

## NATO's Partnerships – Quo Vadis?

**Experts Workshop**

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**Venue:** oiip

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**Event held in cooperation with the Advisory Board to the Scientific Commission of the Austrian  
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co-sponsored by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation**

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## Zusammenfassung

Am 5. Mai 2014 trafen sich ExpertInnen aus den WEP 5 Ländern im Rahmen eines Workshops am Österreichischen Institut für Internationale Politik, um gemeinsam über den Status und die Zukunft der NATO-Partnerschaften zu reflektieren. Im Zentrum standen hierbei die Strategien, Präferenzen und Erwartungen von Österreich, Finnland, Irland, Schweden und der Schweiz. Berücksichtigt und analysiert wurden hierbei auch der regionale wie globale Kontext, vor allem die aktuelle Lage in der Ukraine und die möglichen Konsequenzen für die NATO-Russland-Beziehungen. Dieses Papier gibt die Inhalte dieser Diskussionen wieder, ohne dabei offen zu legen, welche Informationen und Argumente von welcher TeilnehmerIn stammen.

## Abstract

On May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014, experts from the WEP 5 countries and NATO met at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs in order to discuss NATO's partnerships in general as well as the related policies, expectations, and preferences of Austria, Finland, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland in particular. The discussion, of course, also reflected on the broader strategic context while giving special consideration to the potential implications of the crisis in Ukraine and the consequential deterioration of relations with Russia. This report summarizes these discussions without making any explicit attributions to individual speakers.



This event was co-sponsored by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

## Preface

On September 26-27, 2013, academics and other experts from a number of neutral and non-aligned European countries (namely from Austria, Finland, Ireland, Malta, Sweden and Switzerland) gathered at NATO Headquarters in Brussels for a briefing by senior NATO officials and subsequent discussions on the future of the Alliance's partnerships. The Austrian Institute for International Affairs (oiip) and the Advisory Board to the Scientific Committee of the Austrian Armed Forces organized a follow-up event – held in Vienna, Austria, on May 5, 2014 – in an effort to bring the same experts together again and provide an additional platform to jointly reflect on what was presented in Brussels, outline the related positions and expectations of the countries aforementioned, and discuss relevant topics. This seemed to be both necessary and legitimate as “partnership” is an inclusive term, or otherwise put, as it takes two to partner, where by any adaptation or transformation process should also rest on an inclusive approach taking account of the needs, visions, expectations, and ideas of partners. Accordingly, along with an assessment and analysis of the status quo of NATO's partnership portfolio and of the broader regional and global strategic context and next to an identification and listing of the challenges and risks NATO and its partners are confronted with and will have to cope with or respond to in the foreseeable future, the workshop participants provided information on the policies, priorities and preferences of their countries of origin. Moreover, both the debate as well as its timing seemed to be more than adequate, as the year 2014 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Partnership for Peace* (PfP) program.

Except for Malta, experts from the countries mentioned above (Austria, Finland, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland) participated in this workshop alongside a staff-member from NATO's Public Diplomacy Division. This paper summarizes the statements given by the workshop participants (see list on next page) and ensuing discussions without disclosing who said what and making any explicit attributions. Please also note that all speakers participated in the workshop in a personal capacity and expressed exclusively their personal views and assessments. Moreover, as this paper incorporates all the different views expressed, a participant will unlikely endorse all arguments to be found herein.

At this point, we wish to thank all workshop participants for their statements and contributions to the discussions. Special thanks are also due to the Public Diplomacy Division of NATO, which co-sponsored and lent support to the organization of this event. We would also like to thank our entire team for its support and collective team-work that led to this event taking place.

## List of Participants

| <b>Name</b>            | <b>Institution</b>  | <b>Country</b> |
|------------------------|---|----------------|
| Heinz Gärtner          | oiip  | Austria        |
| Hakan Akbulut          | oiip  | Austria        |
| Irina Iancu            | oiip  | Austria        |
| Lawrence Kettle        | oiip  | Austria        |
| Amb. Karl Schramek     | Head of the Austrian Mission to<br>NATO and Ambassador to Belgium | Austria        |
| Karin Fichtinger-Grohe | Austrian Foreign Ministry   | Austria        |
| Barbora Maronkova      | Public Diplomacy Division   | NATO           |
| Walter Feichtinger     | Austrian Ministry of Defense                                      | Austria        |
| Wolfgang Manzl         | Austrian Ministry of Defense                                      | Austria        |
| Erich Riedl            | Austrian Ministry of Defense                                      | Austria        |
| Kari Möttölä           | University of Helsinki  | Finland        |
| Terhi Suominen         | Atlantic Council of Finland                                       | Finland        |
| Andrew Cottey          | University College Cork   | Ireland        |
| Lena Bartholdson       | Society of Defence, Sweden  | Sweden         |
| Stefan Ollson          | Stockholm Free World Forum  | Sweden         |
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## Introduction

