

Frontex & NATO: A New Partnership in the Making

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Summary:

This working paper explores the operational cooperation between Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard agency, and NATO. Since 2016, these two disparate actors have started to cooperate in the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean Sea after NATO's involvement in countering irregular migration. This working paper, based on data collected through semi-structured interviews with Frontex and NATO staff as well as document review and analysis, seeks to analyse the cooperation of these two institutions by assessing their mandate, the reasons for their establishment, their operations and their organisational enhancements. It focuses on their role in addressing a non-traditional security challenge, namely irregular migration, which provided the basis for joining efforts and initiating their operational cooperation. The latter raises serious concerns about the future of both institutions and the adopted EU strategy to cope with the issue of migration. All these define a new EU-NATO security partnership that has the potential to reshape the content of the transatlantic cooperation.

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Frontex & NATO: A New Partnership in the Making

Introduction

In the universal calendar, it is possible to distinguish two years that altered the world significantly and can be separated from the continuity of modern history due to their profound and immense changes that they triggered. 1945 marks the end of the World War II that led four years later to the birth of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). This signals the emergence of a Cold War period characterised by geopolitical, ideological, economic and military rivalries between powers in the Western Bloc led by the capitalist United States of America and powers in the Eastern Bloc led by the communist Soviet Union. The collapse and dissolution of the Soviet Union brought an official end to the Cold War leading to a complete transformation of the norms underpinning the international system.

In a similar vein, almost 60 years later, 2001 was another key year for the modern world history. The 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States committed by Osama bin Laden's terrorist group al-Qaeda occurred the death of 2,977 people. These attacks initiated the 'Global War on Terrorism' declared by President George W. Bush. The War on Terrorism described a counterterrorism campaign that forged a 'coalition of the willing' accompanied by legislative measures, economic restrictions as well as military operations to combat terrorist networks. In the other side of the coin, terrorists targeted EU countries, with attacks in Madrid on 11 March 2004 and in London on 7 July 2005. Four years after the 9/11 attacks, Frontex, the EU border agency, became operational so as to provide an EU response to common border challenges. These challenges included irregular migration, trafficking and smuggling of human beings, organised crime and terrorism.

Born in variant chronological periods, serving different purposes and reflecting disparate security logics, NATO and Frontex appear very different. NATO, being a Cold War product, seems to represent an old or traditional conception to security as opposed to Frontex, which engages with non-traditional security challenges. However, both institutions constitute key security structures for Europe. Furthermore, both have undergone a series of institutional changes for the reinforcement of their function and role to be still relevant and important actors. In this context, trying to respond effectively to today's world security concerns, NATO and Frontex have started their cooperation marking the formation of a possible new partnership. As a result, this shapes a new status quo to the European security regime, while, in parallel, it brings considerations for further amendments to the role, function and character of these two institutions.

NATO: An Enduring and Evolving Alliance

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is an intergovernmental military alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty that was signed on 4 April 1949 for providing regional defense against external threats or coercion. Most importantly, NATO was created to function as a counterweight to the Soviet Union. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the formation of a military alliance along with the distribution of economic aid to Europe via the Marshall Plan was deemed as a *sine qua non* condition to ensure a long-lasting peace avoiding a possible World War III. In this context, on April 4, 1949, in Washington, D.C., 12 countries signed the North Atlantic Treaty forming the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) with a mandate to 'promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area' and 'safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation' of member countries through political and military means.² This decision for NATO's establishment reflected a change in US foreign policy, as the United States of America chose to tie officially its security to that of the other members of NATO quitting isolationist practices.

NATO consists of 29 member countries³ and since its foundation it has conducted various missions in Europe, Asia, Africa and North America, to preserve peace and security. These missions range from disaster response, such as earthquake relief assistance in Pakistan and the coordination of movement of urgently needed material after hurricane Katrina struck the south of the United States to the air campaign, Operation Allied Force, in Kosovo and Operation Ocean Shield against piracy in the Gulf of Aden.

This wide range of missions and crisis management activities marks a redefinition of NATO's role from military threats to non-conventional security challenges, such as societal and political instability, counter-terrorism as well as cyber defence. After all, with the dissolution of the Soviet threat, NATO's existence started to be questioned. To adapt to the post-Cold War security environment, find a new *raison d'être* so as not to be obsolete and refute Kenneth Waltz's assumption that though 'NATO's days are not numbered, its years are',⁴ the Alliance started to engage with new security preoccupations. This redrawing of NATO's goals and the expansion of its mission is reflected in the three NATO Strategic Concepts that have been drafted since the end of the Cold War.⁵ These Concepts capture an evolving and unstable security environment. As such, they adopt a broader focus on security noting that 'the security challenges and risks which NATO faces are different in nature from what they were in the past ... Risks to Allied security are less likely to result from calculated aggression against the territory of the

² The North Atlantic Treaty (Washington D.C.: 1949).

³ NATO's founding member countries include the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Iceland and Canada.

⁴ Waltz, K. 'The Emerging Structure of International Politics', *International Security*, 18, 2, (1993), p. 76.

⁵ See NATO, 'The Alliance's New Strategic Concept Agreed by the Heads of State and Government participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council' (1991). Available at https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm (accessed 14 February 2018); NATO, 'The Alliance's Strategic Concept Approved by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington D.C.' (1999). Available at https://www.nato.int/cps/on/natohq/official_texts_27433.htm (accessed 14 February 2018); NATO, 'NATO Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Lisbon 19-20 November 2010' (Lisbon: NATO, 2010).

