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Some Ideas for European Defence Cooperation

from the Case Study of the Belgian-Dutch Navy Cooperation

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Front cover : ABNL flag
(http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a3/Flag_ABNL.jpg),
EU flag
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Europe.svg)

Abstract

This paper examines the current issues concerning European defence cooperation and tries to give some ideas for more defence cooperation on a regional and European level by using the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation as a benchmark. The main problem of Defence as a whole in Europe is the duplication problem. The features of the small but qualitatively deep Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation give an answer to the issue of combining national sovereignty and defence cooperation and make as such the lessening of duplication possible between the Belgian and Dutch navy.

Keywords: EU, ABNL, Admiral Benelux, Belgium, the Netherlands, defence cooperation, Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation.



About the Author

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Introduction

The Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation is only a small bilateral defence cooperation with in total 12,000 people affected.¹ Nevertheless it contains some features and ideas that can be interesting for (European) defence cooperation in general. It shows that the pragmatism of bottom-up defence cooperation could be very complementary to an overall top-down coordination for defence cooperation on a European level, not in the least because cooperation in practice fosters trust between partners and, as such, can provide a basis for even more cooperation. A fact that has already been highlighted by the founders of the EU:

“Europe can be built only through practical achievements which will first of all create real solidarity.” (European Coal and Steel Community 18 April 1951, Preamble)

The bottom-up character of the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation is two-sided. The main engine of this defence cooperation is the military and up to the present day, in particular, both navies. And secondly, being a bilateral defence cooperation, it is limited in scope.

The Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation can also be considered a source of ideas for other bilateral and regional defence cooperations.

¹ Although it is sometimes referred to as the Admiral Benelux cooperation, that itself is only one part of the navy cooperation.

In the particular case of the Belgian Defence, I think that this cooperation can also be an example for the Belgian army and air force. Through its enhanced cooperation with the Dutch navy since 1996, the Belgian navy has been able to keep its already limited capabilities. With a navy of only approximately 2,000 people, Belgium has a Mine Countermeasures fleet and two frigates, of which there is nothing to be ashamed. So our fleet can act also in the highest spectrum of military operations. On the other hand, the Belgian army component has lost a great share of its ability to participate in hard intensity fighting. Indeed, it has become more a Crisis Response force suitable for most of the current operations but not able to fully manage violence escalation. Our army has become a tool for the present, not an insurance policy for the future. And the future doesn't look particularly bright with the lasting stress on defence budgets in mind. The current financial crisis - that seems to be rather persistent - could for this matter be seen as a positive thing as it might give the necessary impetus for more defence cooperation in Europe. But the problem is that although there is a lot of talk between governments and Defence ministries on European defence, little coordination is practically achieved on a European level.

The Belgian-Dutch case study can also provide some interesting ideas for the regional defence cooperation between the Benelux countries, the Baltic States and Nordic countries. The navy cooperation between Belgium and the Netherlands is not a cooperation on a Benelux level because of the simple reason that Luxembourg hasn't got a navy, till now². However, although a basic agreement for military cooperation on a Benelux level has been adopted in 1987 (Militaire overeenkomst 1987), there exists only limited military cooperation on a

² June 2001, the Belgian government agreed to acquire a common military roll-on-roll-off transport ship, the '*Navire de transport belgo-luxembourgeois*' (NTBL). This project has been abandoned. (Belgisch/Luxemburgs strategisch transportschip mil.be)

regional Benelux scale in non-naval fields.³ Defence isn't even a topic in the official Benelux political fora. (Benelux 2008, 1-4)

The defence cooperation between the Baltic States is stagnating and, in the case of BALTBAT, even negative. The main reason for this is to be found in the existence of different views in the field of international relations. (Molis 2009, 39) An important point in line with this issue is that the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation shows that even a deep form of military cooperation is possible next to national independence on a political level of international security. And this all is possible, as in the Belgian-Dutch case, between a small partner (the Belgian Navy) and a bigger partner (the Dutch Navy, which is five times bigger) because there exists a relatively good balance between both partners in the cooperation. They are both dependent on the other partner for a part of their capabilities.

The already existing defence cooperation between the Nordic countries has received fresh impetus with the Memorandum of December 2009 but is structured in a very top-down way. The engine of the cooperation is the political ministerial level. (MOU Nordic Defence Cooperation 2009, 4-5; NORDEFECO 2010) As we will see in the Belgian-Dutch case study, a bottom-up approach is very well suited for limited regional defence cooperation agreements such as between the Nordic countries.

Although the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation itself is limited in quantity, an important point is that it can be used as a looking glass towards European level defence cooperation or the lack of it because of its quality.

In this paper I will first paint a quick picture of the current status of defence cooperation in Europe. In a following part I will explain the current form of the Belgian-Dutch navy

³ The BEST (Belgian Transformation Soldier) project is an example of cooperation with Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

cooperation. Next, I will set out four interesting features of the Belgian-Dutch cooperation for (European) defence cooperation. In a final chapter, I will express some views on the relation between bottom-up and top-down defence cooperation.

I wish to thank the different persons in the field who were so kind as to let me interview them and who work daily to make defence cooperation happen. I also wish to thank the people who provided me with documentation and information and off course the reviewers of this paper for their highly appreciated comments. Nevertheless, the views in this article are entirely mine and may not be seen as the view of the Royal High Institute for Defence or of the Belgian Defence.

The current basic treaties of the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation and their (unofficial) English translation can be found on the following website: www.militarycooperation.eu.

On this website you can also find a background paper on the evolution of the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation (in Dutch) next to some links.

