

The future of NATO's open-door-policy: prospects and challenges

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Abstract

From its beginning (1949) NATO was an inclusive international organization (Article 10 of The North Atlantic Treaty). In the post-bipolar international relations the enlargement of NATO has been one of the most successful NATO's internal policy. Russia Federation has been strongly opposed to its enlargement but NATO managed to calm down its objections. After the accession of Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia are the main aspirants for the full-fledge membership to NATO. But today, in the time of the new resetting United States/West-Russia Federation relations, the leaders of NATO are much more conscious about its open-door-policy. It goes to the NATO's enlargement to the Eastern as well as to the South Eastern Europe. The process of further enlargement of NATO should definitely be slowed down in the near future.

Key words: NATO, Russia Federation, NATO enlargement, Western Balkans

Introduction

The NATO Summit in Warsaw represents a cornerstone in adaptation of the Alliance to the new complex security scenario in the international relations. NATO's essential mission is not changed and has stayed the same: to ensure that the Alliance

remains a community of freedom, peace, security and shared values ,including individual liberty, human rights, democracy and the rule of law, with the accent on Europe, keeping the transatlantic ties strong and important for NATO's global role. The Warsaw Summit was also a confirmation of NATO's decision on enhancing military capabilities especially on its eastern border, with Russia being active again. It is important to stress that it was repeatedly stated in Warsaw that the Alliance does not seek any confrontation and poses no threat to Russia, if the safety and security of Europe and North America is not endangered.

By inviting Montenegro to participate in the Warsaw summit, the Alliance confirmed that it is on its way to full-fledge membership. However, NATO said a little about the future of its 'open door' policy. The Summit made a caution nod in the direction of Ukraine's and Georgia's aspirations for membership as well as those of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia. On the other side, influenced by the so-called *Russian factor*, Sweden and Finland are moving closer and closer to NATO, though without seeking full-fledge membership to the Alliance.

The paper is devoted to the future of NATO's open-door-policy. The author's main thesis is that because of the new crisis in the relations between NATO and Russia Federations, after the accession of Montenegro as 29th member of the Alliance, the further enlargement of NATO in near future is not going to be really on the agenda of this organization. Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the two counties from the region of the South Eastern Europe, who are willing to join the Alliance, and specially Georgia and Ukraine, despite how much they are performing their internal reforms in order to join the NATO, will not in the near future become a full-fledge members of that Alliance. That is not good for NATO. But what is even more important it is not good for the whole process of post-socialistic transformation and democratization of these aspirant countries. Generally, it is not good for the overall stability and security in Europe.

The importance of NATO's open-door policy for the Alliance

In 1997 at its summit in Madrid NATO has announced that the first three post-socialistic countries: Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland will become a full-fledge members of the Alliance at its next summit in 1999 in Washington D.C. It was not well

accepted in some academic and political circles. Immediately critics of the enlargement of NATO, the most quoted in that time was a famous George F. Kennan, claimed that extending NATO it would be the most fateful error of the American policy in the entire post-cold war era.¹⁹⁹ Despite such scenario the proponents of the enlargement of NATO claimed that the enlargement of NATO will have a beneficial impact on stability and security in Europe. Adams Daniel Rotfeld from SIPRI wrote that it should be seen as natural process and as an adequate response to new needs and challenges in Europe and whole international community (Rotfeld, 2011). In the post-bipolar world NATO become more than just a defence alliance: it is now the centre of gravity in the search for a security order in Europe. So the NATO enlargement decisions are basically expressions of political will of its members. The enlargement of NATO affects the security interests of members and applicants as well as the interests of countries outside the alliance. Enlargement of NATO is seen by both NATO members and aspirants as an extension of the zone of stability. The fundamental role of NATO is the politico-military integration of Europe (Rotfeld, 2011:23).

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, NATO chose not to remain an exclusive organization, with a limited membership and tight focus on the security of Europe's western half. The enlargement become the means to extend NATO's democratic security community to the former eastern socialist part of Europe. But geopolitics presents a limit to NATO's east enlargement. Russian intervention to Georgia in 2008 and its annexation of Crimea in 2014 were a Russian way of making Georgia and Ukraine an unattractive candidates for inclusion in the NATO. The process of enlargement is still seen as a vehicle for advancing security and stability across Europe but more and more as a case of unfinished business (Webber, Hallams, Smith, 2014).

