Revamping CSDP Partnerships in the Shadow of Brexit

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Abstract
One of the aims derived from the EUGS is to develop a more strategic approach to third-country partnerships in the realm of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). This reflects the necessity of updating existing arrangements with a view to the EU's broadening comprehensive approach, defence related innovations and Brexit. Discussions are on going, but the Brexit negotiations provide some insight into the meaning and limitations of this strategic upgrade. They illustrate the EU's red lines and the fact that its openness continues to vary depending on the CSDP sub area. The real meaning of this more strategic approach remains to be spelled out, and its merit can only be judged based on its implementation.

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Introduction

The EUGS reads like an ode to multilateralism. Partnership is one of its four guiding principles. The words "partner" or "partnership" appear 76 times in the 50 page document and encompasses a broad range of actors. Partners include multilateral and regional organizations,[1] civil society and private sector players, recipients of EU development aid, and "like minded" countries. The EUGS calls on them to share responsibility with the EU in advancing the rules based global order and underlines that this "goes hand in hand with revamping our external partnerships".[2]

The Security and Defence Implementation Plan (SDIP), published in November 2016, applies this aim to the CSDP: the EU should develop "a more strategic approach to CSDP partnership cooperation with partner countries which share EU values and are willing and able to contribute to CSDP missions and operations including considering possibilities to strengthen their resilience".[3] Why does the EU need a more strategic approach? How far has it come in revamping these partnerships? And what are the implications of Brexit?

A more strategic approach: What, why and how?

Generally speaking, a more strategic approach should imply aligning CSDP partnerships more closely with the EU's interests. The SDIP lists three reasons for the EU to engage third countries in the CSDP[4]: it enhances legitimacy, opens paths for further cooperation, and enlarges the pool of available resources. Third countries also have an interest in participating in the CSDP as the EU can lend them legitimacy and act as a multiplier. In addition, they might gain a degree of informal influence on the EU's security and defence policy. These mutual benefits explain the long tradition of CSDP partnerships.

[1] Hilke Dijkstra, "Implementing the Integrated Approach: Investing in Other International Organisations", in *EU Global Strategy Watch*, No. 1, Istituto Affari Internazionali/Foundation of European Progressive Studies, July 2018, https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/eugs_watch_2.pdf
[2] Council of the European Union, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, Brussels, June 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf
[3] Council of the European Union, *Implementation Plan on Security and Defence*, Brussels, November 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_implementation_plan_st14392.en16_0.pdf
[4] *Ibid*.

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Overview of the EU's more institutionalized CSDP partnerships

Partner country	Framework Participation Agreement	Security of Information Agreement	Participates in EU Battlegroup scheme	EDA admin. arrangement	EDF "associated country"
Albania	x	x			
Australia	x	x			
Bosnia Herzegovina	x	x			
Canada	x	x			
Chile	x				
Colombia	x				
Georgia	x	x			
Iceland	x	x			x
Israel		x			
Liechtenstein		x			x
Moldova	x	x			
Montenegro	x	x			
New Zealand	x				
North Macedonia	x	x	x		
Norway	x	x	x	x	x
Republic of Korea	x				
Russia		x			
Serbia	x	x	x	x	
Switzerland		x		x	
Turkey	x		x		
Ukraine	x	x	x	x	
United States	x	x			

Source: Author's compilation

The table above is not exhaustive, but it illustrates that CSDP partnerships have grown organically. There is no one size fits all approach. Cooperation intensity and arrangements vary according to the CSDP sub area:

- Approximately 45 third countries have to date contributed to CSDP missions and operations.[5]
- Eighteen of them have opted for a more structured engagement via a Framework Participation Agreement.