1. A snapshot of the current defence cooperation in Europe

If one looks at the different examples of European defence cooperation, one will see that current bilateral and multinational initiatives are mostly one-dimensional and/or not permanently structured. The enhanced defence cooperation between France and the United Kingdom could be an exception to this but has yet to become practically achieved. The initiatives taken on a European level, be it from the EU or NATO, also stay too much on a very political level, where they create a lot of structures and paperwork but are only able to have a limited influence on the real problem of the European armies, namely duplication. By which I don't mean that there aren't any good EU initiatives in the field of the use of the military in Crisis Response, on the contrary, in this field, the EU is a real pioneer especially in combining civilian and military Crisis Response. But the problem of duplication⁴ is very real and this is certainly the case if we compare the efficiency of European defence with the Defence of the United States. The American military have a budget of 600 billion dollars for 1.1 million personnel, of which they can permanently deploy the half globally. European countries can hardly deploy 7% of their combined 1.8 million troops for a budget of approximately 280 billion dollars. (IISS 2008, 93; EDA 2009, 18, 40)

This duplication is due to the fact that defence is still strongly linked to the national state because it is seen as the ultimate

⁴ In the literature, the term duplication is used to designate the existence of different weapon systems and supporting military structures/tasks within the different countries. This can be seen as a negative form of duplication. Further in this article we will address the need for identical means to lessen duplication. Identical means are in fact a form of positive duplication. They are the prerequisite to be able to lessen duplication in supporting military structures/tasks through cooperation.

attribute of state sovereignty. (Mérand 2008, 11) This implies that every country wants to pursue its own national defence policy and this, in turn, leads to duplication in basic research in the military field, duplication of weapon programmes, duplication on a European level for defence industry, duplication of defence needs, duplication for instruction and training, duplication for operational steering and duplication for logistical support. The current initiatives in the field of defence cooperation are mostly focused on weapon programmes with more limited initiatives for training and logistical support. But even for weapon programmes, duplication is tremendous in Europe compared to the United States because only 27% of the bigger European weapon programmes are multinational endeavours. (IISS 2008, 107) For example, there are currently in Europe 4 'main battle tank' programmes against one in the US, 16 'armoured infantry vehicle' programmes for 3 American and 20 European programmes for military vessels against 3 American ones. (Darnis 2007, 18)

In the light of the negative evolution of the European defence budgets after the Cold War, an evolution emphasized by the effects of the current financial crisis, and today's international security tasks of European countries, it is very unlikely that the expenditure on the European militaries will be raised. At the same time, the very expensive weapon systems for the higher end of the violence spectrum are becoming even more expensive with every evolution and are overkill for most of the current international military operations. It is very hard to convince politicians that it is necessary for Europe too to invest in these means because of the current volatile international security situation and the uncertainty about the future posture of upcoming global powers that are investing heavily in military capabilities for the higher violence spectrum. (Eindrapport Verkenningen 2010, 51-55; Holslag 2008a, 14-19; Holslag 2008b, 10-15; Zuiderwijk 2009, 11-12, 28) Doing this in a coordinated way both at a multinational and European level is

the obvious solution to achieve this efficiently but is at the same time a very strenuous task.

In the different treaties of the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation, lessening duplication is the main theme. (Overeenkomst logistiek 1975, 1; Overeenkomst opleidingen 1976, 1; Gemeenschappelijke verklaring 1994, 2; Uitvoeringsakkoord Materieel Logistiek 2006, 1) A small bilateral defence cooperation as the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation shows that there are more possibilities in the field of European defence cooperation and that it can be interesting to look at examples in the real world which really work, although of course not perfect and limited of character, instead of solely working top-down out of a political and politicized level. Political aims such as a common defence or navy policy are not really mentioned in the different treaties on the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation, a fact that underlines the bottom-up character of the cooperation. This modesty was only slightly broken in 1994 in a declaration that laid the foundations for the strengthened navy cooperation starting from 1996 between Belgium and the Netherlands:

“[...] dit initiatief kan zeer wel een kern vormen voor verdergaande samenwerking in breder internationaal verband.”
 (“[...] this initiative can very well form the core for further broader international cooperation” [own translation])
(Gemeenschappelijke verklaring 1994, 2)

2. The current Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation

The Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation has evolved towards a cooperation with five pillars which form a matrix, as shown hereafter in figure 1. The cooperation consists of three domains: 'operational steering, workup and training', 'navy military education' and 'operational support', next to two common capabilities: Mine Countermeasure Vessels and Frigates. The cooperation in each domain differs because, for the most part, the cooperation has grown in an organic way, as one should expect from a cooperation directed bottom-up from the practical military side and only between two players.

Domains <i>Capabilities</i>	Operational steering Workup & Training	Navy military education	Operational support
<i>Mine Countermeasure Vessels (MCM)</i>	BE & NL	BE-NL (+/- Lead BE)	BE Leading Party
<i>Frigates (FF)</i>	BE & NL	NL-BE (+/- Lead NL)	NL Leading Party

Figure 1: The five pillars of the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation

1 January 1996 is an important date in the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation because from then on the already existing cooperation between the Dutch and Belgian navies was deepened and this, mostly because the Belgian navy foresaw future problems to keep its frigate capability in a purely national way. In the beginning, the cooperation was thus mostly a necessity for the Belgians and a way of working more efficiently for the Dutch. (Toremans 2007; Rosiers 2010) Considering the current defence reduction programmes within the member states of the EU, this cooperation has also become more important for the Dutch navy. (Goddyn 2010b)