Allies, but rather from the adverse consequences of instabilities that may arise from the serious economic, social and political difficulties'.⁶

In this context, migration has been integrated in the rhetoric of NATO as a new security preoccupation. For instance, in 1990, during the Annual Session of the North Atlantic Assembly, NATO Secretary General, Manfred Wörner, was the first to refer to migration at NATO level, as a source that emanates tensions and therefore is considered a threat to NATO's member-states territorial integrity.⁷ Today, the issue of migration has assumed tremendous dimensions due to the increased number of people that attempt to cross the borders in search of better economic and social opportunities. Others have been displaced and forced to flee to escape war, conflicts, violence, persecution, environmental disasters and human rights violations. In 2015, the estimated number of international migrants had reached 244 million compared to 173 million in 2000.⁸ Usually, numbers are perceived in a context and are being followed by policies and measures. As a result, and amid Trump administration in the United States, a resurgent interest in migration has been developed. According to the US President, NATO must adapt to the challenges of the future and upgrade its 'focus on today's most pressing security and all of its challenges, including migration and terrorism'.⁹

⁶ NATO, 'The Alliance's New Strategic Concept Agreed by the Heads of State and Government participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council' (1991). Available at https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm (accessed 14 February 2018).

⁷ NATO, 'Address given at the 36th Annual Session of the North Atlantic Assembly: Speech by Secretary General, Manfred Wörner' (1990). Available at https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1990/s901129a_e.htm (accessed 06 March 2018).

⁸ IOM, 'Data Bulletin: Informing a Global Compact for Migration', *Global Migration Trends*, 1, November 2017. Available at <http://gmdac.iom.int/data-bulletin-global-migration-trends> (accessed 05 March 2018).

⁹ NATO, 'Joint Press Conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the President of the United States, Donald Trump' (2017). Available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_143135.htm (accessed 06 March 2018).

Frontex: From the EU Integration to the Projection of Security and Border Management

Out of the ashes of the Second World War, the project of the European Union emerged that led to the gradual development of an economic and political union between 28 member states.¹⁰ The EU has promoted and is now characterised by the principle of free movement, which constitutes part of the four fundamental freedoms of the common market referred to the 1957 Treaty of Rome, namely free movement of goods, services, capital and workers. The free movement is guaranteed by the 1985 Schengen Agreement on the gradual abolition of checks at the common borders of Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Germany.¹¹ Open internal borders within the Schengen zone were balanced with rules for the tightening of controls at the common external border. This has led to a distinction between mobility of EU citizens and members of the Schengen area and third country nationals entering the EU. The attraction of the Schengen model that now consists of 26 European countries has deepened the cooperation in the respective field producing the development of a common migration policy.

In this context, in 2004, the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex) was established by Council Regulation (EC) 2007/2004 to assist member states with migration management and border control.¹² After several enhancements in its role with subsequent Regulations,¹³ Frontex has now become the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.¹⁴

Frontex was created to coordinate the operational cooperation between member states in the field of border management. Apart from addressing irregular migration issues, Frontex's mandate also included

¹⁰ Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom. Although on June 2016, the United Kingdom has voted to leave the EU, currently it remains a full member of the EU.

¹¹ Convention Implementing the Schengen Agreement of 14 June 1985 between the Governments of the States of the Benelux Economic Union, the Federal Republic of Germany and the French Republic on the Gradual Abolition of Checks at their Common Borders. (Schengen Implementation Agreement) [2000, OJ L 239, 19.06.1990].

¹² Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 of 26 October 2004 establishing a European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union [2004, OJ L 349/1].

¹³ See Regulation (EC) No 863/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 July 2007 Establishing a Mechanism for the Creation of Rapid Border Intervention Teams and Amending Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 as regards that Mechanism and Regulating the Tasks and Powers of Guest Officers [2007, OJ L 199/30]; Regulation (EU) No 1168/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2011 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 establishing a European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union [2011, OJ L 304/1]; Regulation (EU) No 1052/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2013 establishing the European Border Surveillance System (Eurosur) [2013, OJ L 295/11]; Regulation (EU) 656/2014 of the European Parliament and the Council of 15 May 2014 establishing rules for the surveillance of the external sea borders in the context of operational cooperation coordinated by Frontex also introduced changes to the mandate of the agency, namely in terms of what concerns sea operations coordinated by Frontex [2014, OJ L 189/93].

¹⁴ Regulation (EU) 2016/1624 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2016 on the European Border and Coast Guard and amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation (EC) No 863/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 and Council Decision 2005/267/EC [2016, OJ L 251/1].

other types of cross-border crime, such as trafficking in human beings, migrant smuggling, smuggling of drugs and weapons, document fraud, stolen vehicles and terrorism. In this regard, in 2015 Frontex conducted twenty-one land, sea and air joint operations at the EU external borders. In addition, it organised sixty-five return operations.

Apart from the conduct of joint operations and rapid interventions in case of urgent and exceptional pressure, Frontex is also contributing to the EU's research. In this regard, it develops new capacities and capabilities, like technological tools and innovative products for border management as proposed by its Research and Innovation unit. Moreover, Frontex manages and develops operational resources, including human resources and technical equipment to be deployed during joint operations. Thus, Frontex builds its own capacity with a pool of experts and technical equipment or services for border control. Furthermore, through training activities, Frontex promotes the harmonisation of border-guard education and competencies setting standards for quality assurance and learning development. Also, Frontex cooperates with EU partners, international organisations and third countries providing technical assistance and operational advice. In this light, regarding operational cooperation with third countries, Frontex has concluded working arrangements with the authorities of eighteen countries.¹⁵ Moreover, it has created several information sharing networks to deepen Frontex's collaboration with EU's neighbouring countries and foster information exchange. Furthermore, focusing on risk analysis, Frontex collects and analyses data about the situation at the external borders identifying potential risks and migratory trends so as to formulate suggestions for future operational responses. Apart from analysing future threats, the current situation at the borders is monitored by the Frontex Situation Centre, which aims at providing a constantly updated picture of the irregular migration situation.

