THE RELEVANCE OF THE BERLIN PLUS AGREEMENTS FOR THE PLANNING PHASE OF THE MILITARY OPERATION EUFOR ALTHEA

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Abstract: Conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2004, EUFOR Althea still remains the most significant military operation of the European Union. Using the document analysis as a qualitative research tool, this paper examines the usefulness and viability of the Berlin Plus Agreements (established between NATO and the EU) in the initial planning phase of EUFOR Althea.

Keywords: Berlin Plus Agreements, Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUFOR Althea

1. Introduction

In the process of European military integration, initiated by the Treaty of Brussels (1948), the Berlin Plus Agreements hold a considerable importance. Finalised in March 2003 on the basis of the conclusions of the NATO Summit in Washington (1999), they actually integrate a series of multiple agreements, mainly regarding [1]: the NATO-EU exchange of classified information; secured access to the planning capabilities of NATO in case of crisis management operations conducted by the EU; procedures for sharing, monitoring and returning the employed capabilities.

Namely, the Berlin Plus Agreements allow access for the Union to NATO's military capabilities, in the event of a military operation initiated by the Union and in which NATO does not choose to get involved. Thus, the Union receives access to the Alliance's European command options; operational planning is conducted at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) level, while the operational command is provided by the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander

Europe (DSACEUR), which informs the European Union's Military Committee on the major plans and decisions. In his activity, DSACEUR is assisted by a Director for EU Operations and a Staff Group, made up of EU officers; the purpose of this group is to ensure a connection between DSACEUR and the EU Military Staff, as well as to implement the SHAPE support in planning and conducting the operation [2].

2. Scientific tool

In writing this paper, we used the document analysis as a qualitative research tool, as it was described in a comprehensive encyclopaedia edited by Bruce Frey [3].

3. Challenges in the planning phase and the relevance of the Berlin Plus Agreements

The idea of a NATO-EU transition in Bosnia and Herzegovina was first submitted at the Copenhagen European Council (December 2002). But the actual planning of such an initiative had become possible only after the adoption of the Berlin Plus Agreements and after the transition *Amber*

Fox – Concordia proved that these agreements are functional, if only at a lower level.

The possible NATO-EU transition in Bosnia and Herzegovina was thus resumed at the end of 2003, when the Ministers of Foreign Affairs from NATO's member countries announced the intention to complete the SFOR mission by the end of 2014 and to hand over its mandate, in the legal framework created by the Berlin Plus Agreements. Only a week after, the European Council expressed its readiness to launch a military operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, under the auspices of the (then) European Security and Defence Policy and benefiting from the provisions of the Berlin Plus Agreements [4].

Even from the start, numerous challenges have been identified in the planning phase of the operation. The success of IFOR and SFOR in ensuring the peace and the objectives of the General Framework Agreement generated a significant capital of trust of the local population towards the NATO forces; their withdrawal was thus perceived reservedly, all the more so as some skeptics feared that the future European forces might be as inefficient as the UNPROFOR forces; deployed in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992-1995, the UNPROFOR forces were still being associated by the locals with the incapacity to prevent the Srebrenica massacre, in which over 8.000 lives were lost.

Also, other critics emphasized the essential role that the United States played in the region, the country being viewed as the only one capable of responding to new threats; in their analysis, the involvement of the United States further warranted the involvement of NATO [5].

Thus, unlike *Concordia*, the extent and the complexity of *Althea* made the implementation of the Berlin Plus Agreements a more difficult task. The initial progresses were achieved on two tracks: on the one side DSACEUR drafted

Althea's Operation Plan, while on the other side political consultations were initiated, in order to prepare the transition between the North Atlantic Council of NATO and the Political and Security Committee of EU.

But the debates between experts continued. According to an official involved in the planning phase, "while the French insisted in looking exclusively at NATO's common assets, and more particularly the OHQ [Operational Headquarters] at SHAPE and the CIS [Communication and Information System], other Member States thought that the Union should lean on the Alliance as much as it could. Whereas most aspects of Berlin Plus were approached by British or Germans from a practical, procedural, commonsense angle, any small detail would be considered by the French of the utmost political importance" [6].

Accordingly, the initial terms had to be extended; it took no less than six months to get from the Crisis Management Concept to the Initiating Military Directive. The process was also extended by debates surrounding the meaning of the term „capability“, as well as by Turkey's requests to have full access to classified information.

But once the operational phase was initiated, the contradicting opinions lessened. The Operational Headquarters professionally generated the Operational Plan, which it also implemented in the same manner. According to another involved expert, "the (operational) planning process was very, very comfortable; we had the transition plan from SFOR and I had the whole SHAPE at my disposal; I had Naples, I had the SFOR FHQ [Force Headquarters]. It was a piece of cake. Berlin Plus works perfectly well, so long as you stay within the box, that is. It is perfect on the technical side: it is the best planning and conduct option the EU has by far" [7]. Thereby, the progresses scored in the planning phase in the first part of 2004 allowed the leaders of the Alliance to announce, at the Istanbul Summit (June

2004), the decision to complete the SFOR mission by the end of 2004 and to support its replacement with an EU-led and UN-mandated force, on the basis of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. According to the official *Communiqué* issued at the end of the summit, „NATO’s long-term political commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina remains unchanged” and the General Framework Agreement still constitutes „the basis for peace and stability” in this country [8]. Through the same communiqué one affirms the support for Bosnia and Herzegovina to enter the Partnership for Peace, which actually happened two years later, in 2006.

Significant aspects regarding the planning of the future operation (mission, legal mandate, participation of partner countries) were further established in the second half of 2004, mainly through *Resolution 1551* and *Resolution 1575* of the UN’s Security Council and the *Joint Action 2004/570/CFSP* of the Council of the European Union.

Also, on 15 July, NATO’s Secretary General and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy together visited the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to personally inform the national deciders on the timeline and the ways to accomplish the transition. The two had talks with the Presidency of the country (a collective leadership body, consisting of three members), the Council of Ministers, the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina and with the SFOR Commander; the Euro-Atlantic leaders also visited Camp Butmir, as well as the Headquarters of the Union’s Police Mission in this country [9].

Finally, on 25 November 2004 the Council of the European Union adopted *Decision 2004/803/CFSP* on initiating EUFOR Althea, starting with 2 December 2004.

Thus, all these endeavors made possible the end of the SFOR mission and the official launch of the Althea operation, within a ceremony that took place on 2 December at Camp Butmir.

In this entire process of transition SFOR-EUFOR Althea, the Berlin Plus Agreements proved their helpfulness. Besides the significant contributions brought by SHAPE (directly linked with the deciders from Brussels) and the Alliance’s planning, command and control capabilities, the Berlin Plus Agreements offered operation Althea other benefits on the part of NATO, such as [10]: the experience and prestige of DSACEUR, as the operation commander; NATO’s Communications and Information System; the Joint Force Command Naples, which includes the Western Balkans in its area of responsibility; Camp Butmir (Sarajevo), which hosted the SFOR Headquarters and, subsequently, the EUFOR Althea Headquarters.

4. Conclusions

The Berlin Plus Agreements represent a major success in the NATO-EU cooperation. Thanks to them, the Union launched its first military operation: Concordia, conducted in Macedonia between March-December 2003. The success of Concordia determined the Union to assume a more significant role in ensuring security in the Western Balkans and to embark on a more ambitious endeavour, by launching operation EUFOR Althea in December 2004.

Looking back, we can conclude that the planning phase of operation EUFOR Althea was a truly complicated one. But the Berlin Plus Agreements proved their usefulness and viability and made possible the subsequent avoidance of further dissensions, once the execution phase started.

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