

# NATO: A View from Central Europe

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# NATO: A View from Central Europe

**Bogdan Klich**

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Poland has a full place in an Alliance seeking to meet new challenges. Warsaw naturally supports everything that strengthens the links between the United States and Europe, but also favors the development of the capacities of the European Union (EU), which complement those of the Alliance. Furthermore, while Poland favors the enlargement of the Alliance to include Ukraine and Georgia, it also seeks a deepening of cooperation with Moscow.

politique étrangère

This is a unique moment to address North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) issues, mainly because anniversaries celebrated in the course of 2009 are clearly of particular importance for both the Alliance and Poland.

In March, we had the tenth anniversary of the wave of NATO enlargement that embraced Poland. In May, five years had elapsed since Poland's accession to the European Union. Then, at the Strasbourg/Kehl summit, the allies celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of NATO's foundation. They also took the important decision to develop a new Strategic Concept. Thus, at the next meeting of heads of state and government in Lisbon, NATO may be provided with a new strategic framework, reflecting changes in the security environment and adjusting the Alliance to current requirements. The ambition of Warsaw, as with other capitals, is to actively co-shape the new document. This ambition is well illustrated by the fact that the former Polish minister of foreign affairs, Adam D. Rotfeld, is a member of the group of 'wise men' that is to prepare an initial draft of the new Strategic Concept.

In this anniversary year, it is fair to state that NATO's achievements in recent years should be perceived in terms of a success story. It is beyond doubt that NATO remains the main pillar of member states' security and defense, providing them with effective and credible security guarantees.

The Alliance remains viable through the process of internal adaptation, continued enlargement and the development of relations with all partners that contribute to its efforts in key regions to ensure Euro-Atlantic security.

Over recent years, NATO has also become an important instrument for providing security and stabilization even in the remote regions of the world. It has effectively adapted to new security requirements and is preparing for threats and challenges of a less conventional nature.

During the last decade, Poland, as one of the Central European states, has significantly contributed to such changes in NATO by proving to be “a good and credible ally in fair weather or foul”<sup>1</sup> and by demonstrating a proper understanding of the necessary balance of rights and obligations required from members of the organization. That is why, in the current strategic debate, Poland does not focus on the question of whether or not NATO is still needed but rather on what should be done to make it even more effective and how to keep the Alliance in good shape in the decades ahead.

In this context, it is worth addressing four issues important to the Polish approach to the Alliance: NATO’s role and tasks; cooperation with the European Union and the United States; enlargement; and relations with Russia.

## NATO in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

It is clear that the fundamental problem in the ongoing strategic debate concerns the Alliance’s role in the years to come. There is a need to strengthen and deepen consensus on how to maintain the balance between those functions outlined in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, and those tasks relating to various challenges, which often require actions on the global level.

There is no doubt that, in the immediate future, NATO will face Afghan-istan-type challenges and will have to deal with other numerous threats in the area of maritime piracy, and cyberspace and energy security. But at the same time the Alliance must retain the ability to defend its members, since the old threats have not disappeared – as the conflict in Georgia last year indicates. This is of particular importance because NATO needs to prove its relevance at home in order to get the public’s mandate for acting far

1. As promised by Polish Foreign Affairs Minister Bronislaw Geremek when Poland joined the Alliance in 1999.

away from its borders. NATO's current endeavors clearly show that these two functions are not irreconcilable.

The Alliance is currently involved in a number of operational activities, often in remote regions of the world. These operations, such as the one in Afghanistan, prove that NATO is capable of defending its core values while adapting to the challenges of the current security environment. Accordingly, member states are fully aware that success in NATO operations depends on the willingness and readiness of all the allies to share the burdens in political, military and financial terms.

For these reasons, Poland takes with utmost seriousness the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation in Afghanistan, the largest and the most demanding mission in the Alliance's history. Polish troops are responsible for security and stabilization in Ghazni province. There are no national caveats limiting the operational capacities of these forces, of the kind that often pose an urgent problem for the allies. To provide a safe and secure environment for the elections – the presidential elections in August and the parliamentary elections in 2010 – the level of our forces was raised to 2,000, backed up with combat and transport helicopters, while another 200 troops were ready if required for deployment at short notice. An important part of our efforts is the training of Afghan security forces and development assistance, in response to NATO expectations for a comprehensive approach to the Afghan operation.

NATO transformation is aimed at providing the Alliance with the tools and capabilities for the full range of tasks. While developing new expeditionary capabilities, NATO should thus maintain those capabilities needed to address traditional challenges. A good example in this context is the NATO Response Force, a flagship transformational project that enables the Alliance to respond quickly and effectively to a crisis both of a traditional and an expeditionary nature. Another example is the Strategic Airlift Capability, which provides the allies with critical transport assets for operational purposes. Another key element of NATO transformation is the adequate geographical distribution of NATO military infrastructure on member states' territories. Poland actively contributes to this process and its initiatives. Warsaw also sees the value that NATO can add in supporting member states' efforts to counteract disruption to the flow of vital resources, and to deal with acts of cyber-terrorism and other similar threats.