Frontex's establishment, operational function and expertise on issues related to border management has contributed to the development of a comprehensive approach to EU border control. This has led to the coordination and harmonisation of this area with different measures, such as the proposal in 2013 for a Smart Borders Package and the adoption of the Eurosur Regulation, which constitutes a border surveillance system that fosters situational awareness and information exchange.¹⁶ Also, in relation to irregular border crossings, Frontex has contributed to an improved integration of external border management through the Agency's horizontal activities. More specifically, an evaluation of the Poseidon Land Joint Operation from July 2008 to July 2014 revealed that Frontex's activities contributed to a reduction to the number of incidents of irregular migrant crossing and cross-border crime.¹⁷ The same applies to the deployment of Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABIT) in 2010 at the request of Greece so as to tackle the exceptional and urgent irregular migration towards this member state. This operation started on November 2010 and ended on March 2011. By the end of the RABIT operation

¹⁵ These countries are Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Cape Verde, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Nigeria, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine and the United States. See Frontex, 'Key Documents: Working Arrangements with non-EU Countries' (2018). Available at <https://frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/key-documents/?category=working-arrangements-with-non-eu-countries> (accessed 02 October 2018).

¹⁶ Regulation (EU) No 1052/2013.

¹⁷ Ramboll Management Consulting & EurAsylum, 'External Evaluation of the Agency under Art. 33 of the Frontex Regulation: Final Report', 28/07/2015;

there had been a 76% decrease in the number of irregular migrants apprehended compared to the daily average in October 2010.¹⁸

These achievements and the contribution of Frontex to the management of EU border control led to the agency's enhancement with more functions, staff and budget. However, the unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants that reached the EU in 2015 marked a refugee and migrant crisis that required additional measures to address it effectively. In this regard, in December 2015, the European Commission proposed a Regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard (EBCG). This Regulation was part of a package of measures aimed at ensuring the protection of the EU's external borders.¹⁹ After only six months of political negotiations, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament adopted new tasks and competences for Frontex in the framework of the European Border and Coast Guard. Consequently, the Agency was entrusted with a broader responsibility in the management of the external borders of the EU.²⁰

Although there are several common elements from the old Frontex, upon which the new Frontex is constructed, like joint operations, risk analysis, training and research, there are also important differences that highlight the character and functions of this new Frontex. From the official launch of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in 2016, Frontex has included in its expanded mandate the deployment of European Border and Coast Guard teams and the provision of support at hotspot areas with screening, debriefing, identification and fingerprinting. Apart from that, under the new mandate Frontex has more competences in return activities. It is also tasked to carry out vulnerability assessments, which can include the assessment of the capacity and readiness of a Member State to face threats at the external borders. Hence, Frontex now has a broader mandate to tackle the increasing challenges at the EU's external borders. But, apart from the mandate, this new Frontex also has and the means to fulfill its enhanced goals. In this context, from 317 staff members in 2014 the goal for new Frontex's staff is to reach 1,000 by 2020. The same remarkable increase applies to financial resources, as by €89 million in 2014, new Frontex's budget is planned to reach €322 million in 2020.²¹

Under this expanded mandate and role in migration management Frontex has to develop and provide effective operational response capacity regarding border management so as to justify its profound enhancement. This can only be implemented with an important and steady reduction in the number of irregular border crossings as well as the development of an EU border control policy that will ensure an equitable burden-sharing for border management between the EU outermost countries and the member states that do not have external borders. This can render border control a joint effort.

¹⁸ Frontex, 'News' (2011). Available at http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Attachments_News/fer_rabit_2010_screen_v6.pdf (accessed 19 February 2018).

¹⁹ See European Commission, 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council Managing the Refugee Crisis: State of Play of the Implementation of the Priority Actions under the European Agenda on Migration', COM(2015) 510 final. Brussels: 14.10.2015.

²⁰ Regulation (EU) 2016/1624.

²¹ European Commission, 'Press Release Database: 'Questions & Answers: The New European Border and Coast Guard Agency' (2016). Available at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-3308_en.htm (accessed 19 February 2018).

The Turbulent Road of EU-NATO Cooperation: The CSDP Case

The success of the EU model of government and polity led to the deepening of integration. Also, it encouraged certain EU member states to start exploring additional areas for increased cooperation. In this context, the EU's inability to solve peacefully the tensions in the Balkans,²² as well as its incapacity to act with military means, without the help of NATO, against potential aggressors underlined a substantial EU security gap. At the other side of the pond that period underlined the military supremacy of the USA. In parallel, it expressed the need for the USA to disengage from Europe and move its attention to other geographic areas, such as the East Asia and the Arctic.

In this security and geostrategic context, the EU started to envision the development of a common security and military capacity to accompany its common foreign and security policy (CFSP) established in 1993 under the Maastricht Treaty. Having as milestones the Franco-British Summit at St Malo in 1998²³ and the European Councils in Cologne and Helsinki²⁴ in 1999, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) was launched. After the conclusion of the 'Berlin Plus' agreement in 2003,²⁵ which clarified the terms of cooperation and the relationship dynamics between NATO and CSDP, this new EU defence structure started to operate. Since then, the EU has undertaken eighteen missions using civilian and military means in Europe, Asia and Africa, while other seventeen operations are currently conducted.²⁶

In the next decade of the 'Berlin Plus' agreement, both NATO and the EU evolved as they faced new security preoccupations, crises and institutional challenges. The Arab Spring uprisings and Arab Winter extremism brought instability on Europe's doorstep and an unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants. This compelled the EU and its member states to direct their efforts and resources to the issue of migration elaborating new policy and operational responses. At the same time, NATO's Operation Unified Protector in Libya in 2011 and the ISAF mission in Afghanistan that ended in 2014, highlighted NATO's operational weaknesses, organisational shortcomings and capability gaps between the United States and EU countries.

²² The Balkan wars broke out in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995 and in Kosovo from 1998 to 1999.

²³ The St Malo Declaration in 1998 called for the development of a 'capacity for autonomous action backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises'. See Franco-British St. Malo Declaration, 'Joint Declaration on European Defence'. 4 December 1998.

