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A Look Back on the 2018 NATO Brussels Summit

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The NATO summits are one of the most important events in the sphere of global security. They usually serve as a platform to announce changes or news regarding the Alliance. It could be anything ranging from enlargement announcement to expressing concerns and proposing strategies against multiple global threats. The recent summit was no different. Even though the Brussels event was scheduled mainly to tackle the issue of 2% GDP spending by the allies, it touched upon other key issues. There were several documents adopted through the summits framework: 1. The Brussels Summit Declaration; 2. Brussels Declaration on Transatlantic Security and Solidarity; 3. Joint Declaration on Cooperation between the NATO and the European Union; 4. NATO-Georgia Commission Declaration; 5. Chairman's Statement on NATO-Ukraine; and 6. Joint Statement on the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan.

Naturally, one of the first topics to discuss was the case of Russia, its continuous violation of the international law; usage of soft & hard power on countries of Eastern Europe and Baltic region; interfering and attempting to disrupt Western democracies by meddling in elections of different European countries and spreading disinformation there.

Russia

In the Brussels Declaration on Transatlantic Security and Solidarity it

is stated that the Alliance sees Russian actions in Europe as a main source of destabilization. The NATO members condemned Russian actions in Georgia and Ukraine, once again calling upon the state to push back its forces from the countries it had illegally and illegitimately occupied. According to the document, Russia "is violating international law, conducting provocative military activities, and attempting to undermine our institutions and sow disunity"(Brussels Declaration on Transatlantic Security and Solidarity 2018: Paragraph 2). This statement is further enhanced in the full Brussels Summit Declaration, where the Alliance practically repeated the messages addressed towards the Russian Federation. Again, they have mentioned countless efforts made by the NATO over two decades to build a partnership with the Russian side, but all those efforts proved to be fruitless as Russia continues to view the Alliance as a threat. Russia's occupation of Georgia's (2008) and Ukraine's (2014) territories have proved that no matter how many times the relations with Russians are reset, they will never give up their "sphere of privileged interests".

As a result, the document reiterates Warsaw Declaration's statement that "all practical civilian and military cooperation" with the Russian side remains suspended at the moment, however, the option of open political dialogue would be maintained (Brussels Summit Declaration 2018: Paragraph 5).

However, unlike the Warsaw Summit Declaration, in the Brussels Summit's Declaration, it is noticeable how the NATO views Russian actions and not Russia itself as an enemy. It is apparent especially in paragraphs where the NATO talks about one of their defensive capabilities, nuclear weapons to be exact. There it is highlighted that the NATO BMD (Ballistic Missile Defence) in their possession is for defence only, and only in case of self-defence would be used against an enemy (ibid.: Paragraph 37).

In next sentences it is even stated that the Alliance did not and will not use those capabilities against Russian Federation. As it is stated "NATO BMD is intended to defend against potential threats emanating from outside the Euro-Atlantic area" (ibid.: Paragraph 41) which naturally raises a question what exactly can be considered as a threat grave enough to use the Ballistic Missile Defence system. The Alliance goes into such a length to explain that the BMD system is not only incapable to oppose the Russian nuclear arsenal, but there is also not such desire to improve the system in the first place. The Alliance uses this statement as an argument to prove why exactly "Russian statements threatening to target Allies because of NATO BMD are unacceptable and counterproductive" (ibid.: Paragraph 41).

While comparing this part to the Warsaw Summit Communiqué, it can be said that the current position of the Alliance towards the Russian Federation, has become less confrontative. It shows that the NATO is willing to avoid any sort of military confrontation from the Russian side, and remains open to political dialogue. However, it can be easily noticed that the accusations towards the country's aggressive policy towards its neighbours and meddling in European countries affairs, is not highlighted as starkly as it was in Warsaw Summit Communiqué.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the majority of the Alliance learned not to trust to Russian promises, and thus, relations can no longer revert to "business as usual" as it was attempted many times by the West, most famous example being the 2009 "Reset/Perezagruzka" policy¹. Even though, there are still some that do not view Russia as an enemy, the majority of states have seen enough international law violations (interference in the elections of USA, France, Germany; as well as recent usage of chemical weapon in the UK) to realize that the country, which easily denounces the treaty signed the previous day, should not be trusted.

