

## 15 LET SLOVENSKEGA ČLANSTVA V NATU SKOZI PERSPEKTIVO SPREMINJAJOČEGA SE VARNOSTNEGA IN GEOPOLITIČNEGA OKOLJA

## 15 YEARS OF SLOVENIAN NATO MEMBERSHIP THROUGH THE LENS OF THE CHANGING GLOBAL SECURITY AND GEOPOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

**Povzetek** Nato leta 2019 praznuje svojo 70-letnico obstoja. V tem času se je spoprijel z raznovrstnimi varnostnimi in političnimi izzivi, ki so zaznamovali njegova delovanje in razvoj ter usmerjali tok sprememb in prilagoditev na dinamično varnostno okolje. Prav tako letos tudi Republika Slovenija praznuje 15 let svojega članstva v zavezništvu. Od prvotne hladnovojne vloge zavezništva pa do danes se je mednarodno varnostno okolje temeljito spremenilo. Zavezništvo se je okrepilo ter razširilo z novimi članicami, ni več stroge blokvske delitve med vzhodom in zahodom, varnostno okolje pa so zaznamovali nove grožnje ter tudi ostanki starih. Republika Slovenija je leta 2004 postala enakopravna članica zavezništva in tako prevzela del odgovornosti za zagotavljanje skupne varnosti. Kot polnopravna članica Nata je Slovenija prispevala ter vplivala na ključne odločitve in zaveze, sprejete v okviru zavezništva v preteklih 15 letih. Še vedno pa se spoprijema z izzivi izpolnjevanja nekaterih skupaj sprejetih zavez, med katerimi so gotovo najodmevnejši tisti, ki zadevajo višino izdatkov za obrambo. Hkrati lahko ugotovimo, da so širše varnostne in geopolitične spremembe pomembno vplivale tudi na varnost in obrambno politiko Republike Slovenije ter na nacionalni razvoj zmogljivosti in načrtovanja. Kot ugotavljata avtorja, kljub spremenjenemu varnostnemu okolju oziroma prav zaradi njega Nato ostaja najustreznejši okvir za celostno zagotavljanje obrambe Republike Slovenije.

**Ključne besede** *Nato, Slovenija, obramba, varnostno okolje, prilagoditev.*

**Abstract** The year 2019 marks the 70th anniversary of NATO; furthermore, 2019 also marks 15 years of Slovenian membership of the Alliance. NATO has faced a diverse array of security and political challenges throughout its history, which have guided a constant adaptation of its defence posture and working practices. Since the initial Cold War role of the Alliance the international security environment has changed

significantly. The Alliance has been enlarged and strengthened by new members, the strict block divisions between the East and the West have ceased to exist, and the security environment has evolved through new and old security threats. Slovenia became an equal member of the Alliance in 2004, when it took up an important share of responsibility for common security. As a full member of NATO, Slovenia has contributed to and influenced key Alliance decisions. Nevertheless, Slovenia still struggles to fulfil some of the commitments it made, particularly when it comes to defence spending. At the same time we may note that broader security and geopolitical changes have also had a significant impact on the security and defence policy, as well as on the development of national capabilities and defence planning of the Republic of Slovenia. As noted by the authors, in spite of the changes in the international security environment or, even more, particularly because of them, NATO remains perhaps more than ever before the most appropriate framework for the comprehensive defence of the Republic of Slovenia.

**Key words** *NATO, Slovenia, defence, security environment, adaptation.*

**Introduction** The retired marine General and former US Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, in his efforts to convey the message of the enduring importance of the Alliance to the highest ranking members of the US government and public, stated that “if NATO did not exist today, we would have to build it” (Mattis 2017; Tertrais, 2019, p 4). While the message might have been oriented towards an internal US audience and placed in the specific political framework of the current US administration, it conveyed the broadly relevant observation of the increasing trend of global instability and complexity, as well as the growing interdependency of emerging global threats, which do not allow for Allies bickering between themselves but call for an even closer cooperation. At the same time, in his term of office as General, Mattis never forgot to restate the importance of fair burden sharing between the Alliance members, which should not be over-dependent on US resources and capabilities. This in itself was a decade-long endeavour, but has particularly gained momentum in the last decade and especially during the latest US administration, while also being closely related to the increasing urgency of the development of appropriate and sufficient Alliance defence and deterrence capabilities.

