

## NATO Enlargement: Past And Present Challenges

Inida Methoxha

*PhD candidate  
Institute for European Studies,  
University of Tirana, Albania  
E-mail: inida.methoxha@mfa.gov.al*

---

**Abstract:** NATO has a solid enlargement experience since its creation in 1949. NATO has undergone 6 rounds of enlargements. NATO enlargement policy during Cold War was oriented to prevent the expansion of communist system in the borders of the West Europe and ensuring the security of this area. The end of the Cold War had its impact on the European security architecture. The collapse of communism provoked significant changes for the European Security and for the North Atlantic Organization, which remained the only military and political alliance responsible for the security of Euro Atlantic area. This new security environment naturally poses many questions about the NATO's transformation and brought into question the enlargement policy of the Alliance. This paper attempts to present the past experience and the present challenges of NATO Enlargement, considering that this process has been very controversial and critical. This current paper concludes that despite uncertainties, NATO should continue its further expansion, providing strong alliances with a view to enhance the contribution to the peace and to face with the new challenges arising in the international security environment but maintaining the balance with Russia.

**Key words:** NATO, enlargement, security, challenges,

---

During the period of 40 years, NATO proved to be the leading international institution, which successfully ensured the preservation of peace and security between two opposite blocs. The purpose of NATO creation in 1949 was clearly to prevent the spread of the communist system further West that become known as West Europe during the Cold War. NATO was originally established as a collective defense organization to provide security for its members to an external threat and it is always portrayed as more than a traditional military alliance, which has successfully performed its main task during the last half a century, and as long as the Warsaw Pact led by the Soviet Union stood, NATO was the most important defense's mechanism.

NATO enlargement policy during Cold War was oriented to prevent the expansion of communist system in the borders of the West Europe and ensuring the security of this area.

Even though in the Washington Treaty was not specified any specific threat, had no doubt that the Alliance's attention during these 40 years was focused on the Soviet Union. The enlargement policy of NATO during the Cold War was mainly based upon this specific threat.

NATO has carried out six rounds of enlargements since its founding in 1949. At that time, there were 12 original signatories of the Alliance Treaty. They included Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom and the USA. The first round of expansion took place in 1952 with the inclusion of Turkey and Greece, second expansion stage in 1955, West Germany, third enlargement in 1982 with Spain.

The consensus for the founding states of NATO was not a coincidence, it comes as a result of many discussions and negotiations which were concluded with the adoption of "Washington Letter" in September of 1949. In this document were three groups of states called (hard core, stepping stones and the goats) (Smith fq.26). United States of America, Canada, UK, France, Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg were in the first "hard core", these countries share the same strategy and form the so-called heart of the Alliance (Smith fq.26). Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Ireland and Portugal constitute "stepping stones", whose geographical position of these countries made significant military strategies. The last group consisted of Italy, Turkey and

Greece, none of these states were not considered appropriate in terms of geographic, strategic or ideological, but were no less important for Western Europe (Smith fq.27).

In the process of enlargement during the Cold War, we can point out some elements that has mainly influenced such as a) the possibility of direct military threat, due to its geographical location confrontation with the Soviet Union, b) the projection of the position of these states from the western countries, c) the overlapping interests of member countries of NATO with those new members and d) the Cold War developments influenced countries of NATO members in giving their consensus in accepting new members. (Smith, 2000, p.178)

The collapse of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact raised a series of questions regarding the future of NATO, maintaining security of this organism or its replacement with a security structure, which would include the former member of the Warsaw Pact. From this debate gradually was reached a consensus according to which NATO should be preserved as an organization, but it should be transformed into the so called "new architecture of European security", which would include a number of security structures and should establish links with members of the Warsaw Pact<sup>1</sup>.

The new security environment and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the field of security, has influenced NATO to a constant and continuous transformation. The main challenge of NATO transformation is the transition from a defense Alliance in a flexible security Alliance that should address global security threats.<sup>2</sup> These new threats are not traditional ones and old threats must be considered collectively. Of course as long as the security environment is unpredictable, as well as at regional and international level, NATO will have to transform itself in all aspects. These powerful new threats have affected the alliance's purpose, objectives, membership and missions (Peterson 2011, p.2).