NATO did not only outlast the Cold War but also proved those wrong who claimed its years were numbered as its *raison d'être* had ceased to exist when the Soviet Union collapsed and the Iron Curtain fell. Rather than disappearing from the scene or sinking into irrelevance, NATO has successfully transformed itself in response to a changing regional and global context. Correspondingly, NATO's past twenty years were characterized by flexibility and adaptability. The Alliance did not only expand its mission portfolio and extend its operational radius beyond Europe, but with this it also drew on an enlarged membership and a web of partnerships spanning large parts of the globe. Accordingly, NATO, counts as of today 41 partner countries alongside a number of international organizations such as the EU, UN, or OSCE, with whom it has been cooperating with.

Overall, partnerships have been a central element of *cooperative security* and effective *crisis management* in and beyond Europe. However, this is not to say that there has been one *single partnership model* being applied to all interested countries. To the contrary, NATO has been partnering with countries of different political making, having different security needs and different means at their disposal, favouring different levels of engagement with the Alliance, and thus making different contributions to the goals of the Alliance and asking for different returns alongside varying allied prioritizations of issues, regions and countries. As an example, one should look at the Europe bound *Partnership for Peace* (PfP) that has also served to prepare many countries for membership, the *Mediterranean Dialogue* (MD) and the *Istanbul Cooperation Initiative* (ICI) reaching out to the countries of the MENA region, or the *partners across the globe* including countries such as Japan South Korea, Australia, the Philippines or Thailand, but also India, Vietnam, Indonesia or Pakistan.

As NATO and partner countries face a number of new challenges today, the need to adapt to changing circumstances seems to be of an enduring character and *transformative capacity* an all-time requirement. First, having fielded many operations, with the end of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, NATO's status will change "from deployed to prepared" as the Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, put it. These operations did not only give birth to partnerships between NATO and many countries in the first instance, they have also necessitated a certain level of steady consultation, coordination and cooperation. With NATO changing to a "non-deployed" or "stand-by" mode, the task will, first and foremost, be to preserve the ties established and "conserve" the achievements made (including, among others, the lessons-learned, levels of interoperability achieved, or common visions and convergences generated in different issue areas). Above that,

however, the Alliance will need to create opportunities for “peace time” exchanges, coordination and cooperation. To put it in other words, NATO will have to find a creative formula to avert an “erosion” of the partnerships created. At the same time, given the abovementioned variety of partner profiles and different fora for engaging various countries in different forms, and notwithstanding efforts taken so far (especially the *Berlin Package* of 2011), NATO is still confronted with expectations from some members, partners and external observers to streamline or overhaul existing partnership formats, define principles for prioritizing certain partners over others, and pronounce related costs and benefits of belonging to one category or another. When working to adapt NATO and its partnerships to the post-Afghanistan period, all involved parties will also need to give credit to the potential implications of, for instance, the reality of shrinking defence budgets in Europe and the US (while, for example, Russian or Chinese defence expenditures have been rising continuously), of the US pivot to Asia, of the volatility of the situation in the MENA region, and the need to pursue a comprehensive approach when tackling eventual crises. It goes without saying that any crisis can erupt anywhere unexpectedly; with the recent crisis in Ukraine constituting a case in point, which also redirected attention to Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty and collective defence. Apart from such crises and tensions with specific countries, among others, risks and challenges associated with cyber security, energy security, piracy, terrorism, WMD proliferation, climate change, and disaster relief, will continue to bear on efforts to adapt and transform NATO's partnerships.

Summarizing what was mainly discussed during the workshop titled “NATO's Partnerships: Quo Vadis?” held in Vienna on 5 May, 2014, this paper looks into the past and potential future of partnerships giving special consideration to the experiences and preferences of neutral or non-aligned European countries (Austria, Finland, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland) that have been engaging with NATO at varying degrees.

## **NATO's Partnerships – Experiences, Opportunities and Challenges**

NATO's partnership policy has evolved and transformed over a period of twenty years. In fact, when the Alliance's partnership program was kicked off a short time after the end of the Cold War, uncertainties loomed over the entire project which was being questioned by many sceptics. How would, for instance, Russia react and where would this partnerships lead to? Would PfP be the path to membership or would it rather be a substitute for joining the Alliance? It took even NATO some years to realize that the partnerships constituted much more than simply providing assistance in security sector reform and alike. As the 2010 strategic concept defined cooperative security as a core

task of the Alliance alongside collective defence and crisis management, the significance of the partnership policy became even more apparent.

