

NATO: what to expect from the Bucharest Summit

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Are enlargement and the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme still effective tools for NATO in spreading democracy? And what can we expect in this sense from the upcoming NATO Summit in Bucharest in April?

Democratisation and the Bucharest agenda

Since the break-up of the Warsaw Pact in the early nineties, NATO has expanded to include ten new members, mostly in parallel with EU enlargement. The democratic credentials of candidate members were carefully scrutinised over the years in order to facilitate this process: NATO demanded that new members were democratic societies, and the assistance it offered was mainly focussed on democratic defence reform - establishing parliamentary oversight of security and defence and setting up accountable and transparent defence ministries. Through the PfP advice and assistance were also given to countries that did not have obvious prospects for membership in the near future. While current aspiring members - Albania, Croatia and Macedonia - and countries that aspire to engage in the Membership Action Plan (MAP) - Georgia and Ukraine - are reforming their societies and democratising their defence structures, several other PfP members do not take the EU and NATO message of democracy "Western style" for granted anymore. Since NATO is not in the business of democratic regime change, but works through gradual reform assistance, options to do so effectively need to be reviewed.

Democracy promotion through organisations such as the EU, NATO, OSCE and the Council of Europe is characterised by internal hesitation and outside resistance from several former Soviet Union countries. The EU suffers from enlargement fatigue and has recently found a worthy soft power opponent in Russia, which promotes its own sovereign (or managed) democracy. The OSCE is internally divided over its Human Dimension, that should further promote democratic governance and human rights among its 56 members but is becoming increasingly controversial among the "East of Vienna" members. And to some extent this more critical attitude towards democracy can also be found within the Council of Europe. Among NATO members and current candidate countries there is no debate about democracy as such, but the question of democratic credentials versus strategic importance is debated when deciding on levels of co-operation with PfP members. Widespread doubts on Western democracy promotion suggest that NATO is also becoming less strict in answering the call of its own democratic rhetoric while focussing on geopolitical considerations such as energy security over democracy.

From 2 to 4 April NATO members come together in Bucharest to discuss current affairs and the future of the alliance. This summit is a quick follow-up to the Riga gathering that was held in November 2006 and which resulted in little, while focussing heavily on the ISAF operation in Afghanistan. The Bucharest event is likely to be an enlargement and partnership summit. The alliance will probably issue membership invitations to three Western Balkan countries. Moreover it will need to discuss a revival of old partnerships (Partnership for Peace, the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative) and initiate some kind of “Global partnership” with key powers outside the Euro-Atlantic area, such as Australia and Japan. Other issues such as NATO’s operation in an “independent” Kosovo, Afghanistan, French plans to reintegrate into NATO’s military structure, NATO-ESDP relations, NATO’s Response Force and drafting a new Strategic Concept - the current one dates back to before 11 September 2001 - will also rank high on the agenda, but can be regarded as business as usual or decisions can be postponed to 2009 when NATO is likely to hold a 60th anniversary summit.¹ So what is the state of affairs on enlargement and partnerships?²

From Albania to Uzbekistan: the state of play and expectations

It is fairly certain that Albania, Croatia and Macedonia will join the alliance this year. These three Western Balkan states have worked with NATO in the Membership Action Plan for several years and have implemented most of the necessary defence-orientated legal and practical reforms requested by NATO. Reviewing Albania and Macedonia from a more general democratic standpoint would suggest that serious reform still needs to be implemented after NATO accession and before EU membership. In 2003 the Adriatic Charter was signed in which these three countries pledged to jointly undertake the reforms necessary for membership. The only issue standing in the way of this happening is Macedonia’s problematic name issue. Since independence in 1991 Macedonia and Greece have been arguing over the name “Republic of Macedonia”. While over a hundred countries have recognised Macedonia under its constitutional name, Greece insists on using FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and is agitated by the fact the small Balkan state uses the same name as the northern territory of Greece. Proposals such as Upper Macedonia (favoured by Greece) or Democratic Republic of Macedonia (acceptable for Macedonia) have not found common ground to resolve this dispute.³ Greece has stated it will block Macedonia’s NATO accession bid as long as the issue is not settled. Although Athens thus implies that the current situation, with some using FYROM and others using Macedonia, is unacceptable, it seems unlikely that this small though problematic issue will keep the Macedonians out of NATO.

