EU – NATO Relations in
The Western Balkans
Disclaimer

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I. Introduction

The conflicts that emerged amidst the breakup of Yugoslavia in “Europe’s backyard” occurred at a pivotal time. The Cold War had come to an end, and the North Atlantic Treaty Association (NATO) was forced to rethink its fundamental purpose after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact.\(^1\) Additionally, Europe was starting to show signs of acting as a more unified, independent security actor. Despite then president of the Council of the European Union Jacques Poos (foreign minister, Luxembourg) characterizing the conflict as the “hour of Europe”\(^2\) at the beginning of the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1992, it would ultimately take NATO air strikes and US led negotiations to come to a peace deal, which is still in place today.

As such, both the European Union (EU) and NATO remain heavily involved in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and other parts of the region, to this day. This involvement has shifted from military intervention to peacekeeping, stabilization, and finally towards further democratization and integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions. All of this has occurred within the complex and evolving relationship between the EU and NATO. At the same time that the two organizations were adapting to the changing security environment of the 1990s and dealing with the type of conflict brought on by the breakup of Yugoslavia, the EU was also growing as a security actor alongside NATO. It became apparent that closer cooperation in security and defense between the two organizations would be a vital element of relations moving forward.

How have EU-NATO relations developed over this time, especially in the context of the post conflict region of the western Balkans? This paper will look at the development of relations between these two organizations, and how institutional cooperation agreements came about largely from deficiency in dealing with events in the Balkans, in addition to being put into practice for the first time in the western Balkans. How cooperation has continued to develop in a political and security capacity since the 1990s will shed light on the current EU and NATO policy in the region, as well as the implications of their cooperation has on the latest threats to security in Europe.

It is clear, given the recent conflict in Ukraine, that cooperation between the EU and NATO has a renewed importance and urgency to further develop. This paper will outline past examples of successful cooperation in relevant operations (that is, in meeting security issues on the continent) in the western Balkans, and show the implications this has in moving forward. In doing so, the initial international response to the breakup of Yugoslavia will briefly be reviewed, and the subsequent

Involvement of NATO and Europe to these conflicts in the 1990s. This leads to US/NATO efforts that finally brought the warring parties to the table, and Europe's increasing involvement as NATO phased out its operations. The evolution of institutional and operational dynamics of cooperation between the EU and NATO will then be examined before focusing on this relationship in regards to the western Balkans, and the impact it has had on the region—both positive and negative—to date. The paper will conclude with the lessons drawn and the implications for EU and NATO relations' moving forward, as conflict once again has emerged on the European continent.

II. International Involvement in During Yugoslav Wars

As early as 1991, Yugoslavia started to unravel with Slovenia declaring its independence, followed in short order by Croatia. In Bosnia, rampant nationalism turned the Bosniac, Croat, and Serb populations on each other, and for almost four years, the three sides fought each other in part to gain more territory. The United Nations (UN) deployed peacekeeping force UNPROFOR of roughly 40,000 troops in 1992, however the various mandates that UNPROFOR operated under were narrow and limited. This gave little options for the forces under the UN flag to operate, resulting in notable failures in not only keeping the peace, but also in protecting civilians in harm’s way. Initially the goal was to deliver aid to Sarajevo, which was under heavy siege, and other cities in Bosnia. As the conflict went on, UNPROFOR’s mandate increased to include protection of humanitarian aid convoys, and to protect so called “safe areas”. This was a result of a lack of consensus between Americans and Europeans (and among Europeans) on what to do about the conflict, and the hesitation about the use of force contributed to the longevity of the war in Bosnia. Not until the UN approved US led NATO airstrikes on Serb positions around Sarajevo and elsewhere did the warring parties come to the negotiating table and agree to terms, known as the Dayton Agreement, signed in Paris in 1995.

During the early stages of the war, NATO had been operating in a limited monitoring capacity, both in airspace and maritime monitoring. This was done most notably by enforcing an embargo of Yugoslavia in international waters in the Adriatic Sea, and enforcing the no-fly zones over Bosnia. 1994 saw the first NATO combat action when they shot down four Serb military jets while enforcing the no-fly zone.

NATO continued to increase its combat role in 1994 and 1995 as the situation on the ground failed to improve. NATO upgraded its operations to include retaliatory airstrikes against targets.

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after Bosnian-Serb leaders refused to comply with UN ultimatums to move or surrender heavy weapons. This continued until the parties agreed to stop fighting and enter peace negotiations.