Partnerships build on shared interests and mutual benefits. The partners have been able to decide to what extent they would engage with the Alliance. While some Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries viewed PfP as a stepping stone and preparation for membership, other states simply regarded it as a pragmatic framework for cooperation, including in crisis management. Creating and sustaining interoperability has undoubtedly been one of the key benefits associated with partnerships. It also goes without saying that the partnership framework has allowed for dialogue and consultations on challenges and threats to security. PfP also served as a model for partnerships with countries located in other parts of the world within the framework of the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. Overall, NATO's partnership policy has been allowing countries of a different political making, different values and interests, from different parts of the world to engage with the Alliance without contradicting national security and foreign policy interests and at varying degrees.

At the same time, it has not only been partner countries profiting from cooperation with NATO but also vice versa. Past and present NATO operations have shown, especially those in Iraq and Afghanistan, that a comprehensive approach including civilian elements is needed and NATO cannot go it alone; neither in political nor in military terms. Yet, beyond contributions to crisis management and post-conflict nation-building, the participation of partners changes the way in which NATO operations are perceived and evaluated by external observers. For instance, the participation of Sweden in the operation in Libya completely changed the quality and nature of this undertaking and consequently the perception thereof, which facilitated contributions from other countries such as Morocco, Qatar or Jordan.<sup>1</sup>

With NATO's partnership portfolio growing and expanding to different parts of the world, the question also arose on how to reform the Alliance partnership policy and bring all these different partners under one umbrella. The meeting of foreign ministers in Berlin in 2011 thus approved a new policy, which was intended to create a new momentum and allow for a better engagement of partners creating new tools and new formats for meetings. However, the Berlin policy did not work

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<sup>1</sup> A similar situation could be observed during the EU operation in Chad. The operation was under Irish command while an Austrian commander was in charge of the special forces. This helped to signal that this was not a French undertaking.

out as smoothly as expected and opening up all activities (training, education and cooperation menus) to all partners did not create the intended effect as each partner has particular interests and particular relations with other allies. It became obvious that an alternative strategy was necessary. The Western European partners (WEP) played a crucial role in this context. The so-called “tiger teams” – comprising at least one member-state and a partner country – were created in an effort to bring up issues from the bottom up and give some substance to debates in partnership fora and revitalize them as such. At the same time, the tiger team concept reflected a change in understandings underlying the partnerships policy: While NATO would previously reach out to partners and see who wanted to participate in predefined operations, exercises or other forms of cooperation, with the tiger teams emerging, some partners would start bringing their policies to NATO and try to make the Alliance adopt what was relevant from their point of view. For instance, the Swiss pushed the topic of Private Security Companies within NATO. This ended up as a NATO policy and the Alliance subscribed to the *Montreux Document*. In a similar fashion, Sweden initiated discussions on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. This led to the instalment of a special adviser on the topic, which will become a permanent position within NATO's international secretariat. Austria, as another Western European partner, has facilitated discussions on the topic of POC, that is the Protection of Civilians. This is in sharp contrast to initial policies and practices, when partner even had no guarantee of being invited to relevant meetings in spite of their contributions to NATO operations. This was, for instance, the case in Kosovo where partners “had to push for inclusion in meetings” and were side-lined “whenever possible”. NATO did also previously hardly ever react to proposals tabled by partners. So, many “letters the WEP 5 [Austria, Finland, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland] sent NATO remained unanswered”. This is all illustrative of the learning process that both NATO and the partners have undergone as well as of the transformation of the nature of this relationship.

The Alliance and its partners face a number of challenges and uncertainties today. To begin with, NATO's operation in Afghanistan - unquestionably the most challenging and biggest NATO operation to date - will end in 2014. Even though the end of ISAF will not mark the end of NATO operations as such given the fact that the operation in Kosovo will continue, the question arises as to how NATO will manage to stay connected with partner countries after 2014, especially with those that did not engage with the Alliance prior to ISAF. Thinking ahead, partnerships will overall have to focus on three main topics: First, on the question of interoperability, which all sides have been profiting from, both NATO and the partners. The connected forces initiative, the framework nation concept and joint training activities in general will help to uphold and secure interoperability even after ISAF has come



to an end. The second issue of concern will be capacity building. However, this is something that has been practiced in the past twenty years and does not constitute anything new given security and defence sector reform work in many countries. For instance, Austria has extensively contributed to this. The question will be how related knowledge can be transferred to countries in other regions such as Africa (as this was already done in the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan). Thirdly, what will be relevant with respect to partners in distant parts of the globe will be to uphold political connectivity. Australia, for instance, has participated in ISAF and it is most likely that Australian officers will attend the NATO Defence College or participate in training. However, the challenge will be to uphold higher level political dialogue after ISAF. With regard to WEP, there are a great number of projects and common interests that will guarantee continued political and military connectivity even after 2014. Nonetheless, participation in NATO operations has been the most central and significant form of engagement with the Alliance. Thus, once these operations have been completed, this will come to bear on NATO-WEP 5 relations, too, as a core area of cooperation will have disappeared. Nonetheless, the major task will still be to identify substantial issues and activities to continue high level dialogue with distant partners. In fact, global partners such as Australia or Japan have been among the most active ones alongside the WEP 5 while the CEE countries which had also performed actively as partners joined NATO at some point. Therefore, while NATO has indeed established partnerships with a broad range of countries all around the globe, the range of “active partners” seems to be rather limited.

