



Europeanisation of Norwegian security and defence policy Nordic cooperation as vehicle

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KEY POINTS

- With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, European security has been placed on high alert, highlighting the importance of *both* the EU and NATO as key, although different, regional security actors.
- As the election of a more isolationist president in the US again in 2024 or 2028 cannot be excluded, boosting *European security and defence* should be a key objective for both Norway and its European allies.
- Such a Europeanisation should be seen as an add-on to Norway's NATO membership, but should imply a more serious investment in various initiatives taken by the EU and key EU-member states (France and Germany), in addition to those taken by the UK.
- Strengthening Nordic security and defence cooperation should also be seen as a vehicle for a much-needed *Europeanisation of Norwegian security and defence policy*. With Sweden and Finland now entering NATO and Denmark returning to the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the potential for Nordic security cooperation as a means to this end has never been greater.

With the unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine, European security has been placed on high alert. The implications of the Russian military invasion are many, and difficult to grasp in full. For the Nordic region, this has led to radical changes in most of the Nordic states' security and defence policies: Sweden and Finland have filed their application for NATO membership and Denmark has decided to abandon its opt out from the EU's defence cooperation. The war in Ukraine has also revealed the importance of EU and NATO as regional security actors, complementing each other with its comparative advantages where the EU is adopting sanctions on Russia and provides economic, political and military assistance to Ukraine, NATO is returning to its core task of military deterrence and territorial defence. As there is little indication that Norway will consider EU membership in the near future, an increased Europeanisation of Norwegian security and defence policy should be considered.

While membership would have been one way of responding to the current changes – a Norwegian “Zeitenwende” – a more profound Europeanisation of Norwegian security policy might compensate for this. However, this would entail a greater commitment to various initiatives taken by both the EU and key EU-member states, like France and Germany, but also in a strengthened Nordic security and defence cooperation. Such a Europeanisation should not be seen as an alternative to Norway's bilateral cooperation with the US or to Norway's NATO membership, but as a hedging strategy.

The added value of a differentiated European security and defence integration

One obvious implication of the Russian invasion of Ukraine is that all Nordic countries now agree that NATO, and its article 5, is the ultimate security guarantee when faced with a potential military attack. And following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the sincerity of the US commitment to keep Europe safe seems to be renewed once again. But the question remains: for how long? Despite the seriousness of the Russian military attacks on Ukraine, and the Russian threat of using nuclear weapons, the handling of Russian aggression may develop into more of a European regional problem than a transatlantic/global one. Trumpism is not gone, and a more isolationist president – or a president that prioritises US security interests in the Pacific – may be elected again in 2024 or 2028. Europe therefore cannot afford to take US foreign policies and security guarantees as a given. As a result, the need to boost *European security and defence* is more important than ever.

The European allies are also more committed than ever to increase their defence spending. The German “Zeitenwende” is a case in point. And with the adoption of the Strategic Compass in the EU, the ambition of creating a stronger *EU security and defence policy* has also regained momentum. While the EU cannot replace NATO when it comes to military deterrence, it is widely recognised that all European states must do more to strengthen their common security and defence policy and their collective capacity to act in response to the threats Europe is currently facing. This is particularly true when it comes to handling everything that is below the threshold of military invasion, as

this is likely to become a European (if not an EU) responsibility.

While increases in the national defence budgets of the different European countries are crucial, this is insufficient for a real improvement in a joint European security and defence capacity. This can only be achieved through a *higher level of integration*. But what does this really mean? What type of integration is needed and how can it be achieved?

There are different definitions of “integration,” but here we understand it as everything that goes beyond purely inter-state cooperation. At the core of the European security integration process is of course all the ongoing processes initiated to boost European strategic autonomy (from energy autonomy to food security and civilian preparedness of different kind), as well as regional defence integration under the supervision of the European Defence Agency (e.g., Permanent Structured Cooperation [PESCO] and the European Defence Fund [EDF]).

