'. Informal co-operation with groups of member states can help keep partners aligned with the EU's broad aims, but there is also a risk that it may lead to disunity and undermine CFSP and CSDP if member-states prefer working with partners outside EU structures.

## Recommendations

The EU is currently taking stock of how it co-operates with partners as part of its 'Strategic Compass' process – designed to produce a new strategy defining EU aims in security and defence policy. The Strategic Compass is due to be completed during the 2022 French Presidency of the Union. The EU could benefit by allowing partners in foreign and security policy more opportunities to shape its policies, while preserving its full decision-making autonomy. The EU does not need to make all partners the same offer: the way it works with partner countries is already very differentiated.

★ The EU should hold more frequent and broad-ranging consultations with partners at both senior and working levels, both with the EEAS and with Council working groups. The EU should be open to discussing issues that it might have limited interest in, if these are important to its partners. The EU's partners value consultations and they help to strengthen personal links and bilateral relationships more broadly. Multilateral consultations involving the EU and several partners can also help build trust between the EU's partners. The EU should consider allowing close partners to second staff to the EEAS on the Norwegian model to increase understanding of how the EU institutions function and to facilitate policy co-ordination.

★ The EU should also informally involve its partners at an earlier stage of planning for CSDP missions and operations. This could entail earlier and greater access to planning documents, for example, and could make partners more willing to contribute personnel to EU missions, potentially allowing for more ambitious and effective EU action abroad. Moreover, the presence of non-EU countries in EU missions can increase their legitimacy and raise the EU's international profile as a security actor.

★ In the defence industrial field, the primary aim of the EDF is to buttress the European defence industrial base and it will not be easy for the EU to involve third countries more closely. In theory, the EDF and PESCO are open to participation from third countries, but with strict rules on intellectual property and exports to third countries that could make participation unappealing or impractical. In practice, much depends on how their rules will be applied. A very restrictive approach risks cutting off the industries of close partners like the UK and Norway, making it harder for the EU to develop the defence capabilities it needs. After taking stock of how the EDF has performed in its first few years, the EU may want to make it easier for its partners' defence industries to benefit from its funding, by relaxing the way it interprets its rules.

---

## Conclusions

The EU has a variety of arrangements to co-operate in foreign and security policy with countries in its neighbourhood. There is no single model for co-operation, which depends above all on the overall state of bilateral relations between the EU and its partner. When bilateral relations are good, the Union benefits from its partners aligning with its foreign policy statements and actions, and from their contributions to CSDP missions. Co-operation is much more limited when bilateral relations are poor, as exemplified by the current EU-Turkey relationship and, to a much lesser degree, the current EU-UK relationship. On the whole, the EU's current arrangements for co-operation with partners in foreign and security policy allow for limited involvement by its partners, with the EU not wanting to compromise its decision-making autonomy or create precedents by formally giving one country significantly more influence than others.

There is considerable scope for the EU to co-operate more closely with its neighbours in foreign and security policy, above all by deepening consultation and co-ordination with them. This would allow the EU to benefit from its partners' specialist knowledge and maximise the effectiveness and legitimacy of its words and actions by enacting more co-ordinated responses with them. At the same time, deepening foreign policy partnerships would

make co-operation more durable, and might prevent some member-states from working with partners outside of the EU framework, undermining European cohesion and gradually emptying out CFSP and CSDP.

Senem Aydın-Düzgit

**Professor of international relations, faculty of arts and social sciences, Sabancı University and academic affairs co-ordinator of the Istanbul Policy Center**

Ian Bond

**Director of foreign policy, Centre for European Reform**

Luigi Scazzieri

**Research fellow, Centre for European Reform**

**May 2021**

**An earlier version of this paper appeared under the title 'The role of differentiation in EU foreign, security and defence policy co-operation with neighbouring countries', as part of the EUIDEA (EU Integration and Differentiation for Effectiveness and Accountability) project, which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 822622.**