The Alliance has come a long way since its formation in 1949. It has been able to survive through the era of the Cold War and find a new/old *raison d'être*, in spite of some critics calling it an obsolete relic of the past. Moreover, it has proven to be a relevant actor in peace, stability and security beyond its initial framework, continuing to attract the aspirations of the new members which have expanded the “Euro-Atlantic Family” to today’s 29 members – soon to be 30. The Alliance of today is indeed not the Alliance of 1949, nor that of 2004 when Slovenia joined NATO as a fully-fledged member. The contemporary security environment which indivisibly impacts the process of transformation and adaptation of the Alliance is fundamentally more complex and interdependent, with elements of renewed struggle

between great and rising global (but also regional) powers, and the geopolitics of the past again gaining prominence. The Alliance furthermore continues to face persistent and evolving complex security challenges emerging from destabilized and failed states, particularly along its southern neighbourhood, ranging from violent uprisings, civil wars, instability, regional conflicts, irregular mass migrations, human and drug trafficking, organized crime and terrorism. All these and many other aspects of today's vastly changed security environment shape the way we perceive security and defence and the role of NATO.

As we will argue in this article, the Atlantic Alliance, amid the changing security landscape and threats, remains relevant and essential, perhaps more than ever before. As an Alliance of democratic countries which share common values, it continues to represent the fundamental guarantor of peace and stability in an increasingly uncertain and complex geopolitical environment. On the occasion of Slovenia's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of NATO membership we paraphrase the aforementioned statement of General Mattis: if today Slovenia was not yet a member of NATO, it would be in our best national security interest to ask for membership without delay.

As we will argue later in this article, this is not only a politically sound statement, but first and foremost a conclusion reached through the analysis and examination of the current international security environment and its trends, NATO's role in this changing geopolitical landscape, and the national security system and interests of the Republic of Slovenia. In this article, we aim to examine different aspects of the changing security environment since Slovenia's accession to NATO, Alliance adaptation, and the consequent implications for Slovenian defence policy and planning. A special focus will be made on several important milestones and broader trends that have shaped both NATO and Slovenia's perspectives and defence policies, continuous adaptation and transformation. The article is primarily based on the authors' extensive professional experience and involvement with NATO and national defence policies. It furthermore relies heavily on the analysis of relevant public documents and statements by senior leaders and representatives, as well as other relevant academic and professional papers.

## **1 SLOVENIA'S NATO MEMBERSHIP IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE WIDER INTERNATIONAL SECURITY SETTING**

In order to be able to thoroughly analyze contemporary discussions on Slovenia's role in NATO, we must first take a brief look back at the time of Slovenia as a newly independent state. It was a time when the Slovenian leadership was searching for a suitable international framework to implement its fundamental national security interests. As noted by several authors, a broad national foreign and defence policy early adopted a key priority to join the Euro-Atlantic integrations, primarily NATO and the EU (Grizold and Vegič, 2002; Bebler, 2009; Jelušič, 2009 etc.). Nonetheless, while NATO might have been the most reasonable way forward for Slovenia, at least according to the vast majority of national defence and international affairs experts,

it was not the only option to be discussed in a wider public discourse at the time (Bebler, 2002, pp 639-644; Grizold and Vegič, 2002, p 384). As noted by Grizold and Veglič, several theoretical concepts on national defence circled in Slovenian public and political spheres following Independence in 1991. Among other alternative concepts, the authors mention the formation of self-sustaining defence forces, gaining the status of armed or unarmed neutrality, and reaching bilateral security assurance agreements with other states (Grizold and Vegič, 2002, p 384).

In 1994, interest in joining the Euro-Atlantic path solidified among the Slovenian political leadership, and became the formal political goal of the Republic of Slovenia through the Supplements to the Resolution on the Starting Points for a National Security Plan, adopted by Slovenia's National Assembly (Grizold and Vegič, 2002, p 384). In the same year Slovenia began formal cooperation with NATO by becoming one of the first partners within the framework of the then newly established Partnership for Peace Programme (NATO PfP) on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1994. Partnership for Peace, which celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, was established, among other things, as a response to a growing interest in NATO membership among the post-Cold War independent (eastern) European states. As was early recognized, the intention of the PfP was not to substitute (eventual) full membership, but to be a comprehensive mechanism to prepare interested countries for their potential membership, while also enabling a wide framework of cooperation for partner states who did not intend to join NATO. Individual partnership plans (IPAP), together with the PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP) (and alongside the later adopted Membership Action Plans), formed a core of national reform efforts on the path towards NATO. While partner nations indeed, and reasonably, do not undergo the same planning and coordination processes as Allies, PARP is notably the closest a partner country can get to the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP), and as such served as important guidance for national defence planning at the time (Šavc, 2009).

The National Strategy for Accession to NATO from 1998 further defined the strategic priorities of Slovenian efforts to join the Alliance, stating, among other things, that NATO membership would guarantee Slovenia a long-term stable political-security environment which would foster comprehensive social development, a higher degree of national security, a role and responsibility in international discussions on relevant security challenges in Europe, and so on. It also noted the economic and scientific benefits that would be part of Slovenia's accession to NATO (National Strategy for the Accession of the Republic of Slovenia to NATO – Nacionalna strategija Republike Slovenije za vstop v NATO, 1998). In addition to this, as noted by Bebler, accession to NATO was to a large extent viewed as an important aspect of the country's general political integration into the community of Western democratic states (Bebler, 2009). The results of the 2003 referendum proved to be largely positive, with 66.08% of voters in favour of NATO (MZZ, 2019). Slovenia joined NATO in 2004 as part of the largest enlargement in NATO history, along with Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia, bringing NATO to 26 member countries.