Enlargement is a permanent feature of the NATO's summit conclusions. But somehow, NATO's mantra of creating a Europe whole and free often sounds hollow, if not insincere (Dempsey, 2016:25)

NATO's open door policy is not a peripheral issue, it is Alliance's founding principle In *The North Atlantic Treaty* that created NATO in April 1949, enlargement was enshrined as a fundamental element. Article 10 of the Treaty states that by unanimous agreement the alliance may invite to membership "any other European

¹⁹⁹ Porter, P.(2000) „Hooked on security“, The World Today, The 5th November 2000, p. 13.

State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area."²⁰⁰

In the *NATO Strategic Concept* document of 2010 is written that NATO's enlargement has contributed substantially to the security of Allies and the prospect of further enlargement, and the spirit of cooperative security have advanced stability in Europe more broadly. The goal of NATO; Europe whole and free, and sharing common values, would be best served by the eventual integration of all European countries that so desire into Euro-Atlantic structures.²⁰¹

In his *Annual Report 2016* Secretary General of NATO , Jens Stoltenberg stated that NATO's door is open to all European democracies that share the values of the Alliance, and are willing and able to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership (Stoltenberg, 2016:62).

In the post-bipolar American foreign policy strategy, NATO enlargement, is a bipartisan effort that has spanned the Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations, and has been seen as one of the most successful U.S. foreign policy achievements of the past two decades. As a result of that NATO's policy, more than 100 million Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europeans in 12 nations from Estonia to Albania can freely elect their own governments and pursue national priorities without fear of foreign invasion. Moreover, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, the alliance has benefited from the contributions of the new members, even if few of them are yet spending at least 2 percent of their gross domestic product on defense, the NATO target.²⁰²

The enlargement of NATO has progressed significantly over a period of the last two decades and has arrived at a point of near complete realization of its principal objectives. The core aim and intent of the enlargement agenda is to incorporate the entire region of post-socialistic Europe into the command and control structure of the military alliance. NATO has strategically encapsulated its core geospatial command

²⁰⁰ The North Atlantic Treaty (2001) NATO Handbook, Brussels, NATO Office of Information and Press, p.529.

²⁰¹ Active Engagement, Modern Defense.. Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, (2010) Brussels, NATO Public Diplomacy Division, p. 25.

²⁰² Haltzel M. (2014), „Extend NATO's umbrella to Montenegro and Macedonia“, The Washington Post, The 27th June 2014th

area, and therefore a successful conclusion of the enlargement process is a matter of the highest priority. (Milinkovich, 2017)

Southeastern Europe and the Balkan Peninsula are an essential component of this framework owing to their geopolitical and geostrategic significance. The entire Balkan Peninsula practically serves as a forward operating platform from which NATO's military force projection capability can be readily launched in the direction of the Middle East, Northern Africa, the Black Sea region, Eastern Europe, as well as Western Europe. This would signify the consolidation of NATO military supremacy in the entire hemisphere surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. For the establishment of NATO military pre-eminence in that region successful completing the enlargement process is a crucial necessity.

NATO is therefore tasked with affirming the position of the Western hemisphere, or North Atlantic axis, within the immediate environment that *comprises the former sphere of influence of the Soviet Union (Milinkovich, 2017:1)*

Today there are three main groups of countries as a potential candidates for the membership to NATO:

- the two Nordic countries, Sweden and Finland
- the countries within so-called Russian sphere of influence, Ukraine, Georgia, maybe Moldova
- the countries from the region of the South Eastern Europe/ Western Balkans, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, maybe Kosovo.

Rapprochement of Sweden and Finland to the NATO

In the recent years the policy dialogue between NATO and the two Nordic countries, Sweden and Finland has been much more intensive and fruitful than ever before in the history of their relations. In the framework of the format 28 + 2 (28 members of NATO plus Sweden and Finland) representatives of this two countries are seating at the same table with NATO representatives discussing contemporary political and security situation in the international arena.²⁰³ The first meeting in the new format

²⁰³ The format has been tried before with Central Asian countries but with limited success and little concrete follow up.

28+2 between NATO, Sweden and Finland took place in the deputy ambassador circle in January 2015. Denmark initiated a military assessment of the security situation in the Baltic Sea region. The next meeting was on 22 April 2015. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg chaired a meeting of the North Atlantic Council with Sweden and Finland. For the first time the Council discussed the security situation in the Baltic Sea region. NATO and two new partners, Sweden and Finland, concluded that Russia has been intensified its activities to secure its access to the Baltic Sea. It was perceived that Russia was testing NATO's determination to stand up for security in that region. Three partners; NATO, Sweden and Finland have agreed that in the following area they are going to intensified their mutual cooperation in the future:

- The exchange of situational awareness in the region
- The exchange of information about hybrid warfare
- Connection with NATO's rapid reaction forces
- Coordination of training and exercises in the region of Baltic Sea (Wieslander, 2016:140)

From year 2016, Swedish and Finnish representatives took part in the meetings of foreign affairs ministers and defense ministers of the members of the Alliance. Naturally, Sweden and Finland, as a non-members of NATO are not engaged into all decision-making processes and do not have the full access to NATO planning structures.

