

TRANSATLANTIC STRATEGIC FORUM: "NEW STRATEGIC CONCEPT FOR NATO"

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Introduction

The Transatlantic Strategic Forum was a two-day expert round table which took place from November 13 to November 14, 2009 in Château Béla. The main purpose of the event was to create space for discussion and *exchange of views within the Slovak security community on the issue of NATO's new Strategic Concept*. The aim of the organisers was to unify the attitudes of Slovak experts towards specific topics of the new Strategic Concept, which is currently in the phase of developing. The existing Strategic Concept was adopted at the Washington Summit in 1999, before the September 11 attacks on the United States. The dynamics of the international security environment has changed the perception of the world's safety since the last ten years. International security has become more complicated, less predictable, with many new non-governmental actors. *The Slovak Republic, as a NATO member country, participates on the preparation of the Alliance's Strategic Concept for the first time*. It is in its own interest to come up to the global debate on the new Strategic Concept with well considered ideas and consequently to shape the strategic ambit also for its own benefit. For this purpose, it is essential to encourage intensive debate on specific issues with which the new Strategic Concept should deal. The conclusions from the Transatlantic Strategic Forum could serve as an example for the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence for formulation the attitudes of Slovakia in the process of creation the new Strategic Concept of NATO.

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1st Panel: Future of Relations with Russia: Cooperation or Confrontation?

The deliberation of the 1st panel focused on questions related to the future relations with the Russian Federation. The experts agreed that the future of relations with Russia is one of the key issues which the new Strategic Concept should address. According to the participants, there are three groups of member states. *The first group doesn't consider Russia as a threat, the second group sees Russia as a real threat and the last group acknowledges that Russia could pose some kind of threat but not directly against the NATO.* The new Strategic Concept should consider all three possibilities and reflect them. The experts call collectively for cooperation and constructive dialogue with Russia but there are differences in the form and the intensity of this cooperation.

During the discussion it was mentioned that *the Soviet Union was the first superpower which "died in the bed"*, so without one gunshot. On the other hand, Russia is only trying to find its new position in Europe after the breakdown of the Soviet Union. In addition, the new initiative of **Dmitri Medvedev** is just some kind of a test whether Europe is willing to negotiate and to what extent. At the same time, the new *Russian political theorem was presented, whose main purpose is to disintegrate the NATO, to initiate disputes between the EU and the U. S. and to push Russia into the process of decisions about the European security.* Taking this into consideration, the European Union will not be able to fully control and guarantee security assurances otherwise provided by the USA/NATO. And *Europe without the U. S. will be an easily available victim for Russia.* Secondly, there are some signals which indicate the decrease of American attention towards Europe, in the context of more serious security problems around the world. In this case, Central-Europeans would rather prefer the European Union than the USA in negotiations with Russia.

The participants stated that *the Alliance imagines that the more it cooperates with Russia the better it will be. But some experts say it is only an illusion.* Both sides have been suspicious towards each other for years. The experiences demonstrate the uncountable behaviour of Russia: they have always come up with changing of the format and the content of negotiations at the every last moment. Consequently, there are feelings that Russia isn't really keen on developing mutual relations on political level. Some of the participants considered *Russia as an unpredictable ally*, but on the other hand they emphasized the necessity of partnership and cooperation with this country.

Indeed, Russia must demonstrate the real attention for closer cooperation with the Alliance.

According to the experts, cooperation with *Russia has been evolving like a sinusoidal wave since last 20 years*. The main reason for this has been the strong influence of political elites on the military structures. There was stated that Russian military officers are interested in cooperation but they are afraid. Therefore, the problem lies not in the technical or the operational matters, but in the *Russian mentality which considers NATO not as an ally for partnership but as the enemy*. Most of the experts agreed that the key to cooperation in short and middle time horizon is cooperation on the low level, in small practical military projects, common army trainings or in cooperation in Afghanistan. *Communication is really important not only on higher political level but especially on lower stages* which could present a better approach for building up mutual confidence “from below”. In addition, the opposite statement was remarked in the discussion as well. According to it, the recipe for the elimination of constraint is the patience and a 15-20 years time horizon during which it is necessary to see Russia as the future element of the Euro-Atlantic space.

When talking about the *NATO-Russia Council*, it was stated that this form of cooperation *had been created for Jelcin's Russia*. Today, it is clear that the creation of this organ didn't lead to closer cooperation and overcharging of mutual prejudices. The experts support its continuation, but with some reasonable modifications.

One of the suggestions how to find the appropriate way to deal with Russia was through Ukraine. *Closer Ukraine to Europe will be, the bigger is chance that Russia chooses this way*. Consequently, it was highlighted to pay attention to the energy security because of the European energetic dependency on the Russian gas.

2nd Panel: The American Perspective of NATO

The second panel focused on issues related to the American perception of NATO and transatlantic relations in the context of dynamics of international security environment. The participants agreed that the new U. S. administration has brought some kind of changes into the foreign and security policy of the USA. President Obama's declared inclination to multilateralism means at the same time the increase of demands on European allies, especially in the field of defence budgets and real contributions to the operations. For the complex

evaluation of the changes in the American foreign policy is, of course, necessary more time. *Until now it has been impossible to talk about principal changes in the priorities of the U. S. foreign policy.* In case of comparison and evaluation of particular priorities of the current and previous administration, it is important to focus not only on the respective content but also on the way in which this policy has been realized.