What seems to constitute a more pressing issue is the crisis in Ukraine. In the short term, it is unquestionably going to leave its imprint on NATO's next summit in Wales that was initially planned to focus on the topic of partnerships. The question will, of course, be how to deal with Russia. For the time being, all practical political and military cooperation with the latter has been suspended. However, allies' views diverge on this issue and there is no common position on a strategy to be adopted towards Russia, at least not for the time being. Overall, at this stage, it seems to be impossible to forecast what the mid and long term impact of the Ukraine crisis will be on NATO's partnership policy and the Alliance as such. Nevertheless, it is most likely going to feed into and fuel debates on priority setting within the Alliance. The crisis will most probably bolster calls for “returning to traditional values” and giving greater attention to territorial defence and Article V rather than focusing on cooperative security and partnerships. This would also mean limiting the radius of NATO activity to the European continent and rethinking its global role. On the part of partner countries, this might also further differentiation; that is to say some allies might move closer to the Alliance while others might continue to prefer lower levels of engagement. All these “divides”

among NATO member-states and partners are, of course, not a product of the Ukraine crisis as such and have already existed before. They could, however, grow further and thus become more visible given the developments in Ukraine.

It is worth reiterating at this point, that since the end of the East-West conflict, NATO has undergone a significant transformation process and became an organization of global reach. The former Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, concluded in 2005 that NATO had to face the challenges “when and where they emerge or they will end up on our doorstep”. NATO moved on to crisis management operations, even if they were to take place out of NATO's core area, such as in the Balkans or Afghanistan. NATO not only acted “out-of-area” but also “out-of-continent”. Yet, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer later also stressed that NATO could not act as a “global policeman” because it faced financial restrictions and had limited resources. Even though the focus has shifted towards Ukraine, the humanitarian crises and natural disasters will not disappear. The need for crisis management, early warning, conflict prevention, and post-conflict settlement will remain. Some of the partners have special (niche-) capabilities in early warning, preventive deployment, protection of civilians, disaster relief, peace-keeping or post-conflict reconstruction. Crisis management is a comprehensive task. It involves political, security, military, diplomatic, civilian, environmental and humanitarian dimensions. Some of these tasks might be better developed by partner than member countries. Moreover, a multiplicity of tasks has to be provided by NGO's through the military, such as water, food, medicine, tents. The “tiger teams” can provide a useful basis to prepare these missions. NATO together with partners could enhance the global crisis response structure.

Some partner countries might concentrate more on the crisis management pillar of NATO, others might want to move closer to membership and collective defense. This also means that within the concept of the “framework nations” interoperability has to be tailored for those partners who want to be more involved in crisis management operations rather than territorial defense. The military capabilities of partners might not be sufficient for every pillar and task. The common basis between NATO and partners will remain cooperative security, however. Partners should be further engaged in the NATO Response Force (NRF), the Connected Force Initiative (CFI), in command structures for special missions, civil-military relations, regional security complexes, counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency (COIN) coordination, education and training cooperation. In the framework of cooperative security, partners could through functional cooperation develop together with NATO a security community with common values, mutual accountability, intensified communication and

information sharing. This requires international coordination standardization and interoperability, common education and data exchange.

The crisis in Ukraine might also move some countries to spend more money on military procurements despite the financial crisis of recent years. The financial crisis has in fact been another big challenge in past years and rendering publics even less willing to accept huge investments in the military sector. Whether this tendency will be reversed in the face of tensions with Russia remains to be seen. However, the experiences made after the 2008 conflict in Georgia might, offer some hints on how things might evolve. There were some minor increases in military spending in some countries but no general rush to procure more weapons and equipment. Hence, it is plausible to assume that in today's case, too, different countries will respond differently and some will probably spend more money on defence compared to others. Overall, at this stage, it seems to be inadequate to regard the developments in Ukraine as a big "game-changer".

Financial short-comings might indeed also have a positive side-effect, for they render closer cooperation between NATO and the EU indispensable. So far, there has been only limited cooperation, especially due to the disputes between NATO member Turkey and EU member-state Cyprus. Even though high-level staff talks take place between NATO and organisations such as the UN or the OSCE, this is not possible in the case of the EU, which is rather difficult for outside observers to conceive. So, even though "more cost-effective work" was a necessity before Ukraine and will continue to be so thereafter, unless the Cyprus issue is solved, prospects for closer NATO-EU relations will remain dim.