[5] UK Parliament, "Brexit: Common Security and Defence Policy Missions and Operations", London, April 2018, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldeucom/132/13207.htm#footnote-209

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- Seventeen countries have concluded agreements with the EU on the protection and exchange of classified information.
- Five partners have participated in the EU's Battlegroup scheme.
- Four countries have administrative arrangements allowing them to participate in the projects and programmes of the European Defence Agency (EDA).
- Three countries are designated as eligible to participate in the European Defence Fund (EDF) as associated countries according to the proposed regulation.[6]

Why does the EU need a more strategic approach and why now? First, the patchy nature of CSDP partnership arrangements calls for a review, also taking into account possible links to other areas of cooperation within the EU's broadening comprehensive approach. Second, the EU has drawn up new defence cooperation formats in the past years. It thus has to decide to what extent and how to engage third countries. This particularly concerns the European Defence Fund (EDF) and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). Finally, Brexit provides additional political thrust. With the departure of the UK, one of the EU's most significant military players is leaving the club. The question is how close cooperation could be ensured nevertheless. Any "revamped" partnership with the UK will likely lead other closely engaged partners such as Norway and Turkey to call for an upgrade as well.[7]

So far relatively little is known about the concrete meaning of the EU's more strategic approach to CSDP partnerships. Discussions are on going, but have largely taken place behind closed doors. On 25 June 2018, the Foreign Affairs Council acknowledged proposals by the High Representative and tasked the relevant preparatory bodies to take work forward.[8] According to informed sources, the EU's more strategic approach consists of three lines of action:

1. Reviewing existing mechanisms for third country participation in CSDP missions and operations. This could involve better and earlier access to planning documents as well as greater involvement in strategic review processes.
2. Upgrading political dialogue on security and defence. This could, for instance, lead to more structured and tailor made bilateral security dialogues as well as regional ones on thematic clusters such as maritime security or counter terrorism.
3. Taking a more structured approach to capacity building. This is about adjusting the EU's tools and strategies for enhancing the resilience of partners, for instance in the Sahel region.

[6] European Commission, *Proposal for a Regulation Establishing the European Defence Fund*, Brussels, June 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-eu-defence-fund-regulation_en.pdf

[7] Senem Aydın-Düzgit and Alessandro Marrone, "PESCO and Security Cooperation between the EU and Turkey", Istituto Affari Internazionali, September 2018, https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/pesco-and-security-cooperation-between-eu-and-turkey

[8] Council of the European Union, *Conclusions on Security and Defence in the Context of the EU Global Strategy*, Brussels, June 2018, http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10246-2018-INIT/en/pdf

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Brexit and the EU's red lines

Brexit may be a driver behind revamping CSDP partnerships, but it is also the reason why discussions were on hold at the time of writing. Anything agreed in the negotiations is likely to have implications for CSDP partnerships and vice versa. The future EU-UK security partnership can thus be seen as a testing ground for the EU's more strategic approach. The negotiations to date provide some insight on its effective meaning and the EU's red lines.

The EU's negotiating position rested on three principles. The EU-UK security and defence partnership post-Brexit should:

1. Be without prejudice to the EU's decision-making autonomy;
2. Reflect a balance of rights and obligations; and
3. Not grant benefits equivalent to those of an EU member state.[9]

In addition, the British solution should "not disrupt [the] EU's relationships with [other] third countries".[10] In other words, the deal offered to the UK should, at least in theory, be available to other relevant partners. These principles clashed with the UK's call for a unique security partnership that, while mirroring aspects of existing EU-third country arrangements, should go beyond them.[11] Amongst other things, this implied greater access to decision-making or at least decision shaping as well as the possibility to join PESCO and EDF projects.

