

## **Nuclear Disarmament is a precondition for real security in Europe**

Ludo De Brabander – Büchel 07/07/2021

We can look with optimism or pessimism to the future.

On the negative side: it appears that we are living in a more dangerous decade compared to even the difficult episodes of the cold war. In the last two consecutive years, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists set the hands of the ‘Doomsday Clock’ – measuring the likelihood of man-made global catastrophe – at one hundred seconds to midnight – closer than it has ever been before, due to the imminent threats of nuclear war and climate disaster. Arms control treaties are no longer upheld, and governments have started updating and expanding nuclear arsenals.

But there are also hopeful developments. On 22 January, the [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons \(TPNW\)](#) entered into force. Meanwhile 54 states ratified the Ban Treaty. A milestone in history. Four years ago (the 7th of July 2017), after several years of negotiations, 122 countries voted in favour of the new Ban Treaty, with one against (Netherlands), and 1 official abstention (Singapore). Unfortunately, 69 nations did not vote at all. They didn’t even take part in the negotiations. Among them the nuclear weapon states and all NATO members except the Netherlands.

### **NATO: nuclear alliance**

NATO and governments of member states claim that the TPNW is incompatible with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and even undermines it. It is important to recall that a key motivation of the states that negotiated the TPNW was to take forward the implementation of the nuclear disarmament obligations of article VI of the NPT. This intention is also clearly stated in the preamble of the TPNW. Article VI of the NPT legally obliges all states parties to pursue “negotiations” and “effective measures” “on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control”. That is exactly what the TPNW does. UN secretary-general, António Guterres, flatly rejected in 2018 in Geneva claims that the TPNW undermines the NPT declaring that the two treaties are “fully compatible” and complementary. The research services division of the German federal parliament, wrote in a detailed

paper in January 2021: “The TPNW does not undermine the NPT; it is part of a common nuclear disarmament architecture.”

Nevertheless, despite the obligations under article VI of the NPT, most NATO member states as well as all nuclear states, have been boycotting the negotiations. Worse, NATO started a disinformation campaign with the false claim that the Ban Treaty undermines the nuclear disarmament regime. The real reason is that NATO sees the treaty as a threat to the organization's political unity over its nuclear strategy. According to NATO: “Nuclear weapons are a core component of NATO's overall capabilities for deterrence and defence, alongside conventional and missile defence forces. NATO is committed to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, but as long as nuclear weapons exist, it will remain a nuclear alliance.”

However, NATO defined itself only recently as a nuclear alliance. In NATO's earliest years, nuclear weapons were in fact not even mentioned in the alliance's strategic concepts. Nuclear arms were considered as a responsibility of NATO's nuclear states. Only the last decade, NATO accepted a strategic concept in which it considered itself a ‘nuclear alliance’.

### **The collectivization of nuclear responsibility**

From the 1960s, the US began to deploy nuclear weapons in other NATO member states, giving them a role in the planning and preparation of nuclear war. In the years that followed, all countries except France became involved in the nuclear deterrent policy, which was increasingly defined as a form of alliance solidarity. The reason? International support among the population for nuclear disarmament grew. In the 80's many hundreds of thousands demonstrated in European and US-cities opposing new deployments of nuclear arms. The strengthening of humanitarian and anti-nuclear norms during and after the Cold War played a key role in pushing NATO to adapt. This led to [the collectivization of political responsibility for nuclear weapons](#).

Why? First, the nuclearization of NATO as an organizational identity allowed pro-nuclear actors to justify costly nuclear modernization programs and nuclear deployments as contributions to alliance "solidarity" and "cohesion". Second, this nuclearization of NATO undercut the potential for intra-alliance resistance to nuclear arms. Calls for nuclear disarmament could thus be seen as anti-NATO.

