

European Security and Defence – remaining Transatlantic, acting more European

27. und 28. November 2018
Vienna House Andel's Berlin



German-Netherlands Military Cooperation: Leading by Example

(BSC/Colonel Martin Bonn/Lieutenant Colonel Peter Kooistra, Defence Department, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands) In a rapidly changing world in which security, stability and prosperity are increasingly under threat, military cooperation is of paramount importance. The German-Netherlands military partnership is a blueprint for effective and beneficial cooperation and integration. This strong bilateral relationship, which has been shaped over the course of several decades, is continuously breaking new ground. Both nations recognise that a strong strategic partnership can add value without infringing on national sovereignty. Working together in peacetime and in operations both within and outside Europe shows that integrating countries' armed forces is feasible. The solid foundations we have built to date provide further opportunities for the future.

Cooperation over the years

The Netherlands has always been a strong advocate of wide-ranging European military cooperation, whether in a multilateral or bilateral framework. After the Cold War, when NATO's armed forces faced reductions due to severe budget cuts, the Netherlands concluded that international cooperation with like-minded nations within existing NATO and EU frameworks was necessary in order to meet future challenges. The cornerstone of this new bilateral cooperation was the establishment of the 1 German-Netherlands Corps in Münster in 1995. This laid the basis for the development of mutual trust and confidence.

Over the years, the partnership has broadened and deepened, with a wide range of activities such as the exchange of military intelligence, combined education, training and exercises, the exchange of military personnel and expeditionary operations. In 2013, a 'Declaration of Intent' was signed by the German and Dutch defence ministers. This strategic document provided political guidelines, an organisational structure and a roadmap that resulted in more than 150 projects for the Army, Air Force, Navy and Joint Support Command.

In 2014 the 11 Airmobile Brigade was integrated into the Division Schnelle Kräfte. In 2016 the 43rd Mechanised Brigade was integrated into the 1st Panzerdivision. At the same time, the combined Army Tank Battalion 414, manned by German and Dutch soldiers and using German tanks, merged with the 43rd Mechanised Brigade. Currently, two of our three Dutch Brigades are under the tactical command of the Bundeswehr. In 2018, the German Surface-to-Air Missile Group 61 was placed under the command of the Netherlands Defence Ground-based Air Defence Command. Both Navies share the joint support ship Karel Doorman, and the German Sea Battalion is integrated within the Royal Netherlands Navy. Germany used the Dutch joint support ship in a national evacuation exercise ('Schneller Adler') in September 2018. Cooperation between Germany and the Netherlands is also increasing in the areas of cybersecurity, medical activities, air and missile defence (Project Apollo), materiel and support activities.

Germany and the Netherlands make optimal use of the best characteristics of our respective military cultures. We believe that our two approaches – one being strong on thoroughness, procedure and organisational skills, the other on pragmatism, improvisation and thinking outside-the-box – do not divide us, but rather add value. Our military cooperation is based on ‚Augenhöhe‘ and the will to make it work. In addition to our military groundwork, we have also worked to improve the interoperability of our armed forces by using the same weapon systems, such as the Leopard 2, the PzH 2000, the Boxer and the Fennek, and this too has proved beneficial for our partnership.

Strengthening our cooperation has also resulted in the deployment of our Soldatinnen und Soldaten in operations and missions. Examples include missions in Afghanistan and Mali, our participation in EU operations like ATALANTA and SOPHIA and our NATO contributions, such as the Enhanced Forward Presence and the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF).

Next Steps

Despite all this progress, the Dutch armed forces continue exploring new opportunities. There is still a lot to be gained, for example, with regard to interoperability. The next step should be further harmonisation of our national certification and standard operating procedures. And we could start working to further streamline and harmonise our education, training and exercises, and thereby the readiness of our forces.

One important area that deserves extra attention is cooperation in the field of capability development and the procurement of new military equipment. In May 2018 the two countries' defence ministers signed a ‚Declaration of Intent‘ on digitalisation. Its goal is to further explore and develop the digital integration of our land forces. The potential for maritime materiel cooperation is well-known. Hereby, we always face the challenges of balancing operational requirements, timelines, available budgets and the interests of the national defence industry.

Long-term strategic military cooperation extends beyond the date of the next elections. It can only be achieved with continuous commitment and willingness based on respect and trust. Countries must be prepared to make compromises and to make choices based on mutual benefits. Germany and the Netherlands are laying down a potential blueprint for others in this respect: We are leading by example.