



POLICY PAPER

# NATO'S TRULY ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP

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## INTRODUCTION

At the Wales Summit in September 2014, NATO introduced new initiatives to enhance the capacity of its various partners to work with the Alliance. In themselves, these initiatives were by no means novel. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has developed an extensive partnership programme. The main tool for such cooperation, the Partnership for Peace programme (PFP), was launched in 1994; from a humble beginning it has morphed into a network connecting the 28 Alliance members with more than 40 partners around the world.<sup>1</sup>

This network extends geographically from Europe and North Africa to Asia and Australia, and from the High North to the Middle East. The partners have contributed meaningful military capabilities to a number of NATO operations, such as in Afghanistan and Kosovo, and have brought regional perspectives to NATO debates, thus enriching the Alliance's understanding of these regions.

In return, NATO has provided its partners military education, training and exercises along with a seat at the NATO table for political dialogue on shared interests. Perhaps most importantly, in over two decades of cooperation, the NATO Allies and partners have achieved unmatched military interoperability. NATO partnerships have truly been "a two-way street of mutual benefit."<sup>2</sup>

In today's international environment, these partnerships are perhaps more important than ever. This was recognized at the Wales Summit, where in order to demonstrate its interest in

investing in partnerships, NATO adopted a new initiative known as the Enhanced Opportunities Partners Programme (EOP).<sup>3</sup>

This programme deepens NATO's cooperation with its most interoperable partners. At Wales, it was offered to five key partners: Australia, Finland, Georgia, Jordan, and Sweden. As these countries are different from each other and have their own security needs and goals, the Allies agreed to expand the ways in which these select partners may choose to work with the Alliance. It is precisely this differentiated approach, tailored to match the interests of the EOP partners and NATO to their mutual benefit that makes the EOP potentially so valuable.

At Wales, the Allies also emphasized that the EOP can eventually expand beyond these initial five partners, as other qualified partner nations express interest and provide new capabilities. Thus, the EOP should be seen as a status, not a new format.

## ENHANCED OPPORTUNITIES: WHAT COULD THEY BE FOR FINLAND AND SWEDEN?

Finland and Sweden have a long and cherished history as NATO's most active and engaged partners, with these two Nordic countries alternating in the role of the Alliance's "partner number one."<sup>4</sup> Neither of them is, however, likely to seek NATO membership any time soon. Therefore, the EOP might just fit their current political and military ambitions toward NATO.

Enhanced strategic and political consultation and practical military interoperability between

<sup>1</sup> Ambassador Douglas Lute, "The Wales Summit: Strengthening NATO Partnerships", United States Mission to NATO, [http://usmission.gov/sp\\_11202014.html](http://usmission.gov/sp_11202014.html)

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Richard Weitz, "NATO's Partnership Policy: New Challenges, New Opportunities", *Diplomaatia*, No. 134, October 2014, <http://www.diplomaatia.ee/en/article/natos-partnership-policy-new-challenges-new-opportunities>.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, the Partnership Interoperability Initiative (PII), launched at the Wales Summit, contains two parts. In addition to the EOP, there is the Interoperability Platform (IP) that involves 25 countries, including Finland and Sweden.

<sup>4</sup> This designation has been used by Ann-Sofie Dahl, in "Sweden and Finland: Operational Partners or Allies-to-Be?", Ann-Sofie Dahl (ed.), *Trends and Threats: NATO in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Center for Military Studies, University of Copenhagen, 2014, p.19.

the EOP and NATO are the key to the success of the EOP initiative. Let's now take a look at how these two advanced partners could work within and benefit from the Programme.

## 1. ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATO-NORDIC/BALTIC COMMISSION

The European security system – with NATO as one of its key pillars – has faced a tough test over the past decade. Under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin, today's Russia is a revisionist power seeking to change the existing international order. In times of tension with Russia, the security and stability of the Nordic and Baltic states is highly dependent on the commitment of like-minded nations as reflected in the structures of NATO and the European Union – in short, through collective defence. Two regional countries, Sweden and Finland, have chosen to stay outside the Alliance. Yet, their security is contingent on the success of NATO's engagement in the area.<sup>5</sup>

Political and military dialogue over the important security-related issues affecting the region could be strengthened by the establishment of a NATO-Nordic/Baltic Commission as a framework for cooperation between NATO, Sweden and Finland. This Commission would work parallel to and in support of the cooperative structures already in existence in the region, such as the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFKO). It should be noted that for Georgia, one of the current five EOP partners, a NATO-Georgia Commission already exists.

