

CURRENT TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

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South-Eastern Europe is one of the buffer zones of the current international conflict arena given its role into taking up the jolts stemming both from an old and yet democratic and modern Europe, and from a seething, authoritarian and, in many cases, dogmatic Asia. Within the current international environment characterized by swift and unpredictable changes NATO plays an essential part in strengthening the Euroatlantic security. As a result of the Alliance's determination to model and ensure a solid security environment and a durable peace, the new NATO doctrine develops a strategic concept according to which security strengthening needs to be based on a political-military partnership, as well as on cooperation and dialogue among all states.

Key words: *security, NATO, political options, partnership, South-Eastern Europe*

1. INTRODUCTION

The dissolution of the communist block did not only signal the disappearance of the red East and blue West dichotomy, but also the political reorientation of the former East European communist states towards democracy. As a result, the likelihood for these to join the same security structure their former adversaries had been part of increased. Ultimately, the need to maintain control over the security in the Euroatlantic area made NATO a natural and feasible choice for security insurance. Consequently, the Alliance expanded through the accession of the aforementioned states into its structures and, hence,

a highly dangerous and chaotic phenomenon was avoided, namely anarchic security.

2. POLITICAL CHALLENGES AND OPTIONS IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE FROM A TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization plays a key role in the stabilization and defense of South-Eastern Europe (SEE) and at the moment, an important part of this area, the south and almost all the west of the region, respectively, are already under the control of the Alliance. NATO promotes a policy centered around

the concept of trusting neighbors. In this respect, worth reminding are its partnerships with Russia (1997), with Ukraine (1997) which resulted in the NATO – Russia Council (2002), the NATO – Russia Council Action Plan on Terrorism (2004), the NATO – Ukraine Commission (1997), the NATO – Ukraine Action Plan (2005), the NATO – Georgia Commission (2008), as well as a number of individual partnerships signed with all the countries in SEE. As a result of the more secure and stable environment ensured through initiatives like the Multinational Peace Force South-Eastern Europe, NATO's involvement in the region also plays a positive role from an economic point of view.

The numerous civil wars, terrorism spread at international level, and other contemporary asymmetric threats proved that the security of European border regions – the eastern and south-eastern ones, mostly – is a component of the overall Euroatlantic security. Therefore, NATO needs to intensely cooperate with the Western Balkans, Caucasus and Middle Asia in order to solve the problem of the frozen conflicts in the SEE. The means through which such an initiative can be undertaken are: exerting the Alliance's entire influence over the external supporters of the secessionist movements; incentivizing and accelerating democratic reforms in SEE, enhancing the defense capacity of the states in the region against external regional threats; establishing a number of

general rules and norms aimed at encouraging and maintaining the interregional cooperation through market economy as a basis and incentivizer of conflict resolution and political relations, as well as ensuring a follow-up to their implementation; establishing a dialogue platform in the security field and developing targeted programs. Frozen conflicts in the area are a barrier to increasing the collaboration between NATO and the states in the region, not to mention Russia's diplomatic, economic and military role. Currently, the Alliance's influence in the region manifests through its member states: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Romania, Slovenia and Turkey, through the states willing to join NATO: Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, through Armenia – that, even though it is a PfP member, also signed a strategic partnership with Russia – and Russia that established a special relationship with the Alliance in the NATO – Russia Council.

During the 2008 NATO Summit that unfolded in Bucharest, 26 NATO member states representatives and 23 PfP representatives met to debate issues of major interest at the moment like Afghanistan, NATO's enlargement and the deployment of the antimissile shield in Europe. There were also disagreements between the Alliance and Russia over Georgia's and Ukraine's requests to join NATO. In this respect, Russia voiced its concern about the Alliance's expansion into the former Soviet area and threatened the two countries

with severe consequences should they be keen on their intentions. In their turn, officials from Kiev and Tbilisi denounced Russia's position and underlined their commitment to pursuing their plans.

The 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia severed the relations between Russia and NATO and they were to be resumed only in December 2008 when the ministers of foreign affairs from NATO member states met in Brussels and agreed that the two states took important and yet insufficient steps towards their accession to the the Alliance. As a result, the allies decided to increase these countries' opportunities to join NATO through the two commissions that were already in place: the NATO – Ukraine Commission and the NATO – Georgia Commission. On the other hand, they underlined the importance of NATO's relations with Russia. However, they reiterated their disapproval of the conflict between Russia and Georgia and invited Russia to commit to the values and principles of international security by complying with the agreement signed with Georgia and by refraining itself from conflict prone declarations and threats to allies' and their partners' security.

No further progress towards Ukraine's and Georgia's accession was made during the Lisbon and Chicago summits. Ianucovici changed Ukraine's position into a non-alignment one, whereas Georgia's chances to join NATO any time soon decreased dramatically after the conflict with Russia.