NATO cannot provide comprehensive solutions to all such threats, but that should not serve as an excuse for lack of action in these fields. Since

the Riga summit in 2006, the Alliance has undertaken substantial work in the area of energy security. It has been agreed that NATO mechanisms and tools can be used for protecting critical infrastructure, for intelligence-sharing and for fusion and consequence management. In a similar manner, after cyber-attacks on Estonian computer systems in spring 2007, the Alliance's policy on cyber-defense was defined and is now in the phase of implementation.

### **The transatlantic link**

Poland recognizes NATO as an exceptional forum for both consultation and cooperation between Europe and America. US engagement in the Alliance is seen as a prerequisite to maintain the strength and vitality of the organization that provides its members with key security guarantees. The numerous threats and challenges of today only emphasize the need to maintain this position.

Warsaw therefore supports the initiatives that enable the anchoring of the United States in Europe, contribute to close cooperation between European and American allies on the continent, and help the Alliance to tackle a whole spectrum of challenges peculiar to the current security environment.

Advancing NATO-EU cooperation plays an important role in reinforcing transatlantic relations. From the Polish perspective, a solid partnership between NATO and the European Union constitutes a warranty for transatlantic security. They have both been instrumental in the post-Cold War transformation of Europe, and share fundamental strategic interests in today's volatile security environment. The membership and purposes of

### **The NATO-EU relationship should be complementary and enhanced**

NATO and the EU virtually overlap. The challenges and threats to security that they face are of a similar nature and – as demonstrated by Afghanistan and Kosovo – must be tackled together. For the sake of opera-

tional success, there is thus a strong need for complementarity and reinforcement, as opposed to rivalry and duplication. There should be readiness to make full use of the Berlin Plus arrangements, but also to go beyond them, both in terms of planning and cooperation on the ground and of strategic dialogue and consultations. The development of capabilities in both organizations must obviously not proceed in isolation from one another.

In 2009, some optimism arose concerning the NATO-EU partnership. At the Strasbourg/Kehl summit, Paris declared its reintegration with

NATO's military structure, and showed that it is determined to ensure that the NATO to which it is reintegrating is capable and effective. This is the step all the allies strongly need to bring us closer to an alliance of our dreams. Of course, France managed to contribute militarily to NATO in the past even when outside its command and planning structures. However, this situation, if continued, could have been misperceived as revealing a lack of solidarity and cohesion within the Alliance. The return of Paris to NATO should help us to avoid this negative perception.

At the same time, the Washington administration showed its interest in the strengthening of the EU contribution to international security and stabilization across the globe. The French presidency of the EU made an effort to bring Russia and Georgia to an acceptable agreement, putting an end to war in the southern Caucasus region, and launched the EU civilian monitoring mission that played a key role in stabilizing the region.

Another visible confirmation of this positive tendency in NATO-EU relations is the Alliance's modified strategy on security and stabilization in Afghanistan, adopted at the jubilee summit. It recognized something that the European allies had often raised – that success in operations depends on using both military troops and civilian tools, in accordance with the principle that security and development are two sides of the same coin.

Poland welcomes these developments. As stated in Polish strategic documents, NATO and the EU are two key pillars of its security and defense policies. Poland recognizes the need for a credible and strong NATO as well as a European Union equipped with effective foreign and defense policy.

For these reasons, Poland participates in the EU's flagship projects and aspires to be a leading driver in the development of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). Examples of its active engagement are, *inter alia*, the Polish leadership in the two Battlegroups in 2010 and 2013 and its decision to send troops to Africa twice under the aegis of the EU, in 2006 and 2008.

The ongoing strategic debate in NATO provides a good opportunity to consider the future of the important relations between the Alliance and the EU and to seek areas in which they may be further developed.

## Enlargement

Three rounds of NATO enlargement since the end of the Cold War bear strong testimony to the Alliance's vitality and attractiveness and its stabilization role on the European continent, while they also reinforced its political and military potential. Throughout this period, the enlargement process has been part and parcel of NATO's partnership policy. However, the ongoing strategic debate raises a critical question about the future of the process. Some argue that NATO should now focus less on enlargement and more on cooperation on a global scale, with those partners that share NATO's principles and actively contribute to its stabilization efforts.

Due to NATO's enlargement, the Euro-Atlantic area is now much safer and more secure than it was in previous decades. NATO membership was – and remains – a major incentive for European nations to introduce and implement difficult but necessary reforms of a political and military nature, as well as to build better neighborly relations. Furthermore, even though the Cold War ended almost twenty years ago, some unfinished security issues in Europe remain to be dealt with. It is still NATO's mission to help deal with these issues and contribute to the further unification of the continent. Enlargement is a critical process that brings the Alliance closer to this fundamental, long-standing objective. As such, it must be kept high on NATO's agenda, while the expectations of other partners in the Alliance's day-to-day work continue to be met.

Consequently, it is of utmost importance to keep NATO's door open for those states that are willing and ready to join the organization. Accordingly, decisions on the enlargement of Euro-Atlantic structures will always be a sovereign choice of NATO members, and not a form of calculated settlement with any third party. Simultaneously, there is a need to conduct a dialogue with those countries that, for various reasons, have concerns about the whole process. This should stimulate our efforts to convince them that enlargement is a step in favor of security and stabilization.

