

A Report of the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies Conference on

Toward NATO Membership: Harmonizing Efforts in Southeast Europe

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Introduction

The NATO Summit in Prague, Czech Republic, in November 2002 ushered in a new era for the Trans-Atlantic Alliance. NATO Heads of State and Government formally invited seven countries to Accession Talks with NATO: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Notably, these invitations to the Prague Seven, also heralded in a new strategic situation for Southeast Europe. Three Partnership for Peace participating countries from Southeast Europe – Albania, Croatia, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia -- were not extended invitations, thus creating a new impetus for regional cooperation among these countries. By the end of 2003, these three countries had already taken steps through various institutions and agreements, including the Adriatic Charter, to cement plans for cooperative action. Capitalizing on the experience of the Marshall Center in enhancing regional cooperation and supporting European cooperative security structures, from November 4-7, 2003, the Conference Center held a conference to support the efforts of Albania, Croatia, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to further refine cooperative efforts toward NATO membership and broaden security cooperation.

Forty-one participants representing both MoD and MFA agencies attended, and delegations were headed at the deputy minister level. The purpose of the conference was to evaluate the current state of individual reform programs and evaluate planned and possible avenues for cooperation in the context of the Membership Action Plan (MAP) process. The conference also served as a forum to test some of the ideas put forth through the Adriatic Charter. Representatives of Bosnia & Herzegovina and Serbia & Montenegro participated as observers.

Senior representatives from participating countries presented plans and ideas for cooperation, and plenary sessions were supported by separate working group sessions in which participants attempted to define a consensus vision for future cooperation, and subsequently translate that vision into an action plan. The discussions were enhanced by experts from the Prague Summit invitee nations – some of whom cooperated toward common objectives that led to necessary transformation that supported their invitation for NATO accession – who provided lessons learned from their experiences. Representatives of NATO, U.S. NATO, the U.S. Department of State, and other experts provided direction and

insights. Ambassador Mary Ann Peters, Marshall Center Associate Director for International Liaison, moderated the conference.

Conference Foundations

The basic foundation of the conference was the idea that all of the participating countries included future NATO accession as a strategic national goal, and that NATO maintained its open door commitment to consider these countries for future membership. The final communiqué from the Prague Summit made this commitment clear:

We commend Albania for its significant reform progress, its constructive role in promoting regional stability, and strong support for the Alliance. We commend the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for the significant progress it has achieved in its reform process and for its strong support for Alliance operations, as well as for the important steps it has made in overcoming its internal challenges and advancing democracy, stability and ethnic reconciliation. We will continue to help both countries, including through the MAP, to achieve stability, security and prosperity, so that they can meet the obligations of membership. In this context, we have also agreed to improve our capacity to contribute to Albania's continued reform, and to further assist defence and security sector reform in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia through the NATO presence. We encourage both countries to redouble their reform efforts. They remain under consideration for future membership.

Croatia, which has made encouraging progress on reform, will also be under consideration for future membership. Progress in this regard will depend upon Croatia's further reform efforts and compliance with all of its international obligations, including to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

The Membership Action Plan will remain the vehicle to keep aspirants' progress under review. Today's invitees will not be the last.

Building on this foundation, the conference made clear from the outset its purpose to define areas where cooperation among coun-

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tries in Southeast Europe would help individual countries meet MAP goals, and conversely, to define areas where cooperation would not be constructive.

The conference took place in the context of previous actions on the part of the participating countries. On May 2, 2003, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell joined with Foreign Ministers Meta, Mitreva, and Picula to sign the Adriatic Charter, an initiative in the spirit of the 1998 U.S.-Baltic Charter. The presidents of Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia had proposed the charter jointly at the NATO Prague Summit in November 2002. The Charter was one among many initiatives with the laudable goal of fostering cooperation, and served as the basis for participants to take stock of the current status of cooperation.

The opening comments by Ambassador Mary Ann Peters, Croatian Deputy Minister of Defense Zlatko Gareljic, and U.S. Ambassador to Croatia Ralph Frank confirmed these foundations and encouraged the participants to seek out significant steps that would carry the vision of cooperation to practical steps.