Nuclear sharing became a core component of NATO's strategy. Of the three nuclear powers in NATO (France, the United Kingdom and the United States), only the United States has nuclear arms in other member states: Belgium, Germany, Italy, the

Netherlands and Turkey. Once there have been also US nuclear arms in Canada (1950-1984), Greece (until 2001) and the UK (until 1992). This means, by the way, that it was possible to send nuclear weapons back to the United States without being considered as an act against 'NATO obligations'.

Currently, the US has about 150 tactical B61 gravity bombs deployed in Europe. They have to be mounted into (not in Turkey) dual capable aircraft (DCA) in war time. This can be considered as a transfer or control by non-nuclear states of nuclear arms which would be in breach with the [non-proliferation treaty](#) (NPT) of 1970. The NPT prohibits the direct or indirect transfer or control of nuclear weapons to non-nuclear states. But according to the US the NPT is not valid anymore in war time (argument: the purpose of the NPT to avoid war failed).

These bombs will soon be replaced by new B61-12 bombs. They are equipped with an electronic tail kit that can guide the bomb to its target. They have also lower yield options. The mixture of both, precision and lower yield options could be seen by war planners as [more useable](#) allowing some targets that previously would not have been attacked because of too much collateral damage to be attacked anyway. This is a very dangerous development. The new B61-12 will increase the danger of a war with nuclear weapons eroding the concept of 'deterrence'.

### **European population opposes nuclear weapons**

According to [recent surveys in several European countries](#), a majority of the population in Europe is in favour of a ban on nuclear weapons. This is what 77% of those surveyed want in Belgium, 89% in Spain, 87% in Italy, 78% in the Netherlands and Denmark. The challenge for the peace movement is to translate that support from the population into political pressure and to get nuclear weapons back high on the political agenda. For several months, representatives of the peace movement have been preparing a call to hold a month of actions against nuclear weapons in September 2021. We must not miss that opportunity because in a few years' time the new B61-12 bombs will be deployed in Europe. We are also witnessing an increase in investments by nuclear weapon states for the maintaining and renewal of nuclear arsenals in nuclear weapon states. According to [an ICAN report](#) the nine nuclear weapon states invested 72,6 billion dollars in 2020, an increase of 1,4 billion compared to 2019. The billions thrown away on nuclear weapons could instead be funding health care, climate measures or for the promotion of social justice.

The world is at a crossroads and Europe has to make a strategic choice: remain part of the arms race or demonstrate global leadership by promoting a peaceful approach towards common global security.

I invite all of you to participate actively in the new European "[nuke free Europe](#)" [campaign](#) against NATO's nuclear sharing policy and for the removal of all nuclear weapons in Europe. During the month of September, in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and the UK there will be actions near military bases with US nuclear weapons. Our first goal is to get the nuclear arms back on the political agenda and to raise awareness among other movements (trade unions, the climate movement, women and youth movement) about the planetary threat of nuclear weapons and the need to act.

We need to discuss and find ways to increase pressure on governments of the nuclear sharing countries to embrace the vision of nuclear disarmament as a preventative tool for shaping Europe's security environment. A first condition is to end nuclear ambiguity which means that the governments of nuclear sharing states acknowledge that nuclear weapons are deployed on its territories. We need a free and open democratic discussion so that the presence nuclear weapons in the sharing countries can politically and legally be contested. As a peace movement we should join forces with social movements in Europe in making nuclear disarmament a political priority. We must believe that the return of the anti nuclear mass movement of the eighties is not impossible. Secondly, we need a clear political commitment and time schedule for European nuclear disarmament, starting with negotiations between the US/NATO and Russia to dismantle US nuclear bombs followed by agreements on nuclear disarmament in France, UK and at least the European part of Russia. Once nuclear disarmament is reached Europe can legally become a nuclear weapon free zone. At the same time the door is open for European countries to fulfil their obligations under the NPT and to sign and ratify the TPNW.

To recall the iconic slogan of Greenpeace: "No time to waste!"

***Ludo De Brabander is a Belgian writer and spokesman for the Belgian peace organisation Vrede vzw. - <https://vrede.be/en>***