

Importance of a Knowledge-Based, Network-Centric Approach in Strengthening Transatlantic Links with New NATO Members in South Eastern Europe

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Introduction

The current diversity of new risks and threats, as well as new opportunities and responsibilities for projection and protection of our common values and interests, are considered by some to be risks in and of themselves to the further development of Euro-Atlantic solidarity and cooperation. They represent a real challenge to build common assessments and strengthen perceptions about the security agenda, to define a common set of instruments, especially when it comes to military operations; necessary expeditionary forces, including their basing, modernization, training, and most of all modalities of use; combined command and control; and support for “out-of-area” actions as well as long term sustainability.

In the context of transatlantic security cooperation, Bulgaria has a very clear record of supporting the first (1990/1) and second (2003) Gulf Wars as well as IFOR, SFOR, Operation Allied Force, KFOR, and Operation Enduring Freedom, as well as ISAF in Afghanistan. Furthermore, just after September 11 the Bulgarian Parliament and government declared the nation’s full support for the war against terrorism, deciding to act as a *de facto* member of NATO, and became a full member of the antiterrorist coalition through its actions in the United Nations Security Council, with its decision to send troops to Afghanistan and Iraq, and through the provision of essential logistic support to operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, including the use of an air base in Burgas. But Bulgaria has done still more. At the same time, Bulgaria increased its participation in peacekeeping operations in Bosnia in order to free U.S. troops for engagement in Iraq, and, with the decision of NATO to take over the stabilizing mission in Afghanistan, substantially increased its participation in ISAF and new security programs there.

Bulgaria also proposed NGO support for operations in Iraq in the form of the establishment of the Atlantic Association in Baghdad (as was done in Belgrade), and, in addition is considering offering humanitarian help to provide support for creating a new Civil Protection Service in support of the Iraqi people. Bulgaria is strongly considering an option to participate with specialists in helping to build the new armed forces of Afghanistan and Iraq. In this regard, a current subject of serious discussion is how best to support – with the help of the TEREM SHC and the Academy of Sciences’ research and development

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capacity, in close cooperation with Western firms – the maintenance, overhaul, and modernization of Soviet-made military equipment in these countries so as to make it interoperable with Western systems in the long term.

The record of Romania – Bulgaria’s northern neighbor – is similar, adding involvement in SEEDM (South East Europe Defense Ministerial) and BLACKSEAFOR. With a look at the map to see how these two countries are situated in relation to the Western Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and having in mind the new U.S., NATO, and EU security strategies and force postures, it is clear that a great deal can be achieved through full cooperation with these two states.

The paper is focused on drafting a conceptual framework, based on the idea of a knowledge-based, network-centric approach, for strengthening the transatlantic relationship with the involvement of the new South Eastern European members of NATO and the EU. There are five aspects to this approach:

- New security agenda (the case of South Eastern Europe [SEE]).
- New Combined Joint Expeditionary Task Forces (CJETF) and new US/NATO/EU footprint in SEE.
- New combined joint modernization and training strategies for the new CJETF.
- New network of Centers of Excellence in the area of Research and Development and Education and Training in SEE to support NATO / EU security and defense transformation.
- New outreach missions – namely, the projection of security eastward – within the PfP zone and the “large Middle East” with the Euroatlantic Center for Security and Integration Studies (ECSIS).

All of the above aspects can help strengthen the transatlantic links during the dual enlargement processes of NATO and the EU. They also take into account that the emergence of a new security role for the U.S. and increased cooperation with Russia demands that intellectual efforts be developed and integrated into a sound strategy, with solid political and economic support. Public attitudes are of great importance for the successful implementation of these changes. This is why another dimension of the approach itself is the effort to provide greater understanding and motivation for politicians, business, and civil society to invest resources in pursuing such a plan.

The paper is based on the experience of the Security Sector Reform Coalition (SSRC) in Bulgaria, working on a national basis as well as in the broader SEE region and within the larger framework of the PfP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Study Institutes to develop a common vision and gain political, business, and public support for its implementation. The focus is on the Bulgarian experience, but it is clear that combined joint efforts

and well-orchestrated endeavors in all NATO, EU, and even PfP countries are critical for wider success. Such harmonization on the intellectual and conceptual level could be achieved through strategic community-building throughout the Consortium with a network of projects, focused around the issues of developing the new security agenda; enhancing crisis management capabilities; the future of the NATO–EU common security and defense policy; security sector reform; and the use of new information technologies in education and training.

