

# NATO's New Strategic Concept and its Influence on the Stability of the Western Balkans

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*In this paper, the author deals with the transformation of NATO's role in the region of the Western Balkans in the last ten years. The 1999 NATO Strategic Concept provided for a more active role of the Alliance in the consolidation of the security situation in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

*At the same time, the author points out NATO's New Strategic Concept and the perception of the role of Western Balkan and Southeast European states in this document. The author especially points to numerous segments of the gradual transformation of NATO's role, from being a factor that guarantees security in the region and influences the post-conflict consolidation and peace keeping, to the alliance that, due to the values it relies upon, keeps together most of the countries in the region, being an adequate framework for their international and security position.*

**Key words:** NATO, New Strategic Concept, Western Balkans, Southeast Europe, security, stability

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## 1. Introduction

After the end of the Cold War in 1989, the geostrategic and security surrounding in Southeast Europe changed significantly. On the one hand, countries in Central and Eastern Europe, dominantly influenced by the former Soviet Union within the Warsaw Pact (1955–1991), have substantially redefined their foreign-policy and security priorities, resulting in the fact that during 1999 and 2004 they became members of the North Atlantic Alliance. At the

NATO Summit held in Washington in April 1999, commemorating its half-century anniversary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary became new members of the Alliance. Five years later, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia also became new members of NATO. In this way, all the countries that ceased to belong to the Soviet Union's sphere of interest after the end of the Cold War were incorporated into the new Euro-Atlantic security network.

On the other hand, on the territory of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, NATO reacted mainly in order to prevent the ethnically motivated conflicts in Bosnia and

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Herzegovina (during 1994 and 1995), and Kosovo (1999).<sup>1</sup> After the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, NATO established a permanent peacekeeping field mission, firstly within the Implementation Forces (IFOR), and later also within the Stabilization Forces (SFOR).<sup>2</sup> It was not until 2 December 2004 that the European Union, within the Common Foreign and Security Policy, took over from NATO the command over the International Military Presence in this country – *EUFOR Althea* mission, but with the use of NATO's capacities.<sup>3</sup> The basic goal of this mission is to ensure compliance with the Dayton Peace Agreement, the implementation of the rule of law, the reform of the defence system and the apprehension of the remaining accused war criminals.<sup>4</sup>

A similar NATO military mission was established after the end of the Kosovo crisis in June 1999, in accordance with the Resolution 1244 of the United Nations Security Council.<sup>5</sup> In this context, the first mission was the Kosovo Forces (KFOR) mission, as a result of international military and security presence on the territory of Kosovo under the auspices of the UN. The text of this Resolution stated that NATO would lead this mission. The task of the above-mentioned NATO mission in Kosovo was to disarm the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) members, as well as to support the establishment of democratic institutions, rule of law and full security on this territory. After the unilateral proclamation of Kosovo's independence on 17 February 2008, KFOR managed to ensure the security of non-Albanian ethnic communities and prevent new instabilities, despite the fact that at that point it was reduced to only 10,000 soldiers. In accordance with the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement (2007),<sup>6</sup> which preceded the proclamation of independence of Kosovo, NATO remained the framework of the International Military Presence, under the command of the North Atlantic Council.<sup>7</sup> IMP, in accordance with the mentioned document, should train the Kosovo Security Forces and control their work, as well as support the inclusion of Kosovo's defence forces into Euro-Atlantic structures and international peace missions. In this respect, within IMP, NATO has entirely taken over the control over the creation of Kosovo Security Forces.

At the request of the authorities of the Republic of Macedonia, NATO established the *Operation Essential Harvest* in August 2001,<sup>8</sup>

whose main goal was to decrease the evident ethnic tensions between Albanian rebels and the country's authorities. The operation was focused on disarming members of the National Liberation Army and gradual building of reconciliation and inter-ethnic trust in Macedonia. In September 2001, the *Amber Fox* mission was established. Its goal was successful implementation of the Ohrid Agreement (2001). This agreement suspended the conflict between rebelling members of the Albanian minority community and the Macedonian authorities at the initiative of the United States and the EU. The agreement also served as a tool for conducting substantial changes in the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, along with the introduction of elements of consociative democracy and full representation of the Albanian communities at all levels of authorities.<sup>9</sup> Later, the above-mentioned mission was transformed into a new one – *the Allied Harmony*. However, in March 2003, the mentioned NATO mission in Macedonia was replaced by the *EUFOR Concordia* mission, based on the cooperation between NATO and the EU. This mission was replaced by European forces (*EUPOL Proxima Macedonia*) in December 2003, its goal being related to the consolidation of the rule of law, the fight against organized crime and the reform of the Macedonian Ministry of Interior. Later, on 15 December 2005, *the EUPAT Macedonia* mission started with its work. It had similar tasks to the previous one, and lasted only six months.