²⁴ The European Council in Helsinki created the institutional framework for CSDP's management, which included the Political and Security Committee (PSC), the EU Military Committee (EUMC) and the EU Military Staff (EUMS). Also, it set the Headline Goal, that is the military capability target for the undertaking of European missions, including the Petersberg Tasks. The Petersberg Tasks refer to the scope of military action assigned to the EU during crisis management operations. These include humanitarian tasks, peacekeeping and peacemaking. See EU External Action, 'Shaping of a Common Security and Defence Policy' (2016). Available at https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/common-security-and-defence-policy-csdp/5388/shaping-of-a-common-security-and-defence-policy_en (accessed 03 October 2018).

²⁵ This agreement refers to a package of arrangements between the EU and the NATO that allows the EU to make use of NATO assets and capabilities for EU-led crisis management operations. See EU External Action, 'Shaping' and NATO, 'EU-NATO Declaration on ESDP' (2002). Available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_19544.htm (accessed 13 February 2018).

²⁶ EU External Action, 'Military and Civilian Missions and Operations' (2016). Available at https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/military-and-civilian-missions-and-operations/430/military-and-civilian-missions-and-operations_en (accessed 08 October 2018).

To adapt to the new security environment and re-energise their strategic partnership ensuring a mutual beneficial relationship for both organisations, in July 2016, in Warsaw, a joint declaration was published. This document outlines the areas for strengthened cooperation in relation to the new common challenges that EU and NATO members face, such as hybrid threats, cyber-attacks, migration and maritime security.²⁷ These threats, apart from operational response planning and conduct, also require the development of a comprehensive approach, which combines the application of both military and civilian means. These means need to be complemented with mechanisms for early detection and analysis as well as structures for information and intelligence gathering and sharing. These additional elements give a new form and add impetus to the EU-NATO partnership. After all, this has also been stressed by the EU in its 2016 Global Strategy (EUGS), as this strategic document sets new priority areas for the partnership with NATO in the field of cyber and hybrid threats, as well as maritime security.²⁸ All these unveil the development of an expanded EU-NATO security cooperation with the inclusion of non-traditional security preoccupations, which widen the partnership scope and activities.

²⁷ NATO, 'Joint Declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization' (2016). Available at https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_133163.htm (accessed 06 March 2018).

²⁸ EUGS, 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy' (2016), pp. 36-37. Available at https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/regions/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf (accessed 06 March 2018).

NATO's Involvement in Migration

The issue of migration as a security challenge in NATO's rhetoric was first introduced in 1990 in an address given by its Secretary General, Manfred Wörner, at the 36th Annual Session of the North Atlantic Assembly.²⁹ Over the years, parallel to the increased migratory flows and NATO's transformation, migration gradually entered NATO's agenda, as a preoccupation linked with other security threats, like armed conflicts, terrorism, climate change and water or food shortages.

In this immediate post-Cold War period, NATO and its member states started to redefine NATO's role and mission by adapting it to the new post-Cold War security. The goal was NATO to continue providing effective protection to its members from the current and tangible security challenges that they were facing. Several initiatives were promoted, such as the Partnership for Peace programme (PfP), NATO's enlargement into central Europe in 1999 and the redefinition of NATO's relationship with Russia. In this context, NATO advocated for a broader approach to security with the issuing of two Strategic Concepts.³⁰ As such, this collective defence organisation committed to activities for stability and the preservation of peace identifying new threats that were not military, like terrorism, ethnic conflict, human rights abuses, political instability and economic fragility. This paved the way for the broadening of NATO's agenda and mission leading to the Alliance's transformation.

Following this spirit of NATO's re-definition, NATO members endorsed in 2006 a policy document, entitled 'Comprehensive Political Guidance', which sets out the framework and priorities for the Alliance in the next decade. In this document, there is an expansion in the list of security threats, with specific reference to mass migration.³¹ In this light, NATO started to engage with new areas, such as actions to promote the role of women in peace and security as well as counter-piracy and counter-migration missions. This signals NATO's transformation and shift from a collective defence structure to a collective security organisation.

Regarding migration, a milestone date was 11 February 2016, when NATO Defence Ministers agreed NATO's provision of support to assist with the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe, and especially in NATO's southern borders. More specifically, on the joint request of Germany, Greece and Turkey, NATO decided to respond to the high numbers of irregular migrants across the Aegean Sea. According to NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, the goal was to contribute 'critical information and surveillance to help counter human trafficking and criminal networks' and not to stop or push back refugee boats.³² NATO's involvement in the Aegean referred to the deployment of naval vessels of the Alliance to help with international efforts to stem the flow of irregular migration and trafficking. NATO's Aegean activity is focused on the passing on of information to FRONTEX and the Greek and Turkish

²⁹ NATO, 'Address'.

³⁰ NATO, 'The Alliance's New Strategic Concept' (1991); NATO, 'The Alliance's Strategic Concept' (1999).

³¹ NATO, 'Comprehensive Political Guidance' (2015). Available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49176.htm#evolving (accessed 07 March 2018).

³² NATO, 'NATO Defence Ministers Agree on NATO Support to Assist with the Refugee and Migrant Crisis' (2016). Available at https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/news_127981.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 05 March 2018).

coast guards by conducting surveillance tasks and patrolling.³³ This NATO activity set in motion a process of cooperation with Frontex.

At a rather rapid speed after the formal decision regarding the Alliance's involvement, NATO started the deployment of its forces and proceeded to the clarification of the modalities of its involvement in the Aegean Sea. NATO's deployment in the Aegean includes patrolling, reconnaissance, monitoring, surveillance, conduct of training activities and real-time information gathering and sharing of illegal crossings, in support of Turkish and Greek authorities and Frontex. The composition of this NATO operational involvement concerns maritime and air capabilities, just over half a dozen warships, organised under the Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2). The area of operation refers not only to the territorial waters of Greece and Turkey, but it also extends to international waters.