But it is important to note that European defence integration is not exclusively taking place within the EU. It is also taking place among the European allies in NATO (except for Turkey, all are either EU members or candidates for EU membership). And more importantly, it is increasingly taking place through bilateral and multilateral initiatives outside of these institutional frameworks. This has been the case for decades, but these initiatives are now increasingly seen as key parts of a European security and defence integration process – often referred to as a differentiated or flexible regional defence integration (Rieker and Giske 2022). Some are initiated by one of the larger European states through the Framework Nation Concept (FNC). While the German-led FNC consists of around 20 partner nations and covers a wide area of defence capability development in different areas (e.g. logistic support; chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear protection; deployable headquarters), the British and French initiatives are both focused more on the development of a joint capacity to act – either through preparing the ground for a common strategic culture that will facilitate the establishment of coalitions of the willing and thus joint action (European Intervention Initiative [E2I]) and an established operational expeditionary force (Joint Expeditionary Force [JEF]). But in addition to these FNCs, there are also a series of bilateral cooperation agreements (e.g., French–German cooperation, and French–British cooperation) or agreements in various sub-regional settings (such as the Nordic Defence Cooperation [NORDEFECO]).

All the existing initiatives have a common objective: to improve the joint European defence capacity. Therefore, they should all be considered when analysing developments in European security and defence. What is key is that this patchwork of initiatives should not be seen as a sign of fragmentation. Rather, it is the core characteristic of a multi-levelled/multi-faceted European security and defence integration. But for this to be useful, it must be recognised politically and be promoted as a strength rather than a weakness. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

Nordic cooperation as a sub-regional part of European defence integration

How does Nordic security and defence cooperation fit into such a differentiated or flexible system of regional security and defence integration? In a report published by the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) on global trends towards 2040, the authors conclude by arguing that “the shared interests of the Nordic countries make closer ties in this region the best way to close the gap between situations considered to be too big for Norway, but too small for NATO” (Beadle et al. 2019, p. 4). This is key, but the only thing that should be noted as lacking is a reference to the EU. As the Ukraine crisis has shown, both institutions are crucial when it comes to safeguarding European security: NATO for deterrence and the EU together with member states and partners for handling the implications of the war and for assisting Ukraine in different ways.

While Nordic military cooperation in international crisis management operations has a long tradition and was strengthened in the 1990s during the Balkan wars (Rieker 2006), it was with the Stoltenberg report (Stoltenberg 2009) and the establishment of NORDEFECO in 2009 that a more-structured Nordic defence cooperation gained new momentum – and even more so from 2015 onwards. At first, the main driver for increased cooperation was to reduce costs, as all states wanted to receive greater value for their national defence spending. The illegal Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, however, led to a changed European security context that also impacted Nordic defence cooperation. From then on, this cooperation became driven more directly by common security concerns. The need for both regional (European) and sub-regional (Nordic) defence cooperation also intensified after the election of Donald Trump. As a consequence, an increased willingness to strengthen Nordic defence cooperation was highlighted in a joint op-ed in several Nordic newspapers by the Nordic Defence Ministers (Søreide et al. 2015).

Of the 13 concrete recommendations for stronger Nordic cooperation presented by Stoltenberg in 2009 – which covered not only defence, but foreign and security policy as a whole – only some have been implemented. The main challenge has been diverging security policies, including different institutional affiliations; moreover, diverging defence–industrial interests have been difficult to overcome. The status in Nordic cooperation in foreign and security policy was summarised in 2019 in a review commissioned by the Icelandic presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers (Haugevik and Sverdrup 2019). Interestingly, the report concluded that the following three proposals from the Stoltenberg report had been implemented: *Nordic cooperation on surveillance of the Icelandic airspace; a Nordic resource network to protect against cyber-attack; and cooperation between the Nordic foreign services*. It also determined that some progress had been made on seven proposals: *the establishment of a Nordic maritime monitoring system and a maritime response force; the strengthening of Nordic cooperation on Arctic issues; the establishment of a disaster response unit; an increase in intra-Nordic military cooperation on transport, medical services, education, materiel and exercise ranges; the establishment of*

