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The EU and NATO are increasingly exposed to cross-border and cross-sectoral climate impacts within Europe. These are called cascading climate risks. While the EU and NATO have a strong awareness of these risks, awareness does not equate to preparedness and readiness. Critical cross-border infrastructure networks are increasingly exposed, with consequences for European security, military mobility, and resilience. The EU and NATO need to coordinate, prepare, and adapt.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, the EU and NATO have increasingly worked together to address transboundary threats. To foster comprehensive resilience, the EU and NATO created complementary but distinct frameworks for preparedness, societal resilience, and critical infrastructure. However, in the rush to prepare for war in Europe, climate risks may be underestimated and deprioritized, especially as their impacts cross international borders and disrupt vital societal functions and essential services. To make Europe climate resilient, greater EU and NATO cooperation is needed. This thesis examines how the EU and NATO address cascading climate risks and their implications for European critical infrastructure resilience.

Cascading climate risks are a risk and threat multiplier with strong implications for cross-border critical transport and energy infrastructure. Railways, ports, energy grids, roads, and other infrastructure, such as the Trans-European Transportation Network (TEN-T), are increasingly exposed to these risks. The impacts extend beyond national borders and sectors, with implications for European security, civil-military readiness, military mobility, and operational effectiveness. In conducting this thesis, twenty-nine EU and NATO policy documents were analyzed, and fourteen interviews were conducted through field research in Brussels, Belgium. This study reveals that cascading climate risks are rarely explicitly integrated into EU and NATO resilience planning, preparedness strategies, and critical infrastructure policies. Nor does it translate into policy guidance for EU Member States and NATO Allies. Progress is limited due to a lack of common EU-level policies, uneven risk assessments, differing national priorities, and insufficient policy implementation. As a result, preparedness for cascading climate impacts is uneven across Europe.

Yet, the thesis suggests an enabling environment is emerging. New EU-level policies, such as the EU Integrated Framework on Climate Resilience and Risk Management and the new EU Security strategy, offer a path to integrate cascading climate risks as a cross-cutting policy and security concern. Moreover, NATO is integrating climate risks into its baseline resilience requirements and defense planning for NATO Allies. Here, EU-NATO policy coordination and coherence are essential to addressing cascading climate risks and supporting national governments. However, a surprising find is that responses are emerging organically through national-level approaches and coalitions of the willing. Yet, EU-level coordination is still fragmented.

This research study leads to an important conclusion: Europe understands that climate change is a security threat, but it is not fully prepared for its consequences. Without more coordinated approaches, uneven adaptation efforts could create significant vulnerabilities across Europe. To

build long-term resilience, the EU and NATO will need to integrate cascading climate risks across their policies and pursue systemic climate resilience. As European transboundary crises interact, the impetus shifts to how the EU and NATO govern interdependency itself with new actors. This study can be used to improve EU-NATO policy coordination and improve how stakeholders account for cascading climate risks in Europe. Ultimately, complementary EU and NATO frameworks to address systemic climate risks are necessary to prepare for an uncertain future.