<sup>5</sup> See a strong political statement by the Heads of State of the Nordic countries with President Barack Obama, "U.S.-Nordic Leaders' Summit Joint Statement", <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/13/us-nordic-leaders-summit-joint-statement>.

## 2. POLITICAL-MILITARY ANALYSES OF THE BALTIC SEA REGION SECURITY

It is a long list: the annexation of Crimea; the intervention in support of the separatists in eastern Ukraine; the continued and frequent violations of its neighbours' airspace in the Baltic Sea region; the regular harassment of other countries' military vessels in international waters; and the use of methods of multi-pronged "hybrid warfare" (including propaganda and cyber threats). These are some of the hostile actions that Russia has been taking against its neighbours, most of them illegal according to the rules and regulations of international law and customary behaviour among nations.

This is something that all the Russian neighbours in the Baltic Sea region agree on, be they allied or non-allied. It would be, therefore, useful for them to carry out common reviews and studies of the security situation in the region. It would also be useful to share and debate these reviews and studies on a high political level (ideally that of foreign and defence ministers). It should be noted that there has already been some joint working with Finland and Sweden on Baltic Sea security, and the EOPs attended the NATO defence ministerial dinner discussion in February 2016. A good model for these meetings, whether high-level (ministerial or heads of government), or working-level, is the "28+2" format, which would bring Sweden and Finland together with the NATO Allies to discuss concrete security issues concerning the Nordic and Baltic region.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Such interest was voiced by the Nordic Ministers of Defence in their meeting in Copenhagen in March 2016. See "The Joint Statement of the Nordic Ministers of Defence Meeting in Copenhagen on 30-31 March 2016", <http://www.regjeringen/no/aktuelt/nordic-defence-ministers-meeting/>.

### 3. STUDIES OF RUSSIAN MILITARY CAPABILITIES AND MILITARY POLICY IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

As with the more general political reviews of the security situation in the Baltic Sea region, it would be highly important to carry out joint detailed analyses of Russian military policy and the growing Russian military capabilities. This would involve sharing of intelligence information and, at the end, would hopefully result in the adoption of a common threat perception. Here, as above, the studies should be presented to and debated by high-level military and political figures, such as defence ministers and CHODs in the “28+2” format.

### 4. INCREASING SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

NATO and the two Nordic EOP partners share a need for better situational awareness in the Baltic Sea region. It could be improved by common collection of data, sharing of surveillance information (air, land, and maritime) - to the extent possible, taking into consideration the sensitivity of such data - and developing an early warning system covering the Baltic Sea region.

### 5. ANALYSES OF HYBRID WARFARE, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON CYBER DEFENCE

Is there something called hybrid warfare? If so, what is it? Is it something new? These questions are important and very relevant for security analyses carried out by NATO Allies and EOP countries. There is also great interest in NATO-EU cooperation on these issues. A special panel should be established in which all aspects of hybrid warfare, cyber defence issues in particular, could be studied and common approaches developed. NATO Allies and the Baltic Sea region EOP countries could also consider the establishment of a special “centre of excellence” for hybrid warfare issues.

### 6. STUDY OF AIR AND MARITIME ISSUES

The Baltic Sea is a unique security environment in terms of both air and sea. With the A2/AD concerns raised by the recent Russian actions in the area, there are both civilian and military issues that should be urgently studied in order to develop a common approach for NATO and its EOP partners.

### 7. PLANNING FOR AND PARTICIPATING IN NATO’S MILITARY EXERCISES

As it is, NATO has already opened its doors to a high number of military exercises to its EOP partner nations; Finnish and Swedish troops have already participated in these exercises for some time.<sup>7</sup> It would be useful, however, if the Swedish and Finnish defence planners could contribute to exercise planning as early in the process as possible, preferably during the stage at which the general concepts of the exercises are discussed and developed.