Apart from that, in November 2016 NATO launched a new mission that covers the full spectrum of maritime security. Accordingly, at the NATO Warsaw Summit in July 2016, NATO announced the transformation of the counter-terrorism operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean Sea, launched in 2001, to a maritime security mission, entitled operation Sea Guardian. Sea Guardian, led by NATO's Maritime Command located in Northwood, United Kingdom, has a broader mandate responding to a full range of maritime security tasks. These tasks include maritime situational awareness focusing on information-sharing, protection of critical infrastructure, maritime security capacity-building and maritime counter-terrorism. Furthermore, Sea Guardian contributes to the protection of navigation using the tools of surveillance, patrol, maritime interdiction, special operations, deployment of law enforcement detachments and, when authorised, the use of force.³⁴ Currently, Sea Guardian operation supports with maritime situational awareness, conducts counter-terrorism activities at sea and contributes to maritime security capacity-building. These tasks enhance the maritime security in the Mediterranean Sea and cover the multifaceted nature of security, as they touch upon cooperative security, crisis management and collective defence.

³³ Interview with NATO Staff, 07/09/2018.

³⁴ NATO, 'Operation Sea Guardian' (2016). Available at https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics_136233.htm (accessed 05 March 2018).

The Future Role of NATO in Migration: A New NATO?

This engagement of NATO with migration during its deployment in the Aegean Sea and during operation Sea Guardian has opened a new and unfamiliar path for the Alliance. It represents a new type of mission and a shift of the Alliance's function that is under way.

Accordingly, although NATO has included the term 'migration' in its rhetoric since 1990, it deals with root causes of instability, such as conflicts that produce refugee flows. Over the years, it has come across criminal activities linked to migration, while conducting its missions. For instance, in 2006, during the counter-terrorist operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean Sea, NATO assisted the Hellenic Coast Guard with the prevention of human smuggling by providing information for this criminal activity. Yet, the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe in 2015 has provided the basis for NATO to redirect its focus towards the scope of migration. In this regard, NATO undertook a role in the Aegean deploying its forces so as to support the EU with its fight against irregular migration. Although NATO's mandate was limited to surveillance tasks,³⁵ it enabled the Alliance to be involved³⁶ in a new operational activity, gain expertise and build an approach for this engagement. Similarly, a few months later, at the NATO Warsaw Summit in July 2016, NATO announced the transformation of operation Active Endeavour that was conducted under Article 5 to counter terrorism in the Mediterranean to a maritime security mission. This new mission, entitled operation Sea Guardian, has a broader mandate responding to a full range of maritime security tasks.

Also, at the same Summit NATO has created a new Joint Intelligence and Security Division (JISD) at NATO's headquarters in Brussels. This is characterised as 'the most significant reform in the history of Allied intelligence'³⁶ because it promotes a wider and holistic approach to security with the fusion of civilian and military intelligence. The new Division, by taking into consideration both civilian and military threats, reorganises NATO's method of collection and analysis of intelligence. This allows the Alliance to set new directions, as well as to adapt and respond more efficiently to the evolving political, security and military priorities of the current threat environment.

Similarly, NATO in 2017 created the NATO Strategic Direction South Hub. The Hub, which is under the lead of the Allied Joint Force Command (JFC) in Naples, permits the Alliance to focus on the evolving security challenges, including migration, terrorism, destabilisation and radicalisation. Furthermore, it aims at fostering a focused security dialogue of NATO with countries in Middle East and North Africa.³⁷ Thus, it enables NATO to build not only channels of communication, but also to promote cooperation practices and therefore construct an environment of trust that can expand to different areas and fields such as training, intelligence sharing and defence planning.

The importance that NATO accords to this new area of engagement and type of deployment has been demonstrated by, among other things, the visit of NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, to the FGS

³⁵ Interview with Frontex staff, 12/03/2018.

³⁶ NATO, 'Adapting NATO Intelligence in Support of "One NATO"'. *NATO Review Magazine* (2017). Available at <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2017/Also-in-2017/adapting-nato-intelligence-in-support-of-one-nato-security-military-terrorism/EN/index.htm> (accessed 05 March 2018).

³⁷ NATO, 'NATO Strategic Direction South Hub Inaugurated' (2017). Available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_146835.htm (accessed 05 March 2018).

BONN, that is the German flagship of SNMG2, while operating in the Aegean Sea, in April 2016. During this visit, NATO's Secretary General underlined NATO's important contribution and role in controlling irregular migration, especially in the areas of information collection, which enabled Greece, Turkey and Frontex to design and undertake effective action against human traffickers and smugglers. Furthermore, NATO functions as a platform for communication, strengthening the operational cooperation between Greece and Turkey in an area of common interest, such as migration flows between these two countries.³⁸ Consolidating NATO's involvement in the migration field, NATO's Secretary General had discussions on the refugee and migrant crisis with several EU officials, including the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and European Commissioner for Migration, as well as with Angelina Jolie, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Special Envoy.

This new type of activities, relations, visits and structural amendments indicate that NATO's involvement in migration is not a temporary development. Rather, it marks an evolution that might enable NATO to meet today's threats and security challenges. Furthermore, it allows NATO to enrich its toolbox by bringing soft power to its repertoire.³⁹ Following that, NATO has already started to refer to law enforcement activities as an operational area.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the characteristic of the US navy ship GRAPPLE that patrolled the Aegean Sea was that it was manned by Civil Service Mariners.⁴¹

This transformation is not only promoted by the current security circumstances and by its member states, but also by NATO itself. After all, the inclusion of a wider mandate that surpasses the military functions to incorporate the full spectrum of non-traditional security challenges can give new breath to the Alliance. For this reason, NATO officials regularly highlight NATO's operational success in the field of migration. For instance, in his statement, NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, supported NATO's role in migration and added value as the Alliance amplifies the capabilities in the operational theatre as well as facilitates information-sharing and information exchange among its member states.⁴² The same positive assessment of NATO is also being made by Frontex, as NATO is considered to have helped in migration management.⁴³ However, there are contradictory evaluations regarding NATO's contribution, as Turkey, one of the countries that initiated NATO's presence in the Aegean, asked for this involvement to be terminated, due to low apprehension rates and sovereignty considerations.⁴⁴

Overall, it is really difficult to measure or estimate the impact of NATO on migration flows. The main reason for this is that the deployment of NATO constitutes only one measure in the midst of several policy changes undertaken by the EU in reducing irregular arrivals, such as the EU-Turkey Statement of

³⁸ NATO, 'NATO Secretary General visits NATO flagship in Aegean Sea' (2016). Available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_130225.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 06 March 2018).