Military cooperation between NATO and Sweden and Finland has constantly been expanded too. The armed forces of this two Nordic countries are relatively small but technically very well equipped and highly developed. Besides that, the level of interoperability of their armed forces with NATO standards in military terminology, military routines and procurement is very high because since 1994 they have worked together with NATO within the framework of its partnership programmes Partnership for peace and Planning and Review Process. Sweden and Finland have joined this two NATO's program to contribute to the building of a common European security architecture (Čehulić, 2002) and to improve conduct of international peace operations. Both countries gave their military contributions to the NATO operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan, Sweden's forces have been deployed in Libya in 2011. In the Baltic Sea

region the Partnership for peace program became a vehicle for transparency and confidence building activities.²⁰⁴

At the Wales summit of NATO in 2014 the Enhanced Opportunities Program (EOP) for Sweden and Finland was introduced. In the following it is argued that, due to the high degree of security interdependence in the Baltic Sea region, and the degree of interoperability gained by Sweden and Finland, regional cooperation between NATO, Sweden and Finland should be deepened further, thereby strengthening security and stability in a strategically crucial region for the Alliance (Wieslander, 2016:134).

In the framework of so-called extended cooperative security Sweden and Finland have been intensifying their partnership with the Alliance particularly in the Baltic Sea region since the crisis in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea by Russia have accounted. From that time, both, the governments in Sweden and Finland and the leaders of NATO are stressing that all of them share a strategic interest in security and stability in the Nordic-Baltic region. Such cooperation includes not only the military dimension, such as common exercises but also a political dimension of cooperation. Both countries have taken part as partner nations in maneuvers BALTOPS in June 2015 and Crisis Management Exercise in March 2016. In the latest, Sweden and Finland were able to participate in a NATO's collective defense scenario for the first time.

On May 2016 the Swedish parliament ratified the Host Nation Support Agreement permitting NATO to use the Swedish territory, air space and waters in the event of a crisis or military attack on Swedish territory. Since 2014 a similar agreement NATO has got with Finland. Finland supports the NATO Centre of Excellence for Cyber Security and Strategic Communication in Tallinn and Riga and Sweden recently decided to join them both. Moreover the cooperation between NATO and Sweden and Finland has been strengthened in military training and in the defense industry.

Full-fledge membership of Sweden and Finland to NATO will have a significant strategic importance for the Alliance and its possibility to defend its northeast members and borders. Nowadays Russian system of anti-access/area denial (A2/AD system) - air defense system and anti-ship missiles in Kaliningrad restrict NATO's access to the strategically important Baltic Sea region, impeding the defense of the

²⁰⁴ Such kind of cooperation often included the participation of Russia Federation, including search and rescue exercises open to all NATO partners, as well as scientific research on mine disposal and handling of dangerous chemicals in the sea. (Mackey, 2016)

Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in the event of an attack to their territory (Kroenig, 2015) As a members of NATO, Finland could provide important information about Russian activities in the wider region, and Swedish airspace could be used automatically. Furthermore , on the southern coast of Sweden (Island of Gotland) NATO could create an air force base. Thus NATO could strengthen its position throughout the Baltic Sea region.

Sweden and Finland are members of the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFECO). Its goal is to promote defense policy cooperation among its members: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Since 2014 three Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) have been able to cooperate in its projects. But, as a members of NATO, they are thinking that their involvement in the NORDEFECO and their cooperation with the non-NATO members is going to, eventually to jeopardize their position within the Alliance. With Sweden and Finland as a full-fledge members of NATO NORDEFECO will lose its importance.

Last, but not less important, is the fact that the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO should send a political signal to Russia that NATO is still relevant and desirable international organization. It can improve NATO's own image, particularly its soft power, because both, Sweden and Finland, are democratic countries, committed to respect all kind of human rights and supporting worldwide United Nations peace missions. Also they are economically the richest countries in Europe.

Despite all of that, Sweden and Finland are very hesitant concerning their full-fledge membership to NATO. Their governments face public opinion that tends to reject NATO. While NATO remains its open door policy, resistance among Sweden and Finns to join NATO remains high. In the time of the highest crisis in Ukraine the survey showed that only 41 % of Swedish and less than one quarter of the Finnish population were in favor of the accession of their country to NATO (Domisse,2016:5). Both countries are hesitant regarding the delicate topic of NATO nuclear strategy and nuclear program. Finland is strongly against any kind of nuclear materials and weapons on its territory.

