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THE NEW GEOPOLITICAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND EMERGING CHALLENGES TO ALLIED SECURITY

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Abstract: The article analyzes the transition and change in conceptions of the NATO concept over the last 20 years. The current security environment and applicability in relation to alliance security are analyzed. The challenges facing the economies of

NATO member countries related to the allocation of greater defense funds are defined.

Keywords: Military Affairs, NATO, Security Environment, Defense Assets, Alliance Security.

I. RETROSPECTION

Allied security is a widely discussed topic – the reasons for the creation of NATO, the adaptation of the Alliance in the years of its existence, the plans for the future development of collective defense. Moreover, nowadays, the war between Russia and Ukraine is perceived as a result of NATO’s eastward expansion and the lack of adequate support for Ukraine.

If we look at every single security threat in Europe since the end of the Second World War, we will always find the role of the Washington Pact in keeping the peace, suppressing militarism based on nationalism and making decisions based on the political integration of the countries of the continent. NATO is called upon to guarantee security by building a collective defense system. A system that

is the result of overcoming of many difficulties by individual societies and their maturation with regards to the common values of Europe. All member states make it clear that they could not deal with today's challenges in the security environment alone.

Self-defense is not a sufficient guarantor of national interests, and given the wide variety of risks and threats, it is costly to maintain a full range of defense capabilities. Self-defense may seem more reliable, more manageable, ensuring independence, but in fact it creates an imbalance in social development and leads to the isolation of the country on the international arena.

Therefore, collective efforts are preferred by most European countries in the form of military cooperation within NATO and lead to political and economic progress. And although the Washington Treaty has remained unchanged since its signing, NATO has evolved in sync with the changes in the conditions of the security environment.

NATO has created the prerequisites for developing a common European security system; in December 1991 the Union established the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, which in 1997 was renamed the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. This forum opened opportunities for consultations between countries from Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Mediterranean, on one hand, and NATO, on the other. The idea is that these countries should not feel threatened and should be able to rely on support in ensuring their common security.

After the end of the Cold War, the NATO member states realized the power of the economic tool during the period of inter-bloc confrontation (between NATO and the Warsaw Pact countries). Many countries, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, including Bulgaria, found themselves in a "strategic vacuum", relying only on their own armed forces, without sufficient economic potential to ensure the defense of the country. It was a natural choice for these countries to try to guarantee their security within the framework of the European security architecture, as it has been proven over the years in the face of NATO and the EU. Thus, choosing the path of Euro-Atlantic integration, they overcame the state of isolation. To support the countries that had lost the Cold War, in 1994, NATO established the Partnership for Peace Program (PfP).

Countries that tried to defend certain Cold War conquests, such as Yugoslavia, developed nationalist ideas in opposition to NATO's goals, descended into a period of internal confrontation, and even went as far as committing acts of genocide. Allied action was initiated in support of UN efforts and included imposing an embargo, a no-fly zone and an beginning an air strike campaign in September 1995. NATO subsequently deployed 60,000 troops to the country, in order to secure the implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords.

In 1999, at the summit in Washington, three of the partner countries were accepted as full members of the Alliance. These were Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary.

Against the background of NATO's expansion, challenges followed one after the other. Albanian separatists in Kosovo on one side and the Serbian military and police on the other had fueled the conflict between themselves, forcing more than 300,000 refugees to flee their homes. The alliance had to conduct about 78 airstrikes daily, with a total of more than 38,000 sorties, to enable multinational peacekeeping forces to enter Kosovo.

Changes in the security environment forced NATO to adapt to the new conditions and not lose its focus on its role as a leading political-military organization for collective defense. September 11, 2001 is a date marked by terrorist attacks on the territory of the United States, which provoked a response from the Alliance. For the first time in its history, NATO was calling on member countries under the collective defense clause (Article 5) of the treaty. A coalition of countries, most of which NATO members, launched military action in order to destroy the bases of the al-Qaeda terrorist organization in Afghanistan and capture its leaders.

Meanwhile, NATO continues welcomed new members and built partnerships. In 2002, the NATO-Russia Council was established to maintain equal partnership relations, which initially played a positive role for dialogue and cooperation. In 2004, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia joined the Union, and in 2009, Croatia and Albania became full members. Subsequently, in 2017, Montenegro joined NATO, and in 2020, North Macedonia did the same.

I would like to note that in his speech before the start of hostilities and aggression against Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin, revealed a little-known fact about Russia's application for NATO membership. According to him, the subsequent refusal hardened the Alliance's hostile position towards Russia and predetermined Russia's decision to oppose further expansion near its borders.