2.1 Cooperation in the domain of operational steering, workup and training

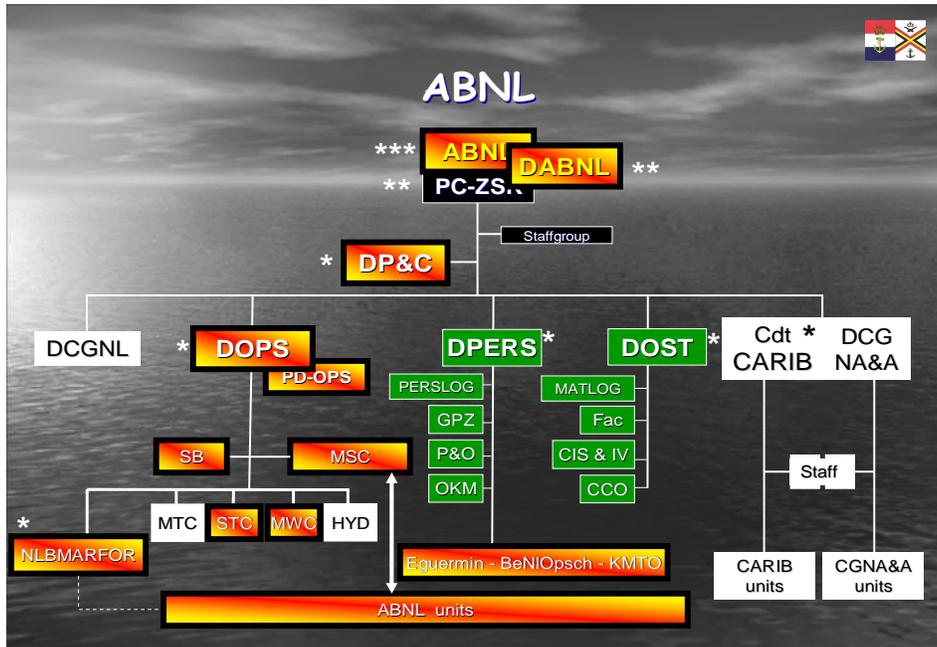


Figure 2: Admiral Benelux (orange) in CZSK (*Commando Zeestrijdkrachten* [navy forces command]) (Goddyn, 2010b)

Since 1996 the part of the defence staff that is responsible for operational steering and training of the Belgian navy is integrated with its Dutch counterpart in the structures of the Dutch navy (orange in the figure). This cooperation, that is a part of the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation, is known as the Admiral Benelux cooperation or ABNL.

The commander of the Dutch naval forces is the commander responsible for the binational operational steering and training of the parts of the Belgian and Dutch fleets dedicated to this structure (operational units). (Overeenkomst samenwerking 1995, 1) In fact the biggest part of both fleets resides permanently under this commander called the Admiral Benelux. Up to now this person has always been a Dutch admiral with next to him a Belgian Deputy Admiral Benelux (P-ABNL or DABNL). The relationship between the two admirals is more one of cooperating partners than a real hierarchic relationship in which the Dutch admiral or general with more stars would be the chief of the Belgian two-star admiral. (Goddyn, 2010a)

A binational Direction Planning and Control (DP&C) and a Direction Operations (DOPS) operationalise the binational coordination and execution of the operational steering, workup and training of the ABNL-fleet. The DP&C is responsible for coordinating the operational plans of the Belgian and Dutch navy and to control the level of readiness of the ABNL fleet. Within DOPS, the binational Maritime Situation Centre (MSC or Mar Sit Cen) is the core staff for the operational steering and support of operations and exercises delegated to ABNL, Sea Training Command for the individual workup of fleet elements and NLBMARFOR for the workup and exercising of the fleet

and the Dutch marines.⁵ (Botman 2010; Overeenkomst samenwerking operaties 2007: 3-4)

All these structures are to be found in Den Helder in the Netherlands with only a small staff element in Belgium for strictly national activities such as help in case of emergency in the territorial waters or fishery control tasks. (Neptunus 2008, 119) Belgian officers and warrant officers take with approximately 24 people an important share of the positions within ABNL and are physically working in the main Dutch naval base in Den Helder. (Overeenkomst samenwerking operaties 2007, Bijlage A; Botman 2010) The men and women of both nationalities who work for ABNL perform tasks for the whole of it and, in theory, every function can be taken up by a Belgian or a Dutchman. (Overeenkomst samenwerking operaties 1995, 3; Overeenkomst samenwerking operaties 2007, 3) Most of the training and workup structures, with the exception of those for the Mine Countermeasures training, are also to be found in Den Helder.

In short, the duplication in the domain of operational steering, workup and training of the ships and fleet of both navies is minimised through a real binational staff and binational means to perform the workup and exercising of ships with a proportionally approximately equal representation.

⁵ It is the responsibility of the separate Belgian and Dutch Directions Operational Support (DOST) to deliver "physically ready units whereby materials, personnel and operational management are integrated in an unit that can operate safely". (Overeenkomst samenwerking operaties 2007, 4) It is the task of DOPS to further workup these ships and their crews so that they can safely operate individually (Sea Training Command) and together (NLBMARFOR) in the total spectrum of their possibilities. (workup towards Ready for Exercise and Ready for Duty)

2.2 Navy military education

In the domain of military education, agreements existed well before 1996 between the naval schools of both Belgium and the Netherlands for the exchange of students and cooperation on parts of the naval instruction. In 1975, EGUERMIN, the school for Mine Countermeasures in Ostend in Belgium and now a NATO Centre of Excellence, did become the first Belgian-Dutch binational school. (Overeenkomst opleiden mijnenbestrijdingsschool 1975, 1,3) In 1996 two more schools became binational. The operational training school in Den Helder in the Netherlands absorbed the Belgian operational instruction and the Belgian navy commissionership school in Bruges became the place for the Dutch student navy cooks. (Regeling samenwerking opleidingen 1996, 1) The schools became binational in name but in fact, the Dutch side kept very clearly the lead at the operational training school in Den Helder. As for the two binational schools in Belgium, relations are better balanced, with the Belgians slightly in the lead. (Cornez 2010; Velghe 2010; Nederlands-Belgische Operationele School 2010)

Since this year, a new agreement has also been reached between the technical naval schools of both countries to end duplication. Both schools have however been kept physically separate but they share now a complementary curriculum. (Overeenkomst technische opleidingen 2010, 1; Saussez 2010; Alle Hens April 2010: 29)

As far as strictly military education is concerned, duplication has also been minimised between the Belgian and Dutch navies but with different degrees of leading roles. There is no real cooperation for the basic academic training of navy officers and for the continued military education to work in a staff. Only a limited exchange programme does exist. (Van Lavieren 2010; Saussez 2010)

2.3 Task specialisation of the operational support

In 1996 the idea was that the operational, workup and training part of the navies would be binationalised for the biggest part but that the operational technical part of the ships themselves and the related logistics would mostly remain national, certainly maintenance. This idea has even been restated in the recent update of the agreement on logistical cooperation in 2007. (Overeenkomst samenwerking 1995, 2; Overeenkomst samenwerking operaties 2007, 3) Those tasks are supposed to be carried out by both national Operational Support Directions (DOST) as showed in figure 3.