## **WEP 5 under Focus**

Prior to the PfP, NATO did not have an institutionalized framework for engaging neutral and non-aligned states and exchanges were very limited, in most cases coming in the form of bilateral defence relations between neutral or non-aligned states and a number of NATO countries. However, in the post-Cold War era, the PfP has constituted a political fact both for NATO and the neutral and non-aligned countries. They have been cooperating and implementing joint activities almost on a daily basis. What is more, the WEP 5 – that is the countries under consideration in this paper – have been among the most active partners. Both shared interests and shared values facilitated such engagement and rendered cooperation easier. Given the fact that all these countries are established democracies, there was no need for NATO, for instance, to invest in security sector reform, which

also left these countries as contributors rather than recipients in the PfP context. They have, for example, been contributing to training and defence sector reform in the Balkans and the Baltics.

Just as there is a certain degree of flexibility within NATO and member-countries are engaging to varying degrees with the Alliance, the same is true for partners. This has been also the case within the group of WEP 5. Sweden and Finland, on the one hand, have been pursuing a maximalist approach, that is to say they have been ready to engage to the fullest extent possible with the Alliance, yet short of membership. Switzerland and Ireland, on the other hand, have only had limited cooperation. Austria has usually been somewhere in-between. In spite of “clear nuances and differences in national preferences”, however, the WEP 5 managed to appear as a “coherent group” and became to be viewed as such. Such coherence nonetheless has been exposed to added strains recently, mainly due to efforts on the part of Sweden and Finland to enhance differentiation and move closer to NATO. The Ukraine crisis is likely to further move these two countries closer to the Alliance. This could have the adverse effect of undermining the standing and relevance of the WEP 5 as a whole. It has been these countries performing as a group that has vested them with significance and some level of influence within the NATO context. As single countries, they might be rather “negligible” for NATO, one line of argumentation goes. The national preferences and policies of single WEP 5 countries are briefly outlined below.

## **Austria**

Two factors mainly shape Austrian policies in the security realm. First, Austria does not face any immediate challenges to its security. Second, Austria wishes to contribute to peace and security abroad and act as a reliable partner. When doing so, Austria pursues a “balanced engagement”, that is to say that the country works to contribute to the activities of all relevant international institutions (UN, EU, NATO, OSCE). Notwithstanding this “balanced approach”, Austria, nonetheless, puts special emphasis on strengthening the Common Security and Defense Policy of the EU for this is the most significant security framework for Austria as a non-NATO member. What is more, a UN mandate is a prerequisite for Austria’s participation in operations abroad. Another feature of Austrian engagement is that the country is rather risk-averse and gives preference to near-by theatres. Hence, South East Europe constitutes the region of primary concern and priority for Austria.

Given these preferences, priorities and principles, joining the PfP was only the logical thing to do. PfP has constituted a welcome opportunity for Austria to contribute to operations in South East Europe,

on the one hand, and, at the same time, to rake in some benefits from its engagement. So, Austria has worked alongside allies in security and peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and currently has personnel deployed in Afghanistan and Kosovo. Participating in such peacekeeping and peace support operations alongside NATO has reinforced Austria's own process of military transformation. Participation in the PfP and NATO-led operations facilitated interoperability on the basis of NATO standards.

During the late 1990s and shortly after 2001, there were some debates in Austria on whether the country should join the Alliance or not. However, these were soon dismissed. The fact remains that the population is reluctant when it comes to Austria becoming a fully-fledged NATO member. Membership would not be an option, because this would neither entail any additional benefits, except for Article V. However, within the current political context and given the fact that Austria does not face immediate threats from the exterior, Article V has currently no relevance for Austria.

All in all, Austria wants to maintain its policy of balanced engagement by further contributing to peacekeeping and being an active member of the international community. As mentioned above, Austrian troops have been deployed in Kosovo (500), Lebanon (160) and almost 350 in Bosnia. Austria also dispatched three officers to Afghanistan to show flag. In recent years, Africa has emerged as a new area of concern and operation for Austria. Austria participated in the mission in Chad, has been contributing to the mission in Mali and also raised the issue of sending some troops to Central Africa.

As for the question on what activities the partners could engage in in the future, pooling and sharing has a huge potential from an Austrian perspective. Even though Austria has “earmarked” 1,100 troops for operations abroad, this is not seen as a reason to engage in a kind of “mission hunting”. In the case that lower numbers are needed, “excess troops” can, for instance, be tasked to train conscripts. With regard to the developments in Ukraine, at least for the time being, Austria does not consider these events as being a game-changer in the security context.

