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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 2)/Council

Subject: Sixth progress report on the implementation of the common set of proposals endorsed by EU and NATO Councils on 6 December 2016 and 5 December 2017

1. On 26 May 2021, the Political and Security Committee (PSC) had an exchange of views on the *Sixth progress report on the implementation of the common set of proposals endorsed by EU and NATO Councils on 6 December 2016 and 5 December 2017* (doc. 8791/21) and agreed to forward the document to the Council for notation, via the Permanent Representatives Committee (COREPER).
2. COREPER is therefore invited to take note of the progress report as set out in the Annex and to submit the document to the Council for notation.

**SIXTH PROGRESS REPORT
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMON SET OF PROPOSALS ENDORSED
BY EU AND NATO COUNCILS ON 6 DECEMBER 2016 AND 5 DECEMBER 2017**

This year marks the fifth anniversary of the signature of the Warsaw Joint Declaration of 8 July 2016 by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Over the past five years, in view of known and emerging challenges faced by both organizations, the long-standing EU-NATO partnership has made unprecedented progress, demonstrating and reinforcing the solidity of the transatlantic bond. In the course of the past year, the two organizations continued to further consolidate their mutually-reinforcing strategic partnership to the benefit of all NATO Allies and EU Member States, with a view to upholding and promoting the shared values and interests of the Euro-Atlantic community.

The present, sixth report on the implementation of the 74 common proposals – which were endorsed by NATO and EU Councils in parallel processes in 2016 and 2017 – elaborates on progress achieved between June 2020 and May 2021 by demonstrating tangible deliverables in all areas of cooperation.

In particular, the following elements can be highlighted:

- In a rapidly evolving strategic context and despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis, political dialogue continued at all levels and settings. It remains an indispensable instrument for strengthening mutual understanding, building confidence and ensuring reciprocal transparency vis-à-vis all EU Member States and NATO Allies, as well as their ownership and strong support.

- The first-ever meeting of the NATO Secretary General with the College of EU Commissioners in December 2020 and his exchange with the members of the European Council in February 2021 underscored the growing complexity of common challenges and the need to find common responses. In the same vein, the participation of the EU High Representative in meetings of NATO Foreign and Defence Ministers highlighted the importance of the strategic NATO-EU partnership in areas of shared interest.
- In addition to continued consultations with EU Member States and NATO Allies, these interactions highlighted a number of cross-cutting issues within the scope of the common set of proposals that are emerging as key drivers of relevance to both organizations. This includes notably resilience, emerging and disruptive technologies, crisis management, and key global issues such as the security and defence implications of climate change, and growing strategic competition, which could be tackled through enhanced political dialogue.
- EU and NATO staffs have continued their dialogues and regular contacts – including at senior level – despite COVID-19 related constraints. Particular focus was placed on addressing challenges related to the pandemic, including in countering disinformation activities, in tackling cyber threats, and in responding to requests for assistance by NATO Allies, EU Member States and partners.
- Well-established cooperation tracks continued to deliver concrete results. These include, among others, regular meetings between the North Atlantic Council (NAC) and the EU Political and Security Committee (PSC); the Structured Dialogue between staffs on Military Mobility; efforts to ensure the coherence of output between the respective EU and NATO defence planning processes, where requirements overlap; as well as ensuring the delivery of critical capabilities such as the European multinational fleet of multi-role tanker–transport (MRTT) aircraft.

The two organizations are conducting respective strategic reflection processes that will shape their strategic orientations and goals for the coming years. This presents a unique opportunity to foster further coherence and cooperation, where relevant, in full respect of the decision-making autonomy of both organizations, to the benefit of their members and of Euro-Atlantic security.

The implementation of the 74 common proposals is underpinned by a systematic, informal staff-to-staff mechanism consisting of three inter-locking layers: 1) implementation of individual proposals through regular interaction at expert level, including dedicated dialogues as appropriate; 2) monitoring, coordination and consistency ensured by an intermediate layer ('EU-NATO Core Group'); 3) strategic guidance and oversight provided at senior official level ('EU-NATO Steering Group'). This informal mechanism has demonstrated its value and efficiency in practice by ensuring steady overall progress and effective implementation of the cooperation agenda with concrete deliverables.

The EU-NATO strategic partnership continues to be taken forward in full respect of the agreed guiding principles enshrined in the Warsaw and Brussels Joint Declarations on EU-NATO cooperation.