³⁹ For the 'soft power' concept see Nye, J. S. Jr., 'Soft Power'. *Foreign Policy*, 80, (1990), pp. 153-171.

⁴⁰ NATO, *Framework for Future Alliance Operations* (Norfolk: 2018), p. 27.

⁴¹ NATO Allied Maritime Command, 'Transatlantic bond in the Aegean Sea' (2016). Available at <https://mc.nato.int/media-centre/news/2016/transatlantic-bond-in-the-aegean-sea-.aspx> (accessed 09 October 2018).

⁴² NATO, 'Statement by the NATO Secretary General on NATO Support to Assist with the Refugee and Migrant Crisis' (2016). Available at https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/opinions_128372.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 06 March 2018).

⁴³ Interview with Frontex Staff, 12/03/2018.

⁴⁴ Politico, 'Turkey Seeks End to NATO Patrols in Aegean Sea' (2016). Available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-seeks-end-to-nato-patrols-in-aegean-sea-migration-crisis-refugees/> (accessed 06 March 2018); Greek Reporter, 'Ankara Calls for NATO to Terminate Operations in Aegean' (2017). Available at <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2017/02/24/ankara-calls-for-nato-to-terminate-operations-in-aegean/> (accessed 06 March 2018).

18 March 2016.⁴⁵ Therefore, NATO was not deployed as a panacea to irregular migration but rather as a component of a broader strategy that included various arrays to manage the migration crisis with the provision of operational support. Hence, NATO's Aegean activity contributes to a multinational effort to deal with the rather complex and multi-dimensional problem of illegal human trafficking and migration.⁴⁶ Yet, due to its nature and operational assets, NATO's presence first in the Aegean and then in the Mediterranean with the Sea Guardian operation, not only signals a different role for the Alliance but also shapes a new context for EU-NATO cooperation.

⁴⁵ Council of the EU, 'EU-Turkey Statement', 18/03/2016.

⁴⁶ Interview with NATO Staff, 07/09/2018.

The Framework of the Frontex-NATO Cooperation: The Variant Security Partners

Apart from supporting and cooperating with the EU in the framework of the CSDP missions in the past, NATO's involvement in migration has brought NATO in contact with the EU's border and coast guard agency, Frontex. In particular, during NATO's deployment in the Aegean Sea, NATO assisted not only its member states, namely Greece and Turkey, but also Frontex in the fight against irregular migration. In this context, NATO complemented Frontex's assets with the deployment of its own capabilities. NATO capabilities deployed in the Aegean Sea include ships that are larger than Frontex vessels, as well as radars and sensors that have a wider detection range from the radars of Frontex. NATO, as a military alliance, makes use of assets that are designed for military or defence missions and assigned to combat situations. Frontex, as a border and coast guard agency uses operational capabilities that refer to aerial, maritime and terrestrial assets employed to monitor and protect the EU borders. Furthermore, Frontex has a rapid reaction pool from which it can draw and deploy 1,500 border guards within five working days to assist member states in emergency situations at their EU's external borders. These border guards can be border surveillance officers, registration and finger scanning experts, advanced-level document officers and nationality screening experts. In contrast, NATO has developed a quick-reaction Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) of 20,000 soldiers from air, land, maritime and Special Forces divisions, which can be deployed within two days against threats to NATO. All these indicate the quite diverse mandate, approach, role and organisation of these two institutions.

Despite these differences, NATO and Frontex have an 'extremely successful' and 'very efficient cooperation'.⁴⁷ In this context, since NATO's deployment in the Aegean Sea, Frontex and NATO have established informal links of communication and information exchange at tactical level building a cooperative relationship. To do so, Frontex deployed a liaison officer on NATO's flagship so as to have direct information regarding the situation in the Aegean and enable the exchange of unclassified information in real time. It should be noted that the same applies to NATO; namely, there is an agreement for NATO's deployment of liaison officers on board Frontex's vessels but until now it has not been implemented,⁴⁸ as current arrangements are deemed sufficient.⁴⁹ Furthermore, NATO officials participate in Frontex's daily briefings regarding situational information, during which Frontex and NATO officials exchange views and discuss about the development of the missions.⁵⁰ Also, there have been some technical training activities organised jointly.⁵¹ Thus, although these two institutions have not signed a memorandum of understanding and therefore NATO does not constitute a Frontex partner,⁵² after the clarification of their cooperation arrangements Frontex and NATO have formed a smooth partnership on the ground, without any quarrels between them.⁵³ This indicates the existence or development of a common spirit between Frontex and NATO that enables them to cooperate and build their partnership.

⁴⁷ Interview with NATO Staff, 07/09/2018.

⁴⁸ Interview with Frontex Staff, 12/03/2018.

⁴⁹ Interview with NATO Staff, 07/09/2018.

⁵⁰ Interview with Frontex Staff, 12/03/2018.

⁵¹ Interview with NATO Staff, 07/09/2018.

⁵² Interview with Frontex Staff, 12/03/2018.

⁵³ Interview with Frontex Staff, 12/03/2018.