NATO Transformation, the MAP Process, and Information Sharing

Frank Boland, director of force planning in the Defense Policy and Planning Division of NATO's International Staff, provided the keynote address for the conference. He provided key insights into NATO's new roles, the transformation needed to support these roles, and the importance of defense reform to be successful in transformation. Noting the Prague Summit invitations changed the landscape for the newly invited countries, Boland pointed out that these countries

...now know that their defense will be able to rely on Allied assistance. That has an effect on how much they should plan to do for themselves with only their resources. But to able legitimately to call on Allied assistance, should they need it, they must also be prepared to contribute to operations, whether under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty or not, that contribute to the wider security that will benefit them as much as any other nation. And these contributions are not cheap.

He noted that in the end, the participants at the conference should examine the capabilities they are seeking to develop, and to consider the costs carefully as a function of budget planning.

Boland's keynote address was followed by a panel of experts who set out to provide some lessons learned from the experience of matching defense reform goals to future capabilities. Chaired by U.S. Air Force Lt Col John Cappello of U.S. European Command's J-5 (Plans)

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Division, the panel drew attention to the challenges of transformation and recommended some potential areas for cooperation among the three countries. Dr. Velizar Shalamanov, director for strategic studies at the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria and the former deputy defense minister of Bulgaria, provided an overview of the Bulgarian experience. He noted that Bulgaria used the NATO transformation requirements as tools to enhance security sector

cooperation and cooperation within the MoD. Mr. Ivan Hostnik, advisor to the government at the International Relations Department of the Ministry of Defense of Slovenia, provided a similar assessment from the Slovenian experience. He noted that the Slovenia process was conducted in several cycles, each providing a different level of opportunity for cooperation with neighbors.

Subsequent working group discussions focused on evaluating the current status of defense reform in the context of NATO transformation. Participants noted that, if the countries were to be successful in determining areas for cooperation in the context of NATO transformation, the vision of NATO and the expected capabilities of its future members would need to be more clear. A key perception was that NATO needed to provide more guidance to future members to help them define the capabilities that should be under development. The broadly-held conclusion that enhanced NATO guidance would enhance defense reform in the region led to a number of specific recommendations that could increase the effect of cooperative efforts among PfP countries in the region.

The main thrust of these recommendations was the idea of information sharing among all the countries of the region would facilitate better cooperative actions and improve the defense reform efforts of all. The timely exchange of important defense reform-related documents was voiced as an important step toward cooperation. Participants noted that document exchange could help individual countries determine areas for cooperation as planning cycles were still in their early stages. Along with the recommendation for a sharing of documents, participants recommended a sharing of experiences, suggesting that future 19+1 discussions involving the MAP process could include an invitation for other PfP countries to attend.

Defining the Capabilities for a Transformed NATO

The second day of the conference opened with a review of the Croatian experience. Dr. Jelena Grcic-Polic, assistant minister for defense policy from the Ministry of Defense of Croatia, drew attention to the fact that many countries in the region had to face the reality that the legacy of the currently reforming forces was not significantly far into the past. She noted the importance of considering a wide-array of missions and the necessity of matching capabilities to a practical budget. Importantly, she provided a potential foundation for cooperation by pointing out Croatia's ongoing tasks to include fully implementing decisions on downsizing and reorganization, development of the Armed Forces Long Term Development Plan, conducting a study on professionalization, introducing a Program Planning Budgeting System (PPBS) resource management tool, conducting a strategic defense review, enacting further legal adjustment, developing a public relations strategy, and ensuring a balance of resources.

A second panel followed the presentation of the Croatian case by drawing attention to the lessons learned from the development of capabilities from the experience of Lithuania and Bulgaria. Chaired by former NATO Assistant Secretary General Anthony Cragg, the panel provided a unique look into the differing perceptions and lessons learned. An interesting contrast was provided by Dr. Janina Sleivyte, deputy head of the Defense Policy Division at the Ministry of Defense of Lithuania. She pointed out that Lithuania had made the strategic decision to eliminate the mission of total and unconditional defense from its defense strat-

egy in lieu of collective defense. She pointed to the importance of defining niche capabilities for the forces, and ensuring that these forces were not hollow, but ready to contribute to the Alliance, thus producing a resource challenge. Dr. Tudor Tagarev, from the Center for National Security and Defense Research at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, provided insights into the types of missions that Bulgaria was accepting and pointed to capabilities

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that were being developed to match these missions. Significantly, he suggested that regional countries had to assess cooperation in the context of ongoing regional and multilateral cooperative institutions such as the Southeastern Europe Defense Ministerial (SEDM) and various other initiatives. Dr. Tagarev recommended that when considering

the future of cooperation toward the development of capabilities, participants should consider opportunities provided by security sector integration, collective crisis management capabilities, and shared training and bases.