Undoubtedly the inclusion of three Western Balkans states will enhance stability in the region. The alliance has already served as a binding factor in these countries. In Macedonia for example Albanians and Macedonians disagree on almost everything except NATO membership. For these states inclusion is especially crucial in order to avoid any potential backlash from Kosovo’s independence in the form of violence or ethnic rivalry. Kosovo will rank high on the Bucharest agenda. Certainly the 17,000 KFOR troops will remain for some time to come but arrangements have to be made with the EU, that currently plans its EULEX mission, and a *modus operandi* needs to be established for Mitrovica - the northern part of Kosovo mostly inhabited by Serbs and still largely controlled by Belgrade. It is doubtful if NATO countries will be able to agree on a format for partnership between Kosovo and NATO let alone inclusion of Kosovo (and the officially non-military orientated Kosovo Protection Corps) into PfP.

¹ For a more precise account of the Bucharest Summit subjects see: Kamp, Karl-Heinz, “The NATO Summit in Bucharest: The Alliance at a Crossroads”, NATO Defense College Research Paper, No. 33 (November 2007).

² This comment mostly focuses on the Partnership for Peace including NATO instruments such as the Membership Action Plan (MAP) and less on NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. Participant in these NATO cooperation mechanisms have no membership wishes and/or prospects while NATO democratic (defence) reform assistance is mostly limited.

³ Vucheva, Elitsa, “Greek-Macedonian name spat intensifies”, *EU Observer*, 6 March 2008, <http://euobserver.com/9/25792/?rk=1>.

Meanwhile NATO relations with Serbia will remain troublesome for months, if not years, to come. The obvious reality of poor relations has been exacerbated by the recent resignation of the government and the likely victory of nationalist parties in the upcoming elections scheduled for mid-May. Serbia entered PfP during the Riga Summit in 2006, despite not having fulfilled the key criteria of catching and extraditing suspected war criminal General Mladić to The Hague. In Riga it was mainly the US that argued that NATO should drop this condition in relation to PfP and focus on Serbia's reasonably successful efforts in the defence reform domain. Under Dutch pressure one sentence was added to the Riga communiqué stating that progress made in Serbia's cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) would be reviewed regularly. This has not happened in a serious manner over the last 18 months, as Kosovo's independence and the resulting Serbian backlash against NATO and the EU have overshadowed earlier commitments. It is important for NATO to work with Serbia, especially now, in trying to build good relations and thereby assist the key Western Balkan country on its road to membership. This remains a distant prospect, not so much from a military or democracy point of view, but from the stance of popular support for membership. After all, NATO and Serbia have been at war and the alliance still gives rise to understandable resentment among large sectors of the population.

The two other PfP members in South-East Europe - Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Montenegro - pose less serious questions for NATO. Montenegro is making good progress in setting up its own security structures and is likely to be offered an "Intensified Dialogue" in Bucharest - a confusing stage before MAP. The latter might be offered in 2009. BiH is making progress in integrating Bosnian, Croatian and Serb entity forces under one umbrella and is making use of the tools that PfP offers in further reforming its defence apparatus. Although it seems only a matter of time before both countries can expect MAP status there is some nervousness in the Balkans over the possibility of strategically motivated fast-track MAPs for Georgia and Ukraine that would bypass Balkan countries' reform efforts.

Moving northeast to Moldova, both NATO and Chisinau seem satisfied with current levels of cooperation. Moldova currently does not have any membership ambitions and sticks to a neutrality policy that is closely related to the "frozen conflict" of Transnistria within its borders. NATO plays a role only on the sidelines, concerning conflict resolution, and Moldova is keen to avoid upsetting main stakeholder Russia by applying for membership. Chisinau has an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO that is meant to broaden cooperation, including reforms which NATO monitors as well as gives advice and assistance on. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Kazakhstan also have IPAPs with NATO and all participate in NATO's well-defined but meagrely implemented Partnership Action Plan - Defence Institution Building (PAP-DIB). The initiative outlines NATO's views on democratic governance of armed forces but little substance is offered by way of practical implementation in these countries or NATO coordination in implementing these requirements through support programmes or financial assistance to civil society institutions that work on PAP-DIB.

For Armenia and Azerbaijan the Partnership for Peace and available instruments are ideal. Neither have direct membership aspirations, but strong links with NATO are a cornerstone of the foreign and defence policies of both countries. They each understand that healthy links with Moscow are important, as is fostering good relations with Europe and the US. In that sense Armenia tends to choose Moscow's friendship over that of the West, while oil-rich Azerbaijan attaches priority to close links with Turkey and Europe, to which it exports oil through the BTC pipeline. While NATO is not a mediator in the conflict resolution process over Nagorno-Karabakh, the two arch enemies Baku and Yerevan sit around the table in the Euro-Atlantic

Partnership Council (EAPC). In this way some security is offered through participation. Although NATO will need to review partnerships and enlargement policy in Bucharest it is unlikely that this will substantially affect working relationships with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova. NATO's support to democratisation programmes is present but limited here. After all, NATO leverage on these countries, to make them implement the reform plans agreed upon, is weak because the membership carrot is lacking.