The new security agenda concerns the future of South Eastern Europe after 2004, following the dual enlargement of NATO and the EU. There is still an open debate in transatlantic and even intra-European circles about new threats and risks and the new security strategies associated with them, including a new set of responsibilities assigned to the armed forces and the security sector at large. Most of the issues involved in the debate are closely related to the future of SEE after the dual enlargement of NATO and the EU in 2004, the security footprint of the U.S. in the region, and the projection of stability eastward from the region. It is clear that the new security agenda was a natural matter of interest in South Eastern Europe, and was rapidly accepted in the region, especially in Bulgaria and Romania – two of the most recent countries invited to join NATO, with a clear commitment for them to also enter the EU in the next five years.

Bulgaria is currently considering the consolidation of its participation in operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq – understanding its key geographic and geopolitical role – under the framework of the Strategic Defense Review. It hopes to accomplish this important security task in cooperation with the U.S., NATO, the EU and neighboring states – allies in NATO and future partners in the EU – such as Romania, Turkey, and Greece. We believe that a long-term strategy for security, based on successful Bulgarian and Romanian participation in the framework of NATO and EU enlargement as well as an optimal U.S. footprint in the region, is both possible and necessary for transatlantic security and economic cooperation. With the reconstruction and democratization programs in the Western Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, and possibly other places under way for the next decade, Bulgaria and Romania along with other allies in South Eastern Europe are natural positive elements for success not only in strengthening transatlantic relations, but also for transforming the political and economic landscape in the greater Middle East and SEE itself.

Any successful project in the region must be undertaken within the framework of NATO and EU enlargement and integration of this region with a vision for further cooperation with adjacent regions to the east and south. Because NATO and the EU themselves are in the process of adaptation, this means that the countries in the region will embrace transformation in this transition period and simultaneously will participate in the transfer of knowledge and experience about transition and transformation eastward to the Black Sea, Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

Security is a central issue for the SEE project, and it is why a SEECAP extension is important as a joint effort between SEE countries, NATO, and the EU to achieve a cooperative security environment assessment as well as development of the security agenda for SEE. Based on the Bulgarian experience with Security Watch Bulletin, similar sort of monthly publication for the region, in printed and electronic versions and prepared by a coalition of NGOs and academic institutions in the region, would be a good tool for development of common security agenda and security sector reform priorities.

The two ongoing projects of the SSRC in Bulgaria – one with the government and one with the parliament – are useful prototypes for SSR action plans and progress reports. The first project is called the NATO Integration Program (NIP). It is aimed at replacing MAP after formal accession to NATO membership in 2004 and is really a nationwide program for security sector transformation and integration on the agency, national, and international levels. The second project is based on an assessment methodology developed in 2001 to monitor states' readiness to join NATO, and has been updated to evaluate progress in security sector reform with a new set of criteria and the NIP blueprint mentioned above. This experience can be easily transferred to other countries with capable NGOs, and a network for regionally harmonized national action plans and progress reports is to be established, with an opportunity to draft annual regional reports.

Knowledge-based, network-centric transformation, both shaped by and motivating the dual processes of NATO and EU enlargement and stability projection in the framework of U.S.–NATO–EU–Russia strategic cooperation, is a currently successful formula. It must be supported by instruments of the security sector reform action plan and progress report mechanisms, since the main goal is not only reforms in South East Europe, but a long-term security strategy for regions to the east of NATO and the EU's advancing borders. At the same time, the global war against terrorism is a reality, and not only for the short term; it will be long-term driver of security agenda development.