All the above-mentioned shows that NATO missions in the region of the Western Balkans were related firstly to the implementation of particular peace agreements (Dayton Peace Agreement – 1995, UN Security Council Resolution 1224 – 1999, Ohrid Agreement – 2001) and peacekeeping operations. A few years later, a new phase of democratic consolidation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia followed, which caused changes in the character of the mentioned NATO missions, and later their transformation in cooperation with the EU and other organizations. Nowadays, mainly under the auspices of the EU, new missions are formed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, relying mostly on NATO's capacities. Their main goals are the implementation of the rule of law, the transformation of armed forces and police formations, and the fight against organized crime. It is important to emphasize that within the International Military Presence in Kosovo, NATO's predominance in the mentioned process was ensured.



## 2. Membership of the Western Balkan Countries in NATO:

### State and Perspectives

All countries emerging from the former Yugoslavia, except the Republic of Serbia, were oriented towards the accession to NATO after gaining their independence. They began this process with their accession to NATO's programme Partnership for Peace. The Republic of Slovenia was the first ex-Yugoslav country to join the partnership on 30 March 1994, while ten years later it became a member of NATO. The Republic of Macedonia joined the same programme on 15 November 1995, but it still hasn't managed to become a member of NATO, above all due to the lack of compromise with the neighbouring Hellenic Republic over the country's name. However, there are certain indications that the authorities in Skopje and Athens might soon reach a compromise. However, the Republic of Croatia accessed the mentioned programme on 25 May 2000, after the change of political power in this country, and in 2009 became a member of NATO. The Republic of Albania became a member of the Partnership for Peace programme on 23 October 1994, and became a full member of NATO in 2009.

After the disappearance of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, the two republics joined the partnership separately, on 14 December 2006. At the same time, Bosnia and Herzegovina also joined the Partnership for Peace at the NATO Riga summit. Both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro subsequently became members of the U.S.-Adriatic Charter arrangement, established in 2003 in Tirana as an attempt to strengthen partnership between the countries in the Adriatic region (Albania, Croatia and Macedonia), on the one hand, and the USA, on the other hand, aiming at rapid accession to NATO.<sup>10</sup> This model of regional cooperation proved to be very successful, which was sustained by the fact that two out of three initial members of this arrangement – Albania and Croatia, became members of NATO in 2009. Meanwhile, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro received the Membership Action Plan (MAP), thus it became obvious that in the next few years these countries would become NATO members as well.

It is important to mention that Kosovo, after the unilateral proclamation of its independence on 17 February 2008, intensified the preparations for

accession to the Partnership for Peace programme, and that the authorities in Priština were oriented towards the accession to NATO. The Kosovo Ministry of Foreign Affairs has described NATO membership as one of its main foreign policy priorities.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, it should be stressed that members of armed forces of the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Croatia participate in NATO peace operations, and the same applies to the armed forces of Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which within the U.S.-Adriatic Charter participate in the above-mentioned missions.

Unlike the rest of the countries that emerged on the territory of the former Yugoslav federation, the Republic of Serbia has declared the status of "military neutrality", in accordance with the National Assembly Resolution on the Protection of Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity and Constitutional Order of the Republic of Serbia (25 December 2007).<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the official position of the ruling coalition is that the country, at this moment, is oriented towards the use of all capacities of NATO's Partnership for Peace programme, but not towards the membership in this organization.<sup>13</sup> The above-mentioned resolution denounced NATO's role related to the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement which determined the Alliance as the leader of the International Military Presence (IMP), and in the context of creation of an independent country in this territory, which is under UN protectorate. At the same time, this document states that the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia declares military neutrality, until an eventual referendum is called.<sup>14</sup>

The majority of public opinion polls show that only one third of examinees opt for Serbian accession to NATO. At the same time, the Serbian political elite, guided solely by the support of its electorate and not taking into account the substantial changes in its geostrategic surroundings, made a decision which moved the country away from the dominant form of collective defence in the region. In this context, the fact that political elites and the general public in Serbia were more oriented towards NATO membership only two years after the end of NATO's air campaign against the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia sounds absurd. This was supported by the fact that the former federal minister of foreign affairs, Goran Svilanović, in



his *exposé* of 24 October 2001, emphasized the Euro-Atlantic orientation of his country, and it was not until the start of the talks on Kosovo's status in 2005 that it was brought into question.<sup>15</sup>