Full engagement and continued support by all NATO Allies and EU Member States remain crucial in order to reach the full potential of the 74 proposals.

Countering hybrid threats

Countering hybrid threats remains an area of key importance in EU-NATO cooperation. Work has continued at steady pace, building upon the achievements and keeping the momentum of the previous reporting periods.

The membership of the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki (Hybrid CoE) continued to grow with 30 NATO Allies and EU Member States having joined the Centre to date. The Hybrid CoE facilitated various scenario-based discussions, workshops and exercises, with active participation of the two staffs. The Director of the Hybrid CoE briefed NATO Allies and selected partner countries on the Centre's activities in February 2021.

Well-established working level relations between the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell and the NATO Hybrid Analysis Branch – extending to the Hybrid CoE – continued to develop through monthly staff-to-staff exchanges, with the aim of strengthening situational awareness and mutual understanding of respective activities, as well as to explore further potential cooperation avenues. The two staffs continued the established practice of preparing Parallel and Coordinated Assessments, publishing three such documents in the reporting period.

In the area of counter-terrorism (CT), cooperation continued to develop through cross-briefings and mutual staff participation in dedicated meetings and specific projects, such as the working group on the NATO Counter Unmanned Aircraft Systems (C-UAS) in February 2021 and the virtual counter-UAS workshop organized by the European Commission in March 2021. EU and NATO staffs are also working together on research activities, for instance as part of the NATO Drone Single Local Air Picture project and through exchanges between the European Security and Defence College and NATO in the context of the development of the NATO counter-terrorism Reference Curriculum. The German and Portuguese Presidencies of the Council of the EU hosted informal seminars, respectively in December 2020 on battlefield evidence and in May 2021 on terrorist misuse of technologies, with the participation of representatives from NATO Allies and EU Member States, as well as of NATO and EU staffs. Virtual EU-NATO staff talks on counter-terrorism took place in November 2020, addressing topics including battlefield evidence, C-UAS, partner CT capacity-building, countering terrorist financing, as well as gender and terrorism.

In terms of Strategic Communications, cooperation between the EU and NATO staffs has been further strengthened during the pandemic, in particular when addressing challenges related to the ‘infodemic’ and massive spread of false or misleading content related to COVID-19 both online and offline, as well as analysing and exposing information manipulation by persistent and emerging actors.

Information exchanges at staff level intensified: regular cross-briefings have been organized, aimed at generating better situational awareness of both organizations on respective Strategic Communications efforts. Multidisciplinary staff exchanges between NATO, the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) have been held to exchange on practices and working methodologies to counter disinformation and build societal resilience. An important milestone was reached in the second semester of 2020 when NATO International Staff was included in the International Cooperation Space on the EU’s Rapid Alert System (RAS), which facilitates direct exchanges between EU Member States, relevant EU Institutions and third partners. Staffs from both organizations briefed relevant EU and NATO committees on efforts aimed at building resilience to disinformation. In February 2021, NATO staff participated in a discussion at the European Parliament’s Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all democratic processes in the EU, including disinformation.

Staff cooperation has moved to concrete activities to raise public awareness. EU and NATO digital teams cross-posted content such as on Women, Peace and Security and Human Rights, while respective staffs participated in public diplomacy events, reinforcing common messaging. Joint public outreach events in partner countries were organized to strengthen resilience against disinformation. The EEAS and NATO staff jointly commissioned a study proposal from the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (StratCom CoE) on “Disinformation in democracies – Strengthening cognitive and societal resilience against disinformation among NATO and EU audiences”. The EEAS East StratCom Task Force continued to liaise with the StratCom CoE, including on training materials and awareness raising activities. At the end of 2020, they jointly developed a training course simulating disinformation attacks and responses, delivered to EU staff.

The staffs of both organizations continued to engage on resilience and civil preparedness, including exchanging information on their respective activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In September 2020, the Commission updated NATO's Civil Emergency Planning Committee (CEPC) on the EU's response to COVID-19, while NATO shared with the EEAS and the Commission its updated Baseline Requirements for Resilience in November 2020. NATO and EU staffs have also actively exchanged views on broader developments related to resilience and civil preparedness, including civil protection, critical infrastructure protection, and foreign direct investment. In March 2021, the staffs agreed to further streamline their cooperation on resilience and civil preparedness through a dedicated structured dialogue, starting with an online workshop organised by the Hybrid CoE in April 2021.

