CHAPTER 8

NATO Enlargement and European Defense Autonomy

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Introduction

The enlargement of NATO and the development of a European-based military and defense capability have been hailed as among the most significant developments in European security affairs since the early 1990s. Not surprisingly, a great deal has been said and written about these twin processes. The relationship between them, however, has not given rise to anything close to the same degree of interest. This situation notwithstanding, NATO enlargement does have certain consequences for the two organizational forms in which European military and defense autonomy has developed. A link with the ESDI—the “European Pillar” of NATO—has been implicit since at least the mid-1990s. Somewhat more obvious is the link between NATO enlargement and the ESDP developed within the EU. Insofar as the ESDP requires the development of an effective institutional and operational interface between the EU and NATO, the entry of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland into the Alliance in March 1999 complicated this already difficult task. The issuing of invitations to other NATO candidates at the Alliance’s summit in Prague in November 2002 could complicate it still further.

This chapter explores the various connections between ESDI and ESDP on the one hand, and NATO enlargement on the other. It has
a particular focus on the institutional and security issues raised by the overlapping but not always congruent memberships of the EU and NATO. These memberships have altered and will continue to alter as the twin enlargements of NATO and the EU proceed. There is thus an ebb and flow to the manner in which the relevant issues gain prominence and with which they are dealt.

NATO Enlargement and ESDI: The Missing Link?

Discussion of European defense has a long history, but its most recent phase can be traced to the reinvigoration of European integration inaugurated by the Single European Act of 1986 and the subsequent framing of the 1992 (Maastricht) Treaty on European Union. The latter declared “[a] common foreign and security policy [CFSP] is hereby established” and requested that the WEU “elaborate and implement decisions and actions of the Union which have defense implications.”

Coincident with the Maastricht negotiations, the WEU issued a declaration in December 1991 that outlined the need to “develop a genuine European security and defense identity” via a strengthening of the WEU itself. This was with a view to creating “a common defense policy within the EU” that would remain “compatible with that of the Atlantic Alliance.”

Consistent with this position, NATO, in the Rome Declaration of November 1991, welcomed “the further strengthening of the European pillar within the Alliance” and foresaw the development of complementarity and institutional links between the EU’s then twelve members, the WEU and the Alliance.

While these developments generated considerable debate, one ingredient largely missing from the discussions was the relationship between ESDI and the possible enlargement of NATO. This was not surprising insofar as consideration of the latter only began in earnest in late 1992. However, once that discussion was underway, very little explicit connection was drawn, and what connection there was tended to be general and imprecise. NATO’s Brussels Declaration of January 1994 was significant for its support of ESDI (“as called for in the Maastricht Treaty”) and “the strengthening of the European pillar of the Alliance” through the WEU. However, at this juncture no mention was made as to how these matters might impact upon any expansion of NATO’s membership.

The final communiqué of NATO’s NAC in December 1994 outlined what at that point was the most forthright statement in favor of enlargement. It also introduced a catchall formula whereby the opening up of the Alliance to new members was viewed in terms of the development of