¹ The 2009's "Reset/Perezagruzka" policy was an attempt by the Obama administration to improve relations with Russia after the 2008 Russia-Georgian War. This policy, was focused to bring both countries to the win-win outcome and further cooperation between states through different political and economic areas.

However, this move turned out to be unsuccessful as Russia continued to follow zero-sum logic and further disrupted peace in Europe once again by invading and annexing Ukraine's territories in 2014.

2% and Burden-sharing

The next issue to be looked into would be the US President Donald Trump's rhetoric towards the European allies in NATO. Trump repeatedly stressed that European member states of the NATO have to spend more on defence budget to reach the agreed 2% threshold that was not fulfilled by majority of countries. Many in the West feared that Donald Trump actions would create a discord between the USA and Europe.

Before the summit, NATO General Secretary, Jens Stoltenberg, met with the US President Trump. During the conversation, Trump repeatedly stated that the issue of defence spending had to be resolved urgently. He commented that the "burden sharing" of the USA throughout the decades was not "fair" as the country has been spending more on the defence (4,2% of its GDP) than all the other members of the Alliance. In fact, it was mentioned that from all the 29 members of the NATO, only 5 members were even meeting the 2% GDP spending criteria. From the meeting, it was evident that Jens Stoltenberg did agree with Trump's statement and highlighted that since last year, this issue has been regarded more seriously by the allies. There was some disagreement seen regarding the deadlines, however. According to Stoltenberg, some NATO members (especially Germany) would reach the required threshold of defence spending by 2028. Trump, on the other hand, viewed that the requirement should be met in half amount of time.

Donald Trump also stated that the situation of Germany looked a bit

paradoxical. By presented logic, Europe (including Germany) requires help of the USA to be protected from Russia, while at the same time the same countries of Europe are dependent on the Russian gas pipelines (Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 projects). Those pipelines are spreading from the Western part of Russia, through the Baltic Sea, into Germany, from where the said gas is distributed into different European countries. Trump added that countries such as Germany could use the money paid for the Russian energy to increase the defence budget. To support his argument, the US president mentioned that countries such as Poland, which, even though, have less GDP than Germany, not only meet the defence spending criteria, but also refuse to be dependent on Russian energy supplies.

The next day, during Jens Stoltenberg's press conference, it was evident that Trump's harsh rhetoric did bear its fruits. In his speech the General Secretary said that despite the disagreements, the NATO has reached mutual agreement on many issues, including the issue of burden sharing. The further support to this statement can be seen in the official Brussels Declaration, where it was agreed that the defence spending of all the allies have to reach the 2% point by 2024 the latest. Stoltenberg stated that the situation has been improved greatly, as by the time of current summit, already 8 members have reached the required mark and the spending on defence has increased by additional 33 billion USD, since last year (Press Conference, July 11). This statement was further

confirmed by Donald Trump, in his own press conference, where he added that the numbers would increase by additional 26 billion dollars. Both of them agreed that the NATO would be stronger if the defence spending was to be increased, which itself would benefit both the USA and Europe. Because of the decision made by the allies, Trump confirmed the commitment of the USA to the cause.

From both press-conferences, it can be concluded that all actors – the USA and other NATO states – have reached a mutual agreement on defence spending. Was this decision the result of President Trump's harsh talks and threats or was this action a by-product of West's realization that NATO is facing serious threats? It is hard to say. The fact remains that the only way the NATO can withstand all the challenges is if there are less discords between the members and enough resources to accomplish plans. One should not forget that neither influence, nor capabilities of each member states in the organization are equal, but the main strengths remain strong commitment to the cause and equal burden sharing. NATO Operations.

During the press conference, the NATO General Secretary also touched upon the subject of future missions of the Alliance. From the Q&A session there were mention of three main spheres, where the NATO will conduct its peace-keeping missions.

The first subject to be discussed was the Alliance's defence and deterrence policy. The main purpose of this

mission is to raise the readiness of the NATO troops and improve their transferability across the Atlantic and European continent. The improvement of the troops' mobilization, maritime security and logistical support can be considered as another points of focus. During the press-conference, Stoltenberg voiced a new initiative of the Alliance called "four 30s". The mentioned initiative does not focus on the increase of armed forces, but the increase in the readiness of already existing military capabilities. According to the plan by 2020, the Alliance will be in possession of 30 mechanized battalions; 30 air squadrons; and 30 combat vessels, all of which will be ready to use within 30 days or less.