With regard to crisis response, NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) and the EU's Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) further intensified their regular consultations, continuing to exchange information on respective responses to the COVID-19 crisis, including through bi-weekly virtual meetings to foster mutual situational awareness and avoid unnecessary duplication. In November 2020, EU and NATO staffs participated in the pandemic wargame "Resilient Response 20" organized by the Multinational Medical Coordination Center/European Medical Command (MMCC/EMC) and the Hybrid CoE. In addition, the EU has been taking part in the planning of the EADRCC consequence management field exercise set to be conducted in North Macedonia in September 2021.

Cooperation on Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) issues continued. Staff talks were held in November 2020, addressing, among others, the role of CBRN defence and resilience capabilities in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. The NATO Joint CBRN Defence Centre of Excellence (JCBRND CoE) continued to offer trainings, modeling and CBRN Reachback analysis and support to the EU's CBRN risk mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative. The JCBRND CoE is also a consortium partner of the HORIZON 2020 project for the European Network of CBRN Training Centres (eNOTICE).

NATO staff participated in the EU Consultation Forum for Sustainable Energy in the Defence and Security Sector, notably regarding the protection of defence-related critical energy infrastructure against hybrid threats. In addition, NATO staff regularly briefed the European Defence Agency Energy and Environment Working Group.

Operational cooperation including maritime issues

Staff dialogue on operational cooperation and the practice of mutual cross-briefings in respective NATO and EU Committees, including in the maritime field, continued on a regular basis. In October 2020, the EU briefed NATO's Operations Policy Committee (OPC) on its Operation in the Mediterranean, EUNAVFOR MED IRINI. In March 2021, the EU extended the mandate of EUNAVFOR MED IRINI for a further two years, on which the HRVP informed the NATO Secretary General. On this, the EU is to brief the OPC in the near future.

The ninth Shared Awareness and De-confliction in the Mediterranean (SHADE MED) Conference, the first for the Operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI, was held in a virtual form in November 2020 with the participation of NATO staff.

NATO and the EU continue to successfully cooperate in the Aegean Sea with information sharing at the operational and tactical levels and by supporting Turkish and Greek authorities in their efforts to stem the smuggling of migrants and illegal migration flows.

Well-established operational cooperation and coordination continued also in other common theatres ensuring coherence of respective efforts as well as avoiding unnecessary duplication where relevant.

In September 2020, the NATO-led Balkans Aviation Normalization Meeting accomplished a crucial step by setting the conditions for the imminent opening of new South-West air routes in the lower airspace over Kosovo¹, which will significantly shorten the civil air traffic routing to and from Pristina airport, with benefits in terms of reduced delays, lower fuel consumption, and reduced pollution. This has been possible through the consolidation of a robust process model for Aviation Safety Oversight for the airspace over Kosovo, established with the contribution of the Kosovo Force (KFOR). NATO and the EU focus on different aspects and remits of the aviation normalization process in the Western Balkans: their efforts reinforce each other and aim to lead to a coherent and complete framework for fully normalizing the lower airspace when the political circumstances allow.

Cyber security and defence

EU and NATO staffs maintained regular contact and information exchange on respective cyber activities. Considering the significant evolution of the cyber threat landscape over the last year, including due to COVID-19 pandemic, this interaction proved useful to advance the shared understanding of the threats, develop cooperation mechanisms and identify possible response options that could be taken in a coordinated manner.

In May 2021, a dedicated staff-to-staff scenario based discussion was organized as a parallel activity in the context of the exercise EU Integrated Resolve 20, to gain better understanding and look at potential complementarities and interactions between the NATO Guide on Response Options to Significant Malicious Cyber Activities and the EU Cyber Diplomatic Toolbox.

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

The annual EU-NATO cyber security and defence staff talks were held in January 2021, offering an opportunity to provide updates on respective policy developments and priorities, while assessing opportunities for further cooperation. Thematic sessions focused, inter alia, on respective experiences and lessons learned in addressing cyber related and enabled threats during COVID-19; updates on the implementation of the respective cyber crisis management and response mechanisms, including recent high-level statements; and progress in addressing cyber related challenges related to next generation networks.