And the rest is history – or not quite. By becoming a NATO member, the real work for Slovenia had only really begun. While indeed it took a decade of challenging reform and adaptation processes to finally gain membership in 2004, by becoming a full NATO member Slovenia took over a sizeable amount of responsibility and commitment to the sustainment of Euro-Atlantic security and stability. Slovenia joined NATO in the post 9/11 era, with a substantial amount of Alliance efforts shifted towards out-of-area operations and peace building missions, including in the Western Balkans. This had a significant impact on Slovenia's early efforts and contributions to the international framework (even before formal accession to NATO), through extensive participation in a number of missions and operations (e.g. ALBA, SFOR, KFOR, etc.) (Jelušič, 2009). As a newly joined Ally, Slovenia was also quick to take on responsibilities as part of the coalition forces in Afghanistan, joining the ISAF mission in March 2004 (Grizold and Zupančič 2009). Contribution to international operations and missions is known to be a strong point of Slovenia's NATO membership, with average participation relative to the number of troops higher than the Alliance average (MORS, 2017).

The process of accession to NATO undeniably had an important impact on the overall defence system of the Republic of Slovenia, and while not the sole factor, it can be argued that NATO accession was (and continues to be) one of the key drivers of the professionalization and (ongoing) reforms in the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF). While membership brought with it several demanding commitments, some of which Slovenia still struggles to fulfil, it also gave Slovenia an opportunity to voice its security concerns at the “top table” while being seated among equals.

## **2 15 YEARS ON – NATO IN A CHANGED SECURITY ENVIRONMENT**

Since its founding in 1949, NATO has gone through extensive processes of change and adaptation, both with regard to adjusting to the evolving security environment, and in line with political directions from the growing forum of leaders of the Allied nations. As noted by Stavridis, the original Alliance was optimized for the lengthy, bipolar Cold War, and had a relatively simple mission: stop the Soviets (Stavridis, 2019). For a long time this has been no longer the case, and the scope and objectives of the Alliance have since vastly expanded. As argued by the present authors, we can frame the recent transformation and adaptation of the Alliance along three key turning points or milestones.

The first fundamental turn in Alliance history was the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War period. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and discontinuation of the Warsaw Pact brought fresh air of peace and stability to the European continent while presenting NATO with its first “crisis of identity” while it was readapting to its new role in the broader Euro-Atlantic Security infrastructure (Robertson, 2004, pp 25-26). If, for some critics, it seemed that the further role of NATO was to some extent redundant, the wars of former Yugoslavia served as a wake-up call and a reminder of the continual necessity for the Alliance, even if

in a drastically different role than during the Cold War period. The next notable milestone in NATO's transformation and adaptation process was the 9/11 attacks and the wake of the global fight against terrorism (Robertson, 2004, p 27). It marked the first, and until now the only, invocation of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, and the start of a lengthy engagement in NATO's out-of-area mission in Afghanistan. This brings us to the last and perhaps key turning point – the root of the present shift of focus back to defence and deterrence: Russian aggression in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea (Burns and Lute, 2019, pp 38-40).

As is noted in various perspectives, the international security environment today is vastly different from some 15 years ago when Slovenia became a fully-fledged member of the Alliance. While there are indeed areas of positive development in certain parts of the globe, of which for us the most relevant is surely the overall stabilization of our near neighbourhood in the Western Balkan region (WB), the world is undeniably more dangerous and complex today than was in 2004. For a start, one cannot fail to notice increasingly competitive geopolitical relationships between key global (and regional) powers, sometimes verging on open belligerency, which through the interconnectedness of today's security environment presents a highly combustible mixture of interdependent state and non-state actors and threats. We must be aware of and open to the persistence of schisms and tense relationships between some of the key global actors (including among certain Allies, and also in our close neighbourhood of the WB), while witnessing a more general decline in multilateralism on a global scale and certain worrying signs of desire in some circles to go back to the failed mechanisms of isolation and re-nationalization of defence policies.