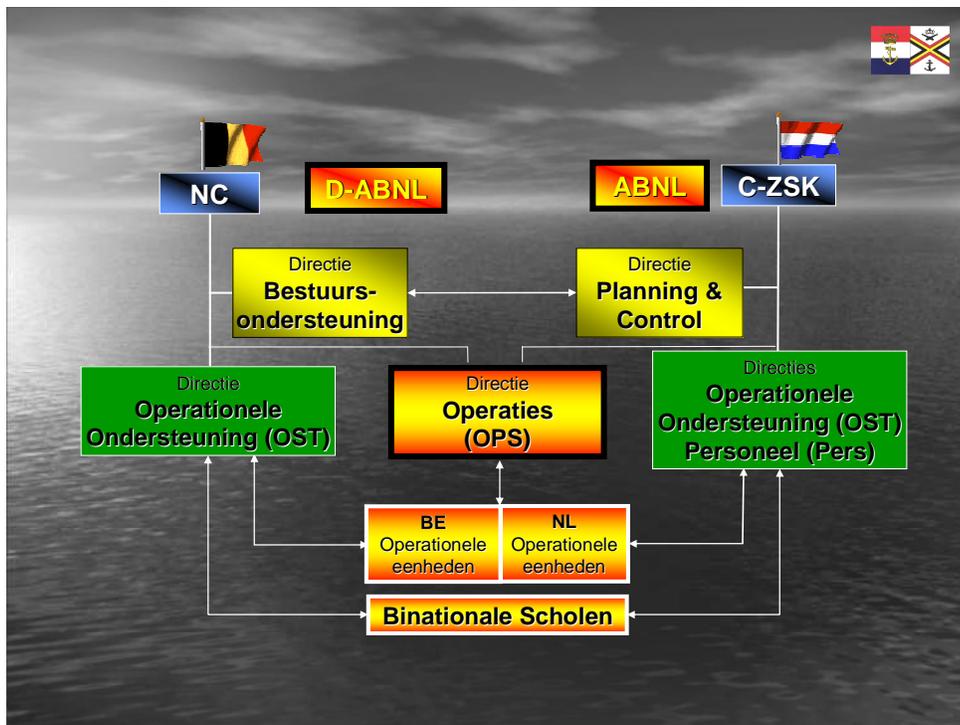


Figure 3: The official separation of the Operational Support in the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation (Goddyn 2010b)

Nevertheless, the dynamics of the cooperation became so strong, certainly after the Belgian acquisition of two Dutch multipurpose frigates in 2007 and 2008 and the binational modernisation of the Tripartite mine hunters from 2006 until 2010, that close cooperation for maintenance and logistics was even developed. (Belgium Netherlands Capabilities Upkeep Program 2010; F931 Louise-Marie 2010) Nowadays Belgium is the lead nation (Leading Party) for the logistical, material and maintenance support of the mine hunters of both national fleets and the Netherlands is the Leading Party for the multipurpose frigates (M-frigates) of both fleets. Each Leading Party is responsible for the logistic chain for its type of ship even if the ship goes in operation on a national basis. The Leading Party is also responsible for the binational configuration policy for its type of ship. (Uitvoeringsakkoord Materieel Logistiek 2006, 2-3, 5-6; Goussaert 2010a; Claus 2010) The latest evolution that settled remarkably fast is that the maintenance of mine hunters of both navies is carried out in Belgium; that of multipurpose frigates of both navies, in the Netherlands. (Goussaert 2010a; Claus 2010; Alle Hens Mei 2010, 31) Since 2008 the main structure of the Belgian navy has been a mirror of the Dutch one and this to further ease the cooperation. (Neptunus 2008, 118-119)

In fact, the current cooperation on training, instruction and most obviously, logistics and maintenance, can be seen as a form of military task specialisation. Belgium leads the Mine Countermeasures capability and the Netherlands the multipurpose frigates capability. Task specialisation is generally considered the deepest form of defence cooperation. (Advisory Council on International Affairs 2003, 9-10) This denomination is not really popular within the military and on a military-political level because task specialisation is also seen as a form of military cooperation that takes away national sovereignty, almost a sort of military merger. But as I will explain further, the fact that this specialisation remains beneath

a sort of political or defence policy level and the fact that a balanced partnership exists, makes it possible to function in the particular case of the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation.

All these forms of military task specialisation in the supporting processes create a very obvious efficiency and consequently, financial gain. They create an increase in scale and lessen the administrative burden that is taken up by one party for both.

3. Four interesting features of the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation

In this chapter I will analyse four features of the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation that are interesting for defence cooperation on the whole but most certainly for regional defence cooperation.

3.1 The Spillover dynamic

The Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation originates in NATO arrangements of the 1950's to defend the Channel and the North Sea and in a very general - then secret - defence treaty between Belgium and the Netherlands of 1948. (NATO 1952; NATO 1993; Instructie admiraal Benelux 1975, 2; Nederlands-Belgische Militaire Overeenkomst 1948)

The current level of cooperation evolved for a great part out of a spillover process between the three domains and two capabilities which up to now form the five pillars of the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation. This spillover effect sounds of course very familiar to people with a background in political theories around European integration. In this military case study the same effect is visible as stated in the theory of Neofunctionalism which describes the effect that an integration step in one domain leads to a step in another domain and so on.