Exchanges continued on concepts and doctrines as well as training and education. In particular, the EU Military staff developed the military concept “EU Military Vision and Strategy on Cyberspace as a Domain of Operations”, expected to be released to NATO staff. Furthermore, two workshops were organized on Cyber Defence Education, Training and Exercises, and Communication and Information Systems and Cyber Defence Concepts in November 2020. In this context, work has started on developing a Cyber Defence Education, Training and Exercises Coordination Instrument. Staff cooperation continued on cyber training modularity. The Hybrid Centre of Excellence and NATO’s Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence continued to participate in the Education & Exercises parts of the European Defence Agency (EDA) Project Team Cyber Defence meetings to ensure transparency on EU pilot courses and exercises. In addition, the EDA participated in the NATO Annual Discipline Conference in October 2020, providing an update to Allies on the EU’s Cyber Education, Training and Exercises projects.

In terms of strengthening cooperation on cyber exercises through reciprocal participation, Cyber Phalanx 21, an EU Command Post Exercise, to be held in September-October 2021, was opened to NATO staff participation in the planning and conduct phases. EDA took part in the planning and execution of exercise Locked Shields 2021 (organized by the NATO CCD CoE) in April 2021, and the Computer Emergency Response Team for the European Union (CERT-EU) in the annual NATO Cyber Coalition exercise in November 2020.

The Technical Arrangement on Cyber Defence between the NATO Computer Incident Response Capability (NCIRC) and the CERT-EU continued to be implemented in line with existing provisions. The Malware Information Sharing Platform (MISP) is being leveraged to this end. In addition, coordination meetings between the staffs are held on a regular basis and exchanges on best practices for technical topics also continue.

Defence capabilities

Efforts continue to ensure the coherence of output between the 2018 EU Capability Development Plan (CDP), the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and respective NATO processes such as the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) and the Partnership for Peace Planning and Review Process (PARP), where requirements overlap, while recognizing the different nature of the two organizations and their respective responsibilities and memberships.

In this context, EU staff were invited by individual Allies to attend bilateral and multilateral consultations for the development of the 2021 NATO Capability Targets in the framework of the NDPP. In parallel, several EU Member States that are also NATO Allies or Partners invited NATO staff to their CARD bilateral meetings. Furthermore, EU staff were consulted during the development of the NATO Defence Planning Capability Survey. Also, as part of the dialogue on coherence between the Headline Goal Process and the NDPP, an abstract of the EU Progress Catalogue 2020, including the EU main shortfall areas, was shared with NATO staff. Moreover, close staff contacts at all levels have contributed to ensure mutual awareness of work under way in each organization. Under the single set of forces principle, capabilities developed by members of both organizations, including those developed multinationally, remain in principle available for NATO and EU operations, subject to national political decisions.

NATO and EU staffs are working together to ensure the coherence of multinational efforts, as EU defence initiatives mature and against the background of new multinational High Visibility Projects in NATO. To this end, regular expert meetings of EU and NATO staffs continued virtually to ensure respective awareness, complementarity of efforts and avoidance of unnecessary duplication downstream as regards respective multinational projects and programmes. Concrete examples in that respect include areas such as Air-to-Air Refueling, Surface Based Air Defence systems, Countering Improvised Explosive Devices, Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS), Maritime Unmanned Systems, Ammunition, and Air Crew Flight Training.

Progress continues on the implementation of the Military Aviation Strategy according to the respective implementation plans for which the related actions are coordinated through dedicated regular staff meetings. The regular reciprocal participation in the European Defence Agency (EDA) Military Aviation Board and NATO Aviation Committee contribute to ensure coordination and coherence on this topic. In addition, and in the framework of the on-going negotiations on Single European Sky (SES) reform, Single European Sky Air Traffic Management Research 3 (SESAR 3) and the upcoming SESAR Deployment programme, staff cooperation continued to ensure that military inputs, including by NATO, are appropriately taken into account.

Cooperation was also pursued on security risks to aviation including the cyber risk, within the NATO-EUROCONTROL Air Traffic Management Security Coordinating Group (NEASCOG) and in the European Aviation Safety Agency's (EASA) 'European Strategic Coordination Platform'. Finally, EDA, EUROCONTROL and NATO staffs, with support from EU Member States and NATO Allies, are working together on fostering common understandings of concepts surrounding communication, navigation, and surveillance. The overall objective is to safeguard military aviation needs and requirements in a European context.