## **Finland**

Similar to the case of Sweden, Finland engages with NATO to the fullest possible extent while retaining its non-aligned status at the same time. Nevertheless, the political elites do not rule out the option of becoming a member even though the current government concurred in 2009 not to take any steps in this regard for the time being. This does also not change the fact that when devising

Finnish defence policy and related undertakings, precaution is taken to avoid any changes which could constitute a barrier to a future accession to NATO. On several occasions, Finnish governments have commissioned reports on the possible implications (financial, institutional, etc.) of an eventual accession to NATO.

Three major factors have been shaping attitudes and decision-making on the issue of NATO membership. In terms of geopolitical thinking, the question has been raised as to whether Finland needs and would actually benefit from membership. There seems to exist a common understanding that Finland requires a strong defence irrespective of the extent of its engagement with the Alliance. Universal conscription and a strong reserve force along with necessary planning and preparations serve to guarantee an effective territorial defence. All this raises the confidence of the public that there is no need for a change. At the same time, there is a lack of confidence in the reliability of other powers coming to Finland's aid in case need arises – even if Finland were to become a NATO member. What is more, at an ideational level, “neutrality” is deeply ingrained in Finnish identity which is being permanently reinforced by the positive historical record. Governance or institutional aspects seem to be less controversial. Only a few would oppose the prospect of sitting at the table with other democracies and engaging in political consultations.

Public opinion on NATO membership and defence issues has hardly changed over the years. According to polls conducted in 2013, 68 percent support universal conscription while only 11 percent are in favour of all-voluntary defence forces. In terms of military cooperation, 93 percent support cooperation with all of the parties, that is the Nordic countries, the EU and NATO. However, support for cooperation with the Nordic countries and the EU is rather considerable, in both cases well above 80 percent, whereas only 49 percent are in favour of cooperation with NATO. In line with this, 70 percent oppose NATO membership while only 21 percent declare their support for accession to the Alliance. After the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine, the percentage of those in favour of membership has only seen an insignificant rise to 22 percent. As the polls indicate, the public positively views cooperation with Nordic countries. Concepts such as pooling and sharing or smart defence are assessed positively, too. Accordingly, close relations with the US, for instance, in terms of military procurements, have never been controversial.

Against this background, Finland has been cooperating with the Alliance to the outmost extent and viewing partnership as a useful and valuable tool for achieving interoperability on the basis of NATO standards. This feeds into the development of capabilities for both participating in international

missions (also in those led by the EU, OSCE or the UN) as well as for fostering national defence capabilities. What is more, in spite of public lack of confidence in the credibility of security assurances provided by external actors, partnership and cooperation with NATO are also expected to raise the likelihood of receiving assistance from the Alliance in case of contingencies. Overall, as there has been no need for security sector reform in Finland, the country has been an active contributor to Alliance activities. Finland has been contributing to ISAF and KFOR. Moreover, it has troops in Lebanon (UN-led) and in Bosnia (EU-led). In fact, Finland currently has more troops in Lebanon (350) than in Afghanistan (110); hence, participation in UN-led operations will continue to be an option after the operation in Afghanistan comes to an end.

## **Ireland**

In order to understand the Irish perspective on NATO and partnerships with the Alliance, one needs to consider that both topics have very little political salience in Ireland; i.e. there is only little interest in both NATO and the partnership with NATO. This is against the background of a very strong public commitment to neutrality and anti-militarism. Moreover, there is a peace movement which is broadly anti-NATO and also anti-partnerships. Even though this movement is becoming quite vocal in Ireland, this does not mean that it necessarily possesses much influence. Beyond that, there are only a few academics that might have an interest in NATO-related issues.

Given these public attitudes, the political elites, also have little interest in discussing NATO related topics. Nonetheless, at the governmental level, there is, of course, an ongoing discussion about NATO and NATO partnerships involving among others the ministry for defence, the foreign ministry as well as the armed forces. Drivers for cooperation with NATO can be summarized under three headings: First, becoming a NATO partner appeared as something that the European mainstream practiced. So, remaining outside the PfP would have meant staying outside the European mainstream, which Irish decision-makers wanted to avoid. Secondly, peacekeeping has always been such a central element of Irish foreign and security policy to the extent that one could argue it was part of Irish national identity. In line with this, it has constituted the major role for Irish defence forces. As NATO emerged as the main peacekeeper in the Balkans in the 1990s, Irish decision-makers concluded that Ireland had to engage with NATO in order to be able to participate in such peacekeeping operations. Thirdly, from a perspective of the military forces and the department of defence, NATO is “the military gold standard” and “good military professionalism in part implies working to the kind of standards and practices that NATO embodies”. Since they view themselves as military professionals, engaging with NATO thus seems only logical.