In this context, it should not come as a surprise that Poland remains a proponent of the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Ukraine and Georgia and believes that cooperation with these two states is important for the Alliance. Kyiv and Tbilisi have potential that would significantly contribute to NATO efforts in various areas, in Europe and elsewhere. However, the maintenance of NATO's assistance is required to overcome internal difficulties that Kyiv and Tbilisi face in their political and military efforts.

Poland thus seeks the implementation of the decisions made at the Bucharest summit in 2008, and reconfirmed last April in Strasbourg/Kehl, with regard to these two countries. In Romania, the allies made an unprecedented political decision envisaging Ukraine's and Georgia's future membership of NATO. There is no doubt that this will be a demanding and long-term process, during which much effort and patience will be required in the two capitals. Nevertheless, the Alliance has to maximize its advice, assistance and support and remain ready to invite these two states into the Alliance once they are willing and ready. The NATO-Ukraine Commission and the NATO-Georgia Commission, with such mechanisms as Annual National Programs, will provide a key impetus for stimulating the necessary reforms.

### Keep Russia in

The future of relations with Russia is the next key point of the current strategic debate, and is particularly significant for Poland. Moscow is a key strategic partner for the Alliance and plays an indispensable role in Euro-Atlantic security. It would be timely, however, to ask openly about the role of NATO-Russian bilateral cooperation, twelve years since its official establishment (in the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act) and seven years since the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) was established to provide a framework for consultation and practical cooperation. The question now is whether the NATO-Russia Council is supposed to be only a consultation forum for building trust, reinforced with some concrete projects, or whether it can be used as a real instrument of mutually beneficial cooperation.

**The results of the NATO/Russia Council are not satisfactory**

In the quest for answers to this question, the Polish approach towards Russia is driven by a spirit of inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness. Poland is open for dialogue and cooperation between Russia and the Alliance and remains interested in having in Russia a trustworthy and credible partner.

Since its establishment seven years ago, much effort has been made to implement the NATO-Russia Council's main functions related to deepening consultation on key security issues as well as engaging in concrete projects and initiatives. There has been some progress, albeit only in several areas, such as the training of Afghan and Central Asian counter-narcotics officers. As well, Russian vessels participated in the Alliance's maritime operation *Active Endeavour*, part of NATO's anti-terrorist efforts. The Cooperative Airspace Initiative has been developed, with its NATO



coordination center to be developed in Warsaw. Its significance depends on the exchange of information on air movement in the border regions of Russia and the Alliance, which constitutes an element in the overall anti-terrorist struggle, while building mutual trust and confidence between the two sides.

Nevertheless, these positive developments should not overshadow the fact that the results of the NRC are still far from satisfactory. Differences in numerous issues of a political nature dominated its agenda from the beginning. NATO enlargement and Kosovo are just two of the most visible ones. Dialogue on outstanding issues is of course needed, even though agreement in many cases is barely foreseeable. Most of the allies agree that this situation must change, but simultaneously emphasize that the ball is in the Russian court. This stems from the fact that Russia tends to forget that the Alliance is not a threat and that its actions are not directed at Russia, but developed for the purpose of addressing common challenges, which Russia also faces. This makes it difficult to advance cooperation in practical fields identified in the Pratica di Mare Declaration of 2002, related to enhancing interoperability and security sector reform.

The recent Russian-Georgian conflict highlighted NATO-Russian difficulties. The crisis made it clear that there is a long way ahead in building real trust and confidence between Moscow and the Alliance. For some states it brought bad memories of the past, leading them to conclude that there is a strong need for the Alliance to convey to Russia a coherent common message. Dialogue and cooperation need to be continued, on the basis of the principles and values defined *inter alia* in 1997 and 2002.

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While celebrating the decade of Poland's membership in NATO, one has to note how the Alliance evolved significantly over this period, successfully adapting to dynamic changes in the security environment. Over the same period, profound changes have taken place in Polish security policy. Beyond doubt, Poland has a broader and more comprehensive perception of security issues than it had in the past. Polish troops have gained valuable experience through participation in demanding expeditionary missions in various regions of the world such as Afghanistan and Africa. The Polish Armed Forces are undergoing a thorough process of transformation, the aim being to develop the required capabilities and to become increasingly professional. As a result, these forces will be smaller but fitter to respond adequately to contemporary threats and challenges.

NATO remains one of the two main pillars of Poland's security and defense policy. While conducting expeditionary operations, the Alliance fulfills its Article 5 commitments on collective defense, provides a unique venue for consultation and cooperation between European and American allies, and contributes to security and stabilization on the whole continent. For these reasons, Poland remains committed to maintaining NATO's strength and relevance in the years to come. Accordingly, Poland expects that, by means of the current strategic debate, NATO will be provided with the new Strategic Concept that will both address the needs of the organization and satisfy Polish security concerns.



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## KEYWORDS

NATO  
European Union  
Enlargement of the Alliance  
Russia