NATO can apply this membership carrot in Georgia and Ukraine but is somewhat hesitant to do so. The "open door" policy is still valid but many NATO members are hesitant about granting MAP status, as requested by both countries in the run-up to Bucharest. There are several reasons for this reluctance in offering a clear membership perspective. In the case of Ukraine the current government might be in favour of membership but public support is extremely low at around 30 percent. In Georgia's case the issue of the two "frozen conflicts" on its territory - Abkhazia and South-Ossetia - might turn out to be very problematic. Both conflicts are unlikely to be resolved in the short term and NATO has stated it will not expand to countries with unresolved conflicts.

In the face of these obstacles NATO members can be divided in three groups. The first group led by France and Germany stresses that offering a membership perspective would further aggravate Russia and worsen already troublesome relations with the country. Vladimir Putin already stated in bilateral talks with Ukraine that Russia would undoubtedly aim nuclear missiles at Ukrainian territory in the case of NATO membership.⁴ Although earlier enlargements also met Russian opposition, this time Moscow might break off all relations with the alliance (should Georgia and Ukraine proceed to membership). The appointment in January of Russian nationalist Dmitry Rogozin as Ambassador to NATO already suggested a tougher stance, while the Kremlin's views on NATO enlargement and activities in its near abroad are unlikely to change under the new President Medvedev. Moscow regards Ukraine first of all as a buffer state between NATO and the "Russian world" but also as the cradle of Slavic civilisation. Moreover Russia still rents a substantial naval base in Sevastopol on Ukrainian territory. In the case of Georgia, Moscow would do everything to keep NATO away from its southern border and the strategically important Caucasus (due to energy transport).

The second group of NATO members, led by the smaller Western European states, argues that although Georgia and Ukraine should be praised for reforms implemented, they are not yet ready to undertake MAP obligations. These NATO members want more proof of democratic reform and are worried about the political stability of both countries. The last group, headed by the US and several new Central and East European members, is in favour of granting MAP. These countries are less worried about aggravating Russia and see it as a legitimate right as well as an obligation towards newly independent countries to offer membership should they wish to do so. Many new NATO members would prefer the organisation to expand further to the east to shift the border of collective security away from their own borders. The US is in favour of Georgian membership from an energy security perspective, also. With Tbilisi on board as a stronghold in the Caucasus, oil and gas from the Caspian littoral states can then be transported, almost completely over NATO territory, through Georgia, Turkey and beyond. This group also argues that both Georgia and Ukraine have contributed substantively to current NATO missions, especially in Afghanistan. Further democratic reform could be implemented during the MAP stage or even after membership. At the time of writing it was unclear which group is most likely to get its way in Bucharest

⁴ Finn, Peter., "Putin threatens Ukraine on NATO", *Washington Post*, 13 February 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/12/AR2008021201658.html>

Crossing the Caspian, PfP also applies to Central Asia's five former Soviet Union republics. Although the participation of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in PfP is a good thing in itself, from a cooperation and participation point of view, one might wonder why PfP membership was blocked to BiH and Serbia for such a long time (also on defence reform grounds) while Central Asian countries' defence structures are far less democratic and Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan can even be regarded as ruthless dictatorships. NATO needs to further fine-tune or even reconsider its engagement through current partnership mechanisms, especially with regard to Central Asia. PfP membership implies either being a democratic state that respects human rights or reforming towards these conditions. Democratic defence reform is essential in this region since it is the governments' security forces that keep dictators in power, suppress the people and in the case of the three energy rich countries, guard the unfair distribution of oil and gas revenues. The tragic events in Uzbekistan's Andjien in 2005 made this very clear. Any democratisation process in the Central Asian States should be spearheaded by Security Sector Reform (SSR) that aims to establish a democratically accountable national security system instead of a situation wherein security forces serve only to maintain the existing regime. NATO might be best equipped to promote such changes, but efforts should be coordinated with the OSCE (that is present in the region with small offices and also has experience in SSR) and the EU, that is stepping up engagement through a Central Asia Strategy that emphasises democracy and human rights.