Neither Sweden nor Finland is likely to apply for NATO membership any time soon. As a senior NATO official stated "NATO partnerships are a largely unseen, but hugely important part of the Alliance today" (Appathurai, 2014:46). Today Sweden and

Finland have earned the status of gold NATO's partners meaning they had become recognized as contributors to security and as interoperable as most allies.²⁰⁵

NATO's open-door - policy towards Eastern Europe

NATO is no longer a crisis manager and an agency of political transformation, as it has been in the past, but an instrument of national and collective defense. This means that for the time being, countries will only be able to join the Alliance if the Alliance is able to defend them. It is therefore unlikely that Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova will become a member of NATO in the foreseeable future ((Kamp, 2016). Because of Russian aggression in Georgia in 2008 and the crisis in Ukraine in 2014, one might think that NATO would unanimously agree on the need for the Alliance to do as much as possible not only to project stability along its eastern borders but also to eventually have Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova become members of NATO. But NATO does not want to inherit border disputes, precisely they are bound to lead to further conflicts with Russia Federation (Dempsey, 2016:26.) Added to that is Russian intimidation of NATO, as former Russia's permanent representative to NATO, Alexander Grushko, made clear. "Any political game concerning NATO expansion into Georgia and Ukraine is filled with the most serious, most profound geopolitical consequences for all of Europe," Grushko told the Life News television channel (Dempsey, 2015:3)

The Ukraine Question

Even though NATO stated in its summit in Bucharest in 2008 that someday Ukraine would be invited to join the alliance, until recently, the Ukrainians made little effort to help make this invitation a reality.

Once an aspiring NATO ally under the leadership of President Viktor Yushchenko (Čehulić Vukadinović, 242-246) Ukraine's previous pro-Russia government under President Viktor Yanukovich blocked membership progress. In 2010, the

²⁰⁵ International Defense Cooperation Efficiency, Solidarity, Sovereignty (2016) Stockholm, Report from the Inquiry on Swede's International Defense Cooperation, p. 42.

Ukrainian parliament passed a bill that barred Ukraine from committing to “a non-bloc policy which means non-participation in military-political alliances.” (Pop, .2010).

The crisis in Ukraine in 2014 is forcing NATO to rethink the strategic benefits of its overall further enlargement. For many NATO members the crisis in Ukraine has had the two positive effect. It has return the attention of NATO back to Europe and force some NATO member allies do decrease their defense spending .²⁰⁶ But the attitude of further enlargement policy of NATO is definitely changing. This issue become very sensitive inside NATO.

Although nowadays leader of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko see the future of Ukraine in the West (not under Russian domination and influence), the country has a long way to go before NATO membership becomes a serious possibility.

NATO defense ministers agreed to work on a comprehensive package of long term measures in support of the Ukrainian armed forces, but this remained within the ambit of existing arrangements geared principally to defense reform and military modernization of Ukraine.²⁰⁷ Of a piece with this approach , NATO has also refrained from renewing its commitment of membership to Ukraine. NATO's pledge to these states in 2008 now seems mistaken.

Georgia

Like Ukraine, Georgia was promised eventual membership at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008. Since then, not all members of the Alliance have been supportive. This is especially true of France and Germany, which have an uncomfortably close relationship with Russia ²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Among others, NATO has established si command centers in Eastern Europe with the aim of supporting its new deployed 6000 forces in the Baltic and some Central European member states to protect that part of Europe from Russia influence. Second all NATO members finally will confront their decline in defense spending (Dempsey, 2015)

²⁰⁷ NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, press conference, Bruxelles, NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 3rd June 2014th

http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natodrive/opiniones_no618.htm, (visited on 11.06. 2014).

²⁰⁸ Erlanger S, Myers S. Lee, (2008) „NATO Allies oppose Bush on Ukraine and Georgia“ , New York Times, 3rd January 2008th , p.4.

Georgia has done everything possible to meet the criteria for joining NATO. Apart from reforming its armed forces to a very high standard, the country has been actively engaged in several NATO missions. Yet for all that, NATO as a whole is opposed to admitting this country, which is strategically located between the Black Sea, Russia, Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

The reason is that several NATO countries are not convinced that Georgia would add to NATO's security, despite its strategic location. Bluntly, countries such as Germany and France but also Poland fear that Georgia might at one stage invoke Article 5 of the NATO treaty, which obliges the allies to come to the defense of another ally under threat.