The experts agreed that *in the scale of American priorities, the question of NATO and Europe in general is losing its exclusive position* – not only because of Europe's inability to be an equal partner to the US, but also because of *American perception of Europe as a stable and safe region.* Therefore, the USA logically turns their attention to other unstable regions and expects cooperation from Europe in protecting the stability out of the Euro-Atlantic area.

The participants unanimously agreed that if the NATO and transatlantic dimension had to play an important part in the American foreign policy, it is necessary to show the US that they are ready to participate in solving the world's problems and in the contribution of such an alliance. The most tangible contribution from the short-term point of view is the increasing of the number of soldiers in common NATO operations, mainly in Afghanistan, and the willingness to share financial expenses for common operations.

Since *in European countries the political will to raise the expenses for defence and security is missing,* the solution to increase the efficiency of the given financial means between the NATO and the EU is the elimination of the duplicities between both organizations and distribution of the work, as well as providing common military technique by different countries.

Nowadays, *Afghanistan is one of the litmus papers of the Alliance's endurance,* of its ability to succeed in difficult conditions out of the member countries' area, but *also the ability of the European allies to take their own part of responsibility effectively and adequately.* This aspect is perceived sensitively by the American public and will still influence their opinions (not only professional ones) about the future of engaging the USA in NATO.

The *Alliance must definitely attain concrete results in Afghanistan.* Taking into consideration the new Strategic Concept, Afghanistan, because of its specificity, should not be the dominant element in defining the Alliance's future. Afghanistan is the only one of many challenges that NATO will have to face in future.

The experts agreed that the strategic question for the USA is the area in which NATO will operate in the future. *The global interests of the USA naturally push the Alliance into wider cooperation and development of global partnerships.* Washington sees the importance of NATO in supplementing its own interests in other parts of the world. But this vision is not unanimously perceived by the European Allies for which NATO should be the primary guarantee of safety in Europe. If the European countries insist that the Alliance should keep the safety in Europe, the Alliance will start to lose its importance for the USA. A very important factor that will influence the future development of perception and engaging of the USA on the European continent is in their bilateral interests. *Frustration and disillusion of the allies from the central Europe* in the task of modification of plans dealing with the deploying of the anti-rocket defence elements in the Czech Republic and Poland, or the reset of relations with the Russian Federation demonstrate influences of such elements in perceiving allies' mutual relations.

The American perspective of NATO in future will be strongly influenced by the ability and the will of the European allies to take bigger part in guaranteeing the common security and global interests of the USA, and by their will to hold the weight of being "the world policeman". In spite of the various scenarios of leaving the responsibility for their own security up to the European allies, it is sure that at least in the nearest future, *it is not possible to expect further reduction of the USA engaging as the provider of security also on the European side of the Atlantic.*

3rd panel – Article 5 of the Washington treaty: is it necessary to redefine its content?

When talking about the forming of the NATO's new Strategic Concept, the experts of the Slovak security community focused on the questions dealing with the Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. *The Article 5 of the Washington Treaty (WT) defining the issue of the „armed attack“ was formulated in times when physical conventional attack was the most probable threat to the Alliance.* Today, the international security environment is more complicated, less predictable and new untraditional players and non-state actors, who seem to be still more dangerous threat for the Alliance, are appearing. New forms of danger such as cyber-terrorism, energetic security or terrorism raise the *question whether the Article 5 covers also new types of threats* and if the Alliance should

activate the Article 5 of the Washington Treaty in case of cyber attack. Thus, it is about a possible redefinition of the Article 5's interpretation and its application to practice in the new Strategic Concept of NATO.

The experts agreed that the *new Strategic Concept should be simple, readable and short*, that it should revitalize the perception of the Alliance in the eyes of the public. There were some opinions within the participants that the final document should not be over-estimated, but on the contrary, the process of forming of the new Strategic Concept, the discussion and clearing of the positions are really essential. When talking about the Article 5 of the Washington Treaty itself, the experts favoured the idea that the *Article 5 of the Washington Treaty and its interpretation should not be changed*. According to the participants, neither energetic security, nor cyber security should be explicitly defined as the types of the threats that should be included in the Article 5 of the WT.

According to the forum's members, the exact content of the *Article 5 cannot be exactly defined and the member countries will consider threats from case to case*. At the same time it is necessary to reinforce the perception of the Article 5 as a very real and practical safety guarantee. *Too extensive interpretation of the Article 5 could cause an inability to fulfill it with real actions in concrete cases and so its devaluation*.