On airworthiness, work continues to develop guidelines, best practices and harmonized approaches for the recognition process of Military Airworthiness Authorities, including process templates (certificates, reports, question sets, etc.) and, where possible, re-use of recognition status information. Cross-participation of respective staffs in the European Military Airworthiness Authorities Forum and the NATO Airworthiness Advisory Group continued to take place in a reciprocal manner, generating valuable inputs for NATO's and the EU's distinctive work strands.

Established cooperation in various capability domains continued apace. Staffs continued to ensure synchronization of the NATO Air-to-Air Refueling roadmap with respective EU work strands. This close cooperation and coordination has led directly to the development and delivery of documents that meet the requirements of technical standardization recognized by the global Air-to-Air Refueling community. The prime example of this is the certification specifications for clearances initially developed within the EDA Project Team on Air-to-Air Refueling, which has now been incorporated into NATO-related documents. Reciprocal efforts also continue to associate staffs in respective working groups. Furthermore, with continued support by the EU and NATO, the project to field a Multinational Multi-Role Tanker Transport Fleet has further advanced with the delivery of the first four aircraft, a capability identified as critical by both organizations.

Regarding RPAS Air Traffic Integration and the implications of U-Space² regulation on military activities, staff-to-staff cooperation has further developed to ensure mutual awareness on respective activities in this critical capability area. NATO presented its RPAS activities to the EU and contributed to various EDA RPAS projects and studies. Reciprocal efforts continued to associate staffs in their respective working groups; this led to concrete results, including the first EDA participation in the NATO Joint Capability Group for Unmanned Aircraft Systems, and NATO participation in working meetings related to the EDA RPAS projects and studies. Pandemic-related restrictions had an impact on the dynamic of progress on planned satellite communication-related activities, but engagement at staff level was maintained to enable the resumption of activities when circumstances allow.

² U-Space is the EU concept that refers to Unmanned Air Traffic Management, i.e. air traffic procedures and services to support small drones in low level airspace.

Military mobility remains a “flagship” of EU-NATO cooperation. Since the fifth Progress Report, cooperation has advanced in a number of ways. The Structured Dialogue on Military Mobility continues to serve as an effective format for focused staff-to-staff discussions on shared priorities, such as military requirements, transport infrastructure, transport of dangerous goods, customs, cross border movement permissions, and relevant exercises.

At their conference in March 2021, the Director General of the International Military Staff provided NATO’s Main Supply Routes (MSR), limited to road movement, to the Director General of the EU Military Staff. This was done in reciprocity to the previously provided update of the EU Military Requirements for Military Mobility within and beyond the EU by the Director General of the EU Military Staff to the Director General of the International Military Staff in October 2019. Further staff interaction and exchanges on the EU and NATO routes are foreseen in order to identify synergies and possible further actions.

Following the 2020 exchange between the staffs regarding the respective networks of National Points of Contact for military mobility, the Director General of the EU Military Staff shared with the Director General of the Internal Military Staff the updated list of the EU Member States' National Point of Contact for Military Mobility in March 2021, established in the framework of the PESCO project Military Mobility.

In addition, a scenario-based discussion on military mobility associated with the EU Crisis Management Exercise Integrated Resolve 2020 took place in January 2021 with the participation of the NATO staff and three non-EU Allies. The discussion focused on national-level decision-making regarding cross-border movement.

Finally, the European Commissioner for Transport addressed the North Atlantic Council in April 2021 and the NATO Deputy Secretary General was a keynote speaker at the second High Level Symposium on Military Mobility organized by the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU and the EDA in May 2021, thus contributing to mutual transparency. NATO staff continued to participate in meetings of the EDA Project Team Movement and Transport.

Defence industry and research

Staff exchanges continued on wider industry matters and concrete topics related to industry engagement, in particular towards Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), to ensure mutual awareness and sharing of best practices. The dialogue focused on the impact of COVID-19 on defence industry, notably on SMEs, and on the screening of Foreign Direct Investments.

Staff contacts on research and innovation further increased, including between European Defence Agency (EDA) and the NATO Innovation Hub in Allied Command Transformation (ACT), ensuring mutual awareness on respective policy development related to emerging and disruptive technologies as well as respective innovation work strands also with a view to identifying possible synergies. EDA and ACT agreed to have reciprocal expert participation in the juries of respective innovation prizes. In April 2021, NATO staff participated in the virtual Research and Technology Conference on the Impact of Disruptive Technologies on Defence organised by the EDA and the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU. Furthermore, NATO ACT and the Science and Technology Organization (STO) provided a presentation at EDA's Technology Watch and Foresight Workshop in April 2021.