An important catalyst for this spillover dynamic is the BENESAM management structure that consists of a BENESAM management group and different workgroups that already started their work in 1972. The BENESAM management group is a bi-annual forum for its different constituent workgroups. Nowadays there are seven workgroups: Capability

Development, Matlog, Personnel, Education, Legal & Financial, NH90 and Data Exchange. The real dynamic within the Belgian-Dutch cooperation comes from the different workgroups. In fact, the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation is with this one of the defence cooperation forms with the biggest bottom-up character because it is not only limited in countries but is clearly led from the military side. And in this capacity, it is the inverse of the top-down cooperation forms that stem from the EU or NATO. (Herziening BENESAM 2007: 1-2; Claus 2010) This is also the difference with a bottom-up initiative as the renewed Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO), which is limited in participating countries but where the current structures show that the political steering is very important. (MOU Nordic Defence Cooperation 2009, 4-5; NORDEFECO 2010) The Belgian-Dutch cooperation even hasn't got a permanent political or politico-military steering mechanism, the military and even more precisely the navies are the level on which the cooperation dynamic takes place. The advantage is that integration perfectly reflects the requirements from the terrain and the proposals are very easily accepted by people in the field. (Claus 2010)

But this 'advantage' has also a negative side because it is sometimes useful to have an institutionalised form of cooperation on the political level. When in the case of the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation, one government decides to adapt unilaterally its defence capabilities, problems arise. Big weapon programmes are always political. But unilateral actions may exert a negative influence on the cooperation in the fields of training, workup, education and logistical support. It is clear that good cooperation on the political and politico-military level of the navy cooperation would be a good thing but in fact both navies are reluctant to politicise their cooperation too much because they fear that this would diminish the very good working bottom-up dynamic. Trust on a national level is further also a necessity to cooperate on a binational or multinational level.

Today, the spillover also concerns topics that are not exclusively related to the navy. Both Belgium and the Netherlands will acquire NH90 helicopters and a part of those helicopters are the (almost) identical naval version. Starting from the navy cooperation, both defence staffs are working on a cooperation for the naval version of the NH90. (Claus 2010) We can also notice an influence of the navy cooperation on the cooperation between the Dutch marines, which are navy forces and the Belgian Para-commando's and Special Forces, which are the only Belgian army forces with an amphibious capacity. More binational training in practice has been developed although, up to now, this hasn't led to more structural forms of cooperation. (Callaerts 2010; Botman 2010; Wijnandts 2006, 32; Wijnandts 2009, 16-17; Van der Maas 2009, 24-25)

There is also political spillover although the centre of gravity of the cooperation stays in the military sphere. On the one hand, the navy cooperation that is based on keeping the same configuration between Belgian and Dutch ships of the same type entails a bigger pressure from the military on our politicians to timely allocate predefined funds. The last three years the Belgian military only invested approximately 60 million Euros in new defence investments and 40 million went to the modification of the Belgian multipurpose frigates because they had to keep pace with the Dutch ones. (Goussaert 2010a; Claus 2010; Het Laatste Nieuws 2009) On the other hand, the cooperation also makes some political initiatives possible. The Belgian Defence minister expressed the wish last year that Belgium would lead the EU maritime mission ATALANTA in the second half of 2010 because of the Belgian presidency of the EU. But the problem was that Belgium didn't have a ship that could take an international staff of around 30 people on board. Through the navy cooperation, arrangements with the Dutch navy were made so that Belgium could lead ATALANTA from a Dutch command ship. Unfortunately, France wouldn't give up the lead for the ATALANTA-operation in the second half of this year. (Burggraefe 2010; Goddyn 2010a; Nagtegael 2010; Belga Februari 2010; Gros-Verheyde 2010a)

The spillover dynamic is only possible if there are different fields in the cooperation that make spillover possible. It is therefore very logical that more one-dimensional defence cooperations such as most defence cooperations in Europe, have at best a very limited own dynamic.

3.2 The combination of national sovereignty and maximal cooperation

Another important aspect of the Belgian-Dutch cooperation is that it partially solves the issue according to which deeper defence cooperation leads to less national freedom and hence national sovereignty over the defence forces. The ships themselves stay in the national sphere while there is maximal cooperation in the support to get the ships operational in the domains of maintenance, logistics, training, workup, education and instruction. (Overeenkomst samenwerking 1995, 3; Uitvoeringsakkoord Materieel Logistiek 2006, 1-2; Overeenkomst samenwerking operaties 2007, 2) The fact that the individual ships stay in national hands means that national governments can exercise their full sovereignty and can autonomously decide in which international operations they participate with these national ships. They can still show the flag.

But there are some evident issues. In the domain of operational steering, the cooperation between the Belgian and Dutch navy takes the form of a binational staff. The agreements between Belgium and the Netherlands state that every person working in this binational operational staff works for the whole of ABNL. At the same time the agreements also state that it must be possible to engage in strictly national operations through the binational staff. (Overeenkomst samenwerking operaties 2007,

2-3) So in fact even for strictly national operations some people from the other country are responsible for some operational aspects. Up to now, this situation hasn't led to political difficulties. The same issue applies to the logistical support by the Leading Party of ships which are in fact deployed for a national operation. A sufficient level of trust (and the necessary pragmatism) must exist between the partners in the cooperation to overcome these issues that are inherent to efficient cooperation aimed at lessening national duplication, and until now this has been the case for the Belgian-Dutch cooperation.

To close this point about sovereignty I want to provide a last reflection. In a more classic concept of sovereignty, the issue of national freedom to act and independence to use ones defence forces is the central value. But defence cooperation also creates a form of sovereignty because defence cooperation enables a state to have more capabilities and as such, a bigger choice of means to support the national policy, of which the ATALANTA case is a very clear example next to other more limited ones.