While, as noted, the Alliance is known for its continuous adaptation, modernization and transformation, there is undeniably no other single event that has changed the course of NATO to the same extent as Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, making the 2014 Wales Summit perhaps one of the most important summits in NATO's recent history (Rasmussen 2014). As was clearly and unmistakably noted by the Wales NATO Summit Communiqué, Russia's aggressive actions, the destabilization of the wider Eastern Ukraine, and the illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea represent a gross violation of international law and a worrisome threat for broader European security and stability (Wales Summit Declaration, paragraph 16). As a consequence, relations between NATO and Russia drastically deteriorated. Some commentators might even go so far as to compare current relations between NATO and Russia as a return to a "new Cold War period". Understanding Russia's revisionist aspirations and aggressive posture in disregard of accepted international norms, no matter what we call it, led Alliance leaders to re-shift the focus of the Alliance back to its "core business" – deterrence and defence. Despite this, it would not be accurate to claim that we have found ourselves in a new "Cold War era". The balance of global actors, geopolitical framework and ideological base of the conflict are fundamentally different from during the Cold War, and so are the actions of the actors involved. NATO and



Russia had, prior to 2014, in fact proceeded on a path of cooperation and dialogue following the end of the Cold War. The NATO-Russia Council (NRC), established in 2002, was a prime example of such cooperation. It was suspended following Russia's illegal military intervention in Ukraine and its violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Alliance nevertheless agreed to keep some channels of communication open at ambassadorial level and above, the so-called "double-track" approach, to allow the exchange of views and prevent misunderstandings which might lead to an undesired escalation (Wales Summit Declaration, paragraphs 21-22). Still, the NRC at ambassadorial level meets only sporadically and with limited effect, as the positions of the parties on the majority of issues are far apart, particularly when it comes to the main issue for discussion – the situation in Ukraine.

Challenges from the East are indeed top priority for the Alliance as a whole, and the major driving factor of current adaptation processes. It is also an open secret that the Allies on the eastern flank of the Alliance, with recent historical memory of life under Russian oppression, are the ones who are most directly affected by and concerned with the Russian threat. Russian actions in Ukraine, and their previous travails in Georgia, showcased the Russian leadership's will and determination to actively pursue its political objectives and sphere of influence (particularly in the area deemed by Russia as its 'near-abroad'). At the same time, challenges stemming from revisionist Russia transcend the concerns of neighbouring countries and manifest themselves in several different forms, most notably as part of modern hybrid warfare. Recent publicly renowned cases include the Salisbury chemical attack<sup>1</sup> and cyber activities against the Organization for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons (*OPCW*) in The Hague (Omand, 2018). While the challenges presented by complex and evolving threats from the East might sometimes seem distant to the Slovenian public, it would be naive to think that countries such as Slovenia are either immune or unrelated, particularly when taking into consideration various elements of transnational modern hybrid activities.

A distinct but at the same time closely connected issue is the alleged ongoing Russian violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), and the US decision to withdraw from it. While NATO is not a party to the treaty, it is without any shred of doubt that without the INF the security balance in Europe has the potential to noticeably change. International control of nuclear proliferation itself forms one of the foundations of the Euro-Atlantic security infrastructure. The new reality brought NATO into a position where it will have to comprehensively re-examine its strategies and find a feasible and acceptable solution to present a security dilemma in the absence of an adequate treaty (NAC Statement on Russia's failure to comply with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, 2019). Lurking behind are also Russia's stated objectives of building new, hyper-modern

<sup>1</sup> *The attempted murder of a former Russian military intelligence officer and agent of the British Secret Service, Sergei Skripal, and his daughter using the military grade nerve agent novichok, on 4 March 2018 in Salisbury, England (Omand 2018).*

capabilities that might arguably also have an impact on the strategic equilibrium (Mackinnon, 2019). It is not an unwarranted pessimism to expect that the diplomatic efforts to find a new international solution to succeed the INF treaty will be long and perplexing (potentially including more parties that have developed adequate intermediate nuclear capabilities in the meantime).

While Russia's approach to international security and affairs might be a crucial strategic challenge for the Alliance, international terrorism is and will most likely remain the most imminent threat to NATO countries (Brussels Summit Declaration, paragraph 10), as we can also witness in the daily news. The lethality of terrorist acts, the spread of the religious ideology behind those horrific acts, and the influence that they have on home fronts and abroad is a clear testament to the scale and complexity of what the Allies are facing, both individually and with the support of other Allies. In fact NATO has been reinforcing its framework for countering terrorism quite substantially in recent years. For a start, we should not neglect the fact that the first and only invocation of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty has in fact been in response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 against the USA. The fight against terrorism today spans numerous NATO work strands. It is understandably tightly connected to the work of projecting stability and cooperative security (a commonly agreed core task of NATO) as the (in-)stability of the Alliance neighbourhood often forms a flourishing environment for the development of violent extremism and radicalism that might manifest in terrorist actions. NATO's Southern periphery is deemed to be particularly vulnerable in that sense, with regional instability, failed states, internal conflicts, displaced people and irregular migrations spanning from North Africa and Sahel to the Middle East (The Secretary General's Annual Report, 2018). These challenges indeed transcend the issue of terrorism and demand a comprehensive approach in addressing the root causes of the instability. It would be hubris to think that NATO alone can resolve the situation.