Hence, NATO has assisted Frontex through information-sharing and the contribution of its assets and knowledge. At the same time, Frontex has shared expertise, intelligence and operational know-how in the migration field. After all, Frontex, since 2005, has established a solid activity and presence at the external borders with the conduct of various missions relating to irregular migration and border management. Moreover, Frontex has built considerable risk analysis capability collecting information and analysing trends. Building on this, it has also formed new partnerships and networks with third countries that function as instruments of cooperation and information sharing. All these constitute Frontex's unique experience and added value in relation to NATO. This knowledge and distinct role of Frontex as a border and coast guard agency can provide NATO with the means to undertake new activities capitalising on Frontex's assets and expertise.

This highlights a mutually beneficial operational relationship between these two security organisations that can result in broader functions and scope for both. FRONTEX has already widened its function under its new mandate, performing tasks that refer to a comprehensive approach on EU migration policy. These tasks include vulnerability assessments, the use of new technologies at the EU external borders and increased independence that entails the ability of Frontex to organise rapid border interventions, joint operations and return operations on its own initiative, as well as to purchase its own equipment.

Moreover, as the 2011 roadmap on the ties between actors of the CSDP and the area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ) shows, the EU has already underlined and is promoting a synergy and complementarity between the different aspects of internal and external security for the implementation of a comprehensive approach to the EU security.⁵⁴ This enables a closer cooperation between military instruments and internal security agencies, such as Frontex, triggering a civilian-military interaction and therefore consolidating an internal/external security nexus. This trend has been witnessed in the 2015 European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED) - Operation Sophia against human smuggling in the Mediterranean, as Frontex was involved with the provision of information and intelligence. A more recent and exclamatory development towards this link between internal and external facets of security has been Frontex's cooperation with a military alliance, that is NATO. This is an issue to consider, taking into account that Frontex has the ability to acquire its own equipment. For this reason, various discussions are being held and different projects are being considered regarding the operational priorities and the type of assets that should be acquired.⁵⁵ Thus, NATO's involvement in the Mediterranean waters to counter migration, as well as this Frontex-NATO cooperation, may have an impact on these discussions determining not only the priorities but also the type of capabilities. Following that, by selecting the type of capabilities and then acquiring its own equipment, Frontex may develop the ability to start using military means militarising border control. This can also be manifested in Frontex's promotion of military surveillance systems and drones as border management tools.⁵⁶

In general, synergies between internal and external security pave the way towards the adoption of a comprehensive approach to security that can be flexible and make use of all the available security

⁵⁴ Council of the EU, 'Strengthening Ties between CSDP and FSJ Road map Implementation: Progress Report', doc. 14130/12. Brussels: 24 September 2012.

⁵⁵ Interview with Frontex Staff, 12/03/2018.

⁵⁶ Csernatoni, R., 'Constructing the EU's High-Tech Borders: FRONTEX and Dual-Use Drones for Border Management'. *European Security*, 27, 2, (2018), pp. 175-200.

instruments. This can increase interoperability and cost-effectiveness. However, the internal/security nexus can have important implications as it can lead to a militarisation of security.

Regarding border management, a 'hard' approach to border control and migration management equates to the tightening of borders through measures such as the deployment of military forces, the construction of fences and the use of military capabilities and technologies. An example of this attempt to militarise the EU external borders constitutes Hungary's migration management strategy with the building of fences and the establishment of military bases to allow its military to patrol its borders with Serbia and Croatia.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, such measures have been heavily criticised and condemned by human rights advocates and non-governmental organisations, as they create more risks and dangers for border crossers, causing even the death of migrants and refugees.⁵⁸

In this context, NATO's involvement in migration has triggered skepticism and has been subject to heavy criticism, because it was perceived as another tangible means to militarise migration management.⁵⁹ Apart from NATO's character, scope, structure and code of conduct as a military alliance, which either directly or indirectly define also its other, non-military, activities, various concerns were raised about the management of migrants. More specifically, NATO Secretary General said that 'in case of rescue of persons coming via Turkey, they will be taken back to Turkey'.⁶⁰ However, this raises serious considerations and human rights issues regarding whether Turkey constitutes a safe third country for all the refugees intercepted trying to reach the EU, and especially of those of Kurdish origin; also, how, when and by whom the status of these people will be examined before their return to Turkey. In parallel, after the adoption of the EU-Turkey Refugee Statement in March 2016, Frontex has assisted Greece in returning irregular migrants to Turkey, although before that, as Frontex's spokesperson stated, Frontex had 'never disembarked migrants in Turkey'.⁶¹ Against this background, Frontex's cooperation with NATO may render Frontex the tool for the militarisation of migration in Europe if this EU agency starts practicing and justifying military activities.

⁵⁷ Financial Times, 'Hungary Considers Deploying Troops to Tackle Migrant Crisis' (2015). Available at <https://www.ft.com/content/75159bde-4c09-11e5-b558-8a9722977189> (accessed 05 March 2018).

⁵⁸ Death by Rescue, 'The Lethal Effects of the EU's Policies of Non-Assistance' (2016). Available at <https://deathbyrescue.org/> (accessed 13 March 2018); Open Democracy, 'The Deadly Consequences of Europe's Border Militarization' (2016). Available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/nick-buxton-mark-akkerman/deadly-consequences-of-europe-s-border-militarization> (accessed 13 March 2018); Médecins Sans Frontières, 'Migration: How to Stop the Rising Tide of Death in Mediterranean' (2017). Available at <http://www.msf.org/en/article/migration-how-stop-rising-tide-death-mediterranean> (accessed 13 March 2018).

⁵⁹ Open Democracy, 'Warfare on the Logistics of Migrant Movements: EU and NATO Military Operations in the Mediterranean' (2016). Available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/mediterranean-journeys-in-hope/glenda-garelli-martina-tazzioli/warfare-on-logistics-of-migrant-movem> (accessed 19 March 2018).

⁶⁰ NATO, 'Statement' (2016).

⁶¹ EURACTIV.de, 'NATO Mission Criticised for Sending Refugees back to Turkey' (2016). Available at <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/nato-mission-criticised-for-sending-refugees-back-to-turkey/> (accessed 13 March 2018).