This interpretation is not uncontested, considering Russia's status of a large country possessing powerful armed forces. Big countries such as the USA, Russia, China, and India have the ability to attract satellite countries as guarantors of their security. They have the resources to wage protracted wars. This makes it almost impossible for major countries to participate in common military alliances, because their influence over a third country creates disputes between military superpowers that are difficult to overcome. Even if such an alliance were to arise on the occasion of a common goal, it would be short-lived. In this regard, Russia's membership in NATO, where the USA is the established leader, would have had destructive consequences for the Alliance, especially with regards to the newly admitted member countries, former allies of Russia.

NATO's success in its eastward expansion gives it confidence that it can have full control over military-political crises—before, during, and in post-conflict recovery. This allows it to adapt to new hybrid threats and introduce new domains of military operations. This idea is at the heart of NATO's comprehensive approach, introduced in the Strategic Concept of 2010. The Alliance is increasing its ability to project influence almost everywhere in the world.

Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, following an unprovoked attack on Ukrainian territory, showed NATO that crisis management is important, but collective defense remains task number one. Priorities in building new military capabilities have changed once again. The war in Ukraine has proven the necessity of maintaining heavy and expensive weapon systems, of continuous modernization and a change in the theory of warfare.

The aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine on February 24 of this year and the war that broke out subsequently, accelerated the processes of NATO's adaptation to the new security environment and necessitated a more decisive approach to it. In

response to Russia's actions, NATO defense plans were activated, resulting in the deployment of both elements of NATO's Response Force and 40,000 troops on the eastern flank, along with significant air and naval capabilities, under direct NATO command and supported by allies on whose territory these forces are deployed. Four additional multinational battle groups were also established in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. At the meeting of the Heads of State of the Member States on 24 March in Brussels, it was declared that all measures are being taken to ensure the security and defense of the Allies, and that these measures are preventive and proportionate to the threats.

The war in Ukraine will definitely accelerate NATO's transformation, in the context of today's more dangerous strategic reality, including through the adoption of the new strategic concept in Madrid next June. Also, because now we find ourselves facing the most serious threat to Euro-Atlantic security in decades, NATO will significantly strengthen its deterrence and defense capabilities by building new ones. These steps will be supported by exercises with an increased emphasis on collective defense and interoperability. In addition, the Alliance is improving its cyber defense capabilities, increasing information sharing and situational awareness, increasing civil preparedness, strengthening its ability to respond to disinformation, as well as increasing its readiness to respond to chemical, biological and nuclear threats.

II. A NEW SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

The war in Ukraine has presented Europe, and NATO in particular, with challenges that had seemed unthinkable after the end of the Cold War. The emerging security environment is characterized by a prolonged period of instability, and despite apparent similarities to the Cold War, it is completely different.

After Russia's rejection of the existing world order and mechanisms of interaction with NATO, now, just as in the early 1950s, there are no established and confirmed rules of conduct or clarity in relations. The confrontational policy carried out by Russia materializes in provocations, but unlike the 1950s, they are in many more directions - from political, economic, energy, information and cyber, to military ones, while still remaining below the trigger threshold of Art. 5 of the Washington Treaty. In this regard, the

main challenge for NATO is the development of new rules of conduct and the clear delineation of “red lines”, which the Russian leadership must not violate, not only by actions, but also verbally. Such a “red line” is the oft-repeated threat to use nuclear weapons without any justification.

Establishing such new rules requires striking a balance between the demonstration of force and diplomacy. NATO must strengthen its eastern flank in a way that, on the one hand, is sustainable in the long term, and on the other hand, leaves no doubt in Russia that any attack on the security of any of the countries in the region will be met with both a swift, and large-scale response. The implementation of this strategy is related to a rethinking of the distribution of the burden among the allies in NATO in the direction of a significant increase in the commitment of the European member countries. If it wants to remain a significant geopolitical factor in the system of international relations in the 21st century, Europe must think and act strategically, and acting through NATO, in close cooperation with the USA, is the most suitable way for it to begin to demonstrate this ambition.

Diplomatically, the challenge for NATO is to find the right formula to allow communication with Russia to be maintained without appearing to soften its stance towards it, or accepting the current policy of the Russian leadership. The Alliance must unequivocally convey the message to Russia, regarding its firm and unwavering position in future mutual relations and seek legally binding mechanisms and agreements to break this relationship from entering a spiral of continuous escalation.

Unlike the Cold War, the current security environment is much more complex. The process of globalization has led to the creation of complex supply chains and strong interdependence between countries. In this environment, security and defense policy has long become no longer limited to the armed forces and military capabilities, but encompasses many other areas. This requires close interaction and cooperation between NATO and the EU. Combining NATO’s military capabilities with the EU’s economic and social potential will create the conditions for achieving and maintaining not only the necessary defense potential, but also the political, economic and social resilience of our societies against a variety of hybrid threats.