The Alliance is at best just one of the actors playing a relevant, although only a rightly limited role in supporting regional and international efforts for stabilization and development, notably through various cooperation platforms (e.g. the Mediterranean dialogue initiative) and other forms of engagement. When talking about the South we cannot omit irregular migration – a challenge which is very well known and very often on the mind of the average Slovenian when they think about security. While NATO again is not a key player when it comes to irregular migration, it does have a role, particularly through maritime security (e.g. in the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean) and the prevention of human trafficking, including indirectly through its contribution to the stability and security of the countries of origin (Stoltenberg, 2016). This role did not come naturally to the minds of many inside the Alliance's circles, and it took the migrant crisis of 2015, its vast scale and repercussions from the non-availability of security and defence personnel to any other possible contingencies, to convince them that this was not something NATO could turn its back on.



The persistent nature of modern conflict, in spite of the development of new advanced weapons, is thus moving away from direct conflict between superpowers towards complex, indirect and highly interconnected engagements, many times below the threshold of war. Once known also as unconventional warfare or non-linear war, hybrid threats are increasingly recognized as a fundamental challenge for modern (democratic) societies (Hybrid CoE, 2019). Modern hybrid threats, which are particularly renowned for their cyber components, also open new fields of power competition, which may have additional geopolitical consequences, while at the same time impacting on all international actors regardless of their size. Artificial intelligence (AI) and the development of the next generation telecommunication networks (5G) are just two fields of advanced technology prone to competition with substantial potential for military applications and consequently the future of NATO. Through the ever increasing integration of advanced network-connected technologies, not only in the form of military capabilities but throughout all aspects of modern society (e.g. the Internet of Things – IOT), states are increasingly becoming vulnerable to new forms of threats and challenges that surpass traditional military effects. From critical infrastructure to wider society resilience, NATO is increasingly forced to look beyond traditional, narrow military power and start dealing with, at least at first hand, “softer” aspects of power which are often prerequisites for the sustainable enablement and functioning of modern armed forces. The NATO Cyber Defence Pledge, adopted in 2016, for example, signifies a recognition of this new reality and aims to ensure that the Alliance keeps pace with the fast-evolving cyber threat landscape, as well as developing and sustaining sufficient capabilities for defence in cyberspace. It particularly notes the increased interconnectedness, which in turn means that the Alliance is only as strong as its weakest link (NATO Cyber Defence Pledge, 2016). This further signifies the importance of keeping up with the fast pace of development even for smaller countries with limited capabilities.

To conclude this short overview of the changed strategic environment over the past 15 years of our membership of NATO, we cannot omit a brief look at our immediate neighbourhood. The Western Balkans was and remains the region of strategic interest for Slovenia. Its importance, due to its near proximity and economic, political, cultural and security relevance, is undeniable, not only for Slovenia but for the wider European region. Most of the region has gone through a transformation and reform process since the end of Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, but the results are at best mixed. It was NATO that played a key role in stopping the bloodshed of the Western Balkans, and it is still a key guarantor of peace, security and stability in the region. In spite of visible progress, the region is however still faced with persistent challenges, underlying ethnic tensions, high levels of corruption and pockets of instability with the potential to quickly erupt into broader regional destabilization. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo still host substantial numbers of NATO troops (including a significant number of Slovenian soldiers) who remain, if more subtly, as a key guarantee of peace and stability. It is therefore even more important to note that several countries from the region have made commendable progress along their Euro-Atlantic path, a goal that has been consistently supported by Slovenian

governments ever since its admission to NATO. Croatia, Albania and most recently Montenegro have joined the Atlantic family, with North Macedonia (following the resolution of the prolonged name issue with Greece, in which NATO played a very important and visible role) expected to follow soon. While their addition to NATO might not bring major strategic effects to the wider geopolitical chessboard (as was, in the case of Montenegro, publicly questioned by US President Trump (King, 2018)), nevertheless their accession to NATO is of tremendous importance for the stability and security of the region, while in turn also bringing a relevant added value to broader Alliance efforts.

### **3 NATO AT 70 – REMAINING VITAL AND RESOLUTE**

Even if at first glance the Alliance today seems substantially different from the one Slovenia joined 15 years ago, its fundamentals are still unchanged and unshaken. The inside buzz, however, is marked by a renewed sense of urgency and the importance of collective defence and increased focus on strengthening the capabilities which can ensure the survival of the Alliance in today's security environment. If the Alliance of 2004 was still very much characterized by counter insurgency, the global fight against terrorism and NATO's out of area operations, the Alliance of today is turning back to its original roots, taking care of the resilience and collective defence of its European members. This is profoundly changing and impacting the development of the Alliance's capabilities and tools, which is very much reflected in growing expectations of the fulfilment of more demanding capability goals, as developed through the NATO defence planning process and fair burden sharing, as well as contributions to key allied tools and initiatives. The 2014 Wales Summit was a major turning point in this sense, beginning a lengthy process of transformation and bringing about some of the key initiatives that have shaped the Alliance for the years to come (Braus, 2018).