Should NATO indeed become “post-interventionist” and refocus on collective defence, this would most likely narrow down the political space for Ireland to engage with NATO. The consequence would probably not be Ireland completely disengaging from NATO but rather becoming less active. Irish decision-makers would try not to be excluded from the elements of partnership, but at the same time, worry not to get involved in and bound by anything that might cause political difficulties at home.

## **Sweden**

Sweden has taken part in PfP in an active manner since the program was kicked off. The country has contributed to NATO operations in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Libya. Sweden has also adapted its entire defence forces in line with NATO standards, to the extent that Swedish pilots no longer communicate in Swedish but English. In 2013, Sweden also made a decision to join the NATO Response Force (NRF). So, overall, similar to the case of Finland, Sweden practically engages with the Alliance to the fullest possible extent without joining the Alliance. Sweden thus enjoys a good standing as an active partner whose contributions in some cases tops that of actual members. In fact, Sweden in return expects NATO's (in particular Denmark's and Norway's) assistance in case of any contingency despite announcements by the Alliance that Article V only applies to member-states.

Despite all the commonalities, there are also major differences in the security and defence policies of Sweden and Finland. Sweden abandoned conscription in 2010 and only has a small professional army. At the moment, it could solely fully mobilize a battalion which could only withstand an attack for a week at a single theatre. At the same time, this army is supposed to be highly trained, well equipped and able to jointly operate with NATO countries. The country's geographic position and the lack of any immediate threat to Swedish security might be the reason for having such a small-scale defence force. Since the army is too small to defend the entire Swedish territory, joining NATO could constitute a panacea. This is also why many in Sweden's defense establishment are in favour of NATO membership. It was difficult to have a small army and be a non-aligned country at the same time, the argument goes. Throughout the Cold War, Sweden had a large, strong and independent army, which is no longer the case.

With regards to the public opinion, the situation resembles that in Finland: public opinion remains broadly attached to Sweden's military non-alignment. Only around 30 percent are in favour of joining the Alliance. The Ukraine crisis even entailed a rise in the number of people opposing NATO



membership from 45 percent to 50 percent. It is plausible to assume this is due to the historical legacy of being or conceiving oneself as a neutral country. At the same time, it is worth noting that while the public is convinced Sweden has always been a neutral country, Swedish governments have not been using the term “neutrality” since the mid-1990s. Furthermore, the current government does not even use the term “non-aligned”. Official policy is, however, summarized as “non-alignment while seeking security together with other actors”. The public also seems to be unaware of the solidarity clause contained in the Lisbon Treaty which states that EU countries will provide assistance to other member-states that face terrorist attacks or natural and man-made disasters.

Just as in Finland, the debate on NATO membership in Sweden will surely go on and developments in Ukraine and in Russia's relationship with NATO will continue to be a critical variable to the public opinion and policy-making. It is also worth noting that Sweden takes part in air policing in the Baltic countries and granted NATO permission to use Swedish airspace for surveillance activities. The country, together with Finland, is also exposed to pressure by Baltic nations and Poland to join NATO as this would render it easier for the Alliance to defend these countries.

## **Switzerland**

The developments of the 1990s, especially the Balkan wars and a desire to promote stability via cooperation as well as to export values were essential in creating the ground for Switzerland to become a NATO-partner. Hence, cooperative security has been the main driver for Swiss engagement with NATO. However, in the aftermath of 9/11, NATO has undergone some change and fielded operations outside Europe with Afghanistan becoming the site of its most significant operation. This did not necessarily overlap with Swiss priorities and preferences for which reason the country has also refrained from making any substantial contributions within the framework of ISAF. Western Balkans have continued to constitute the area of concern and engagement for Switzerland.

With NATO undergoing change, public attitudes towards the Alliance have also shifted. While around 28 percent of the Swiss declared a desire to join NATO in the 1990s, this figure declined to 19 percent in 2013. 9/11 and ensuing developments overall reinforced neutrality as an element of Swiss identity. Around 95 percent of the population perceives neutrality as a good thing that should be preserved. Moreover, 81 percent maintain that Switzerland should remain economically and politically independent. At the same time, more than 60 percent support the idea of Swiss membership in the UN Security Council in about ten years, which indicates that the Swiss people view the UN more positively than NATO or the EU.

With the current events escalating in Europe and globally, NATO is going through another series of changes. This tends to put the Swiss relationship with NATO into a different perspective. A NATO refocusing on Europe would indeed be more in line with Swiss preferences, since Switzerland has not necessarily been in favour of NATO acting around the globe. There is, however, another observable tendency to revitalize collective defence, which is less fortunate from a Swiss perspective and will likely entail some debates in the country about neutrality and Switzerland's role in Europe. In the face of the crisis in Ukraine, cooperative security is likely to be devalued. As mentioned above, cooperative security has however been central to Swiss desire to engage with the Alliance. A shift of balances from cooperative security to collective defence will thus very likely render it more difficult for Swiss policymakers to explain why Switzerland should cooperate with NATO. Meanwhile, Swiss contributions in Kosovo continue to constitute "the hard core of Swiss engagement with NATO".

