

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION
AND NEW GEOPOLITICAL PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Attualmente gli Stati membri dell'Alleanza sono diciannove; entro il 2004 altri sette entreranno nell'unione. Tale ampliata cooperazione include anche rapporti amichevoli con la Russia che da temuta minaccia è diventata *partner* della coalizione, partecipando alle consultazioni sui grandi problemi mondiali e venendo coinvolta sempre più nelle attività dell'organizzazione.

Anche se l'obiettivo principale rimane la difesa collettiva, si devono fronteggiare nuove questioni rappresentate dal terrorismo e dalla proliferazione delle armi di distruzione di massa. Si devono inoltre gestire nuove situazioni di crisi nei paesi intorno all'area euro-atlantica, quali rivalità etniche e religiose, controversie territoriali, tentativi falliti di riforma.

La NATO ha mostrato di avere necessaria flessibilità per fronteggiare le nuove sfide, gestire le crisi, cambiare ed adattarsi alle quotidiane competizioni sulla complicata scacchiera politica mondiale assumendo ad un nuovo ruolo geopolitico rispetto alle motivazioni che ne giustificarono la fondazione.

NATO

NATO is an acronym for North Atlantic Treaty Organization, born as an Alliance among twelve countries whose aim was to work together for peace.

The first members were ten European nations: Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom, and two American ones Canada and United States. Then, in 1952 Greece and Turkey entered the organization, while West Germany joined it in 1955, followed by Spain in 1982 and Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic in 1999. But NATO enlargement is continuing and , in fact, by 2004 the nineteen countries will be joined by seven new ones as decided during the Prague Summit in November 2002. The new members will be Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia: "The bottom line is clear: Expanding NATO will enhance our security. It is the right thing to do"¹.

The principal goal of this organization has always been to protect the shared ideals of democracy, freedom and legality in its area, as the treaty signed on 4 April 1949 clearly states. "[NATO] will create a shield against aggression and fear aggression—a bulwark which will permit us to get on with real business of government and society, the business of achieving a fuller and happier life for all citizens"².

This agreement, also called the *Washington Treaty*, was written to maintain security in Europe where Soviet attacks were feared. The pact is made up of 14 articles that mainly outline the safety obligations and the collective defence of all the members, an example of this is Article 5 which clearly states that, if one member nation is attacked, all other allies have to intervene to help it: "the Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them...shall be considered an attack against them all [...] each of them [...] will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties [...] including the use of armed force, to restore and to maintain the security of the North Atlantic area"³.

Article 5 has been the bedrock of the Alliance's Security Policy for

¹ President Bill Clinton, May 31, 1997, Public Information Series, United States Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, February 1998, publication number 10533.

² President Harry S. Truman, April 4, 1949, Public Information Series, United States Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, February 1998, publication number 10533, p. 12.

³ *Ibidem*, art. 5, p. 29.

50 years, but today even if the essential mission remains the collective protection of NATO's soil, this objective will be improved by the join of new members. Enlargement, whilst a positive development will also mean new challenges and it is, for this reason, that NATO has created a program of activities to help and to prepare the countries aiming at joining the Alliance: "To Alliance members, and to the aspirant countries, NATO enlargement has always had one simple purpose: to deepen and broaden Euro-Atlantic security through integration amongst democracies"⁴.

It is an essential process which will preserve and strengthen the peace and safety of NATO's environment. NATO has to work to prevent future conflicts and threats, moreover, it has to consolidate the targets it has gained, doing for Europe's East what has been done for Europe's West.

Moreover, in the last 10 years there have been complex risks for peace such as ethnic conflicts, economic fragilities and the collapse of political systems.

In addition to this, the terrorist threat after 11 September attack, has put into evidence the necessity for the Alliance to face the new security issues. "Last year, terror struck the United States and changed our security environment overnight. A new threat has emerged, a threat totally different than those of the past: without a face, without armies, even without a territory. But a threat with a clear goal: to inflict mass casualties, including potentially with weapons of mass destruction"⁵.

Securing the Alliance and its interests against these new threats poses an enormous challenge, therefore the broadest cooperation among nations is necessary.

The Prague Summit also focused on the improvement of NATO military capabilities and the re-assessment of its Command structure, in order to react quickly to any menace and to be ready to face new challenges. The idea to create a Combined Joint Task Force aims to meet this challenge: "To carry out the full range of its missions,

⁴ *A New Russian Revolution: Partnership with NATO*, speech by the Secretary General at the Royal Society, Edinburgh, 13 December 2002.

⁵ *Europe's Transformation*, Speech by the Secretary General George Robertson at the Conference of the Aspen Institute Berlin and the NATO Host Committee for the Prague Summit, Prague, 20 November 2002.

NATO must be able to field forces that can move quickly to wherever they are needed, sustain operations over distance and time, and achieve their objectives”⁶.

Also cooperation with Russia has broadened, manifested in the creation of the NATO-Russia council founded in May 2002, permitting the members of the organization and Russia to discuss and work together on some issues such as the war on terrorism, crisis management, military cooperation, weapon proliferation and new challenges. “But the moment opened up the possibilities of creating something new in Europe. Where Russia was no longer feared by its European neighbours, but trusted. Where mutual mistrust and recrimination could be replaced by regular dialogue and frank exchanges. And where Russia and NATO could cooperate in solving mutual security challenges, rather than simply challenging each other”⁷.

And the NATO-Russia relationship has created a strong security bridge between Russia and her partners in the West trying to make this country a member of the Euro-Atlantic community.

With the elimination of the Soviet threat, the coalition has been mainly involved in the operations in the Balkans, where troops work side by side with non-NATO countries. In Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia they prevented a civil war, in Bosnia-Herzegovina they stopped the war and created a peace agreement, in Kosovo they have improved people’s life conditions, also working on public safety and order, transforming the country into a liberal society: “Today, NATO has established itself as a crisis manager par excellence. And, as a result, Southeastern Europe is now on its way back into the European mainstream”⁸.

To make Europe more secure and stable and to promote a genuine working relationship among states, NATO has launched a series of activities.

For example, the Partnership for Peace, a programme open to all European countries and Russia. They work to obtain transparency in National Defense Projects, they cooperate in case of civil disasters and emergencies.

Europe’s safety is linked to the tranquillity in the Mediterranean

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *A New Russian Revolution: Partnership with NATO, art. cit.*

⁸ *Europe’s Transformation, art. cit.*

area, in fact the Mediterranean Dialogue among NATO and seven nations, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia, is an activity which promotes mutual understanding solidarity and cooperation between NATO and these countries.

Also the NATO Defense College in Rome is a useful centre to train the officers of NATO countries. Actually, the list of initiatives and activities of this international organization is very long.

Furthermore, NATO can also face crisis situations not foreseen in the article 5 and this is possible through procedures of consultations, cooperation agreements, collective funds, common parameters for equipment and training and mutual operative planning.

In conclusion, we can state the Alliance will accomplish their goals and main tasks respecting the interests of the member countries, looking for a peaceful resolution of conflicts as asserted in the Chart of United Nations. And they will always support democratic institutions contributing to prosperity and progress.

But the Organization will reflect the changes that have taken place in Europe and it will adapt itself to the challenges of the 21st century: "Tomorrow, NATO's role in countering the new threats of the 21st century will be fleshed out still further. A new military concept for defence against terrorism will give guidance to our military planners. A NATO Response Force will bring together the best military capabilities of Europe and North America - to fight together against common threats [...] And new initiatives to detect and defend against attacks with weapons of mass destruction will demonstrate that Alliance remain as essential as ever for our safety and security"⁹.

⁹ *Ibidem.*