This is by no means a complete account of the complex conflict that took place during the breakup of Yugoslavia. It is intended to provide an overview of the role the international community played. Given that this occurred in the early and mid-1990s, following the breakup of the Soviet Union and a drastically reshaped security landscape, this type of conflict was not seen on the European continent for nearly 50 years, and the EU and NATO had limited experience. During this conflict and continuing up to today, the EU and NATO tried to coordinate their efforts and establish efficient mechanisms for cooperation. As stated in the introduction, this was not always a smooth process. The next section will explore both institutional and informal efforts of cooperation between the EU and NATO, before moving on to how this cooperation played out in both the western Balkans and post-Soviet eastern Europe.

III. EU - NATO Relations: A Work in Progress

The Transatlantic security community has gone through many complex changes since the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s. The new security landscape allowed for the emergence of the European Union as a regional security actor, though not without its difficulties. NATO had long been the established security provider on the European continent, and this process made an impact on transatlantic relations. The initial focus was getting consensus within the union on what exactly the EU’s role should be in security and defense matters. Thus, EU’s “actorness” grew alongside and not in conjunction with NATO.4

The emergence of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in the 1991 Maastricht treaty was the first instance of rethinking relations between the two organizations. On the one hand, the United States welcomed efforts for Europe to take on more of a burden on matters of security. On the other hand, the US did not want European defense and security integration to undermine US influence in European security affairs by shifting towards autonomy outside of NATO.5 This conflict of interest was furthered by French and other Europeanist efforts, who wanted to develop more autonomous militarized capabilities for Europe.6 Still, the EU and NATO share much of the

same values and outline similar threats in strategic documents—not to mention member states—so a framework for cooperation is already in place to build upon.

An early example of this is the intersection of EU and NATO interests (prior to increased institutional cooperation) in central and eastern Europe. The situation was much different than in the Balkans, but there are some connections that can be made to EU and NATO attempts to push former Yugoslav states to become member states, just as they did in eastern Europe in the 1990s and early 2000s. The difference is, of course, a post-ethnic conflict situation in the Balkans that did not exist in the former Soviet republics.

During this process of integration, there was very little formal and institutional cooperation between the EU and NATO when working with the new eastern democracies during accession talks. Little thought was given to the overlap of membership demands and requirements for joining the EU and NATO by the two organizations. The demands were certainly felt by the prospective member states, yet they still managed to adhere to the demands and gain membership in relatively short order (some sooner than others) after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the western Balkans, the EU and NATO can also be seen applying this experience gained from promoting democracy and integrating post-Soviet Eastern European states following the end of the Cold War. Still, this is a case of the EU and NATO operating alongside each other and not necessarily with each other. There were certainly overlapping interests, but, as evidence by states joining NATO and EU at different times, the overlap do not equate to full coordination.

One area that the EU and NATO focused on was military and operational cooperation, especially in light of activity in the western Balkans. A significant agreement between NATO and the EU was the Berlin-Plus agreements, which came after the EU-NATO Declaration of 2002. The Berlin-Plus agreement established the first institutionalized agreement between the two Organizations. They were, in part, to give the EU the ability to use NATO assets and capabilities to conduct its own peacekeeping and crisis management operations, should NATO decline to be engaged.

The Berlin-Plus agreement was seen as a disappointment to some, while the accords were a promising institutional development on paper, it was not exactly clear how the EU come to use NATO assets. As a result, there were sentiments of disappointment, and despite being a formal agreement in nature, the implementation of the Berlin Plus Agreements would take place on a case by case basis on the ground. Still, the arrangement was careful to keep in mind issues of cooperation including the overlap and duplication of capabilities between the EU and NATO. This

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9 ibid: 107
was also beneficial in that there would be little duplication of what NATO already had, a measure that would save already scarce resources for EU security and defense.

The first major implementation of the Berlin-Plus Agreements came in the early 2000s, when the EU took over operations from NATO in the western Balkans. Two operations utilized the Berlin Plus Agreements, but operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina is arguably the best example of the Berlin Plus Agreements in action (see: Section VI). It is worth noting that there have not been many uses of the Berlin Plus, this example can still be used to illustrate the effectiveness of the agreements in cooperation between the two organizations.

In recent years, the EU and NATO have made concerted efforts to increase its cooperation mechanisms at the highest level. This includes incorporating a permanent NATO liaison team to the European Union’s Military Staff in 2005. Similarly an EU liaison cell was incorporated at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) the following year.\(^\text{10}\) This hints towards further progress, but with closer cooperation between the EU and NATO as fixture on the agenda of high level summits, there is still more progress to be made.