3.3 Equal means as the central point to diminish duplication

It is very logical that the more equal the means of national armies are, the deeper those forces can cooperate. But in practice it is very difficult to achieve this because of the lasting narrow character of national defence policy within European states. For already long established European armies this negative duplication due to different means for the same capabilities is clearly visible, as already mentioned. But the same problem can also be noticed in more recent armies such as those of the Baltic States where important differences in military means exist between the different Baltic armies due to

different sponsoring states when the armies were formed after their countries' independence. (Molis 2009, 34-35)

In the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation some initiatives were taken to counter this, starting in the seventies of the last century. The first breakthrough was the common procurement of the Tripartite mine hunter by Belgium, the Netherlands and also France. In the second half of the eighties, 35 Tripartite mine hunters were built. (Anrys 1992, 237; Marinecomponent: Historiek 1996; Van de Zeemacht tot de Marine 2010)

But when the concept of Leading Party came into being in 2006, most of the subsystems of the Tripartite mine hunters had different configurations, what made logistical and maintenance cooperation more difficult. Today, most of the differences are again eliminated. (Rosiers 2010; Uitvoeringsakkoord Materieel Logistiek 2006, B3-B4; Goddyn 2010b) This example shows that to deepen cooperation and have a real efficiency benefit, there also has to be a rigid common configuration policy. The configuration evolution after a common procurement tends to be a mean to keep a national defence industry at work, but this not only makes that a rigid common configuration policy becomes difficult, and so creates duplication in the logistical, personnel training and instruction domain, but this also brings about duplication in the European defence industrial complex. (IISS 2008, 102)

Another issue that comes to the fore out of the example of the Tripartite mine hunters is that even with only three partners it wasn't possible to get a same midlife update. Belgium and the Netherlands have just finished a common capability upkeep programme but France decided to do this update sooner and not to use a German main weapon system for demining but a new version of a French producer. (Méret marine 2005; Toremans 2008; Alle Hens 2006, 18; Eguermin 2010)

On a European defence cooperation level, connected to this issue, a tension can be noticed between the emphasizing of capabilities and the emphasizing of common means. NATO

emphasizes most of the time capabilities whereas the European Defence Agency is divided between emphasizing capabilities or equal means. In fact the biggest opponent of the equal means vision is the UK. (De Neve 2010; De Neve 2009, 10-11, 18-19) Of course if one could get more equal means on a European level it would be easier to deepen logistical cooperation and cooperation on instruction. The reason why the UK isn't really eager to achieve this is that it wants to keep its national sovereignty in the classic vision. But even in the UK there are signs of a policy change due to the financial crisis and enormous cuts in defence spending. But the country is only interested in narrower cooperation with France, not in more defence cooperation on a European level. The new French-British defence cooperation is in that way a continuation of the clear-cut British defence policy but an important change of rhetoric for the French policy that talked about *l'Europe de la défense* since the nineties. Article 1 of the French-British Defence and Security Co-operation Treaty speaks of "maximising capacity through co-ordinating development, acquisition, deployment and maintenance of a range of capabilities, facilities, equipment, materials and services,..." and Article 6 states the intention to "where possible harmonise timelines and requirements". (Taylor 2010, 9-10) The French-British defence cooperation treaty gives as such an excellent basis for a common cooperation dynamic but the depth of the practical implementation will show if the cooperation follows the words of the treaty that are sometimes conditional and ad hoc-ish. It is also necessary to stress that the cooperation is lead from the political side and it is sometimes difficult to operationalize political treaties towards a practical and more efficient military output. (Gros-Verheyde 2010b; Taylor 2010, 9-12)

Equal means are very clearly the driving force of the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation because they made it possible to have spillover towards support aspects such as common instruction, training, workup and specialisation of the logistical support.

Conversely, if the amount of equal means diminishes, it is very obvious that the cooperation as a whole diminishes. This dynamic has also already been felt within the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation. When in 1996 the common operational instruction started at the binational operational school, the Belgian E-71-frigates were similar to the Dutch S-frigates. However, in 2003 the Netherlands abolished their last S-frigate what made that the common ground for cooperation on instruction was gone. The binational operational school stayed (luckily) as a structure but in fact there was a separate Belgian operational school within the binational school. Only since the introduction of the M-frigates within the Belgian navy since 2007-2008 the reintegration of the Belgian operational training and the Dutch training could be restarted. (Strijbosch 2006, 17; Marine in Beeld 2010; Velghe 2010) Today, only limited differences exist between the configuration of the M-frigates and the future NH-90 helicopters between the Belgian and Dutch side, mostly due to budget restrictions on the Belgian side for some weapon systems. (Goussaert 2010b) These differences should be kept as small as possible to make a maximal cooperation possible and more efficiency for both sides. In fact, this issue is also related to the following paragraph of this paper. Sharing investments and exploitation costs, also for systems that aren't directly useful for current crisis response operations, gives the signal of being a trustworthy partner, also for the future.

3.4 Building trust through a balanced partnership

In my introduction I already mentioned that, although the Belgian navy is five times smaller than the Dutch one, there is a balanced partnership.

The core of this balance lies in the fact that Belgium has the lead for Mine Countermeasure vessels and the Netherlands for the multipurpose frigates, as already explained. This balancing goes together with the already seen spillover dynamic.

During the history of the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation, progress in one capability led to progress in another one. For example when at the end of the seventies, subsystems of Belgian frigates were logistically handled by the Dutch navy, six years later a subsystem of the Dutch mine hunters was logistically handled by the Belgian navy. (Regeling onderhoud E-71-fregatten 1978; Regeling instandhouding mijnenjacht-systeem 1984) The fact that in the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation both countries are relatively equally dependent on each other, although there is a difference in scale between the navies, creates a balance and entails trust in the cooperation.

Next to this there are other measures for enhancing trust between both partners. Although for example the logistics and maintenance of the technologically more advanced frigates is mostly a Dutch responsibility, there is an exchange of personnel so that the Belgian navy also keeps the necessary expertise and vice versa for the mine hunters. (Goussaert 2010a; Alle Hens Mei 2010, 31) Another example of a trust building measure is the crossed exchange of personnel for key functions. The configuration management for the mine hunters is headed by a Dutch officer in Belgium. The person responsible for the norms of the multipurpose frigates in the Dutch defence staff is a Belgian. (Goussaert 2010a)

Through the already long cooperation between both navies and certainly after 1996, a binational work culture came into being next to the national ones. (Goddyn 2010a; Saussez 2010; Van Lavieren 2010; Nagtegael 2010) A common culture creates mutual understanding and this is again a basis for trust building. Close cooperation also implies that both sides know each others difficulties and sensibilities and if positively used such as is the case for the Belgian-Dutch cooperation, this can even further enhance the cooperation.