Dialogue on topics of shared interest has been further pursued between the NATO STO and the EEAS, the Commission and EDA respectively, including on emerging and disruptive technological challenges, climate change as well as ethical aspects. This interaction included participation in respective workshops, such as by the Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) in an STO Disruptive Technology Table-Top Exercise in February 2021. STO's Centre for Maritime Research and Experimentation (CMRE) participated in OCEAN2020 as well as in several scientific projects supported by the Commission under Horizon2020.

Exercises

In December 2020, following extensive staff-to-staff consultations, the plan for implementing Parallel and Coordinated Exercises (PACE) was endorsed. This plan extends the initial PACE concept for the period of 2022-2023. In 2022, the leading organization will be the EU with its exercise EU Integrated Resolve 2022; the following year, NATO will be in the lead with its Crisis Management Exercise 2023 (CMX23). The implementation of the PACE pilot project in 2017 and 2018 proved to be a useful experience, allowing both organizations to draw and implement important lessons.

Despite impediments caused by the pandemic, EU-NATO cooperation in the domain of exercises continued during the reporting period, including by mutual invitations to participate in respective exercises on a voluntary basis. NATO staff were invited to participate in the relevant planning and conduct parts of the EU Integrated Resolve Exercise held in 2020 and in 2021. In this context, NATO staff were invited to participate in a Military Mobility scenario-based discussion with EU Member States and selected partners (United States, Canada and Norway) in January 2021.

EU staff have been invited to NATO's Crisis Management Exercise 2022 (CMX22), and have engaged in the planning of the exercise, including in two planning conferences. NATO staff shared the initial exercise planning documentation with the EU staff. Staffs also remain engaged to deconflict their respective planning events.

EU staff participated in the NATO Exercise Steadfast Jupiter/Jackal 2020 in an online format. In turn, NATO staff will be invited to the Observation Event to be organized by the EU within the framework of MILEX 21.

Defence and security capacity building

Cooperation on defence and security capacity building for partners continued despite the COVID-19 restrictions. In March 2021, EU and NATO staffs resumed their regular talks in a virtual yet significantly expanded format, with almost 100 participants. They agreed to focus their common efforts regarding those partner countries with which they have been cooperating since 2016, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Georgia, Jordan, the Republic of Moldova, Tunisia and Ukraine. Likewise, they agreed to explore the possibility of organising mutual cross-briefings in respective EU and NATO committees, with a view to better informing EU Member States and NATO Allies on the progress achieved to date on this work strand.

In terms of political consultations, NATO and EU staffs continued to regularly exchange views both in Brussels and on the ground as a useful way to share information regarding the political and security situation in all the aforementioned countries. More specifically, staffs discussed the coordination of their respective actions in Georgia (e.g. EU's Security, Accountability and Fight against Crime programme and NATO's respective projects), as well as cyber security-related issues. In the case of Ukraine, EU and NATO staffs continued to coordinate their advisory support to the country's security and defence sector, providing expertise, advice and recommendations. Over the last year, particular focus was put on the reform of the security and intelligence services. In addition, discussions focused on strategic communication (in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Moldova), and counter-terrorism activities (Tunisia, Jordan).

As per usual practice, the EU was also invited to participate in, and brief at, the NATO meeting of National Points of Contact for the Defence and Related Security Capacity Building (DCB) Initiative, which took place in October 2020. In addition, EU staff contributed to the NATO mapping exercise on the activities of other international organizations in the defence and security fields in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries.

Practical cooperation included:

- Two joint high-level webinars aiming at strengthening Georgia's resilience against disinformation. These two events were organised in June and October 2020 and focused on the respective roles of the EU and NATO, as well as civil society, media and educational organizations in the fight against disinformation. Both events proved to be a success in terms of reaching large audiences. A joint high-level webinar on tackling disinformation in Ukraine is planned in May 2021.
- Continued cooperation for Georgia, Jordan, the Republic of Moldova, Tunisia and Ukraine on NATO Building Integrity (BI), which is supported through the NATO BI – EU Partnership Agreement. Within that framework, regular exchanges took place between NATO and EU staffs, including through meetings of the NATO Building Integrity Trust Fund Steering Group. NATO BI expertise to these countries was also made available thanks to EU financial support and EU experts contributed to relevant activities.