### 8. PLANNING FOR RAPID DEPLOYMENT FORCES, INCLUDING THE VJTF

As EOP partners, Finland and Sweden should be able to participate in NATO’s rapid action forces, keeping in mind that participation in the rapid action forces by these countries, particularly in the VJTF, is affected by highly sensitive domestic political considerations on both sides as well as by serious questions about resources. Obviously, great added value could be obtained by Finland and Sweden from their participation in VJTF exercises.

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<sup>7</sup> Some steps have already been implemented, such as the North Atlantic Council’s (NAC) decision that EOPs are approved to participate in all NATO exercises that are open to partners, including Article 5 and cyber exercises upon explicit NAC approval.



## 9. PARTICIPATION IN THE NFIU (NATO FORCE INTEGRATION UNIT)

As part of NATO's Readiness Action Plan, a decision was taken at the Wales Summit to establish NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU). They are a vital link between national forces and the forces of other NATO Allies. Each unit, so far established in six countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania), is comprised of about 40 staff (20 national and 20 international staff). It is to be expected that NFIUs in Hungary and Slovakia will be operable by the Warsaw Summit.

The NFIUs support collective defence planning and assist in coordinating training and exercises. They will also work with host nations to identify logistical networks, transportation routes and supporting infrastructure to ensure that NATO's high-readiness forces can deploy to the region as quickly as possible and work together flexibly and efficiently. Host Nation Support (HNS) is a vital part of these arrangements.

Discussions between NATO and the advanced EOP states should be launched on the ways these countries could cooperate with the NFIUs. For Sweden and Finland, these should include a possibility of serious involvement in the Szczecin headquarters (Multinational Corps Northeast) with military and civilian staff contributions.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps "mini"-NFIUs could be established in either or both Stockholm or Helsinki.

## 10. TABLE-TOP EXERCISES FOR THE SWEDISH AND FINNISH POLITICIANS

Recent NATO table-top exercises have already included expert and mid-level government participation from Sweden and Finland.<sup>9</sup> It would

<sup>8</sup> Sweden is now represented by two and Finland by one military staff officer in Szczecin.

<sup>9</sup> See "NATO Conducts Annual Crisis Management Exercises (CMX)",

be vitally important to also include Swedish and Finnish parliamentarians in these exercises in order to familiarize them with NATO thinking and practices. This especially applies to members of the foreign affairs and defence committees of both countries' parliaments.

## 11. RESILIENCE AND SECURITY OF SUPPLY ISSUES

NATO Allies and the EOP partners should carry out analyses on how to improve resilience through the "whole of government" and "whole of society" approaches. In these analyses, such key issues to Finland and Sweden as various aspects of security of supply should also be studied, as both these countries are potentially so vulnerable to disruptions of trade and commerce along the Baltic Sea.

## 12. DEFENCE SPENDING AND THE PURCHASE OF MAJOR MILITARY EQUIPMENT

As modern defence forces become more and more capital-intensive, with prices for weapons systems climbing ever higher, it would be useful for such advanced but relatively small countries like Finland and Sweden to participate in discussions within NATO as to which main platforms might be needed for collective defence in the future. This would not only help to ensure interoperability but might also save resources in the form of common purchases.

## 13. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COOPERATION

In order to learn best practices and to gain most value-added, some of the EOP could choose to enter into close cooperation through the Alliance's science and technology programmes. For Finland and Sweden, the future missile defence programme could be a pertinent and topical area of such cooperation.

[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_128783.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_128783.htm).

## BRIDGES TOO FAR?

By launching the Enhanced Opportunities Partners Programme at the Wales Summit, NATO flagged its appreciation for the special contributions of some of its most advanced partners. The establishment of the Programme was also a recognition that as far as NATO partnerships go, one size does not fit all. The EOP partners, each in its own special way, are seen by NATO members to have earned an exclusive, tailor-made relationship with the Alliance. It is now up to each individual EOP partner to maximize the opportunities that EOP brings.


This short paper is an effort to outline some of the potential benefits of the EOP programme to

Finland and Sweden. It is fully recognized by this writer that some of the themes for cooperation listed above might still be a bridge too far: they might be politically too sensitive for Helsinki and/or Stockholm, or there might even be NATO member states that feel that such substantial discussions or in-depth studies suggested here might be best addressed by members only.

Be that as it may, it is clear that a new, highly useful avenue for NATO/partner cooperation has been opened up for selected partners through the Enhanced Opportunities Programme.

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