Switzerland has also benefited from cooperation with the Alliance. The military, for instance, has greatly profited from Swiss participation in KFOR. Political consultations have been another element cherished by Switzerland which would like to see this further strengthened in the future, especially on issues of Swiss concern including energy security, non-proliferation, cyber security among others. Given Swiss content with the current level of WEP 5 engagement with the Alliance, Switzerland would not view efforts to achieve related upgrades positively. Accordingly, gaps within the WEP5 and a potential of them growing further give rise to concerns in Switzerland.

## Conclusion

On May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014, experts from the WEP 5 countries and NATO met at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs for discussions on NATO's partnerships in general and the related policies, expectations, and preferences of Austria, Finland, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland in particular. The discussion, of course, also reflected on the broader strategic context while giving special consideration to the potential implications of the crisis in Ukraine and the consequential deterioration of relations with Russia.

NATO's partnerships have evolved over time and undergone transformation ever since the PfP was launched. The direction this process would take on as well as the benefits it would generate were not all well understood at the very beginning. Countries have participated in NATO's partnership programs for different reasons and at varying degrees. Notwithstanding the fact that PfP prepared many CEE states for accession to the Alliance, the partnership portfolio has also generated benefits for those not seeking membership as well as for NATO. Partnerships have not only created opportunities for dialogue and consultations on security topics, but, first and foremost, helped to achieve interoperability on the basis of NATO standards. Such interoperability has been further developed and practically tested during various NATO operations in and beyond Europe. Accordingly, related work has also fed into and assisted the transformation of partner armed forces and has benefited cooperation in international missions as such, that is, in non-NATO frameworks. Over time, the creation of new frameworks such as the tiger groups has also allowed partner countries to take the initiative and propose policies. On the one hand, a desire not to be left out of the European mainstream and do what others have been doing or the wish to show flag have also been factors motivating engagement with the Alliance. On the other hand, apart from the various contributions (troops, materiel, etc.) to NATO operations, the participation of non-members including neutral and non-aligned countries has allowed such missions to be conceived and perceived more positively, which also allowed further countries to participate.

Conserving all these assets once NATO's operations have been concluded constitutes one of the challenges both the Alliance and the partners face. The parties will have to work to uphold interoperability and continue high-level political dialogue. This will, most likely, be less a challenge in the case of "near-by" partners and those that have been participating in a broad variety of NATO activities. It is also worth reminding that those partners that have not participated actively in NATO's programs so far might anyway be interested in preserving the same low level of engagement.

Further challenges to be considered are the financial crisis as well as the deterioration of relations with Russia given developments in Ukraine. While budget constraints might give impetus to the pooling and sharing of military assets and force NATO and the EU to expand cooperation, the crisis in Ukraine, at the same time, might induce additional defence spending in spite of budgetary effects. Further implications of the Ukraine crisis might be NATO further downgrading its global engagement, refocusing on Europe, and especially reemphasizing collective defence and Article V.

So far, recent developments have not had a tangible impact on public attitudes towards NATO in the countries under consideration. In fact, NATO membership is obviously no option for Austria, Ireland, and Switzerland – both for the public as well as for decision-makers. While neutrality is also deeply ingrained in the collective memories and identity of publics in Finland and Sweden, the defence establishments in the two countries do not rule out this option for the future. Correspondingly, their preference has so far been to cooperate with NATO to the fullest possible extent short of membership. Thus, despite forming a group that displays some degree of coherence, the differentiation between these two countries, on the one side, and Austria, Ireland and Switzerland, on the other side, is likely to grow. What is more, even though having no legal or formal basis, the assumption of an implied commitment of NATO to their territorial defence seems to play into Finnish and Swedish engagement with the Alliance.

In a post-interventionist era, countries such as Austria, Ireland, and Switzerland will most likely find fewer opportunities for cooperation with the Alliance. A further deterioration of relations with Russia alongside more belligerent attitudes and practices on both sides is also likely to negatively impact public opinion on cooperation with NATO in these countries. However, this is not to say that cooperation will cease or that the partnership will be abandoned given abovementioned benefits and interests.

Overall, it is plausible to assume that the broader strategic context will define the prospects and relevance of NATO's partnerships. The Alliance is unlikely to abandon cooperative security and crisis management as core tasks. It is also worth considering that they cannot be wholly separated from each other and are interrelated. However, if current trends continue, the balance is likely to shift to collective defence leaving less time, energy and assets available for the other two tasks, which will ultimately come to bear on the partnerships.