Staffs identified the following potential areas of cooperation and agreed to review the progress made at their next talks in spring 2022:

- Foster cooperation on strategic communications and countering disinformation. In the case of Georgia, Ukraine and Jordan, staffs agreed to explore potential coordinated webinars with the East Stratcom Task Force (EEAS), NATO StratCom CoE/NATO Public Diplomacy Division (PDD);
- Continue the current NATO-EU cooperation on good governance, notably through the NATO Building Integrity programme;
- Explore opportunities to cooperate in the areas of countering hybrid threats and cyber security/defence (Georgia, Jordan and the Republic of Moldova);
- Engage on Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) issues (Republic of Moldova, Tunisia and Jordan), Counter-Improvised Explosive Devices (Tunisia) and counter terrorism-related issues (Jordan);
- Further explore opportunities for coordination or cooperation on border security (Jordan) and demining (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine);

- Explore the potential for cooperation in the framework of the NATO Professional Development Programme (PDP) and on Women, Peace and Security in the case of the Republic of Moldova.

In Iraq, the EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) and the NATO Mission Iraq (NMI) continued their regular coordination and de-confliction to avoid duplication and develop greater synergies, focusing on the current needs of the Iraqi counterparts. Both missions regularly exchange situational awareness on political and security dynamics and cooperate on coordinated messaging. They have – together with other international partners – developed a robust coordination and cooperation framework for the Security Sector Reform effort delineating roles and responsibilities. The two missions, inter alia, facilitated workshops on a new Iraqi national security strategy in early 2021. In addition, their cooperation on the Women, Peace and Security agenda was further strengthened in September 2020 by establishing an informal technical working group for information sharing and coordination. They also worked together on implementing the NATO Building Integrity Self-Assessment Questionnaire methodology in the Iraqi Ministry of Interior.

EU and NATO staffs continued to consult and coordinate efforts in support of the Afghan Peace process and the future engagement of the international community in Afghanistan with the overriding aims to (i) reach a sustainable peace and stability, (ii) preserve the political and social achievements gained over the last 20 years; (iii) mitigate the future security challenges.

Cooperation at the level of Centres of Excellence registered additional progress. NATO's Maritime Interdiction Operational Training Centre (NMIOTC) became in 2020 an Associated Network Partner of the European Security and Defence College (ESDC), paving the way for deeper exchanges. The ESDC participated in the 11th Annual NMIOTC Conference - Interagency and Whole Society Solutions to Maritime Security Challenges (September 2020), as well as in the 4th NMIOTC Conference on 'Cyber Security in the Maritime Domain' (September – October 2020). EU and NATO staffs continue to coordinate and evaluate options for further diversifying ties between the Centres and the support to partners.

Biannual NATO-EU staff talks on CBRN resilience and defence resumed in November 2020. In addition to the longstanding focus on building the capacities of partners to counter CBRN threats, these talks reviewed the roles of CBRN defence and resilience capabilities in addressing the COVID-19 crisis. These included support provided to partner countries through the EU's CBRN Risk Mitigation Centre of Excellence Initiative and NATO's Science for Peace and Security Programme.

Strengthening political dialogue between EU and NATO

Political dialogue between the two organizations continues to be an essential and indispensable instrument for strengthening mutual understanding, building confidence, and ensuring reciprocal transparency vis-à-vis all EU Member States and NATO Allies as well as their strong engagement. Despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, the overall dynamics of staff dialogues and mutual cross briefings was maintained, albeit with reduced intensity. High-level interactions facilitated by virtual channels of communication continued apace.

At the political level, the first-ever meeting of NATO Secretary General with the College of Commissioners in December 2020 as well as his participation in the meeting of the members of the European Council in February 2021 illustrated the growing complexity of common challenges that the two organizations are faced with. In the same vein, the well-established practice of mutual invitations to relevant ministerial meetings continued. The EU High Representative participated in the meetings of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs in December 2020 and March 2021. He also attended the virtual meeting of NATO Ministers of Defence in June 2020 and in February 2021. The Secretary General of NATO attended the informal meeting of EU Ministers of Defence in August 2020 in Berlin and the EU Foreign Affairs Council (Defence) in May 2021. Bilateral meetings of the members of the College with the NATO Principals also intensified.