During his speech, he also mentioned about creation of the Cyberspace Operation Centre in Belgium, which will help the Alliance tackle with the Cyber-attack issue. Together with that there will be created a new Counter-Hybrid Support Teams to timely react to the first signs of the hybrid attack against the allies.

The second issue, that the General Secretary has addressed, was terrorism. According to the request by the Iraqi government, Jens Stoltenberg stated that there will be some new NATO training missions taking place in Iraq, led by Canada. As he stated, they will also establish professional military schools and academies for the Iraqi forces. At the same time, the NATO members agreed to increase their support for Jordan and Tunisia to further strengthen their capabilities in fight against terrorism.

Of course, another matter of focus, is the case of Afghanistan. As Stoltenberg declared, the only way the NATO would solve this case, if the peace talks together with institution-building take place. For now, the NATO operations in Afghanistan will resume. Stoltenberg added in the Q&A session, that this time they would deal with this issue "differently", meaning they would focus more on strengthening the Afghani security forces and let them cope with domestic problems themselves instead of directly involving the Alliance. Because of that both the NATO and the Afghani government have agreed that the local security forces will be financed up until 2024.

NATO Open Door Policy & Case of Macedonia

The following matter of importance are the messages that were addressed towards the NATO aspirant countries. As stated by Jens Stoltenberg during the press conference, the NATO state leaders are welcoming the efforts of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Republic of Northern Macedonia) in solving the country's name dispute with Greece. As is it known, the name issue was the last remaining setback for this country to become the member of the Alliance, which has been disputed for over 27 years. Only recently, the solution has been agreed upon by Prespa Agreement, which changes country's official name into Republic of Northern Macedonia (The Guardian 2018). As the General Secretary of the NATO has mentioned, the only thing left is for the state to do is to conduct the referendum. If people approve the name change,

then the Alliance would welcome its 30th member.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

In the Brussels Summit Declaration, the Alliance has also supported the efforts of the Bosnia-Herzegovinian side in conducting reforms and are further encouraging state's development in the region. They called upon the country's leaders not to cease their progress in pursuit "of political, economic, and defence reforms", so that the state not only fulfils criteria of the MAP (Membership Action Plan) but also supports the well-being of its own citizens. The NATO acknowledged, their progress in the registration of immovable defence property. By doing so the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina will be one step closer to fulfilling the requirements for submitting the first Annual National Programme (ANP) report. The leaders of the military Alliance will continue to maintain strong political dialogue with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and, as stated in the Brussels Declaration, shall continue with their support for "the implementation of the Defence Review and other reform efforts" (ibid.: Paragraph 64).

Ukraine

During the summit there was a special statement made in regards to Ukraine. The NATO heads of state have met with the President Petro Poroshenko, where they have voiced their support towards Ukraine. They welcomed Ukraine's re-stated aspiration towards membership and reforms conducted in different spheres, national security being most important. Once more the Alliance

called upon the Russian side to remove their military and reverse illegal occupation of Ukraine's lands. At the same time, it was stated that the process of Ukraine joining the NATO would follow the guidelines of the Bucharest summit. Before that, Ukraine would have to carry on with its progress in the Annual National Programme (ANP) framework. The allies would support Ukraine throughout reforms by continuously providing the Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP). As it was mentioned, one of the highest priorities for the Ukraine and the Alliance is to find an effective way to deal with the elements of hybrid warfare. The NATO member states have discussed about the possibilities of an implementation of "UN-authorized peacekeeping force in the Donbas" as one of the efforts to bring the Minsk agreement into action.

Georgia

Following the subject, there was made a special declaration by the NATO-Georgia Commission. In the document the NATO praises sets of successful reforms carried out by Georgia in the ANP framework over the past decade. Alliance also appreciated Georgia's support for participating in various NATO missions "in particular its contribution to the NATO Response Force and its significant contribution to the Resolute Support Mission (RSM)" (NATO-Georgia Commission Declaration 2018: Paragraph 3), where Georgia is one of the largest troop contributors, and already reaches many NATO member-states standards, including spending of 2% of its GDP in defence.

In the same document the NATO member states once again supported "Georgia's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders" (ibid.: Paragraph 7). Naturally, they condemned Russia's continuous recognition of the de-facto regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia, which have been occupied by Russia in 2008's August War and called upon the state to cease human rights violations and military operations on those territories.