The following section will focus on the western Balkans, and look at the impact of EU and NATO cooperation in the Balkan region. The evolving institutional relationship between the EU and NATO occurred alongside the convicts that took place in the western Balkans. The events can be viewed as one of the main drivers of both EU’s ambition to become a more autonomous actor, and the EU and NATO coming moving towards increased cooperation in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

IV. EU and NATO: Close but Separate in the Western Balkans

As outlined in the introduction, the western Balkans are a prime region to explore the development of the EU and NATO’s cooperative relationship, simply because of the wide range of involvement by both organizations in the region. This includes military intervention and post-conflict peacekeeping and stabilization (see: section III) at multiple points in time and place. However, the presence of the EU and NATO goes beyond this. Once the situation on the ground maintained a more consistent stability, the focus changed to more political and economic oriented goals, like democratization, pursuing a rule of law based governance, and mainstreaming liberal, free market values that would lead to Balkan states eligible to join the EU and NATO. This section

will go over this transition, while following both the EU and NATO’s separate roles in the region and their relationship as it deepened with developments and shifting priorities in the region.

Following the signing of the Dayton Agreement and the conclusion of the Yugoslav wars in Bosnia, NATO began a peacekeeping and stabilization operation. This was via a UN mandate that NATO deployed an Implementation Force (IFOR), to make sure that the terms of the agreement were adhered to by all parties. Besides the overarching goal to maintain the peace, some of main tasks for IFOR was to oversee the transfer of territory as agreed in Dayton, and the movement of heavy weaponry from undesignated territory. As the situation improved, IFOR was able to focus on some of the civilian aspects of the Dayton agreement, and to assist other international organizations working with similar aims in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Specifically, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the UN.

IFOR was replaced in 1996 by the smaller Stabilization Force (SFOR) with largely similar goals as IFOR. The main focus was again on maintaining a safe and peaceful environment in BiH, and also to continue efforts towards fulfilling all the obligations under the Dayton Agreement, especially those focused on the armed forces, and combining all three ethnically divided armed forces under the state. Other tasks were to collect and destroy surplus weapon stockpiles left over from the war, and high involvement in de-mining operations throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. SFOR also assisted the EU Police Mission (EUPM) by providing additional security. This is an example of successful operational cooperation that took place on the ground.

The EU’s Operation Concordia in the FYROM initiated in 2003 was the first use of the Berlin Plus Agreement between the EU and NATO. NATO conducted two operations in FYROM from 2001 to 2003 after NATO and the EU brokered an agreement between the Macedonian government and the insurgency group National Liberation Army (NLA).\(^{11}\) The main task was weapons collection, and protection of international observers assisting the Macedonian government. in 2003, the EU took over operations, once again through the Berlin Plus agreement to provide security for both the OSCE and other international advisors.

Finally in 2004, the EU officially began EUFOR Althea, taking over the main peacekeeping operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.\(^{12}\) This operation, along with the EU operation Concordia in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), are examples of successful institutional cooperation between the EU and NATO and putting the Berlin Plus Agreements into practice. The cooperation in Bosnia and Herzegovina was successful in part because of it taking place in an operational standpoint on the ground. With the mechanisms in place after much deliberation in

\(^{11}\) Edström (2012): 121.

\(^{12}\) NATO maintains a presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina to assist the EU mission.
Brussels two years prior, both command structures on the ground were able to conduct a smooth transition. A positive sign for cooperation between the EU and NATO moving forward.

EU *Concordia* in FYROM concluded in 2005 and the EU launched a civilian police mission. Today, *Althea* is the longest running military operation by the European Union. The main purpose has continued to focus on peacekeeping and stability, but as the stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina has slowly become the norm, *Althea* has expanded to incorporate political goals of the EU. This has come to include not only stabilization and ensuring the Dayton agreement is adhered to (in conjunction with NATO and the Office of the High Representative (OHR), but also favoring long-term structural approaches to preventing future conflict. This is by way of reconstruction, economic stimulation, and developing political and social structures. Implementing and developing these structures is done with EU membership as an incentive.13

EU and NATO policy in the region today is overlapping in similar ways to what occurred in former Soviet space after the fall of the Soviet Union. There are common goals, to be sure, but the breadth and scope of each organization’s policy and instruments to approach their respective policy varies. NATO, as a military alliance, is able to focus all efforts on security and defense issues. The European Union, on the other hand, brings more political and economic concerns. Much analysis has been done on the positive and negative effects on the central and eastern Europe after accession to the EU and NATO. For example, Poland’s economy has greatly improved since integration, and, militarily speaking, is a regular contributor to NATO and EU operations.14 The Baltic states, and Estonia especially, quickly assimilated to western practices since integrating in the early 2000s. Romania and Bulgaria, joined the EU in 2004, and have shown impressive growth despite the financial crisis.15 With this in mind, what can be said about the EU and NATO relationship and its implications in the western Balkans thus far?