III. CHALLENGES TO THE ECONOMIES OF THE MEMBER COUNTRIES

The decision to increase the defense spending of NATO member countries to a guaranteed 2% of their GDP has no alternative, especially in today’s situation. Abrupt changes in the security environment have forced even countries that have traditionally maintained fairly low levels of spending to decide on unplanned increases in their defense budgets. We must realize that these are not short-term solutions. On the one hand, they need a certain technological time to produce the desired effect. On the other hand, these are decisions with long-term consequences. Europe must no longer allow a situation where defense capabilities are maintained at a level that calls into question the security of the continent.

At the same time, we are aware that the effect of the war on the economy is compounded by the consequences of the health crisis caused by COVID-19, the energy insecurity in the context of the transition to green energy and the overall rise in prices, as a result of a new economic crisis. European societies expect the pressure of crises to be mitigated through the implementation of active public policies. European governments are forced to find a balance and make unpopular decisions, including the financing of rearmament programs through multi-year borrowing.

The war has demonstrated the risks of over-reliance on suppliers of equipment, spare parts and raw materials with which there are no pre-existing agreements. NATO and EU countries cannot and should not isolate themselves from the rest of the world, but the need to maintain sufficient own production capacity and material stocks has been demonstrated once again. The logistical support of the armed forces, the normal functioning of the economy and the resilience of societies in times of crises require both the maintenance of sufficient reserves and greater connectivity between the allied countries.

Connectivity, especially in Europe, is of utmost importance due to the increasing importance of investment in research and the introduction of new technologies. Despite its great scientific and industrial potential, Europe has been lagging behind for decades in the development of defense-related technologies. This is due to a certain underestimation of military security threats and due to the still significant

fragmentation of the European defense industrial base, a trademark of the major European states.

This fragmentation is felt particularly strongly by smaller European countries, such as Bulgaria, which have limited capacity to independently support their technological development. To be sufficiently competitive, they must cooperate with each other and with the leading nations, as well as focus on developing distinct, key capabilities in which they have natural advantages. This cooperation can take place both within the framework of NATO initiatives, and within EU programs.

If they fail to integrate sufficiently into the common Alliance defense and industrial base, smaller European countries face the prospect of being limited to the status of consumers of modern high-tech defense products. Thus, periodically they will be forced to allocate significant financial resources, with a short-term effect, regarding the maintenance of existing and the development of new technologies.

The Republic of Bulgaria, for example, is faced with the need to carry out a rearmament program unprecedented in its scale, which should not only reflect the innovations in recent military conflicts, but also overcome over 30 years of lagging behind. The “peace dividend” was used by a number of governments (not only the Bulgarian one) to direct public resources to other more popular and public opinion-sensitive areas. The long-neglected needs of defense have accumulated to a level that requires a financial resource reaching and even exceeding 2% of GDP in certain years. It is quite logical to ask whether these financial resources will simply flow out of our society, or flow into industries that are much more economically developed. On the other hand, we are aware that our own industry currently cannot offer defense technologies that cover the entire spectrum of required defense capabilities, in the form of finished products.

The solution is to find forms of cooperation that allow the pooling of efforts and technology transfer within our own economy, in order to make it more competitive in the future. These should be forms of mutually beneficial cooperation, since Bulgaria, in

addition to being a consumer, has its own economic, technological, geographical, etc. advantages that can benefit large producers in their future operations.

Although many countries, especially from Eastern Europe, still prefer the more traditional form of bilateral cooperation, multilateral initiatives and alliance formats are becoming increasingly important within NATO and the EU. The European Defense Agency (EDA), the European Defense Fund (EDF) and the Defense Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) enable countries with more limited capabilities to engage in alliance initiatives and for their scientists and researchers to work alongside their counterparts under the best conditions that can be created in Europe. Mutual exchange, cooperation and joint work allow gradually all European countries to establish in a single scientific, industrial and technological base. Joining efforts leads not only to higher results, but also to their diffusion in the economies of the member states and their actual integration.

The new geopolitical environment raises many questions for NATO member states and the Alliance as a whole. In its 74-year history, the Alliance has proven its ability to adapt to changes in the security environment and successfully defend common values. Its capacity to make decisions and overcome crises is world-leading, and taking into account the Alliance’s connectivity between military and economic instruments, as well as the high technological level of defense capabilities, we can say that NATO has a future and remains a guarantor of security in its area of responsibility.

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