Regarding the new CJETF and the new allied footprint in SEE, the above-mentioned strategy has a bearing on a large spectrum of operations that will be performed outside of the current NATO–EU area, both currently and in the foreseeable future. There is a serious need for CJETF and improved reconstruction and integration capabilities, both for NATO and the EU as well as for U.S.-led ad hoc coalitions. The level of contribution from new NATO members from SEE will be a function of the stage of security and development that they have achieved through participation in the larger European community. In this context, with the SSRC Memorandum No. 2 to the Parliament, the President and government of Bulgaria have developed the following proposal:

1. Establishment of a JETF, which is to include:
 - Joint Special Operation Forces / Police Task Force with helicopter group (400 persons).
 - Light infantry (400 persons) plus engineers (200 persons).
 - NBC company (100 persons) and Civil Protection team (50 persons).
 - Field hospital (rapid reaction medical team of 50 persons).
 - Logistics team to support and sustain the deployed elements of the JETF (in Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Bosnia, as well as in Iraq and other areas – 100 persons).

2. In order to build the JETF, it is essential to consider the following immediate actions:
 - Request C4 and force protection equipment from the U.S. in order to provide interoperability and integration with coalition forces, as well as reach-back capability to the National Military Command Center (NMCC) in Sofia.
 - Freeze wasteful projects, including the current ones to modernize the MiG-29 fleet, the fixed communication network, artillery fire control, etc., and redirect the resources to the creation and maintenance of the JETF as a Bulgarian contribution to the NATO Rapid Response Force and European Rapid Reaction Forces.
 - In order to increase the effectiveness of the JETF, establish a dedicated Joint Operations Command around NMCC.

3. The existence of the JETF would enable the Bulgarian government to deploy its various assets on short notice. Readiness will be maintained on a rotational basis, drafting units from the collective defense forces and deployable elements of the Gendarme, Police, and Civil Protection services.

As a second pillar of responding to the challenges of new risks and threats and of fulfilling the operations associated with them, the concept of an allied presence on Bulgarian territory is envisioned. The U.S. military footprint and the presence of NATO forces is connected with the development of a dual-use infrastructure, achieving interoperability and, most of all, combined joint participation in operations, related to the security of the Euro-Atlantic community as well as the promotion of peace and stability in areas where the interests of this community are concerned. This concept is referred to as “network-centric integration, supported by presence,” and will seriously influence security sector reform in the region, harmonized with the transformation processes in NATO, EU, and U.S. security strategy.

This concept requires improved coordination of the processes of building new facilities and networks, and cooperation in achieving the optimal use of existing ones. This new long-term vision could be more fruitful if it were developed jointly and used to optimize the process of SEE integration and NATO–EU cooperation.

In support of the concept, a Memorandum No. 3 of the SSRC was developed, outlining the following proposals:

1. Parliamentary approval of a comprehensive national strategy for hosting allied military bases, including:
 - A joint air base to be used as a hub by both the U.S. and NATO (as well as the EU in the future).
 - A joint naval base to be used as a sea entry point.
 - Specialized joint training facilities in at least two training ranges, as well as the specialized air-defense training facility near the Black Sea.
 - Joint arms testing facilities for new equipment and munitions.
 - A joint educational center for security sector reform and information technology management.
 - An information infrastructure to support military presence and operations in adjacent regions.
 - A coordination cell for military presence management, with a permanent U.S./NATO/EU mission attached.
2. The implementation of the strategy is to begin with exercises of the Bulgarian Joint Expeditionary Task Force (JETF) with allied forces for missions in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Joint exercises are to be used as a tool to cascade experience, concepts, armaments, and equipment to the Bulgarian JETF as well as to form the force's maintenance fund.
3. Identify civilian and military infrastructure components and mechanisms for their joint use by NATO and Bulgaria and possibilities for hosting NATO structures, committees, agencies, and working groups as well as for participation in security sector reform efforts in PfP countries and post-conflict reconstruction areas.

These proposals are under serious consideration under the rubric of the Strategic Defense Review (2003–2004), and hopefully will be implemented in cooperation with the U.S., NATO, the EU, and Bulgaria's neighbors.