#### **3.1 Reinforcement of NATO's deterrence and defence posture**

First in the line of the key new initiatives deriving from Wales was the NATO Readiness Action Plan (RAP). RAP is perhaps the most direct response to the changed security environment, which has brought additional assurance measures to NATO member countries, particularly those in Central and Eastern Europe. The adaptation moves included a measurable reinforcement of the NATO Response Force (NRF), the establishment of a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), and enhanced Standing Naval Forces. It also established eight NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) in Central and Eastern Europe, and two Headquarters for the Multinational Corps.

Furthermore, the Wales summit was crucial for the agreement on the NATO Defence Investment Pledge, which represents a key commitment of Allied nations to a more balanced sharing of costs and responsibilities through investment in national and joint capabilities. In accordance with the Defence Investment Pledge (paragraph

14 of the Wales declaration), the Allies agreed to reverse the trend of declining defence budgets, to make the most effective use of funds, and to further a more balanced sharing of costs and responsibilities. It recognizes that overall security and defence depends both on how much the Allies spend and how they spend it, so it sets further guidelines that increased investments should be directed towards meeting capability priorities, while also noting the importance of the contribution to NATO's missions and operations (i.e. deployment of those capabilities). The aim of the Alliance according to the Pledge is thus to move towards the 2% guideline of defence spending, with 20% spending on major new equipment, including related Research and Development, up to 2024. This is an ambitious goal and a very challenging endeavour for many of the Allies, including Slovenia. Spending only 1.01% of its GDP on defence, Slovenia remains at the bottom of the Allies table when it comes to defence investment, far from the agreed 2% guideline (The Secretary General's Annual Report, 2018). With a current objective of reaching 1.5% of GDP on defence by 2024, Slovenia, while not alone, will face increased Allied scrutiny and critique if it fails to stick to its own commitments to adequately invest in national defence capabilities.

A lesser known, but in the light of capabilities and larger formations development equally relevant initiative is the Framework Nations Concept (FNC). This, originally a German idea, predates the Ukrainian crisis of 2014, and was developed to address the strengthening of the capabilities of the European Allies, the "European pillar of the Alliance". It builds on the recognition that smaller nations (referring in particular to European members of the Alliance) cannot on their own develop sufficient capabilities, and need partners for that. The benefit from cooperation with "larger framework nations" is thus twofold, and contains both capability development and the joint application of modern capabilities that the Alliance lacks overall, putting Europe back on the map as a military might (Zapfe and Glatz, 2017, pp 1-4). Three groupings of the FNC formed in 2014, centred around Germany, Italy and Great Britain. While the scope and intensity of cooperation varies between the different groupings, the overall idea proved to be beneficial and is bringing practical results. Slovenia is currently a member of both the German and the Italian FNC groupings, where it is aiming for jointly useful cooperation while developing specialized capabilities which could be made available to both NATO and the EU.

One of the most visible and direct reassurance measures originating from the NATO Warsaw Summit, particularly affecting the Alliance's most Eastern members, is the establishment of the enhanced and tailored Forward Presence (eFP, tFP). NATO's Forward Presence in the Eastern part of the Alliance has four multinational battlegroups deployed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, and led by the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and the United States. While it is no secret that a force some 4500 troops strong would hardly be sufficient to independently defend our Eastern Allies against possible Russian aggression, their role is commonly referred to as a "trip-wire" that would trigger an immediate Allied response to any aggression through

rapid reinforcements of larger response structures (The Secretary General's Annual Report, 2018, pp 13-15). Slovenia early recognized the fundamental importance of Allied cohesion and solidarity with our Eastern members, deploying some 50 members of the SAF as part of the Canadian-led battlegroup in Latvia.

Understanding of the critical importance and necessity for rapidly available deployable forces in high readiness was further recognized at the most recent Brussels summit by the development of the additional NATO Readiness Initiative (NRI).<sup>2</sup> This initiative, also known as the "Four Thirties", envisions the development of an additional 30 combat naval vessels, 30 heavy or medium battalions, and 30 air squadrons, as well as the necessary logistical support, at 30 days' readiness or less (The Secretary General's Annual Report, 2018, pp 14-15). While the necessity for increased readiness has become evident through the changing threat landscape, it remains to be seen how the Allies will manage to fill these substantial and perplexing demands which add to already substantial commitments, something which might prove particularly challenging for smaller nations with limited capabilities.

### 3.2 Coping with ongoing internal challenges

As in any family, the Alliance is by no means immune to internal challenges and mild friction between its Allies. It could even be said that one of NATO's largest contributions to the security and stability of the European continent is in fact managing and preventing disputes between its historically belligerent Allies, bringing them together under a joint collective defence umbrella and establishing a platform for meaningful cooperation and trust. The other foundations of the Alliance are of course the common set of values of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, clearly set in the preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty. In spite of this, we should not blind ourselves that all those challenges have long been put aside.