To begin with European Union, the main policy goal in the region is to push the Balkan states towards membership. This has been a long process. Slovenia was the first former Yugoslav republic to join the EU in 2004 in the EU’s fifth enlargement, followed by Croatia in 2013. As mentioned, operation *Althea* is the largest EU operation to date, and has come to broaden its scope to include more. This has come to include not only stabilization and ensuring the Dayton agreement is adhered to (in conjunction with NATO and the Office of the High Representative (OHR), but also favoring long-term structural approaches to preventing future conflict. This is by way of reconstruction, economic stimulation, and developing political and social structures. Implementing

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13 Ana E. Juncos, “The EU’s post-Conflict Intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina: (re)Integrating the Balkans and/or (re)Inventing the EU?” *Southeast European Politics* 6, no. 2 (2005): 93.
and developing these structures is done with EU membership as an incentive.\textsuperscript{16} This indicates that while the EU stresses the importance of security and defense integration for external action, still uses economic and diplomatic instruments as its main tools in external relations.

NATO, like the EU, operates beyond what started as peacekeeping and stabilization, with the goal to assist the countries in the region to the proper standards of membership. As a military alliance, NATO has a more narrow approach compared with the EU, focusing on matters of security and defense. There are still political, economic, and social aspects to this, however they tend to lead back to security sector reform. For example, a major focus of NATO was democratizing the armed forces of BiH, as this was prerequisite for BiH to join the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program.\textsuperscript{17}

This was achieved in 2004, a major step because it saw the ethnically separate entities’ armed forces became incorporated under one command structure under the authority of the state, and not the separate entities. The next major step that NATO has been focused on is bringing the immovable military assets (barracks, airstrips, training grounds, etc) under the ownership of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but this has been met with skepticism. This is an obstacle for BiH to take another important step on the path towards joining NATO. This is the Membership Action Plan (MAP) program, which is the last step before full membership.\textsuperscript{18}

More broadly, joining NATO provides security guarantees that are highly sought, even without the threat of an imminent attack. The argument also runs that with besides the geopolitical implications in regards to this newfound security, the benefits also extent to the economy and society. With membership in NATO comes more foreign investment, because by being invited to join NATO means that the situation is already secure on the ground, as well as the process of democratization and liberal markets. Once that is in place, investors are more willing to look for opportunities in the country.\textsuperscript{19}

From this we can discern some of the positive and negative implications that the development of the EU and NATO relationship has had in the Balkan region. It is impossible to infer if further EU and NATO involvement in the region, whether they lead to full integration of the region into both organizations, will have an overall positive impact. The two Balkan states already integrated, Slovenia and Croatia, show varying degrees of success. Croatia is still struggling economically, and while it is important to keep in mind that Slovenia has had the benefit of almost a

\textsuperscript{16} Juncos, (2005): 32.
\textsuperscript{17} NATO, "NATO’s relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina," 17 June, 2014, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49127.htm>
decade of membership over Croatia, the struggles might be cause for concern for potential members of the EU in the region.\textsuperscript{20}

With that said, the western Balkans provides for an interesting region to examine the developing relationship between the EU and NATO because of the conflict occurring before there was much cooperation between the two. The developments in the region have, of course, had a tremendous impact on the region itself, but also on the relations of the EU and NATO. In the context of EU-NATO relations, then, the EU can be seen as establishing itself as a normative regional actor to compliment NATO’s military strength. Security matters continued to arise alongside increasing cooperation between EU and NATO, and many of the events that took place in the western Balkans can be seen as a catalyst for deepening cooperation efforts.

VI. Conclusions

On one hand, the EU and NATO can draw some lessons from their experience in the western Balkans in dealing with new security threats, especially on European continent. On the other hand, the EU and NATO will continue to follow independent paths, with limited political cooperation in the western Balkans outside of the continuing operations under the Berlin-Plus Agreement. This is not entirely surprising, as the requirements and obligations of aspiring member states are different for both organizations.

This paper has discussed how both the EU and NATO have cooperated in both the western Balkans, first in diffusing the conflicts that took place in the 1990s, then in continuing to maintain a presence in the region through a variety of military and civilian peacekeeping operations. With conflict emerging once again on the conflict, this time to the east, the EU and NATO should use the experience gained from cooperating in the Balkans to better address the situation. However, there are problems.