Georgia is vulnerable. Russia's occupation in August 2008 of South Ossetia and Abkhazia-together comprising about a fifth of Georgian territory-has made it increasingly difficult for Georgia to persuade NATO to grant it a Membership Action Plan, which would put the country on the road to accession. Even though Georgia has not been given a Membership Action Plan (MAP), it has a relationship with NATO that far exceeds the traditional MAP; such as the Annual National Program, the NATO-Georgia Commission, and the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package .

Some NATO diplomats have argued that the more NATO procrastinates over admitting Georgia , the more Russia will see this as a NATO's weakness and a vindication of its policies of recognition and support for Georgia's breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Endless procrastination will only embolden Russia further to bully its neighbors and try to restore the Soviet Union de facto , if not de jure (Demspey, 2016:26)

Georgia has transformed its military and has been steadfast with its support for overseas security operations. Georgia has contributed thousands of troops to Iraq, and hundreds of peacekeepers to the Balkans and Africa. Perhaps Georgia's greatest contribution is found in Afghanistan. Georgia currently maintains 860 troops in the country. This is the third-largest contribution after the U.S. and Germany. Moreover, Georgia contributes an infantry company to the NATO Response Force (Coffey, Kochis, 2016:2)

Moldova

On Moldova's sovereign territory in Transnistria, over the last two decades Russia has been able to impose a sort of area denial policy on Moldova's constitutional authorities, propping up a separatist regime and building up a de facto military base less than 40 kilometers from Moldova's capita. Conceived as a way to force Russia to withdraw its troops Moldova's self-imposed "constitutional neutrality" has failed to keep Russia out of its sovereign territory and has fallen short in preventing the transformation of Transnistria into a Russia active military and intelligence outpost (Munteanu, 2016).

Leading voices of the civil society are calling on Moldovan politicians to stop pretending that the countries neutrality is a viable solution and increase efforts in strengthening ties with NATO, expand bilateral form of military-to-military cooperation, while also stressing that this does not conflict with constitutional neutrality.

Relations with NATO started when Moldova joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and the Partnership for Peace program. The country's programme of cooperation with NATO is set out in an Individual Partnership Action Plan which is agreed every two years.

Through participation in Partnership for Peace training and exercises, Moldova is developing the ability of the 22nd Peacekeeping Battalion's forces to work together with forces from other countries, especially in crisis management and peacekeeping operations. These units could be made available for NATO peace support operations. In March 2014, over 40 Moldovan troops were deployed in support of the NATO-led peace-support operation in Kosovo, comprising an infantry manoeuvre platoon and an explosive ordnance disposal team.

Defense and security sector reforms are core areas of cooperation in which NATO and individual Allies have considerable expertise that Moldova can draw upon.

At the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales, Moldova was invited to take part in the newly launched Defense and Related Security Capacity Building (DCB) Initiative, which offers expert advice and assistance to interested partners.. Based on the request received from the Moldovan authorities, a tailored package of measures was endorsed by NATO defense ministers in June 2015 to assist in strengthening and modernizing the country's armed forces and reforming its national security structures.

Moldova is also participating in the Building Integrity Program. The defense ministry completed the NATO BI Self-Assessment and Peer Review Process in January 2016. The ministry receives tailor-made assistance and advice for strengthening integrity, accountability, transparency and good governance in the defense and security sector.

But, the more Moldova and NATO cooperate, the more military drills Russia conducts with the forces of the separatist regimes in Transnistria

NATO has no direct role in the conflict resolution process in the region of Transnistria. However, NATO closely follows developments in the region and the Alliance fully expects Russia to abide by its international obligations, including respecting the territorial integrity and political freedom of neighboring countries. But for sure Moldova will not be invited as a full-fledge member of NATO.

NATO enlargement to the South Eastern Europe/Western Balkans

The only de facto direction of NATO enlargement in recent times has been to the South Eastern Europe/Western Balkans. Three post-socialistic countries from that part of Europe have already joined the Alliance: Slovenia in 2004, Albania and Croatia in 2009. Two of them, Croatia and Slovenia were part of former Yugoslavia, and Croatia is the only post-socialist and at the same time post-conflict country which has managed to become the full-fledge member of NATO.

Very soon the process of ratification in all 28 members of NATO of the Accession Protocol of Montenegro to NATO is going to be finished, so Montenegro will be the 29th member country of that organization. But unfortunately Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina will have to wait for their membership to the Alliance. Kosovo is the specific case and Serbia will try in the future to keep its military neutrality (but within NATO's partnership program Partnership for Peace). Serbia is the only Balkan nation to have opposed NATO expansion in the region, because the bombings in Republic Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the mid 90s of the last century, and in Yugoslavia during the Kosovo conflict in 1999, affected territories inhabited and administered by Serbs.