Perhaps more than ever before, the Alliance is today faced with pressures of uncertainty and ambiguity when it comes both to upholding our shared values and keeping up with the commitments of cooperation and collective defence. Firstly, our analysis would not reflect reality if we failed to acknowledge the unconventional approach of the new President of our biggest and most powerful Ally, Donald Trump. President's Trump's initial public reservations towards unconditional commitment to collective defence indeed raised several eyebrows or even questions about the future of the Alliance (e.g. Gray, 2017). It is his unpredictability and what often seems impulsive reactions (as most clearly demonstrated at the May 2017 and July 2018 NATO Summits) which worries Allied leaders. It is no overstatement that an Alliance based on 70 years of well-crafted diplomatic culture and procedures has been struck hard by President Trump's bluntness and, as some might say, eccentric approach to diplomacy; nevertheless, his most critical request for fair burden sharing and increased defence spending by NATO's European members is neither

<sup>2</sup> *Not to be mistaken for the NATO Readiness Action Plan (RAP), in spite its close interconnectedness.*

new nor unconventional. Rather, it is a long-term appeal by several succeeding US presidents for their European Allies to take up their part of the commitment, with the current President having his own way of stating this.

On the other hand, internal challenges expand way beyond the influence and impact of the current US administration. Upholding common values of democracy and the rule of law may not be equally forcefully pursued in all the Alliance capitals, as some critics would claim, which makes them even more vulnerable and precious. While it is irrational to expect that these issues would be given public scrutiny at the level of the Alliance, they are to be considered when debating the coherence, unity and also the strength of NATO, as they are the bedrock of our resilience and collective defence and will be key elements in upholding the coherence of Alliance actions in the future.

### 3.3 Evolving relations with other actors

Any analysis of the Alliance which does not take into consideration the new role of China would also surely miss some important perspectives, to say the least. While the scale, scope and nature of the relationship between NATO and China are very formal, distant and limited, it is a fact that China is increasingly expanding its influence as one of the biggest players in geopolitics of this century. With a population of roughly 1.3 billion and a GDP of 12.24 trillion USD (World Bank 2019), China is a “rising dragon” that has woken up, wants to take back its “rightful” place on the world stage, and is convinced that its rise is not possible without the appropriate “giant leap” in defence capabilities that such a future role will warrant. It is simply impossible to predict the nature of the future relationship between China and NATO, but what is clear is that it will be heavily influenced by the two, not necessarily connected, bilateral relationships of US/China and EU/China. Another important aspect of the future determinants of the relationship is the role of China in the Pacific, where, despite the fact that the geographic area is not covered by the North Atlantic Treaty, some would see possible tensions with the US and/or other close NATO partners (e.g. Australia, Japan, etc.) as unavoidable. In this respect the development of a potential Russia-China defence relationship needs to be closely observed and properly understood. The recent Vostok 2018 exercise with the participation of the Chinese Armed Forces was a strong example of an upgrading phase in the defence relationship between Russia and China (Yang, 2018). Last but not least, the Belt and Road initiative is perhaps the most visible sign of increased Chinese economic ambitions, including in Europe (particularly in the fields of investment, transport, finance, science, education, and also culture), encompassing sub-regional initiatives such as 16+1. Such lucrative, at least at first sight, opportunities for cooperation may (and to certain extent already do) also affect the internal cohesion and unity of the Alliance. This in turn, combined with the potential development of dependencies through Chinese investments (e.g. 5G technologies), will have important implications that should also be considered when discussing future relations and their influence on the security environment (including the role of NATO). On the other hand, one should not push aside

the sovereign interests of every ally (and the EU as an organization) to develop relationships which have the potential to bring along vast economic benefits and development.

Finally, with NATO at 70, we must not fail to highlight the growing relationship with the EU. While NATO is still considered to be the main cornerstone of the European and Euro-Atlantic security framework, the EU is increasingly positioning itself as an actor in security and defence affairs. The idea of security cooperation and integration is not new to the European nations. It used to be considered, however, that it was somehow limited to specific “softer roles” in comparison to the Alliance. Hence, the role of the EU has, until recently, been reflected more in the framework of “soft power”, while NATO with its robust command and force structure has been called upon when the full spectrum of military powers has been demanded. Perhaps the best example of this was showcased in the case of the Western Balkans, where the EU failed to develop tools which would enable it to prevent the ethnic violence and political tensions that led to the prolonged Yugoslav wars, and only NATO was able to stop the violence and enable the conditions that paved the way to peace and stabilization.