Central Asia is a priority area for NATO also because of NATO's operation in Afghanistan - Germany has a military base in Uzbekistan and the US is discussing reopening its base there. The level of cooperation in PfP differs substantially in every republic. Cooperation with Kazakhstan has progressed most since it has had an IPAP with NATO. Kyrgyzstan comes second, as it is planning to undertake the PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP) this year. (This is a military-oriented tool based on NATO's force planning system which is aimed at enhancing interoperability). Cooperation with Tajikistan is modest while links with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are almost non-existent, in the latter case mainly due to the backlash of the Andjien massacre. Substantial changes in deepening cooperation with Central Asian partners in not expected in Bucharest. While NATO sees a role for itself in energy security and argues that Central Asia is important, given its proximity to Afghanistan, it has been hesitant to work with the most stringent regimes in this region. Moreover, most of the Central Asian states are also members of the Moscow-run counterpart to NATO, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). Not having much leverage in the region, NATO's democratisation efforts are limited although it keeps lines of communication open with all five and works to deepen cooperation with Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

With regard to enlargement, partnership and promoting democracy five issues can be noted for NATO's attention:

First, Kosovo and Serbia are top priorities for NATO in the coming years. The alliance will need to find some way to incorporate Kosovo in PfP or find a new way to assist the new country in establishing democratically accountable security forces. More importantly, KFOR remains the alliance's second operation in size - peace in the Serb-inhabited Mitrovica area will be the basis for stability in Kosovo. Meanwhile, NATO's role in Mitrovica will also be crucial to NATO's relations with Serbia. Now that Belgrade is a participant in PfP, the alliance will need to strengthen ties, a task that will be made more difficult in the event a nationalist government takes office in Belgrade after the May elections.

Secondly, relations with Georgia and Ukraine will be another key to NATO's enlargement and partnership policy. Both countries need a clear perspective. NATO decisions on MAP participation and future membership are politically orientated but these messages cannot be prolonged much longer. If MAP is not granted in Bucharest, both countries need to receive a clear perspective on what remaining obstacles remain to be overcome in order to understand why MAP status was not achieved. Doubts over stability (in Tbilisi public protests seem to continue) or public support would be legitimate arguments in this regard.

Thirdly, ties with Russia are indeed important but should not affect cooperation, membership perspectives or NATO's assistance for democratic reform to other PfP members. Just as in the case of Serbia, NATO will need to foster cooperation with an aggravated and often unwilling partner. It would make sense to further examine the compatibility of countries' membership in PfP as well as CSTO - could this mix of affiliation, that raises eyebrows both in Brussels and Moscow, be turned into a situation that is mutually beneficial for all parties?

Fourthly, NATO's PfP programme has been a success story but risks becoming outdated and ineffective. Instead of clinging onto confusing acronyms (IPPs, PAP-DIB, PAP-T, IPAPs, Intensified Dialogues and MAPs) it would be worthwhile to set up simplified mechanisms under PfP that make a clear distinction between countries open to cooperation but averse to democratic defence reform, and those willing to engage in both. A second distinction could be made between potential future members (without setting dates on admission) and indefinite partner countries. This will prove difficult since both NATO and partners have become accustomed to PfP over the years. This is why PfP should remain, although its instruments need a complete overhaul. In this sense it would also be logical to extend the PfP partnership to Mediterranean and Middle Eastern partners. Although the Mediterranean Dialogue, and to a lesser extent the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, are modelled on PfP, it would make sense to incorporate these countries - should they wish to be incorporated - into a (new) PfP format. Clearly a country like Morocco has equal or probably greater ambitions with regard to linking up with NATO (in reform and cooperation) than Tajikistan, although neither has a membership perspective. A broad PfP would incorporate countries interested in extending cooperation (Algeria for instance), established Western democracies (Sweden and others), authoritarian regimes that aim to at least open lines of communication (Uzbekistan for instance), and countries with a membership perspective (Montenegro and others). While all these nations are brought together in one transatlantic forum, differentiation should be made according to membership wishes and democracy/human rights credentials. In this way NATO can stay true to the values it has set out to protect.

In sum, clarity should be provided on NATO's relations with "contact countries". Can a formula be found to bind "out of area" big powers to NATO in one global partnership? Should this only apply to democratic and stable countries such as Australia and Japan or should key states in the fight against terrorism that are less democratic and stable, such as Pakistan, also be incorporated?

The Bucharest Summit will be an enlargement summit. Albania and Croatia will join while a solution will most likely be found for the question of Macedonia's name. The main question that remains open at this point is over MAP invitations for Georgia and Ukraine and, correspondingly, the possibility of new round of enlargement. Whatever the outcome, the decisions taken in Bucharest on enlargement and partnerships will have an impact on NATO's commitments, its relations with Russia, and further democratisation assistance by the alliance.

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