In March 2021, the Secretary General of NATO addressed the joint meeting of the Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE) and the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), in association with the Delegation for relations with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (DNAT) of the European Parliament; he also gave a keynote speech at the Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy in Lisbon. In March 2021, the NATO Deputy Secretary General participated in a joint hearing of the Special Committee on Artificial Intelligence in the Digital Age (AIDA) with the AFET committee and SEDE sub-committee on the external policy dimensions of Artificial Intelligence.

In addition, the established practice of senior level informal meetings with the participation of non-EU NATO Allies and non-NATO EU Member States continued.

The previously agreed package of three North Atlantic Council (NAC) - Political and Security Committee (PSC) meetings was completed with an informal meeting on the geopolitical implications of COVID-19 in June 2020. Following an agreement on a new package, one formal meeting on EUFOR Althea and one informal meeting on Emerging and Disruptive Technologies took place in December 2020 and March 2021 respectively; the second informal meeting is being planned.

EU and NATO representatives continued efforts to further engage with all NATO Allies and EU Member States through mutual cross-briefings. Since the signature of the Warsaw Joint Declaration in July 2016, 125 cross-briefings have been held in various EU and NATO committees and working groups. However, due to the coronavirus-related restrictions, their frequency decreased in the reporting period.

Members of the College of Commissioners briefed the NAC on emerging technological challenges in September 2020 and on military mobility in April 2021. The Secretary General of the EEAS briefed the NAC on EU foreign and security policy priorities in July 2020 and March 2021. The NATO Deputy Secretary General briefed the EU Political and Security Committee in October and December 2020 on the outcome of the meetings of NATO Defence and Foreign Ministers. Cross-briefings by NATO to the European Defence Agency's (EDA) Steering Board and by the EDA and the Commission to the NATO Conference of National Armaments Directors respectively continued to take place in 2020 and early 2021. Additionally, the NATO Deputy Secretary General delivered a keynote speech at the EDA Annual Conference in December 2020. Several high-level meetings also took place between the EDA Chief Executive and NATO leadership, including the NATO Deputy Secretary General, Assistant Secretaries General and the Supreme Allied Commander Transformation.

Thematic cross-briefings at working level covered, inter alia, maritime issues including Operation EUNAVFOR MED Irini, disinformation, crisis management aspects of COVID-19 pandemic response, Russia, Belarus and counter-terrorism. Several cross-briefings took place in the respective Military Committees as well.

EU and NATO staffs also continued dialogue within the framework of the implementation of the common set of proposals, including on military mobility, capability development, counter-terrorism, hybrid threats, cyber defence, arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament, disinformation, strategic foresight, capacity building for partners, as well as climate change and security/defence.

Dialogue between the NATO and EU military staffs, including cross-invitations for the participation of each organization's Senior Military Authorities in respective Chiefs of Defence meetings was enhanced. The second meeting of the bi-annual NATO and EU military staff Directors General conference scheduled for 2020 was eventually held in March 2021 in a virtual format. The Directors General monitored and reported to their respective Military Committees on the implementation of the military related common proposals as well as on the state of play of staff interactions. Furthermore, an informal game plan was continually updated to monitor the state-of-play between the two staffs on mutually identified objectives, and milestones within designated lines of development.

Cooperation continued in virtual formats on issues related to Women, Peace and Security (WPS). Throughout the year, NATO Secretary General's Special Representative on WPS and the Office of the EEAS Secretary General's Advisor on Gender and Diversity were in regular communication. The EU contributed to NATO's Expert Advisory Group on Conflict-related Sexual Violence; in turn, NATO contributed to the EU Task Force on WPS. In March 2020, the EEAS Senior Gender Adviser participated in the International Women's Day event at NATO HQ and contributed to a number of NATO research projects on WPS. In April 2021, an informal online workshop on good practice was organized by EU and NATO staffs in relation to National Action Plans on WPS. Furthermore, the EU contributed to NATO's work of Human Security issues in the context of NATO's Expert Advisory Group on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings.

The implementation of the 74 common proposals remains an on-going and long-term process. It continues to require commitment and concerted efforts from all stakeholders. Based on a pragmatic and flexible approach, EU and NATO staffs remain firmly committed to, and engaged in, taking this cooperation forward in a swift, fully coordinated and coherent way with a view to delivering further concrete results.