The United States is in favor of the Balkan states' accession to NATO, although it does not act in pursuit of this goal as intensively as it did in the case of the Central

European countries. From the perspective of the U.S., the situation in the Balkans is stable, and enlargement should be preceded by the resolution of disputes between the neighbors.

On the other side, NATO's expansion to Montenegro and its potential expansion to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia is seen in Russian Federation as a provocation. Asked about the integration of these three Balkan countries into NATO Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, during a news conference on the sidelines of the 69th U.N. General Assembly at U.N. Headquarters in New York in 2014 told the Bosnian daily Dnevni Avaz „With regards to the expansion of NATO I see it as a mistake, even a provocation..... this is an irresponsible policy that undermines the determination to build a system of equal and shared security in Europe, equal for everyone regardless of whether a country is a member of this or that bloc.”²⁰⁹

Montenegro

Despite widespread support from the NATO member states for enlargement to the South Eastern Europe only Montenegro will join the Alliance. Immediately after the reestablishment of its statehood in 2006 Montenegro has expressed its formal interest in joining the Alliance. The same year Montenegro has joined the NATO's program Partnership for Peace and in 2009 the Membership Action Plan (MAP) was offered to it. On May 19 2016 NATO foreign ministers took the final step toward inviting Montenegro to join the Alliance by signing NATO's formal accession protocol. As stated by NATO "Montenegro will now participate in all NATO meetings as an observer. Once all allies have ratified the Protocol, Montenegro will be invited to accede to the Washington Treaty and become 29th member of the Alliance".²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov speaks during a news conference on the sidelines of the 69th U.N. General Assembly at U.N. Headquarters in New York, 26th September 2014th, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-balkans-russia-idUSKCN0H011W20140929>, (visited on 14.04. 2017).

²¹⁰ <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R44550.pdf>, (visited on 17.04| 2017).

Some critics maintain that the Montenegrin government has yet to adequately address long-standing concerns about judiciary and corruption.²¹¹ They also note that a majority of Montenegrins appear to oppose NATO accession. But speaking in May 2016 Montenegrin Defense Minister Mrs Pejanović - Đurišić highlighted Montenegrins readiness to join the Alliance stated that Montenegro has the required capacities, recognized the true values of democracy and has sufficient dedication to be a credible and reliable partner within NATO. She has admitted that requirements for joining the NATO have proven to be critical catalysts for all kind of reforms , particularly reforming the military and strengthening the role of law in Montenegro (Pejanović - Đurišić, 2016).

Montenegro is a small but geopolitically important Balkan nation. Its inclusion to NATO would make the entire northern shore of the Mediterranean NATO territory, from Turkey to Spain. Montenegro is also close to important U.S. bases, including Naval Air Station Sigonella in Italy, which hosts P-8 sub-hunting planes that patrol the Mediterranean, and the U.S. Naval Base at Souda Bay, Greece, which hosts the NATO Missile Firing Installation, the only location in Europe where the alliance can test-fire missiles (Goure, 2016).

Montenegro's military is relatively small, but it has already proven itself a worthy partner for the U.S. Montenegrin troops took part in NATO's International Security Assistance Force mission in Afghanistan from 2010–2014, and its men and women in uniform continue to contribute to the follow-on Operation Resolute Support, helping to advise, train, and assist Afghan security forces. Montenegro has donated 1,600 weapons and 250,000 rounds of ammunition to the Afghan National Army.²¹² In November 2016, Montenegro hosted a NATO civil-emergency response exercise, code name CRNA GORA 2016.

²¹¹ „Key Founding of the 2016 Report on Montenegro“, Bruxelles, fact sheet European Commission, 9th November 2016th,

http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-3638_en.htm (visited on 10.11.2016).

²¹² “Relations with Montenegro,“, Bruxelles, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 26th May 2016th http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49736.htm (visited on 10.01. 2017).

Montenegro's new Prime Minister, Duško Marković, reiterated that Montenegro is committed to joining NATO, telling a session of parliament in November 2016 that the "Cabinet that you will vote for today will take us to NATO."²¹³

As to whether Montenegro, a small and not very wealthy country, would enhance NATO's overall security, the added value is questionable. But Montenegro's strategic location in this part of the Balkans, combined with its government's Atlantist outlook and commitment to joining the EU, could serve NATO's interests. Moreover, Montenegro's NATO accession would quash plans by Russia to build a naval base in that republic. Russia, which has a sizable economic influence in Montenegro, coupled of times was warned the government in Podgorica against moving closer to the NATO,²¹⁴ advice that Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Đukanović has brushed aside.