The second day's working groups focused on the question of developing capabilities and the planning processes that are currently underway in each country. Participants were asked to focus on potential means to share information and lessons learned in their planning processes with the goal of defining areas of cooperation early in the planning phases. Although the groups did not report out to the plenary on the second day, a key conclusion discussed among all groups was that the countries should not pursue cooperation for cooperation's sake. In other words, cooperative activities should only be pursued if there was a tangible benefit.

Challenges to Reform and the Political Dimension of the MAP Process

The third day of the conference began with remarks from Mr. Rizvan Sulejmani, the deputy minister of defense of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Setting the stage for the third panel and the ensuing discussion, Minister Sulejmani pointed out two key issues: (1) NATO membership is not only a defense or a security issue, and (2) preparation for membership includes carrying out a full spectrum of reforms in the field of political, economic, legislative, defense security and cultural recognition. He also noted that in an environment where many of the security threats are not traditional military threats, but fall into a category of "asymmetric dangers," countries needed to meet these new challenges through an integrated process of all institutions of government.

Noting the special challenges of Macedonia's multi-ethnic population, he suggested that it was important to "keep the consensual and synergetic approach to the open questions and political discrepancies." Keeping with this synergetic theme, Mr. Sulejmani suggested several ways to increase cooperation both regionally and within the NATO context. First, NATO should consider partnering up one current NATO country and one newly integrating NATO country to one candidate country to share experiences and provide additional assistance. Second, in the regional context, he

suggested that the U.S., NATO, and the EU should harmonize their efforts and that all regional actors should play a role. He recommended that a new perspective of "non-discrimination, avoiding duplications and parallel activities, but in its nature will be multi-lateral, multi-level and multi-institutional, thus creating a network of mutually coherent and balanced forces."

Following the remarks of the Macedonian deputy minister, the third panel focused attention on these political challenges within the MAP process. Colonel Joseph Borsos, representative of Hungary to the Defense Planning Section of NATO, and Brigadier General Tudor Munteanu, deputy to the state secretary and head of the Department for Relations with the Parliament, Legislative Harmonization and Public Relations of Romania, provided insights from the Hungarian and Romanian experiences. Colonel Borsos pointed out the difficulties of adapting to a new security culture. He suggested that this difficulty extended beyond the military sphere and suggested that countries that sought to integrate with NATO should consider the political dimensions of adapting to this new culture. He suggested that the ever-changing environment for national defense planning and capabilities-building required that planners should remain responsive to the momentous changes confronting a country along the road to NATO accession.

General Munteanu suggested that defense planners had to consider necessary measures to coordinate their methods and timelines with other agencies and the parliament. For example, he noted that Romania's defense planning cycle was much longer than the government's financial planning cycle, necessitating a change in the law. Similarly, in the areas of force restructuring and the participation in the full spectrum of NATO operations, defense planners had to consider many areas where constitutional issues and specific laws might impede the execution of plans.

Most importantly, General Munteanu pointed out that there was a great deal of legal harmonization required as part of NATO accession. Pointing to Romania's experience, he noted that it had become "obvious to the current Government that a more efficient mode of cooperation with the parliament was required for the timely harmonization of Romania's then-current legislative framework with the established laws and legal procedures of NATO member states." He suggested that countries seeking accession may wish to consider opportunities that would facilitate cooperation and lessons learned regarding the processes of legal harmonization and working closely with parliaments to assure that defense reform efforts do not face legal obstacles.

Mr. Jim Dehart, a political officer at the U.S. Mission to NATO, chaired the panel. During the follow-up discussion to the panel, he reminded all of the participants that the defense and military issues only formed part of the MAP process. He suggested that countries in the region should consider cooperating in the political and economic fields. These include settling any international, ethnic or external territorial disputes by peaceful means; demonstrating a commitment to the rule of law and human rights; establishing democratic control of their armed forces; and promoting stability and well-being through economic liberty, social justice and environmental responsibility. While the military component was important, he suggested that the participants would ignore the other areas at their peril.