The main weakness in coordination between these two organizations is in political cooperation between high levels of the EU and NATO. Progress since the 1990s has been made, to be sure. This was apparent during the Yugoslav wars and subsequent efforts in the region. Where the two have shown success is operational cooperation on the ground. Military leadership has often spoken of the strong working relationship that made for an easy transition from NATO’s SFOR operation to Europe’s EUFOR. This is in part because of many common members, which led to about 80% of SFOR soldiers continuing on in EUFOR.²¹

The European Union and NATO were founded on many of the same core values, and these values gave been a driving force the action and membership of both organizations. While NATO is strictly a military alliance, and the EU is a much more comprehensive political institution, matters of security and defense are the natural arena in which both cooperation and even competition has taken place. As this paper has shown, the EU and NATO started to stress the importance of close relations, and still do. However, as the conflicts cooled off in the western Balkans, so has this cooperation. This is mainly due to the fact both are pursuing their own separate (but similar) goals in the region. That is, integration of the Balkan states into Euro-Atlantic structures and institutions.

Despite the success at the operational level, this paper has also shown areas where the two organizations are still lacking in institutional mechanisms for cooperation, usually at the highest political levels. This is concerning and relevant as new security concerns have emerged on the European continent in the last eight months. Because the US, NATO, and Europe have expressed their desire to approach the situation in Ukraine through political means, it is highly unlikely that

there will be an instance where the lessons from successful operational cooperation between the EU and NATO can be applied. Instead, political cooperation should continue to develop at the highest political levels, despite obstacles from the Turkey/Cyprus dispute. Informal dialogue should also continue to be pursued to bypass the aforementioned obstacles.

It goes without saying that today’s international security climate is much different than what was witnessed during the former Yugoslavian conflicts and post-Soviet space of the 1990s. However, the need for cooperation between the EU and NATO in dealing with Russia is apparent, given the proximity of conflict and Russian aggression to both the EU and NATO’s eastern borders.²² How both organizations engage with Russia, Ukraine, and the rest of the region will have a deciding impact on the path current crisis will take in the months to come. One only needs to look back on the indecisiveness of NATO and the European Community at the outbreak of violence in the Balkans to see how a lack of coordination can contribute to a crisis getting out of hand.

The western Balkans today, on the other hand, are already intertwined in the complex EU-NATO relationship, and the desire is there to continue on the path towards integration (to varying degrees) in the region. Considering the successes and failures and positive and negative impacts of EU-NATO cooperation in the western Balkans outlined in this paper, the current situation is desirable because of the relative stability in the region. Both can work alongside each other in integrating the region. The same cannot be said to the east, however. For future success of EU-NATO response to security crises (and the aftermath), better high level political and institutional coordination between the European Union and NATO should be a top priority.

### Appendix I

**Table 1: EU and NATO Operations in the Western Balkans**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Mission</th>
<th>Mission</th>
<th>Personel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>1995 - 96</td>
<td>IFOR (military)</td>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>60,000 troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>1996 - 2004</td>
<td>SFOR (mil.)</td>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>32,000 troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Essential Harvest</td>
<td>former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)</td>
<td>3,500 troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>2001 - 2002</td>
<td>Amber Fox</td>
<td>FYROM</td>
<td>700 troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>2002 - 2003</td>
<td>Allied Harmony</td>
<td>FYROM</td>
<td>300 advisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>2003 - 2005</td>
<td>EUPROXIMA (civilian)</td>
<td>FYROM</td>
<td>200 security advisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>2003 - 2005</td>
<td>EUCONCORDIA (mil.)</td>
<td>FYROM</td>
<td>300 troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>2003 - 2011</td>
<td>EUPM (civ.)</td>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>2,300 police/civ. personel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>2005 - 2006</td>
<td>EUPAT (civ.)</td>
<td>FYROM</td>
<td>30 police advisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>1999 - ongoing</td>
<td>KFOR (mil.)</td>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>4,882 troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>2003 - ongoing</td>
<td>EULEX (civ.)</td>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>1,118 (max: 1250)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>2004 - ongoing</td>
<td>EUFOR ALTHEA (mil.)</td>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>600 troops</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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http://www.aco.nato.int/kfor/about-us/troop-numbers-contributions.aspx (kfor)

http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_52060.htm (ifor, sfor)

http://www.nato.int/fyrom/home.htm (nato in fyrom)
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