So the accession of Montenegro would be a tangible proof that Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty is still alive and it can demonstrate that Moscow does not exercise a hidden veto over NATO membership (Sikharulidze Vasil, Bakhtadze Rati, 2016:48) Also it can encourage other potential aspirants by showing that the door to NATO membership remains open.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

In April 2008, Bosnia and Herzegovina stated its desire to join NATO, and the country was offered its MAP in 2010. Bosnia and Herzegovina has made some progress in defense reform and has even deploy troops to Afghanistan, but the country is still far off from joining the alliance.

First and foremost, Bosnia and Herzegovina must register all immovable defense properties as state property for use by the country's defense ministry. Little

²¹³ "Montenegro's Parliament Endorses New Cabinet," Reuters, 28th November 2016th, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-montenegro-politics-idUSKBN13N1OT> (visited on 10.01.2017).

²¹⁴ NATO's Planned Balkan Expansion a 'Provocation': Russia's Lavrov," Reuters, 29th September 2014th, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-balkans-russia-idUSKCN0H011W20140929> (visited on 11.01.2017).

progress on this has been made. In addition, the internal politics of Bosnia and Herzegovina make NATO membership controversial.

Reforms of the security and defense sector have been delayed, modernization of army has been slowed and a common vision of three constitutional peoples (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs) of the country's membership to NATO is lacking. The main political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina support NATO membership, and it is officially still one of the main political foreign policy goal of that country but a common vision of three constitutional peoples (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs) of the country's membership to NATO is lacking. In practice, more than 80% of the support for NATO is coming from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and less than third of population in Republic of Srpska supports integration to NATO ((Žornaczuk, 2012:3).

The President of Republic of Srpska Mr Milorad Dodig stated that if Bosnia and Herzegovina will be invited to full -fledge membership to NATO, Republic of Srpska will organize a referendum for it. Due to the peculiar constitutional arrangements set up under the Dayton Agreement in 1995 Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot be fully integrated within the Western political and military system without the agreement of the Republic of Srpska. That makes it essential to have in Banja Luka a cooperative regime that would be receptive to the Western strategic objectives and willing to place the resources of the Serb Bosnian entity at their disposal, even to the point of self-extinction (Karganovich, 2017:7)

The Republic of Macedonia

With the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991, Macedonia became an independent state under its new constitutional name: Republic of Macedonia. Greece quickly protested on the baseless grounds that the name Macedonia, which is the same as that of Greece's northern province, implied regional territorial claims by the new nation.

In 1993, Macedonia joined the United Nations under the provisional name "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia."Macedonia was one of the first former Yugoslav republic which has joined NATO's program Partnership for Peace in 1995. The same year Macedonia and Greece agreed to a U.N.-brokered interim accord in which Athens agreed not to block Macedonia's integration into international organizations,

such as NATO, so long as it called itself “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, until both sides agreed on a mutually acceptable name.

In year 1999 Macedonia has received NATO’s program Membership Action Plan and completed it in 2008—meaning it had met all requirements to join the Alliance. Thus, Macedonia was certified by the Alliance as qualified for membership. But at NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, when everybody was expected that together with Albania and Croatia (as three members of the Adriatic Charter) Macedonia will be invited to full-fledge membership to NATO in 2009, it has been vetoed by Greece because of a dispute over its constitutional name. Macedonia did not get close to joining NATO despite the favorable verdict of the International Court of Justice in December 2011. The court pointed to the violation of the agreement between Macedonia and Greece (signed in 1995) by Greece because the Greece was obliged not to block Macedonian’s membership to any international organization. Even so, Greece continues to block Macedonia’s membership, not only to the NATO but also to the European Union.

Despite of that, in its intention to join the Alliance, Macedonia still very enthusiastically participates in NATO operations. Relative to the size of population, and its military expenditures which range from 1,2 to 1.9 of its GDP, its contingent was one of the largest in Afghanistan, where its troops acquitted themselves well in combat. Macedonia is still very active member of NATO’s program Membership Action Plan (MAP), the last stage of cooperation between the NATO and applicant country before the full-fledge membership to NATO.

The ethnic conflict in Macedonia in 2001, and the deployment of the NATO contingent afterwards, influenced the perception of the NATO in the country as a guarantor of the stability and integrity of Macedonia.

But faced with the constant political instabilities, ethnic tensions between the two major ethnic groups: Macedonians and Albanians, and very poor economic and social situation, Macedonia is indicated as a country of high level of risk of internal conflict and a potentially subject for spreading instabilities to its neighborhood. In the times when EU and NATO are not willing to involve stronger in Macedonia, the Russia is offering to Macedonia to join its economic and even security arrangements (Bugajski, 2017). So it seems that Macedonia, like was Montenegro, in the near future will be the collateral victim of the new re-setting of relation between the United States/West and Russia Federation.