Together with that the Alliance touched upon the subject of artificial "borderization" (the construction of barbed wire fences and other artificial border-like obstacles) process conducted by the Russian forces on the Occupation line, a subject that is not often talked about today but is continuously threatening Georgia as an element of the "creeping occupation". As stated in the document these actions not only violate Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, but also "contradict the principles of international law, OSCE principles and Russia's international commitments" (ibid.: Paragraph 9). NATO calls upon Russia to reverse its recognition of the so-called "independence" of the occupied regions of Georgia; to fulfil the 12 August 2008 ceasefire EU-mediated by the EU, "particularly the withdrawal of Russian forces from the territory of Georgia; to end its militarisation of these regions; and to stop the construction of border-like obstacles" (Brussels Summit Declaration 2018: Paragraph 7).

In the following segments of the document the Alliance shows support towards Georgia's efforts towards initiating a new peace plan "A step to a Better Future", which is meant to improve the lives of the people living in the occupied regions of Georgia. It should be added that Georgia will undertake the next joint Black Sea training exercises with the NATO in March 2019.

After looking at the NATO statements towards its partner and aspirant countries, several conclusions can be made. The recent Prespa agreement between the Greek and Macedonia governments gave hope to Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's (FYROM) ascension towards the NATO membership. Now it is up to the people to decide during the upcoming referendum will or will not FYROM become the 30th member of the Alliance. The statement regarding Bosnia-Herzegovina proves how much crucial for the NATO the Balkan region is. Despite the fact that it is the least successful aspirant country when it comes to conducting reforms, the NATO officials are interested to increase their control in the region, given the history of conflicts in that region.

It is quite interesting that there was a separate declaration made by the NATO-Georgia commission, while the case of Ukraine's aspiration towards the Alliance was only addressed by the chairmen's statement alone. The reason to that is, because there was no consensus regarding Ukraine on the summit, despite the fact that Ukraine is

also one of the countries aspiring for the NATO membership. It could also be explained by the fact that while the country did conduct reforms towards the membership, the steps taken by Georgia and its contribution into the NATO operations carry far greater weight than any other NATO aspirant country.

It should also be noted that only recently did Ukraine restate its wish to join the Alliance, as 8 years ago they abruptly cut relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. At the same time, all the NATO member states do agree that Georgia's contributions in Alliance's peacekeeping operations is invaluable. It should be mentioned that this country has never faced a single regress in the ANP framework and remains a NATO aspirant country according to the Bucharest Summit.

NATO-EU Cooperation

The last subject to discuss is the NATO-EU cooperation. Before the upcoming summit it was announced that both the EU and the NATO would expand their partnership. Their main goal would be to deal with following issues: hybrid warfare; cyber security; counter-terrorism; military mobility; women and security (Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation 2018: Paragraph 6). The cooperation has to follow the joint declaration that was signed days before the actual summit (on July 10th, 2018) by the EU and the NATO representatives.

During the press conference, it was stated by Jens Stoltenberg, that NATO-EU partnership will cover dealing with

challenges in the regions of Middle East and Northern Africa; situation on the Korean Peninsula and constant breaches of international law from Russia. Currently, there is a constant information exchange between the NATO and the EU. It should be mentioned that the NATO is supporting the EU-lead operation "Sophia" in the Mediterranean through the framework of its own operation "Sea Guardian".

After looking into Brussels Declaration, it is clear that EU-NATO cooperation needs to become more intense. The Alliance acknowledges developments in spheres such as joint intelligence, cyber security sphere, and common border security. The NATO states that only through a tight partnership with the EU the security of the continent can be ensured. Apart from that, it was stated that the non-EU members would continue their contribution towards the mutual cause. From the document it seems that the only way the European countries can counter security threats is through mutual cooperation and intelligence-sharing, rather than each of them acting independently and creating needless bureaucratic barrier. This is further confirmed by the fact that there was no mention of the rumoured "European Army" in the official document.