The third day working groups began to focus on specific areas

where countries could cooperate to overcome some of the challenges brought forward.

Experiences and Challenges to Implementing Cooperation on MAP

The final day of the conference began with remarks from the Deputy Minister of Defense of Albania, Pauli Zeri. He recounted many of the accomplishments and challenges of Albania's reform efforts, pointing to such issues as personnel development, the reorganization of the armed forces structure, and the reform of the defense resource management system. Importantly, he noted the importance of cooperation with other institutions and individual countries. Noting that cooperation within the PfP and EAPC contexts were profitable for Albania in the context of the MAP process. He went on to suggest that other institutional cooperative efforts, such as those that were taking place with SFOR, KFOR, UN, EU, OSCE and other organizations to build a stable, democratic and peaceful Southeast Europe. He suggested that cooperation with neighbors might be expanded within the context of these organizations.

Following Deputy Minister Zeri's thoughts, the final panel discussed various opportunities for cooperation from the experience of the Baltic states, and suggested some ideas in the Southeastern European context. Ambassador Jan Arveds Trapans, Ph.D., former Minister of Defense of the Republic of Latvia and former Ambassador of Latvia to NATO Headquarters, focused on some of the inherent challenges of taking cooperation from paper to reality. He noted that even in the Baltics, countries still had their own processes and political environments, and he suggested that any joint efforts had to have the support of national leaders from an early stage.

Mr. Grazvydas Jasutis, acting director of the International Relations Department at the Ministry of Defense of Lithuania, described the processes of creating a joint air defense network (BALTNET), a joint naval capabilities component (BALTRON), and a joint land forces capability (BALTBAT). Most interestingly, Mr. Jasutis focused attention on the combined education programs culminating in the establishment of the Baltic Defense College. He noted that this cooperation in training and education went beyond traditional military education to include courses focused on civil servants who would have responsibility for contributing to defense and NATO-related activities.

Finally, Colonel Andreas Kastanis, head of the Defense Planning and Programming Directorate at the Ministry of Defense of Greece, provided some ideas in the context of Southeast Europe. He suggested that the national security strategies, and the national defense strategies of each NATO country should have its beginnings in the principles of the Euro Atlantic environment, including democracy, rule of law, human rights, and market economy. He suggested that recommendations for cooperation among the aspiring countries of the region should include some components of bilateral cooperation with current NATO countries. Reiterating suggestions made earlier in the conference, he recommended that an integrated approach to cooperation, one that transcended all ministries was crucial to security cooperation. Specifically, Colonel Kastanis suggested that the harmonization of police forces to EU standards should be part of this process. Lastly, he suggested that regional partners, especially Romania and Bulgaria, should play a special role in cooperative actions among the aspirant countries. The final discussion session was punctuated by an intervention

from a representative from Bosnia and Herzegovina who recommended that future cooperation among the current members of the MAP process be augmented through partnerships with his country and Serbia & Montenegro. It was a general conclusion of all participants that Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro should be a part of future cooperative efforts.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Concluding the conference, the participants put forward several key recommendations for a way ahead. These recommendations followed several important themes of the working groups. The most pervasive area of consensus was in the area of information sharing. Participants clearly recognized the benefit of timely sharing of planning documents, and suggested, for example, the idea of continuing a higher level of more intense information exchange between countries as well as enhancing the inter-ministerial cooperation.

Participants believed that information exchange and the sharing of experiences would be very beneficial, recommending that their countries arrange technical level meetings (à trios / troika) in order to bring the level of cooperation down to the working level. It was further suggested that NATO had a role to play by ensuring that further guidance regarding niche capabilities might be of assistance to these working level meetings.

In addition to sharing experiences across national lines, the participants concluded that this exchange of information and search for cooperative actions should include inter-ministerial efforts, especially efforts that extend security cooperation to the areas of border security and organized crime.

The final, and perhaps most engaging opportunity for cooperation was in the area of cooperative education and training. While participants agreed that the Baltic Defense College was not necessarily transferable directly to Southeast Europe, they nonetheless called for the establishment of a joint initiative in the area of education and training.

This final recommendation highlighted a common conclusion among all participants that each of the countries had a great deal to learn from each other's experiences and that mutual cooperation in the region was essential to stability and security in the region.

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