The issue of relations between the Republic of Serbia and NATO, however, should be considered within a broader context. This implies the rational pursuit of its own security identity, as well as perceiving the reality that Serbia is surrounded by NATO member countries. On the other hand, NATO has no reason to insist on Serbian membership, giving its new geostrategic position of a country surrounded by countries that are already members of NATO or will soon be. However, the support to the Serbian government to continue its "integration into the Euro-Atlantic community of nations"<sup>16</sup> was stressed in the Declaration adopted at the NATO Summit in Strasbourg and Kehl, held on 2–4 April 2009. In this context, Serbia was offered a partnership during the implementation of the defence sector reforms, and strengthening of mechanisms of the political consultations and practical cooperation between NATO and the Serbian government. At the same time, Serbia was invited to support the stabilization of the situation in Kosovo.

### 3. NATO's New Strategic Concept and the Stability of the Western Balkans

In *the Alliance's Strategic Concept* from 1999, the Balkan region was mentioned only three times.<sup>17</sup> In this document, which still contains the basic strategic concept of the Alliance, it was pointed out that NATO, after the end of the Cold War, was ready to ensure security in Europe, which was also confirmed by the "commitment in its efforts to put an end to the immense human suffering created by conflict in the Balkans."<sup>18</sup> Right during the NATO Washington Summit, the air campaign on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was at its peak, because of, as was alleged, massive violation of Albanian human rights in Kosovo. This document promoted the Open Door Policy towards the Balkan countries as well. *The Alliance's Strategic Concept* contained the proven orientation of NATO member countries to prevent conflicts and successfully end the crisis management.<sup>19</sup> It includes, as stated in this document, the creation of conditions for full security of the region. NATO's basic goal – the preservation of security and stability in Southeastern Europe, as stated in this strategic concept, is possible only through the Alliance's operations in the Balkans.

The proposal of NATO's New Strategic Concept, entitled *NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement (Analysis and Recommendations of the Group of Experts on a New Strategic Concept for NATO)*,<sup>20</sup> presented in May 2010, refers to the Balkans in the context of its role in the 1990s in ensuring the end of ethnic cleansing. This only adds to the position presented in the document, which states that NATO contributed to the creation "of stable societies in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo."<sup>21</sup> Also, the Western Balkans is mentioned in the section entitled *Maintaining the Open Door*, where it was pointed out that in future the Alliance would expand toward the countries in this region.<sup>22</sup> The Balkans was also mentioned in the section entitled *Regional Trends*.<sup>23</sup> Particularly, the Balkans and the Caucasus were mentioned as regions in which international attention has to be focused on prevention of certain forms of intolerance, transnational crime (trafficking in arms, drugs and humans), as well as terrorism.

Within this document, it was also pointed out that the full success of collaboration between NATO, EU, UN and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe was demonstrated right here in the Balkans, which should be the Alliance's future practice in other crisis areas.<sup>24</sup> Later, a "second generation of partnerships"<sup>25</sup> among NATO member countries was emphasized. Their main goal is strengthening the capabilities for missions in Afghanistan and the Balkans. NATO missions in these regions, as stated, have contributed to the transformation of NATO forces and their capacities. In the sixth part of this document (*Conclusion*), it was once again underlined that NATO has succeeded, owing to its engagement in the Balkans, in eliminating the instability of the region, but that, in a certain way, the war legacy still remained.<sup>26</sup>

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The explicit determination of the majority of countries in the Western Balkans to access NATO should additionally strengthen the stability in the region and, in the future, ensure a relevant response to numerous regional and global security risks, challenges and threats. This applies, above all, to the fight against organized cross-border crime and some forms of terrorism. By accepting the values of the Euro-Atlantic community, countries in the Western Balkans and Southeast Europe will, at the same time, allow the elimination of any threat



to the security of this continuously instable part of the continent.

In fact, most of the countries in the Western Balkans will, through their membership in NATO, not only ensure their own national security, but also contribute to ensuring political and economic stability, respect of human rights, rule of law, struggle against organized crime and prevention of eventual conflicts in the whole region of Southeastern Europe. Beside the above-mentioned, the accession of the Western Balkan countries to NATO should contribute to the transformation of the Alliance's role in the Western Balkans, namely from being a factor that guarantees security in the region and influences the post-conflict consolidation and peacekeeping into a factor that will contribute to further stabilisation of the situation. This actually means that the Western Balkan countries, as well as the countries in Southeastern Europe in general, will transform from crisis regions, NATO has been engaged in over the past fifteen years, to partners

within the broader Euro-Atlantic community.