Kosovo

Kosovo is not currently considered as a future member of the NATO within the nowadays NATO's members countries but the government of Kosovo declares its willingness to join the Alliance in the future. But Kosovo is not recognized as an independent state by some NATO members. At the same time Kosovo is still an object and the subject of international political relations. Because of its internal instability, and the absence of its functional security forces, NATO troops, together with the forces of the EU, are still deployed in Kosovo. Progress in Kosovo's European integration (Stabilization and Association Agreement was offered to Kosovo), and its dialogue with Serbia, could also prove favorable.

Conclusion

NATO has underpinned European and North America's security for almost seven decades. It is not surprise that many countries in the transatlantic region that are not already members wish to join the Alliance. In that contests NATO's open door policy is critical in mobilizing Europe and its allies around the collective transatlantic defense. Besides that, NATO has done more than any other organization, including the European Union, to promote democracy, stability, and security in the Euro-Atlantic region. For all that reasons NATO should keep its open door policy and take measures to help aspirant countries reach their membership (Coffey, Kochis, 2016:1). These two authors very enthusiastic are suggesting to the NATO's leaders, especially to the U.S. policy the following:

Keep the door open

- **Show support for Macedonia.** The U.S. should pressure Greece behind the scenes to allow Macedonia to join NATO under the terms of the 1995 interim accord.
- **Make clear that Russia does not have a veto right.** Russia should never be seen as having a veto over a potential country's membership in NATO. Just because a country was once occupied by the Soviet Union or under the

domination of the Russian Empire does not mean it is blocked from joining the alliance in perpetuity.

- **Ensure that NATO meets with the three aspirant countries (Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia) at the heads-of-government level not** to the level of foreign minister, as it is now.
- **Establish realistic expectations for Ukraine.** The U.S. should seek to improve relations between NATO and Ukraine while recognizing that NATO membership is not currently a realistic option.
- **Support Bosnia and Herzegovina.** The U.S. should help NATO keep Bosnia and Herzegovina on track for eventual membership once MAP requirements are completed.
- Ensure that the alliance is clear on Georgia's future membership (Coffey, Kochis, 2016:3)

There are now three official candidate countries to join NATO: the Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Georgia. Some are making better progress than others.

We can safely assume that the process of enlargement of NATO normatively will continue but besides the open door policy of NATO 'on the papers and documents' we will face more and more the willingness of some NATO's members to slow down the whole process. The only de facto direction of NATO enlargement in recent times has been to the Western Balkans. So the NATO should seek consensus to accept the other countries aspiring to membership, including Macedonia from that region. Further enlargement of NATO to the region of the Western Balkans will not definitely strongly strengthen the capabilities of that organization. All previous rounds of NATO's enlargement has shown that from a security point of view, membership was a huge psychological benefits for the new countries but from the NATO's point of view, the short-terms benefits were questionable until serious defense reforms took hold among the new comers and they can put their weight. But the open door policy of NATO can serve to consolidate the overall security in the Western Balkans, still very turbulent European region.

And it can put additional impact on the process of the European integration. In the times of decreasing concrete American involvement in the region, and Europe in general, and the ineffectiveness of the United Nations representative's missions in resolving the main disputes, European members of NATO in particular should seek

solidarity with regard to enlarge the NATO. In that process the neighboring countries of the region (Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, even Turkey) have already shown their interests. Poland, a strong member of Visegrad group of countries is also in favor of the enlargement process of NATO , not only to the region of the Western Balkans.

Despite this calls, there are some voices within the so-called old NATO's member countries (especially in Germany and France) strongly opposing the further enlargement of NATO over the next several years.

They are stating that NATO was enlarged too quickly and with all its internal problems connected with the adaptation to the new international reality and security challenges, the NATO's leaders have instead firstly to agree on how to resolve that new challenges, including managing its relations with the Russia Federation. After that NATO can consider a next round of its open door policy.

Today NATO members have to deal with two competing considerations about its further enlargement. One is strategic values of admitting new members. The other is how Russia Federation would react to that NATO's policy. Some members states of NATO are more often raising the questions whether membership of any new country in the NATO can contribute to the overall security and stability of the Alliance in the future. If not, they are suggesting that NATO leaders will have to think twice about admitting it. Ongoing territorial disputes with Moscow in Ukraine and Georgia has shown that the process of further enlargement of NATO should definitely be slowed down in the near future.

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