### **Enlargement challenges after Cold War: Towards the Enlargement**

The new reality definitely put forward the Alliance new challenges. One of them was the new enlargement policy of NATO, and the building a new Europe of democratic values, bringing Eastern European countries closer to the West, ending the Iron Curtain that was decided by Yalta Conference<sup>3</sup>.

Initially, countries of Central and Eastern Europe were very enthusiastic regarding the membership in the Alliance as a guarantee that they will not be controlled anymore by the former Soviet Union and as a "security umbrella" in the vacuum of the security created after the collapse of Warsaw Pact.

The decision for NATO enlargement has not been easy and sometimes very critical and hesitant from Western countries. The main decision for the enlargement policy of NATO was taken in 1991 with the new strategic concept of the Alliance after the Cold War. The legal reference of Enlargement is Article 10 of Treaty of Washington. For the implementation of this enlargement policy, NATO created the forms and mechanisms to establish relationships with former Warsaw Pact members, such as the PfP, MAP, etc. These mechanisms set membership criteria equal for all countries aspiring to join NATO.

Starting in 1995, NATO agreed to expand the Alliance and presented the "Study on NATO Enlargement" which foresaw the merits of accepting new members and how they will be realized. This study was a result of pressure from the U.S. and Germany over the North Atlantic Council to start the work on a study on the

---

<sup>1</sup> NATO-s Handbook, 2006, p.198, <http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2006/hb-al-2006.html>

<sup>2</sup> Roth.Willam, V. Senator, "Nato in the 21st century:" published by North Atlantic Assembly, Printeted by: Vay Ruys s.a Brussels, September 1998, p.47.

<sup>3</sup> An agreement reached near the end of World War II, between President Franklin D. Roosevelt of the United States, Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Britain, and Premier Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union. The three met in Yalta, in the southern Soviet Union, in February 1945

modalities, principles and implications of NATO enlargement (Smith, 2000). This was the first decision of the Alliance to open a process that will ensure each country's ability to meet specific conditions of membership.

This study examines 'why' and "how " of future admissions into the Alliance. The Study on NATO Enlargement concluded that, with the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, there was both a need for and a unique opportunity to build a better security in the entire Euro-Atlantic area without recreating dividing lines.<sup>4</sup>

Study on NATO enlargement provided the basic conditions that must meet the countries who wanted NATO membership:

1. Functioning of a democratic political system (which included free elections and fair elections and respect the freedoms and human rights, law and market economy;
2. Democratic civil and military relations;
3. Treatment of minorities in accordance with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE);
4. Settlement of disputes with neighboring countries and the commitment to resolve them by peaceful means;
5. A military contribution to the Alliance and the willingness to cooperate and act jointly with other Alliance members.

Year 1997 has been extraordinary year for NATO. The first enlargement after Cold War with three new members; establishment of new relationship with Russia and Ukraine, the Council created the NATO-Russia Council and Euro-Atlantic Cooperation with 44 partners and developed the Mediterranean dialogue and took the initiative to revise the strategic concept.

NATO enlargement after the end of the Cold War has been gradual, initially with 3, 9 and 2 members.

Three rounds of enlargement:

1. 1999 (Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary);
2. 2004 (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia)
3. 2009 (Albania and Croatia).

Enlargement is in fact an on-going and dynamic process, based upon Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, which states that membership, is open to any "European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area"<sup>5</sup>.

The main principle of the enlargement process is that the new members are expected not only benefit from membership in the Alliance but also to contribute to collective defense alliance. They should be prepared to participate in other Alliance missions (Trifunovska, 1996 p.305).

States seeking the membership in NATO must demonstrate that they were able to meet the principles of the Washington Treaty and to contribute to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area. In this sense they are expected to meet the political, economic and military that are specifically addressed in the Study of NATO Enlargement, 1995.

Some of the crucial objectives that NATO has taken into account for its enlargement policy were:

- a. Strengthening and consolidation of NATO as an organization, that increase stability and security of individual states as a candidate and member countries, even countries that are not members;
- b. Increased security and stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic region,

---

<sup>4</sup> Study on NATO Enlargement", NATO On-line library: <http://www.nato.int/docu/basicxt/enl-9501.htm>

<sup>5</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty , 4 April 1949 published by the North Atlantic Assembly, <http://www>.