The experts expressed the idea that, rather than widen and redefine the interpretation of the Article 5, it is necessary to support it with real actions to prove its worthiness to the member countries that are sensitive about their own security by means of "contingency planning", common alliance training as well as the investments to military infrastructure. The participants at the forum agreed that the *"mysterious" Article 5 should be backed up by real power*. Also, some opinions appeared that it is necessary to reinforce the ability of the Alliance in the field of intelligence and the ability to predict so the Alliance is prepared for the possible threats. For the so-called subliminal threats such as cyber security, or energetic security, it is essential to create the *area for better application of the Article 4, that is to say to reinforce the structure that would permit to discuss and coordinate the common actions* against these threats on the twenty-four-hour basis that are beyond the competences of the Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.

In case these threats cause serious material damages in the infrastructure of member countries, the NATO should consider application of Article 5. The

participants in the discussion agreed that the Alliance cannot be focused just on the territory defence, but it is necessary to balance it with the so – called “ out-of-area” operations, not on the territory of the Alliance charged with protection of the strategic security of allies. Afghanistan will be also determining factor when defining limits in operations out of the Euro-Atlantic area (out-of-area operations). The experts also agreed that the *new Strategic Concept should not be “Russian-phobic” nor “Afghan centric”*. As regards Afghanistan, the experts mentioned that the Strategic Concept will have to *take into account the experience from the so-called comprehensive approach to security*.

4th Panel: Military abilities and planning in the time of financial crisis

Financial and economic crisis has had a very serious impact on the Slovak budget. The most serious consequences are seen in the defence resort, which was reduced by 21 % comparing with the budget for the year 2009. *What does it mean to have 1, 22 % of the GDP to finance the defence?* In the discussion, there was stated that it does not really matter if we get 1% or 2% of the GDP for the defence, but it is necessary to know what to do with the money. The NATO member states should evaluate if the stated level of the ambition isn't too unrealistic. Nowadays, *Slovakia contributes to the military area, but most of all to the political one*. We participate in operations, but we have limits, that are quite obvious. *These limits include mainly the absence of the political will, financial restrictions but also the real capabilities of the country*. On the other side, our contribution is much higher than in other NATO member countries. Regarding financial restrictions, for example Latvia reduces next year's budget for defence by 52%.

The participants stated that in general there exists a possible triple impact of the crisis in the resort of the defence:

1. Withdrawal of the soldiers from the operations MKM
2. Reduction of the participation in the national and supranational acquisition projects which leads to the reduction in the military modernization.
3. Reduction of military and civil employers of the resort and searching for the possible alternative solutions, for example by outsourcing.

Minister **Baška** introduced a two-phase approach to the solution:

1. National approach: 26% reducing of the number of civil employers in the resort, reorganizing of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic and the

Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic, more than 20% reducing of the number of professional soldiers in the managerial structures.

2. International approach: more than 20 % reducing of the Armed Forces' representation in the commanding structure of NATO, a letter to the Secretary General with the request for:
 - a) the evaluation of the serious reduction of the bureaucratic structures in the NATO,
 - b) the decision of the NATO member states to invest money from the NSIP just to the projects dealing with the availability of the troops,
 - c) *the abolition of existing the NATO projects, which are not profitable for a long time and expensive as well.*

The experts agreed that this approach should be considered to be the right way. However, during the reinforcement of the financial restrictions it is necessary to *balance national ambitions with the real needs and international commitments* based on Slovakia's membership in NATO and EU. Since financial and personal sources will be tense in the next years as well, following actions could be the space for the next saving:

1. The NATO Command Structure – there are more than 1100 people today, and it could be the area for further reductions.
2. The NATO Force Structure – it is necessary to find synergy in multitask forces, but the structures must stay huge in spite of the reduction and reinforcement of the expenditure.
3. The Armed Forces of the SR – large part of the structural reforms is over and the space for the next reduction is limited. It would be right to leave some space for the stabilization and focus more on the modernization and optimization of the existing structures, trying to eliminate duplicity. The common headquarters of the Armed Forces seems to be a possible issue.

During the discussion, it was stated that with *wise considering it should be "what not to be reduced and not what else to reduce"*. The worst way is across-the-board area reduction.

The participants agreed that one possible solution of the necessary modernization of the Armed Forces of the SR could be the participation of the Slovak Republic in multinational initiatives with the aim to gain necessary capability with the lowest financial and personal expenses. Also there should be

the *reduction of various duplicities*, which were results of the low cooperation and low communication within international organizations (for example the NATO Response Forces ↔ the EU BG or more operations against pirates near Somalia). The impacts of the budgetary restrictions will highly probable influence the fulfilment of Slovakia's commitments in the NATO targets stated for the next period. The crisis during 2010 should not have the impact on the Armed Forces' participation in crisis management operations. It is possible to expect a *permanent pressure of the international society to reinforce the participation in the operation ISAF in Afghanistan*. After gradual withdrawal of the Armed Forces from the operation KFOR, the space towards Afghanistan will be freed.

In the discussion, it was highlighted that the importance of processing and approval of the long term documents is marginal as regards the changing conditions in the resort (budgetary, personal etc). Obligation of the planning supported by the decision of the National Council of the Slovak Republic seems to be the possible solution. From the short-term point of view it is necessary to focus on the process of the adequate fusion of civil and military defence planning. The experts agreed that *the building of expedition military forces is more expensive, but also more responsible than building of the territorial forces*, which is financially more advantageous but it is also without any real usage.