A related issue is the development of new combined joint modernization and training strategies for the CJETF. The above joint task force and presence concepts are related to the modernization programs for the military forces

and the security sector as a whole, especially C4ISR, modern weapons, protection of forces, training facilities, mobility, and logistics issues. Many of these programs can be pitched at the regional level, with serious participation of major NATO countries, including reorientation of the local defense industry through joint projects and offset programs, based on effective defense industry and business cooperation with leading Western defense contractors. The formation of joint ventures and cooperative technological programs in support of current acquisition priorities will allow optimal utilization of future program opportunities over the long run. To reach these objectives, Bulgaria and the NATO and EU member states, as well as Western defense contractors, need to engage in a discussion on the following issues:

- Planning for Bulgarian military capabilities and strategies for cooperation.
- Programs for modernization and restructuring of defense capabilities, with respective funding (national budget, foreign military assistance, NATO and EU programs).
- Joint research and development in pursuing force goals.
- Direct and indirect investments and defense acquisition rules.
- Program management and training.

In the short run, decision makers are seeking to establish the country's future specialization within NATO and the EU as identified by the Prague Capability Commitment and the EU Headline Goal respectively. The following capabilities have been listed as possible areas of specialization in future allied missions:

- Special operations module, with combat and transport helicopters.
- Mechanized (infantry, police, gendarmerie) module.
- Engineering and NBC modules.
- Logistics module.
- Medical support module.
- Civil protection module.
- C4 module to integrate the above capabilities.

Meanwhile, decision makers are planning to build defense capabilities to be used within Bulgaria's borders and, when needed, to support allied missions. These goals require further integration into NATO's air defense systems; the development of a system for coastal and land sovereignty that is compatible with NATO and EU standards; and the formulation of police and civil defense systems for Bulgaria's interior, also in keeping with NATO and EU guidelines. The long-term goal of this modernization process is to achieve a thorough modernization of the entire security sector, including the defense industry. In addition, the process seeks a more comprehensive national integration of the vari-

ous institutions and assets that make up the security sector, and the integration of the Bulgarian security sector into the larger Euro-Atlantic security regime.

This strategy is matched with another modernization effort in the area of training, based on interoperable doctrines and force organization with implementation of modern information technology, including simulation, advanced distributed learning, war-gaming, and modern training ranges. This effort is focused on the development of a new network of centers of excellence for research and development and education and training within South Eastern Europe. If the Bulgarian Defense Reform Plan for 2004 is seen as the reform plan, Plan 2008 should be designed as the transformation plan based on a vision going beyond 2008.

One of the crucial issues in the transformation of the Bulgarian armed forces is the extent of the use of new technologies that allow participation in allied missions based on network-centric warfare. This issue cannot be addressed by simply reorganizing and adopting doctrines and training with the available equipment, which was designed in the 1960s and, in some rare cases, as late as the 1980s. What is needed is a technological leap whose management is supported by the integrated efforts of the Ministry of Defense, the Bulgarian Academy of Science, the defense industry, and Western defense companies.

This transformation's technological aspect is crucial, and it cannot be substituted for through lucky accidents of geo-strategic position, offers to host military bases, or contributions of traditional forces or logistical and repair functions to the Alliance. The right approach to the issue of this technological leap requires a modern organization which, according to the Law on Administration, could lead to the creation of a Modernization and Rearmament Agency to manage the program's implementation. Such an agency would receive the requirements and provide a work plan through integrated program teams including clients, scientists, engineers, and traders in close cooperation with NATO counterparts. The agency would provide advanced technological demonstrations; assist in concept development and experimentation in the transformation process; create centers of excellence, which would participate in NATO arms programs, and in the future in the EU's programs as well as in the network of the Allied Command Transformation of NATO. The Center for the Study of National Security and Defense (CNSDR), the Institute for Space Research, and the Institute for Metal Studies – all constituent members of the Bulgarian Academy of Science – are the agency's natural partners, as they have created technological centers and have accumulated expertise in this area.

Without the technological component of transformation, Bulgaria will be unable to become an effective NATO member. However, with very few exceptions, Bulgarian industry does not at present possess the capability to realize this component. This is the primary barrier to implementing offset programs, creating joint ventures, and participating in joint projects in third countries. The state still has three instruments in this area: an investment program for arms

modernization, foreign military assistance, and NATO and EU programs; state-owned defense companies; and technological centers within the Bulgarian Academy of Science. The rapid integration of these three instruments in the currently positive military-strategic, political, and economic international environment under an effective management scheme can contribute greatly toward making the required technological transformation possible.