- c. Assistance in terms of European security architecture and CESDP (common European policy of security and defense), etc<sup>6</sup>.

However, we can say that the opening of NATO eastward is conducted in accordance with its strategic vision to build an Europe "undivided and free". This process has moved forward with the objectives set in the Membership Action Plan (MAP) and according to strategic priorities of NATO. In this context, NATO should consider all the applicant countries equally and do not discriminate geographical or historical reasons.

Rounds of enlargement of NATO after the Cold War have been the result of political decision more than military decisions (Smith 2000). Each of these six rounds of NATO enlargement had its roots in the security needs.

Other countries already had their roadmap. This expansion helped to eliminate divisions and lines dividing the Cold War. It would be unfair to exclude the democratic countries of Central and Eastern Europe from Western institutions only because they have been behind the Iron Curtain against their will.

The expansion of NATO and the European Union towards the East has been a significant dimension of the transformation of Europe since the Cold War.

### **Enlargement debate**

NATO enlargement certainly generated plenty of debate both within members of NATO and aspiring countries and especially with Russia.

In the history of NATO enlargement has been and will be arguments pro and against enlargement. Debates cannot be avoid. Some of the main arguments against which have accompanied the enlargement processes have been:

Loss of ability to be able to take military and political decisions necessary. That's the fact that NATO takes decisions on the basis of consensus. The big question of all is what will happen when the Alliance will grow with 35 member countries? There are suggestions that NATO should reconsider the decision making system but still not known whether or not will happen? Will the countries have a veto? Who will have it?

Another concern is the level of the armed forces of these countries not in the standards required by the Alliance, and the possible involvement of Alliance in territorial and ethnic conflicts with their neighboring states.

Obstacles have emerged as well as within the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In some candidate countries have had internal arguments of politicians who opposed the admission of membership in NATO. Financial liability as a heavy burden for the economies of countries and the membership would weaken the country in place to strengthen him (here can make an example of the previous position of Serbia, Armenia and to some extent and the Ukraine).

There was not a previous debate about costs in the original creation of NATO, or in any previous expansion. This debate has been shown in 1998, the decision for enlargement with three Central European countries and continues even in nowadays. The argument against NATO enlargement is the cost and it is not shared equally between the members states.

Enlargement provokes Russia, especially in the East and consequently may terminate cooperation needed to guarantee the peace and security especially after 2001.

As long as NATO continues the process of enlarging, the peace and stability once limited to Western Europe can spread and include the rest of the Europe as well. The greatest threat to stability in this region would be the perception that some nations will be left outside the process. Such perception could give rise to new anxieties and old disputes that could be difficult to control or moderate. (William, V, p.52)

---

<sup>6</sup> NATO Hand Book, 2006

### *Russian attitude to NATO enlargement policy*

Any discussion on NATO and its enlargement in particular, should consider the Russian factor. Russia during the three rounds of enlargement has raised its claims and concerns about the process of enlargement of the Alliance. Russia's position has not been the same if we compare the three rounds of NATO enlargement. But still unclear is to understand the Russian position on membership for Ukraine and Georgia, countries where Russia has a traditional influence (case of Ossetia and Abkhazia).

What are some of Russia's concerns in relation to NATO enlargement?

1. First, the presence of NATO in Ukraine would threaten Russian control in the Black Sea.
2. Second are 11 million ethnic Russian living in Ukraine, which means more than 20% of the population.
3. Third, NATO will have a direct border with Russia.
4. NATO expansion to Russia means reducing its influence, particularly in countries which have been traditionally under the Russian influence.
5. Negative attitude towards enlargement of the Alliance of the majority of Russian population.<sup>7</sup>

### **NATO must meet the enlargement challenges**

NATO has pledged that the accession of Albania and Croatia to the Alliance will not be the last phase of enlargement and the door to NATO membership will remain open to other states who wish to join and meet the requirements for membership. In spite of this general agreement articulated at the new strategic concept of December 2010 and at the Declaration of heads of states to the Chicago summit, the allies remain uncertain concerning how to move ahead. Some would prefer to pause, others have strongly advocated giving enlargement a southern dimension, some, however object to moving ahead with Ukraine and Georgia.