an amphibious unit; and the issuing of a Nordic declaration of solidarity. And finally, it concluded that little or nothing had happened in the three following areas: *the establishment of a stabilisation task force; a satellite system for surveillance; and a communication and a war crimes investigation unit* (Haugevik and Sverdrup 2019). As the authors argued, the recommendations were implemented earlier in those areas that did not require the establishment of specific new structures and units.

Although Nordic defence cooperation has not achieved all the ambitions from the Stoltenberg report, considerable progress has been made with regards to operational cooperation in all areas (air, sea and land) and training. In 2018, new ambitions were also agreed upon in the area of security and defence through the adoption of “Vision 2025” (Nordic Defence Ministers 2018), where the focus was on how to be better at acting together in peace, crisis and conflict. With Sweden and Finland soon in NATO, these targets should be easier than ever to meet.

Following the unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine, this cooperation has once again gained momentum. When the Nordic Defence Ministers met in Kirkenes on 11 May, 2022, they stated that they remained fully “committed to further deepening our defence cooperation with regards to operational cooperation and total defence” (Nordic Defence Ministers 2022). The increased focus on total defence will also imply a greater coordination with the EU as the Nordic EU countries will likely see their total defence as an integrated part of the EU’s common civilian protection capacities, which are also being strengthened as a consequence of the war. With all Nordic states soon be NATO members and either EU members or highly integrated EEA members, the potential for deeper Nordic cooperation has never been greater.

Nordic security and defence cooperation as a key part of a European defence architecture

For this new momentum for Nordic defence cooperation to be successful and contribute to improving both Nordic and European security, it must be developed as *an integrated part of the ongoing European defence integration process that takes place at different levels with different actors*. For instance, if the ministers are serious about identifying increased operational cooperation and total defence as a goal, this can only be done if Norway fully recognises that the EU is a key actor in this area.

In general, sub-regional security and defence cooperation can only be successful if it serves European security and defence as a whole, and if it develops into a constructive format that contributes to the strengthening of a European security and defence capacity. This could be undermined if some members of the sub-regional groupings continue to have one preferred partner or institutional framework. This is why it is important to make sure that Nordic defence cooperation develops its cooperation in a flexible manner, to be able to “plug into and play” together with different states (France, Germany, the UK, and the US) and different institutions (both NATO and the EU).

Concluding remarks

European security and defence policy is currently being shaped in both the EU and NATO, as well as in various non-institutional formats. The key for Norway is therefore to take part in all these formats, but also to be more convincing in its support for a stronger European security defence coordination, cooperation and integration. This means prioritising joint European initiatives, even those initiated by the EU (like the European Peace Facility) rather than purely national ones (promoted by one of Norway's close allies).

The Russian invasion has led to a call for a stronger European defence capacity. But for this to materialise requires a greater understanding of how the initiatives taken at different levels provide positive synergies. Germany has taken the lead in its "Zeitenwende", Sweden and Finland are about to join NATO and Denmark has abandoned its opt out from the CSDP. Norway, however, has thus far taken no similar steps. While EU membership might be politically difficult, there is no reason why Norway should not strengthen the European dimension in its security and defence policy. One way of doing this, in addition to cooperating more closely with the EU and the different EU members, is to promote a far more ambitious security and defence cooperation within a Nordic framework. The overall ambitions have already been agreed upon. With Sweden and Finland in NATO, it is the time to implement them all. But making the most out of Norway's shared capacities requires seeing Norway's national security in a broader geopolitical context – both at the Nordic level (including the Baltic states) and in Europe as a whole, with the EU and NATO being equally important for European security.

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