The Chicago Summit offered no surprises and it could be characterised as a working group that reunited 64 state and international organizations' representatives: 28 NATO member states, 3 international organizations and 33 states from all continents. The main issues discussed concerned the future of NATO mission in Afghanistan, the development of NATO capabilities under current economic constraints, as well as the strengthening of the relations with NATO's partners. The process of transferring security ensurance responsibility from NATO forces to Afghan forces, and the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan by 2014 dominated the discussions. The conclusions were that by 2014 NATO's mission in Afghanistan will only be concerned with the support and training of the Afghan armed forces. Moreover, the necessity to maintain the presence of the Alliance in Afghanistan beyond 2014 as a result of the Taliban threat, especially in the east and south, was reiterated.

The new concept of Smart Defence was also introduced. Its aim is to focus on a number of multinational projects targeting more efficient expenditures in the military field given the diminishing defense budgets. Such a project is the anti-missile one and its goal is to provide protection against any ballistic threats from states like Iran. Basically, this project is aimed at integrating the anti-missile defense systems developed by NATO member states

and to have the command and control costs covered by the Alliance. In this respect, it is worth reminding that as of 2015, Romania will be full part of the project with the Deveselu base. Russia has expressed its discontent with the project from the very beginning with the covert purpose of maintaining a superior negotiating position that would allow it to have a gain in other fields. Therefore, one major concern for the Alliance is to pursue the project while continuing the dialogue with Moscow.

Despite its aims, the Chicago summit has not resulted in solutions to all the Alliance's problems. For example, Afghanistan's stability is far from being established, Russia headed by its new president will be a cumbersome partner, the European allies that only cover 21% of NATO's expenses will have to find solutions to balance expenditures within the Alliance given the current economic constraints. With a view to the last issue just mentioned, projects like Smart Defence or the EU Pooling and Sharing initiative are a feasible alternative to the joint European effort to maintain Washington's interest for Europe's security.

All of the above pinpoint NATO's role as a power pillar in Europe and, inherently, in SEE, despite the costs and responsibilities incurred. For the Alliance the concept of security in SEE is defined not only as a part of the euroatlantic security approach, but also described through the lenses of the ethnic and cultural diversity that makes it difficult for a regional

identity to emerge. The principle underlying this concept is based on a regional and multilateral approach to the solutions proposed by the democratic countries in the region.

3. NATO STRATEGY IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

In the conclusions of the 2010 NATO Summit in Lisbon, the heads of states reaffirmed their commitment to maintain and strengthen the security of NATO member states: *"We, the political leaders of NATO, are determined to continue renewal of our Alliance so that it is fit for purpose in addressing the 21st Century security challenges. We are firmly committed to preserve its effectiveness as the globe's most successful political-military Alliance. Our Alliance thrives as a source of hope because it is based on common values of individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and because our common essential and enduring purpose is to safeguard the freedom and security of its members. These values and objectives are universal and perpetual, and we are determined to defend them through unity, solidarity, strength and resolve"* [1].

After the end of the Cold War the policy of the Alliance targeted political and strategic goals meant to grant the organization extended power and influence. Thus, immediately after the fall of communism, NATO promoted the open doors policy by accepting as members or as

discussion partners states from Central and Eastern Europe. In this respect, the PfP initiative allowed the organization to reach not only countries from Europe, but also states from the Caucasus.

The extension of the stability and security environment to South Eastern Europe allowed NATO to further reach regions like the Wider Black Sea Region, Caucasus and Central Asia [2]. Such an effort is the result of a core, common sense principle according to which security is one for all and, therefore, requires a common, joint approach given the commonality of the threats at regional level. An important part of this are goals like: a more intense political dialogue, support for undertaking military reforms and for achieving the interoperability desideratum, more secure frontiers, crises management, counter terrorism and armament control, information exchange.

The *Partnership for Peace*, the main NATO cooperation program for the states in SEE has undergone a number of changes in terms of its targets so that, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it reached the states from Central Asia. Moreover, PfP is an important tool supporting candidate states to join NATO – only in the past ten years, ten states becoming NATO members. Moreover, the initiative greatly contributed to stabilizing the conflict areas in SEE by establishing an environment based on understanding, trust and cooperation among allies and their partners, as well as by promoting

military reforms in these states. For the future, PfP will continue to play a major role in the joint approach to cooperation among allied and partner states in the euro atlantic region in the security and stability fields. Its main contribution lies in the continuous dialogue between NATO and each and every participant that is established through common activities and consultations meant to encourage military and democratic reforms. An Individual Partnership Program was founded within the PfP and it was aimed at training, for two years, NATO partners for undertaking activities like civil emergency planning, peace enforcement missions, crisis management.

Another instrument of PfP, the *Planning and Review Process*, with no time constraints in terms of employment, enables NATO to help its partners find solutions to problems other than the military ones. For example, the Alliance provides support and counselling for developing civil society in these countries, for financial planning, or for developing interoperability with NATO systems. The main regional actors from Caucasus, Central Asia, North Africa and Middle East prone to causing instability and, hence, influence euroatlantic security have led to NATO's efforts to consolidate its partnerships with states from the aforementioned regions, without neglecting its relations and interests in Caucasus, Western Balkans, the Republic of Moldova, and Cyprus.