The growing number beyond 35 will increase the political, social and cultural and economic diversity of the Alliance. Consequently, fostering a consensus within the Alliance will become a greater challenge.

NATO enlargement should be carefully paced, not paused (William V.Roth, 1998). The next summit should initiate the next phase of enlargement demonstrating that enlargement will be a continuing process. The expansion of NATO to include eager and viable candidates reinforces NATO's strength and leads toward a European security system that is inclusive and stabilizing.

Candidates for membership should be judged with the reference to the guidelines provided in the Study on NATO enlargement, regardless of their geographic location in the Europe. Of course, the Allies should carefully monitor the continuing process of enlargements and its effects on the overall security and effectiveness of the Alliance.

The North Atlantic Treaty remains a vital document whose words express the basic values and the interests shared by parties to the treaty. The treaty provides a framework that should be expanded to include other European democracies who share the values expresses in the Treaty and are ready to contribute to fulfillment of the Treaty's goals.

### **Concluding remarks**

Obviously the process of NATO enlargement has not been an easy process and supported by all, there were doubts, objections and debate, but despite all this, NATO's policy of open doors functioned and continues to

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.eusec.org/baranovsky.htm> , Vladimir Baranovsky, Prepared for the IISS/CEPS European Security Forum, Brussels, 9 July 2001



remain so by being sure that this is the only way of creating a Europe united, democratic and free.

NATO membership has helped countries to overcome difficulties, to enter to the path of reforms and progress toward rapprochement with Western countries.

Europe vision of a stable and secure area, in which NATO has the lead role implies cooperation with Russia which has a strong potential in the world politics.

The Alliance is committed to maintain its 'open door' policy for the European countries. The new concept sets the goal of enhancing partnerships through flexible formats that bring NATO and its partners together across and beyond existing frameworks.<sup>8</sup>

This Article aims to conclude that the open-door policy of NATO will continue and countries must meet the criteria for enlargement as well as to cooperate with NATO in peacekeeping missions, and to respect the bilateral relations with other states. On the other hand NATO must continue its further expansion, providing strong alliances with a view to increase the contributions for the security of its defense and maintenance of the peace.

Naturally, future enlargement of NATO will help us to create a clearer picture of the enlargement process.

## References

- Barroso.Emanuel, Political Guidelines for the next Commission, September 3, 2009 [http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_barroso/president/pdf/press\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/pdf/press_en.pdf), p.3
- Caparini. Marina 2003, Security sector reform and NATO and EU enlargements, Sipri
- Demi. Leonard, "European Enlargement and the integration of the Western Balkans", Dudaj, Tirana 2009.
- Faber Anner, 2009 Enlarging the European Union: Effects on the new member states and the EU (<http://tepsa.be/Enlarging%20the%20European%20Union.pdf>)
- Hopkinson. William, Enlargement: New NATO, Institute for Security Studies, Western European Union.
- Rakipi. Albert, 2008, "Weak States & Security 2008", Albanian Institution for International Studies (AIIS) Tirana 2008.
- "A larger EU-A more Secure Europe, Study of the consequences for Security of EU Enlargement", Stockholm. 1997, Norsteads Tryckeli AB, Fritzes, 1997.
- Roth.Willam, V. Senator, "Nato in the 21st century:" published by North Atlantic Assembly, Printed by: Vay Ruys s.a Brussels, September 1998.
- Peterson. James W, "NATO and Terrorism", The Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, 2011.
- Knezovic. Sandro -Complementarity or Competition?-EU and NATO Enlargement processes and their effects on regional cooperation, National Defence Academy and Bureau for Security Policy at the Austrian Ministry of Defence in co-operation with PFP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes, Vienne 2007
- Trifunovska Snežana The Transatlantic alliance on the eve of the new millennium, 1996
- Shalamanov. Velizar 2011, Nato's Retirement? The Centre of European Security Studies (CESS) 2011.

---

<sup>8</sup> Cooperative security-multinational solutions to global issues, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO Secretary General. [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int)