The central issue of defence cooperation is trust. A balanced cooperation with a big emphasis on a bottom-up approach such as the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation can create this necessary community of trust.

On a European level, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is maybe (currently) limited in lessening duplication but it helps to create a common European military culture and is supported by initiatives such as the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) and EMILYO, the very recent military Erasmus system of the EU. An initiative such as the ESDC is also important to let civilian international security practitioners get in touch with the still rather closed military universe and vice versa of course.

4. The medianisation pressure on medium-size European military powers and combining bottom-up and top-down defence cooperation

The fact that Defence remains almost exclusively a national policy domain caused reforms after the Cold War to be also mostly implemented in a national way. This had and is still having major consequences for the military capabilities of medium-size European (defence) countries.

The influence of the reforms after the Cold War on the capabilities of small countries was relatively limited because their capabilities were already very limited. The bigger countries saw their armies becoming smaller but big enough to keep most of the military capabilities. Medium-size countries that had a broad spectrum of defence capabilities at the end of the Cold War had to make choices because of the fact that they reformed their armies in a national way. This didn't happen in a coordinated way on a European level but well under the pressure of a decrease in financial and personnel resources.

An example of this is the evolution of the Belgian army forces after the Cold War. The political choice was made to keep working in a largely national way without drastic personnel cuts. Only cooperation initiatives on a high staff level were introduced, such as the Belgian membership of the Eurocorps. At the same time the armed forces had to become more expeditionary because Belgium wanted to use them for international operations. The result today is an army without (expensive) heavy artillery, without a serious direct fire capability (Belga Juli 2010), a median land force with only limited capabilities for high intensity fighting. There has been a 'natural' task specialisation. This is not seen as a problem in different strategic politico-military documents because our army will always deploy in an international operation. (Berth &

Van Camp 2005, 160; Flahaut 2003, 39) In fact this means for the land capacity that when the Belgian army is deployed in a conflict, the heavy capabilities will be delivered by other countries. But in practice there are no treaties with other countries on this issue. Through the navy cooperation Belgium was able to keep navy capabilities for the most militarily demanding tasks too, namely the frigates⁶. For the moment the lessened and lessening capabilities for the high spectrum for army capacities is compensated, on a Belgian level, by the capacity of the Belgian air force F-16's to operate in the most demanding situations. But the fact is that this equilibrium isn't really planned for on a national level and not coordinated on an international level. Very worrying for this equilibrium is the fact that a successor plane to keep the Belgian fighter jet capability isn't planned for the moment and that there aren't any European initiatives for more European coherence on this point.⁷ (Belga Octobre 2010) The current signals indicate that it will be difficult for Belgian Defence to leave the crisis management mode of the allocation of defence expenditure and to make strategic (cooperation) choices instead of financial choices.

Nowadays also the Netherlands and the Nordic countries experience the same 'medianisation' pressure on their defence capabilities and this evolution is only emphasized by the cuts in defence spending that are a consequence of the global financial crisis. For example, also the main battle tank capacity of the Dutch army is targeted in policy documents on the future of the defence capabilities of the Netherlands. (Inspectie der Rijksfinanciën 2010, 83) The only way to keep capabilities for the whole military spectrum is through international defence

⁶ Off course, a characteristic of the frigates is that they also can be used for operations of lower intensity what is more difficult for fighter jets, artillery or tanks.

⁷ The Netherlands are part of the JSF (Joint Strike Fighter)-programme and will replace their F-16 by the new American jets. The pressure of cuts in the Dutch defence budget only had as a consequence that the Dutch air force will only acquire 50 à 60 in stead of 85 JSF's, but they have secured this capability on a national level. (ANP-Belga Octobre 2010)

cooperation as also the former Norwegian Minister of Defence and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Thorvald Stoltenberg acknowledged, instead of keeping an exclusively national defence policy:

“This illustrates a wider trend, in which small countries, followed later by larger ones, will be faced with a choice – enter into military partnership with their neighbours or abandon a modern defence capability, with all the potential political consequences that may entail.” (Funch & Schou-Knudsen 2009, 11)

Stoltenberg’s remark consists of two parts. He speaks of the political consequences and envisages in the first place military partnerships with neighbouring countries.

On the point of the political consequences, it is very clear that military capabilities as well as national and international defence are politics. Having certain military capabilities strengthens the position of the international policy of a state compared to a country that hasn’t the same capabilities. Giving up certain military capabilities by some medium-size European countries or even by the big European states wouldn’t be a problem in itself if this would mean that their political position within the EU and therefore the world wouldn’t be affected.

In fact, the most efficient way to restructure the different national defences of the European countries is a real European army because it would make it possible to end duplication but this is politically speaking a far dream for some people or a far nightmare for others. It would mean also an important mental shift for the individual European soldier and certainly officer and warrant officer to work in a more American-sized army in which your workplace can be in either side of Europe.

The second best option, seen from the view to lessen duplication, would be a military task specialisation between the different European countries, coordinated on a European level.

From a political point of view this would also be closer to the historical reality of the current European political field. But in this case there should be a system of mutual dependence that makes a balanced partnership possible instead of more power for the big European countries and less for medium and small European states. Capabilities are the key point when talking about defence policy. A good example of this is the fact that although the EU defence policy (Common Security and Defence Policy) is based on a system of unanimous decision making, in reality most steps forward occurred when the three big European defence countries (France, United Kingdom and Germany) came to an agreement (Saint-Malo, Helsinki Headline Goal, European Battle Groups,...).