NATO Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme is another instrument of the Alliance targeting researchers from NATO member states, as well as from the PfP and Mediterranean Dialogue states. NATO SPS allows the Alliance to ensure global and, inherently, regional security in SEE by facilitating collaboration and capabilities development. Its goal is to sponsor cooperation in the fields of security, science, environment and technology, and to support the elaboration of recommendations and practical solutions and, thus, meet the requirements of the parties concerned.

As outlined by the new NATO Strategic Concept signed during the 2010 Lisbon summit, as well as by the strategic objectives established during the informal meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs from NATO member states unfolded in Berlin in 2011, NATO's SPS new priorities are [3]:

- to facilitate the mutually beneficial cooperation in fields of common interests for the states involved and to accelerate the efforts towards overcoming the new security challenges;
- to fight against terrorism; to ensure energetic, information and environment security; to protect against mass destruction weapons;
- to increase support for NATO led missions and operations; to increase alertness to the evolution of international security, including early warning to prevent crises by

using advanced technologies for security assurance; by securing frontiers; by detecting and removing unexploded mines in the post conflict areas, and last but not least

- to connect the strategic objectives of the Alliance with the human and social aspects of security.

On the other hand, the political, economic, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity characteristic of the new NATO partnerships requires a review of the PfP/EAPC (Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council) instruments. Thus, a renewed partnership policy asks for a more flexible dialogue and cooperation framework and for granting personalized support to SEE partners, as well as to Western Balkans, the Extended Black Sea Region, Caucasus and Central Asia. Even though the states in the aforementioned areas are committed to implement democracy and durable development, the result are still imbalanced. Therefore, as a result of its new global priorities, NATO needs more than ever to cooperate with its SEE allies in order to fulfill its regional responsibilities.

However, currently, NATO has to tackle two major problems. First, it has to overcome the differences in trust and commitment among its allies. Second, it has to find solutions to the influence of geopolitical and economic factors influencing its operations. In other words, as the Strategic Advisors Group (SAG) within NATO Council underline:

"[...] It is not acceptable that some countries deploy forces in the risky areas of Afghanistan because they believe that their vital interests are at stake, while others reluctantly deploy and only to less risky areas or with limited numbers in the hope to minimally satisfy allied expectations" [4].

With a view to all this, the states in SEE that have agreed to host parts of the American anti-missile shield on their territories are entitled to reiterate that the Alliance's traditional mission, namely collective defense, is still a necessity. Moreover, the new Russian doctrine characterized by a defensive approach signals Moscow's unwillingness to continue reducing its nuclear arsenal. Therefore, the Alliance needs to resort to multilateral diplomatic instruments in order to appease Russia's worries about a nuclear threat. In this respect, a pragmatic and coherent dialogue within the NATO-Russia Council and aimed at approaching the concept of nuclear deterrence in all its details is the best solution.

Committed to its policies adopted after 1990 in the field of long-term regional cooperation, security and stability in SEE, NATO launched the South East Europe Initiative (SEEI) during the 1999 Washington summit. The four pillars of the initiative are:

1. the Consultative Forum on Security Issues on South East Europe whose members are NATO, Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Slovenia, Bosnia and

Herzegovina represented through ambassadors in Brussels;

2. the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) on Regional Cooperation in South East Europe working under the auspices of the EAPC in Political Committee Session;

3. Partnership for Peace working tools;

4. programs targeted at security and cooperation issues of the countries in the region.

As a result of the AHWG efforts, solutions to promote regional cooperation were found and included into activity plans similar to those of the PfP. The targets of the plans are: transparency in defense planning; crisis and defense management; regional cooperation and integration.

As for the tangible results of SEEI, they are as follows: the cooperation program in the security field signed with Croatia (2000) and based on PfP instruments; the special cooperation program in the field of security with Bosnia-Herzegovina; counselling and expertise in military retirees' outplacement as a result of the reforms undergone Bulgaria's and Romania's armed forces.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The cooperation process facilitates NATO member states' access to the Euroatlantic structures, especially in terms of gains in the field of political and economic stability, as a result of employing the Alliance's and EU's available mechanisms, programs and initiatives like EAPC,

PfP (from NATO) and the Stability and Association Agreements of EU.

In conclusion, the Alliance's efforts must and are supported by the endeavors of the countries from South East Europe that are committed to integrate into their political, economic and security structures the Western set of values through their accession into the European and Euroatlantic structures upholding this. South East Europe is under the influence of world security developments. Moreover, any future analysis of the geopolitical, geostrategic and security environment in the region should not neglect the role of NATO member states from SEE, the relations between Europe and the Caspic Sea area, the frozen conflicts in the proximity of NATO's area of responsibility, as well as the part played by EU and OSCE in the region.

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