NATO in the Business of Migration Management?

The involvement of NATO in migration management during its deployment in the Aegean Sea and the Sea Guardian operation in the Mediterranean Sea reflects a different role for the Alliance and the implementation of new functions in addition to collective defence. This shift that is under way with a wider operational scope aims at ensuring that NATO will not become outdated and irrelevant in the current security environment.

Also, it allows a key security organisation with outstanding power projection to line up together with other EU initiatives to counter irregular migration. Apart from the symbolic involvement of NATO in this crisis as the core institution and guarantee of European security, another important element of NATO's function was the fast reaction and rapid deployment of its forces. This is due to NATO's structure that allows for rapid mobilisation in the event of threats. Also, NATO became the tool for the EU to involve Turkey in the operational response in the Aegean Sea, as Turkey constituted the main transit country for migrants in their attempt to reach Europe.

However, taking into account that NATO plans to continue to be a military alliance capitalising on its extensive military experience and military predominance, this engagement in migration **management endangers the spillover of military practices in this field**. After all, the Alliance's military capabilities and tools prevail in NATO's repertoire. However, the involvement of NATO in an area in which it has no previous experience and is not equipped with the appropriate tools to employ, risks weakening its effectiveness and importance. More specifically, while undertaking action in the Aegean and the Mediterranean Sea against a non-military threat, namely irregular migration, NATO deployed its military assets. This shows not only a disproportionate response to irregular migration, but also an operational strategy that is irrelevant and therefore ineffective in the long-term.

NATO's important force projection capabilities cannot be used on the ground to counter migration, as this operational strategy can violate the agreed legal framework for the protection of migrants and asylum seekers. In order to have an effective and viable role in migration management, NATO needs to undergo a deep structural transformation and redesign. Essential steps towards this redesign include a new command structure, the restructuring of capabilities, as well as the adoption of a flexible approach in personnel deployment that may include investment in capabilities for civilian operations. However, the investment in a different set of capabilities and the development of a non-military operational plan and action may reorient NATO by moving it away from its comparative advantage, that is its military expertise, towards the direction of soft power.

The main question that emerges is whether an active role in migration management can strengthen or weaken NATO. Inextricably linked to preoccupations regarding the future of NATO, migration can be the answer to NATO's elusive quest for relevance and role. In this context, migration, as a non-traditional security threat brings to the forefront the transnational character of dangers that transcend sovereignty and borders and require a multidimensional strategy and wide resources.

There are several pitfalls to navigate. NATO already provides the platform for transnational cooperation and common resource management. Yet, migration management may require a divergent approach to that of NATO's military action. In either case, NATO needs to continue providing security effectively. Otherwise, NATO's years will become once again numbered.

Furthermore, NATO's involvement undoubtedly impacts upon the EU-NATO relationship, taking into account that, they have a different understanding of security and the use of force. The EU aspires to be a normative and ethical power developing a distinct approach to security, as uttered in its strategic documents,⁶² than that of the USA or NATO. This variation has already been witnessed in transatlantic divergences within NATO. Also, it has been manifested in a division of labour between NATO and CSDP, as NATO usually undertakes military operations, while CSDP seems to have already developed considerable expertise on civilian aspects of security in parallel with military missions. Yet, this Frontex-NATO cooperation may lead Frontex to start developing hard power and NATO in the direction of soft power.

Additionally, NATO's role in migration management in Europe can trigger competition between Frontex and NATO. A complementarity in combating irregular migration may mean an unnecessary duplication of the two institutions with geographical, operational, functional and capability overlap. This can trigger more disputes affecting the transatlantic relations.⁶³

However, the essence of transatlantic cooperation is to respond collectively to new challenges and combat together common threats. In this context, a constructive security approach is needed that would result in a multidimensional burden-sharing. This presupposes a redesign, restructuring and rationalisation of the strategic action that would make use of all the existing means, actors and tools. In turn, this can lay the foundation for a new basis for cooperation with NATO and Frontex working 'not just side-by-side, but hand-in-hand'.⁶⁴ The Frontex-NATO partnership has demonstrated how NATO and the EU can work together in tackling complex issues.⁶⁵ Furthermore, it can allow NATO to float away from the murky waters of migration, while enabling Frontex to become a considerable security actor with an expanded operational response capacity.

⁶² European Council, 'A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy'. Brussels: 12 December 2003; EUGS 'Shared Vision' (2016).

⁶³ There has been a strain in the transatlantic relationship especially after the Bush's administration War on Terrorism and the current Trump's administration policy of 'America First'. See Lundestad, G. (ed.) *Just Another Major Crisis? The United States and Europe since 2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Kanat, K. B. 'Transatlantic Relations in the Age of Donald Trump', *Insight Turkey*, 20, 3, (2018), pp. 77-88.

⁶⁴ NATO, 'Taking EU-NATO Cooperation to a New Level: Joint Op-Ed by President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg' (2016). Available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_139368.htm (accessed 19 March 2018).

⁶⁵ Interview with NATO staff, 07/09/2018.

Conclusion

This working paper tried to analyse the operational cooperation between Frontex and NATO, which began in 2016, after NATO's involvement in the management of irregular migration in the Aegean Sea. This field of action has gained importance within NATO circles, highlighting a transformation that is under way. Thus, **the inclusion of migration in NATO's security agenda is not an ephemeral decision**. Rather, it sets the strategic context for the future, as it can provide the Alliance with the answer to its quest for relevancy and role in the post- 9/11 security landscape. However, given that NATO remains a military alliance, its involvement with migration risks weakening it if its goals outstrip its actual operational abilities. Also, it endangers Frontex by directing it to hard power practices of border management. For this reason, careful consideration should be given whether, how and with what means NATO should be involved in addressing irregular migration as well as what should be the format of Frontex-NATO cooperation. After all, the outcome of these decisions and NATO's involvement does not impact only on NATO or Frontex as organisations and security partners but it can also weight on the transatlantic relationship.

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