The current evolution of European defence makes that medium and small European defence countries will lose capabilities vis-à-vis the big countries. One cannot blame big European defence countries just for being big and therefore for not really having an incentive for cooperating on a (inclusive) European scale around defence, although the financial crisis coupled to historic policy decisions strain even the defence of the big(ger) countries. The only thing that medium and smaller defence countries can do to counter this 'natural' task specialisation in the advantage of the bigger European countries is to cooperate more intensively in order to keep capabilities and expertise in the full military security spectrum. Defence is politics, so through cooperation to keep a full spectrum of defence capabilities, smaller and medium European countries can enhance their political position vis-à-vis bigger European countries. A French-British-German directorate for European defence is not in the interest of the Benelux, Nordic or Baltic countries. From another viewpoint, it is more useful for the bigger European defence countries to have more equal partners so that there can be a real burden sharing on a European level on defence capabilities for current operations and for more European/EU defence in the future.

From this point of view bilateral French-British defence cooperation differs totally from bilateral Belgian-Dutch defence cooperation. The first cooperation plays on a European and even global level and influences directly European defence cooperation initiatives or future initiatives in such a way that it reduces the incentives to get more defence cooperation for all the European countries as it is exclusively between the two strongest European defence countries. As the British Secretary of State Liam Fox stated in the House of Commons:

“This is not about increasing the defence capabilities of the European Union. I repeat – this is about two sovereign nations, which between them spend 50% of all the defence spending of the NATO members in Europe, and 65% of the research spending.” (Taylor 2010, 8-9)

The second cooperation, the Belgian-Dutch one, is one between medium European defence powers and as such, is certainly not closing the way for more inclusive European defence cooperation, even quite on the contrary, as this paper wants to demonstrate, because it can highlight the possibilities of cooperation in defence matters for other medium and smaller European defence countries. Of course the fact that France has moved to the bilateral road towards defence cooperation has also to be seen in the framework of the limited advancement on a European level for defence cooperation between big, medium and small defence powers. The French move shows the limits of talking on European defence that is commonly known as cheap, compared to real financial efforts for the future European defence capacities.

The second point of Mr Stoltenberg’s remark was that you can best cooperate with your neighbours. Of course this has to be placed in the geopolitical and historical context of the Nordic

countries. By 'neighbours', Stoltenberg really means the relatively equivalent Nordic countries.

Thus, in fact, the aspect of the geographical closeness of neighbours is very useful if one cooperates in more practical military domains such as logistics, maintenance, education, training, operational steering, and so on, that also bring with them physical movements of personnel and material resources. Living in the same geographical area also means that countries have more chance to deal with the same security issues and have the same interests in this field both nationally as internationally and both seen from a geographical as a historical background. As is the case for the Benelux, Nordic and Baltic countries, there were already other forms of (political) cooperation before defence cooperation came to the fore. These cooperation forms created already relations of trust or can make it possible to have payoffs for defence cooperation in other fields, by which cooperation in defence matters can evolve more easily.

Moreover, equal partners have more incentives to also cooperate in a way that they are evenly dependent on each other.⁸ Medium-sized European defence countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands cooperate also a lot with their big neighbours: France, Germany and the United Kingdom and both have experienced situations in which they were treated as the little partner.

Another point that comes to the fore out of the thoughts of Mr Stoltenberg to cooperate in the first place with neighbouring countries is that his vision on military cooperation is one between a limited number of countries. Also in my view and with the Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation in mind, working to deepen defence cooperation with a limited amount of partners offers a lot of advantages compared to working on a European

⁸ But the Belgium-Dutch navy cooperation shows that even a balanced partnership is possible between two defence branches that are not of equal size although the balance between both armies in general is less unequal.

level, where you have 27 different visions and 27 different sizes and capabilities of national Defence. Such bottom-up initiatives are theoretically better suited to having qualitatively deep defence cooperation and the Belgian-Dutch one is an example of this, but only one of the few. It shows that cooperation initiatives that are worked out by people closer to the work field and more sensitive to the needs of the terrain can in turn be implemented more easily compared to initiatives coming from a high political level having a bigger influence on the whole of the defence organisation. It is sometimes very difficult to translate these political initiatives to the executor's level and to work pinpointed. This same reasoning explains also why France wants to cooperate with the United Kingdom on practical defence matters although the political rhetoric goes and certainly went, mostly in the direction of defence cooperation on a European level.

Nevertheless, for all the good features of bottom-up defence cooperation between a limited number of countries, there is also the need for more coordination and cooperation on a European level to lessen duplication on a larger scale in a top-down approach. As already mentioned, the very efficient system of the United States where the soldiers and officers go from one corner of the country or the world to the other, with the army supporting their family, isn't something that our European soldiers and their governments are waiting for.

A more realistic image for the future of European defence can be a constellation of different very deep regional cooperations between medium and small-size military countries next to the bigger European defence powers. All helped to seize opportunities to limit duplication of defence research, defence industry, armament procurement, instruction and so one, through a more efficient and better used European Defence Agency. Maybe the -for the time being- rather empty Permanent Structured Cooperation of the Lisbon Treaty could become a coordinating structure for this network. Most of the

institutions or treaties necessary to make this pragmatic vision possible already exist, they only need to be worked out or used in a more efficient manner. So, even if a real European defence policy or, certainly, a European army are not feasible – in the case they were generally acknowledged as something that is to be strived for – it doesn't need to take years to make European defence more efficient by diminishing duplication.

Bottom-up initiatives can also have a positive influence on the top-down evolution because if national defence visions converge more on regional levels, then the number of visions on a European level is of course reduced. The other way around, it is clear that a bottom-up defence cooperation between the two strongest European defence countries that are together responsible for half of the European defence effort makes it more difficult to increase cooperation and as such efficiency on a European level, although it can be a very pragmatic thing to do from the standpoint of both countries. The French-British defence cooperation treaties certainly give a clear signal to small and medium European defence powers that time for only debating defence cooperation is running out.

Nevertheless a more inclusive European approach on security issues and more coordination and cooperation between national armies within Europe will remain something to strive for. It would be an even clearer signal to global and regional powers that still look at military means in an old-fashioned power politics way and could support a lasting role for Europe on the world stage.

The Belgian-Dutch navy cooperation shows that more is possible in the field of defence cooperation even in the current rigid political framework of a lasting firm grip of national sovereignty on defence. More bottom-up cooperation can also help to create more dynamic top-down.

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