Just as the Center for the Study of National Security and Defense within the Bulgarian Academy of Science must be defined as the primary research and development partner, the Defense Staff College should be the primary education and training partner of NATO and the EU in pursuing security sector transformation through networks of centers of excellence and sound coordination. The staff college is best situated to effect a dramatic change in the Bulgarian way of thinking about security issues.

A related area of importance is formulating a new outreach mission with the Euroatlantic Center for Security and Integration Studies. The experience in South Eastern Europe, where the high degree of diversity in the region and the multiplicity of links to adjacent regions require regional coordination and trans-regional know-how transfer logically leads to a vision of the ECSIS as a physical body to support the process and to serve as a clearing house as well as a point of reference for NATO, EU, UN, OSCE, and individual countries on the issues discussed herein. The concept of such a center is already in development as is being envisioned as an initial Bulgarian contribution to the security sector reform and post-conflict reconstruction and integration processes, later to be supported by interested states and organizations.

Bulgaria will find itself in the unique position of being a NATO member, working very close with the EU in the negotiation process, and being a close ally of the U.S. in the war against terrorism. Especially for countries in the Black Sea, Caucasus, and Central Asia regions, the model of Bulgaria, which was considered in the past to be the closest satellite of the former Soviet Union, will be very useful. It should be noted that, in these countries, Russian language knowledge constitutes an additional advantage for Bulgarian teams supporting security sector reform efforts.

This concept development and experimentation endeavor with ECSIS has three pillars:

- Integration of the security related knowledge centers (research, education, and training) in every country under the rubric of security sector reform.
- Using PIMS/ADL and the PfP Consortium environment to support internal integration as well as regional cooperation, which can lead to the development of a Virtual Distributed Security Sector College.
- Management of a network of projects in the security area, which will fill the system with knowledge and provide structures for its circulation and projection.

All this leads up to the point where, in addition to government programs, the role of NGOs can be of great value if well organized and oriented toward knowledge management and knowledge transfer through regional projects based on successful national models, first in the region and after that from SEE to other regions. In this context, ECSIS could be a joint venture between governments and civil society organizations, supported by business and with the participation of international organizations.

Many of the keywords used in the description of this proposal are not new, but they are organized in a new way in this strategy – tested in Bulgaria – with a clear understanding that a NATO- and EU-wide action plan is needed.

First of all, the analysis above proves how important the network approach is and how diverse the elements are that make up the network. The “joint-ness” of the force concept does not only apply to military services and branches, but includes police, gendarmes, border guards, civil defense, and special services as well as purely civilian emergency forces. At the same time, the international dimension is larger, including countries outside NATO, the EU, and even PfP, but keeping NATO (even for EU operations) as a main C4ISR backbone. The most important characteristics of the network are adaptability and flexibility, not only for force structures, but also in the legal, public, political, and economic arenas.

Secondly, the network’s main purpose is to be proactive and to reach new “territories.” This implies an outward orientation, focused on outreach programs, but using a bi-directional approach, relying upon the active involvement of countries or institutions in the “outer zone.”

Thirdly, there are two main tools for shaping this external space and expanding the network: input of joint research and development and output through joint education and training. One element of the solution, based on the experience in South Eastern Europe, is the establishment of the Euroatlantic Center for Security and Integration Studies, with a focus on:

- Security sector reform, reconstruction and integration studies.
- The role of information technology in reform studies (e-security and e-development).
- Simulation and advanced distance/attending learning-based training on the above topics for the international groups from international staff.

Such a center (part of the network of centers of excellence) is a physical node that integrates the various established networks of NATO, the EU, the UN, and OSCE, and offers the opportunity to strengthen not only transatlantic relations but public-private partnership as well, with the involvement of governments, business, and civil society (academic and NGO players). As such, the center will be a valuable member of the PfP Consortium and, as in holography, will be itself a consortium. Geographical and geopolitical hosting of the center,

along with its joint open character, are keys for its success, so the decision to base the center in Bulgaria is beneficial simultaneously for Bulgaria and Romania, for the Western Balkans and the Caucasus, for NATO and the EU, for the U.S., and for the greater Middle East.