The Political Declaration on the future relationship provides some hints at the future compromise[12]:

- There should be a Political Dialogue on CFSP and CSDP as well as sectoral dialogues that would allow for flexible consultation at different levels (ministerial, senior official, working). The EU and the UK should also cooperate closely in third countries, including on security.
- The High Representative "may, where appropriate, invite the United Kingdom to informal Ministerial meetings".[13] The UK could thus be invited to the informal EU foreign (Gymnich) and defence ministers' meetings.
- The UK is to participate in CSDP missions and operations on a case-by-case basis via a Framework Participation Agreement.
- The EU is ready to grant the UK more and earlier access to the CSDP planning process as well as the possibility to second staff to the designated Operations Headquarters if it participates in military CSDP operations – both "proportionate to the level of its contribution".[14]

[9] European Commission – Task Force for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiations with the United Kingdom under Article 50 TEU, "Foreign, Security and Defence Policy" [slides], Brussels, June 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/slides_on_foreign_security_defence_policy.pdf
[10] *Ibid*.
[11] UK Government, *Foreign Policy, Defence and Development: A Future Partnership Paper*, London, September 2017, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/643924/Foreign_policy__defence_and_development_paper.pdf
[12] Council of the European Union, *Political Declaration Setting Out the Framework for the Future Relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom*, Brussels, November 2018, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/37100/20181121-cover-political-declaration.pdf
[13] *Ibid*.
[14] *Ibid*.

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These supposed concessions are still narrowly framed and partly vague. There is no mention of the frequency of exchanges. There is no standing invitation to informal Ministerial meetings or CSDP missions. It remains to be seen how much access to informal decision-shaping the UK would actually get and in return for what level of contribution.

Furthermore, there is no indication of special concessions regarding Britain's EDF participation. The Political Declaration states that "eligible" UK entities can participate in EDF projects.[15] In principle, eligible entities have to be established in the EU or associated countries and not be controlled by a third country. Exceptions can be made "if this is necessary for achieving the objectives of the action and provided that its participation will not put at risk the security interests of the Union".[16]

Finally, there are high political hurdles for third-country participation in PESCO projects. They can be invited "exceptionally" to participate if they "provide substantial added value" and if the Council in PESCO format (i.e., 25 member states) unanimously agrees.[17] Some EU member states prefer an even stricter approach to eligibility in order to limit access for certain third countries. Countries such as Greece are reluctant when it comes to opening the door too widely to Turkey. The compromise that seems to emerge is making access to *some* PESCO projects conditional on administrative arrangements with the EDA, which currently only four third countries have.

Conclusion and outlook

The EU is still in the process of defining what a more strategic approach to CSDP partnerships means. Two messages can be derived from the Brexit negotiations. First, the EU's red lines are indeed very red. In the negotiations, it prioritized its political principles over the strategic interest in keeping the UK as closely associated as possible. Second, the EU's willingness to engage third countries continues to vary according to the CSDP sub-area: there is an openness to involve third countries in CSDP missions and operations and intelligence cooperation; the hurdles for access to the EU's capability-related cooperation formats are, however, high.

The British case points towards more scalable CSDP partnerships, whereby cooperation could be intensified proportionate to the level of the third country's contribution. The meaning and merit of the EU's more strategic approach will depend on how the terms "scalable" and "proportionate" are translated into practice. Informal arrangements and exception clauses could allow for a much more differentiated approach to third countries than the formal arrangements would suggest.

[15] *Ibid*.
[16] European Commission, *Proposal for a Regulation Establishing the European Defence Fund*, Brussels, June 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-eu-defence-fund-regulation_en.pdf
[17] Council of the European Union, *Decision Establishing Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and Determining the List of Participating Member States*, Brussels, December 2017, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017D2315&from=DE

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Another key test for the EU's strategic approach to CSDP partnerships will be its ability to link them to other areas of bilateral or bi-regional cooperation.[18] This would, for instance, imply linking security-related dialogues to others in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. It would also entail compromises across EU institutions regarding comprehensive capacity building to foster resilience in third countries. While such linkages would clearly be in line with the broadening comprehensive approach promoted by the EUGS, they might well run into some EU-internal hurdles.

[18] Thierry Tardy, "Revisiting the EU's Security Partnerships", EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, January 2018, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%201%20Security%20Partnerships.pdf

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