Also, if one compares the status of the Balkans within the still current NATO Strategic Concept from 1999, and the proposed new strategic concept, one may note that the first document treats this part of Europe as a region in which human rights are being massively violated, and that in this regard the Alliance's actions were reasonable, including the establishment of military operations which should contribute to the stabilization of the situation. The draft of NATO's new strategic concept, however, points out the necessity of accession of the Western Balkan countries to NATO, as well as stronger participation of the countries in the region in fighting contemporary security challenges and threats. It is clear, however, that in NATO's New Strategic Concept, the war legacy of the Western Balkans has not been forgotten yet, as well as all the phenomena it has directly or indirectly produced.

## NOTES

1 Simić, J. (2009) „Angažovanje NATO u bivšoj SFRJ: 1991–2001“, *Međunarodna politika* 50(1136): 112–132.

2 *Dayton Peace Agreement*, Annex 1A: Military Aspects of the Peace Settlement, Dayton, November 21, 1995, URL: <http://www.state.gov/www/regions/eur/bosnia/bosagree.html>. (August 10, 2010)

3 EUFOR BiH, URL: <http://www.euforbih.org>, (August 10, 2010)

4 Dodoš J. i Aleksić D., eds. (2009) *Evropska bezbednosna i odbrambena politika i zapadni Balkan*, Beograd: Centar za civilno-vojne odnose.

5 “Resolution 1244/1999.” (1999) Adopted by the Security Council of the United Nations at its 4011th meeting, on 10 June 1999.

6 “The Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement” (26 March 2007) Vienna: The United Nations Office of the Special Envoy for Kosovo.

7 *Ibidem*, XI. International Military Presence.

8 See: Dodoš J. i Aleksić D., eds. (2009) *Evropska bezbednosna i odbrambena politika i zapadni Balkan*, op. cit.

9 Đukanović, D. (2007) *Institucionalni modeli i demokratizacija postjugoslovenskih država*. Beograd: Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu: 56.

10 Đukanović, D. (2005) „Jadranska povelja - kraći put za ulazak u NATO“. *Međunarodni problemi* 57 (3): 373–390.

11 “The Programme and Core Objectives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs“, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Priština, URL: [http://www.mfa-ks.net/repository/docs/POLITIKA\\_E](http://www.mfa-ks.net/repository/docs/POLITIKA_E)

[JASHTME\\_E\\_REPUBLIKES\\_SE\\_KOSOVES-eng.pdf](#), (15 May 2010)

12 “Resolution of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia on the Protection of Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity and Constitutional Order of the Republic of Serbia”, (25 December 2007) Belgrade: National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia.

13 However, the concept of “military neutrality” has not made this sufficiently specific in its National Security Strategy (2009) and Defence Strategy (2009) of the Republic of Serbia.

14 “Resolution of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia on the Protection of Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity and Constitutional Order of the Republic of Serbia”, op. cit., point 6

15 „Ekspozé saveznog ministra za inostrane poslove Gorana Svilanovića u Saveznoj skupštini Savezne Republike Jugoslavije“, (24. oktobar 2001) Beograd, URL: [http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/spopol/Ministar/Govori/241001\\_s.html](http://www.msp.rs/Srpski/spopol/Ministar/Govori/241001_s.html), (15 May 2010)

16 “Strasbourg/Kehl Summit Declaration: Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Strasbourg/Kehl on 4 April 2009”, Strasbourg, Kehl, 4 April 2009, points 27–28.

17 “The Alliance's Strategic Concept. Approved by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington D.C.”, Washington D.C. 24 April 1999, URL: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_27433.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27433.htm). (10 August



2010)

18 *Ibidem*, Introduction, point 3.

19 *Ibidem*, Part II – Strategic Perspectives, The Evolving Strategic Environment, point 12. and Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management, point 31.

20 *NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement (Analysis and Recommendations of the Group of Experts on a New Strategic Concept for NATO)* (17 May 2010) Brussels: NATO Public Diplomacy Division.

21 *Ibidem*, Part One: Summary and Findings, NATO Legacy of Success: 7.

22 *Ibidem*, Part One: Summary of Findings, Moving

Towards NATO 2020, Maintaining Open door Policy: 10.

23 *Ibidem*, Part Two: Further Analysis and Recommendations, Chapter 1: The Security Environment, Analysis, Regional Trends: 15.

24 *Ibidem*, Part Two: Further Analysis and Recommendations, Chapter 2: Core Tasks, Analysis and Recommendations: 20.

25 *Ibidem*, Part Two: Further Analysis and Recommendations, Chapter 3: Partnership, Analysis and Recommendations: 22.

26 *Ibidem*, Part Two: Further Analysis and Recommendations, Chapter 6: Conclusion: 47.

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