The EU Global Strategy (2016) intends to change that by stating, among other things, that “...as Europeans we must take greater responsibility for our security. We must be ready and able to deter, respond to, and protect ourselves against external threats. While NATO exists to defend its members – most of which are European – from external attack, Europeans must be better equipped, trained and organized to contribute decisively to such collective efforts, as well as to act autonomously if and when necessary. An appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important for Europe’s ability to foster peace and safeguard security within and beyond its borders...” (A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy, 2016, pp 19-21).

A clear declaration of commitment to a more proactive and capabilities-based role of the EU has since materialized through the declaration of Permanent Structured Cooperation in the field of Defence (PESCO). What has particularly set PESCO apart from other forms of defence cooperation is its legally binding nature. Other new initiatives, such as the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), are set to bring both additional funds and coherence in planning to European defence cooperation. While it is still to be seen how the aforementioned initiatives will evolve, as they are still in the early stages of their lifetime, one thing is clear: the EU is ambitious to step up its role in the field of defence.

This of course brings up the question of the relationship between NATO and the EU, which is particularly relevant to Slovenia and other nations which are members of both organizations. With NATO (as also noted by the EU Global Strategy) remaining the key framework for the collective defence of the majority of EU members (being



both NATO and EU members), a framework of cooperation rather than competition has been set as the norm from the very beginning. Particularly for smaller nations with limited defence capabilities (like Slovenia), a single set of forces is imperative for the sustainability of the defence sector (and commitments to both NATO and the EU), and thus must be properly understood. This spirit of cooperation and recognition of the mutually beneficial potential of enhanced cooperation was recognized by the 2016 Joint EU-NATO declaration (and the renewed declaration of 2018), which solidifies these principles and sets a framework for the development of a total of 74 concrete proposals for cooperation in 7 fields (EEAS 2019).<sup>3</sup> With diverse and multidimensional threats ahead, close cooperation between the EU and NATO should and already seems to be a new normal. Important joint initiatives such as in the field of military mobility reinforce the necessity of mutual cooperation. Nevertheless, while there are several exemplary cases of EU-NATO cooperation already available, further steps are necessary to transmit that to all levels – something which will need robust political support from all NATO and EU countries if we want it to succeed.

**Conclusion** Changes in the international security environment and new relationships in the geopolitical power struggle will continue to fundamentally affect the European security infrastructure in the future. Much has already been said on the foreseeable key threats and challenges of the future (including in this article). The continually evolving security environment will shove NATO deeper into “troubled waters” where its true adversaries and their intentions will become ever more ambiguous, hidden behind a clutch of hybrid threats and unconventional conflicts. New developments in technology will find their prominence in the conflicts of the future. NATO will have to find a way and the balance to keep up and retain dominance in the global race for rapid development of state-of-the-art capabilities. A myriad of new and well-known actors will most likely continue to test the Alliance’s coherence, unity and resolve; as the latter is rightly assessed to be the organization’s centre of gravity, it is not just the deterrence posture that will need to evolve, but also the ways and means for dialogue and consultation.

While the future brings no lack of challenges and tests of different natures and volume, NATO’s track record of continual and timely adaptation and an appropriate response where and when needed provides grounds for optimism about its future. Even more, with a number of challenges ahead, the purpose and necessity of the Alliance is becoming ever more evident. Maybe this is especially crucial for the smaller nations, to whom the Alliance continues to offer the most viable framework for the development of comprehensive national security structures.

Membership of the Alliance requires well-planned investment in our defence capabilities, fair burden sharing, and taking an equal share of responsibility for our own security. The times when nations could be merely passive observers are indeed

<sup>3</sup> 1. *Countering hybrid threats*; 2. *Operational cooperation including at sea and on migration*; 3. *Cyber security and defence*; 4. *Defence capabilities*; 5. *Defence industry and research*; 6. *Exercises*; 7. *Supporting Eastern and Southern partners’ capacity-building efforts*.

over (if they ever existed), and it is high time that the Allies took up a fair share of the burden, both practically and financially. While NATO can and indeed is a tough actor with the appropriate tools to streamline national planning efforts, it is up to individual nations to recognize and at the appropriate political level prioritize the development of sufficient national defence capabilities – first and foremost for the individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack, as stipulated by Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty. As is evident from the above analysis, Slovenia, both as part of the Alliance and through its national defence policies, recognizes the evolving nature of international security threats, its interconnectedness and indivisibility. These, however, have yet to be met by sufficient financial investment, which was jointly committed to in the Wales Summit Pledge on Defence Investment.

As is evident from this short overview of the present and future challenges, the “price” we pay for our collective defence as members of NATO is still lower by far than it would be if we were to develop and sustain all the required capabilities by ourselves, or in the worst case scenario, than the price of insecurity. NATO may not be perfect, and it indeed is not free-of-charge, but to paraphrase Churchill: it is still by far superior to all other options of keeping the liberal democracies safe and secure. We thus confidently claim that if Slovenia were not a member of NATO today, it would be in its best national interest to join it.

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