Response from Russia

After the events of summit, it is interesting to look into the response which came from Russia. On July 17th, in his interview with Fox News, Vladimir Putin was asked about a possible Russian response in case the NATO was to add either Ukraine or

Georgia to the Alliance. Putin replied by saying that he was familiar with the ways the NATO was working on the consensus-based decision, though added that there are always bilateral agreements taking place beforehand. He brought the examples of Poland and Romania, where according to him are now stationed and deployed elements of the strategic anti-missile defence of the United States, which is targeted towards the Russian Federation and poses an immediate threat for their national security. Because of that, if the Alliance were to move the NATO infrastructure closer towards their borders, it would be received as a threat and "the reaction would be extremely negative" (Interview to Fox News Channel, Kremlin.ru 2018).

Two days later, during his meeting with ambassadors and permanent representatives of Russia Vladimir Putin voiced threats towards the NATO again. During the conference, he stated that the only correct way of cooperating with the EU is through business projects and not by deploying new NATO bases so close to Russia's national borders. He highlighted that all the economic projects with the European states, including Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipeline projects (which were mentioned previously) are "solely commercial and economically viable; they are not politically charged and have no hidden agenda" (Meeting of Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives of Russia, Kremlin.ru 2018). Because of that Russia, according to Putin, would respond appropriately to the aggressive threat towards its security. He warned the

NATO member states about integrating Georgia and Ukraine into the Alliance, saying that such irresponsible actions could have grave consequences.

By looking into both statements two things become clear. Firstly, that Russia has basically repeated their statement voiced during the 2007 Munich Conference about the NATO enlargement, where they threatened to respond "asymmetrically" in case the NATO were to even think about expanding close to the Russian territories. This "asymmetric response" was later on manifested into a Russian aggression on Georgia's land in 2008, and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Putin proves once again, that no matter how many times the relations with the West are to reset, he will never let go of "spheres of privileged interests".

Secondly, it can be said from Putin's interview, that Russians are more convinced about the enlargement and strengthening of the NATO, than the NATO members themselves. This can be viewed by the fact that the overall tone of the Brussels declaration is softer than the one of the Warsaw summit. Another argument could be the fact that despite such positive tone of an "open door policy" seen throughout the documents, there is a noticeable indecisiveness. In the Brussels Declaration it was shown that Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's efforts to resolve the name dispute was highly welcomed by the NATO member states. The perspective of Bosnia-Herzegovina towards the membership has also been emphasized in the documents.

However, the fact remains that the Alliance is not ready to make bolder steps towards frontier countries. It is good to see that the Eastern Flank was given considerably more attention during this summit, the recent NATO-Georgia declaration also showed that this time the Alliance is ready for more practical partnership opportunities, but at the same time, the same Alliance is lacking strong political will to make a decisive step. If according to the Chairman's Statement, Ukraine has yet to deliver tangible results of its reforms, then Georgia's reform progress is remarkable. It is a burden-sharing country with most progress and most advanced aspirant country, which has all "practical tools to prepare for the NATO membership"(NATO-Georgia Declaration, 2018: Paragraph 6). Despite such a bright example, the NATO is unable to reach consensus on granting the MAP to Georgia. What they often overlook, is the fact that this very indecisiveness might benefit Russia and, moreover, encourage it to take more active steps in seizing control over frontier countries.

Conclusion

After looking into all the events that took place during the summit, it becomes clear why this particular event was essential. Many important issues were addressed. Unlike the previous summit, where the main issue was the case of Russian aggression, here the number one priority seemed to be attempts to settle the discord regarding the budget spending. This goal was achieved. At the same time, the NATO has changed its method regarding with Afghanistan. It was settled that the

NATO would focus more on training the local forces in dealing with the security threats.

Additionally, the NATO has decided to focus on improvement of the already existing capabilities and thinking more about quick transportation and mobilization of those resources. While the Alliance did condemn various cases where Russia violated international law, the note of the Brussels Declaration was softer, despite the fact that Russia had recently interfered in the elections of several European countries and had allegedly used a nerve agent in the UK.

On the other hand, the separate declaration regarding the NATO's partnership with Georgia allowed for the issue of Russian aggression to resurface again in the official documents, given the fact that the ongoing "borderization" process was previously not given enough alarm from the West. Even though this time it was not an enlargement summit, the NATO might see its new member in the context of FYROM, once the referendum allows for it.

Although the EU-NATO cooperation has not shown any new innovative, both of the parties seemed to have decided to join forces in several security areas. The 2018 NATO Brussels Summit did send several messages, and show willingness of the Alliance to the commitment given the tense political background during which the event took place. For a summit which was primarily arranged in order to resolve the issue of defence spending, it had delivered much more.

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