



European Security Challenges and NATO's priorities

*Round table discussion
on the occasion of the visit to Greece
of H.E. The Secretary General of NATO, Mr. Jens Stoltenberg
Thursday, 21 April 2016*



Conclusions by the rapporteur, Dr. Marina Skordeli, Director, Jean Monnet European Centre of Excellence – University of Athens. Dr. Skordeli was Advisor to the Cabinet of the former Prime Minister, Mr. Kostas Karamanlis.

The organization of round table discussions ahead of the NATO Secretary General visits to European capitals does not concern only a few. Recording views and different approaches, as well as diffusing information and promoting dialogue, is a indispensable process, in order to recruit the support of public opinion to the joint venture of addressing challenges, which primarily concern these very societies and peoples, as demonstrated by the recent terrorist attacks in the heart of Europe.

As regards Greece, this discussion is of particular importance, as it belongs to those countries in need of force multipliers, such as the European and Euro-Atlantic pillar. Moreover, modern security threats have a strong maritime dimension, an area in which Greece has a particular relevance, interests, concerns and comparative advantages.

The Warsaw Summit comes at a time, during which a turning of page is noted in terms of security challenges in Europe and it is very important in relation to the priorities, which it will put forward. The balance to be achieved in the East-South axis, meaning the balance between those priorities related to the challenges coming from the East and those coming from the South, will be of crucial importance.

To the East, developments in Ukraine have turned the Alliance "back to basics", i.e. to the primary, existential condition of the collective security of NATO. This does not mean that NATO expects a Cold War type of threat, but it entails strengthening deterrence and preparation.

On the Southern front, the challenges are non-conventional and threats are more vague, but crucial. New and the so-called hybrid threats now sketch a fluid and perplexing setting, while their impact takes unpredictable dimensions. Terrorism acquires pan-European dimensions and confronting the so-called Islamic State and the export of jihadist terrorism is becoming urgent. Soft security issues are intertwined with hard security issues. In Greece, the army is called to address the refugee-migration crisis.

The Alliance member states are divided as to where the balance of priorities should tilt. In any case, there is no easy way to deal with the size and nature of these threats, which, as

they know no borders, cannot be addressed by any one country alone. Unity and solidarity is, therefore, required. In addition, the refugee-migration crisis brought together in cooperation all three major international organizations: the EU, NATO and the UN.

The Warsaw Summit will also deal with additional priorities. NATO is a uniquely powerful political and military alliance globally. However, the democratic element that governs it, as a coalition of 28 members, 28 democracies, where decisions are taken democratically and the power of one does not prevail, is often underestimated. However, democratization is no longer a given on the European continent and the need that it would not retreat should be an additional priority. The issue of member states' defense budgets will be another challenge, as European partners spend less and they do not spend it rationally. Finally, on the issue of NATO enlargement, large enlargements of the past are not expected to recur, whereas partnerships remain important, for instance with Australia, Japan, etc. A case that might occupy Greece in the future is that of Cyprus.

As regards **security challenges in the Mediterranean and NATO, EU and UN cooperation** there, one issue which concerns Greece's wider neighborhood, NATO, at various stages in its history, always had its attention focused on the region as a potential source of challenges and crises. After the end of the Cold War and in the framework of the Mediterranean Dialogue, NATO attempted to tackle phenomena of extremism that occurred within the societies of these countries by showing them that they can work from the inside and in cooperation, in order to address their concerns.

In today's security environment, challenges associated with traditional defense, but also those of WMD, international terrorism, piracy, transnational organized crime, illegal immigration, cyber warfare, manmade or natural disasters, prevail. All of these have one particularity; they can develop more easily in the maritime environment. Acknowledging this reality, both NATO and the EU, have recently adopted strategies for maritime security, relevant policies and bodies. Therefore, the Mediterranean should be the focus of attention, since it also maintains utmost strategic importance. Indicatively, it consists of 20 coastal states, 30% of the world maritime traffic and 25% of oil transportation is carried out through it and it is a popular tourist destination. An interesting question for discussion is that the Aegean operation in order to address the refugee-migration crisis could be taken on by the EU, under CSDP, as in the case of Operation Sofia, in Central Mediterranean. Regarding cooperation among NATO, EU and the UN in the area, some duplications occur and there is considerable scope for joint strategies and effective cooperation, e.g. in intelligence sharing.

Especially in dealing with the refugee-migration issue, this is an unusual situation and a major humanitarian crisis that catalyzes the boundary between soft and hard security. However, there also arises a question as to whether it is indeed a humanitarian crisis, whether it is mass migration flows caused by climate change, whether we are faced with a specific enemy or whether it is a combination of factors with larger dimensions, for example the fact that the Arab spring has turned into an Arab winter.

In Greece, the involvement of the Armed Forces, in order to address the refugee-migration crisis was and remains very active and it expanded, after the closure of the borders of the Balkan countries. This involvement concerns the establishment and completion of structures, the management of cantonment materials, the coordination among bodies, the development of communication channels with NGOs and volunteers, cooperation with international organizations and bilaterally with other countries and managing new challenges pending the implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement.

At the same time, **new challenges are posed for European Integration in general and particularly in the security field.** The European identity has been based on two factors: idealism, which referred to ideas and values, and rationalism, which referred to the venture of growth and competitiveness. Today, we are at a point, which is far from both these elements. Does the European edifice, which marked the end of barbarism, still mean the

same thing? Was there an original deficit in the design? Some short of "original sin" ? In any case, it is imperative that confidence in this edifice should be restored, possibly with a new social contract and the reaffirmation of "strength is in unity". There are serious misgivings as to a further step in European integration in the field of security and defense and, in particular, there are concerns that it would lead to undermining NATO. Another issue hampering further progress in this area is the intergovernmentalism, which runs throughout the edifice, and the fact that the European Commission has retreated from its role, as demonstrated by mistakes made in the case of Ukraine. Does the answer lie to moving further ahead, toward more federalism? In this case, it will be inevitable that decisions are taken by majority vote, except for specific exceptions, e.g. issues of national sovereignty, etc. It is, however, crucial that there will be progress in defense and security integration and Europe must be able to rely on its own forces, in view of the significant security challenges it is faced with.
