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NATO after the Lisbon summit: the consequences for Central and Eastern Europe

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On 19-20 November in Lisbon, the 22nd summit of the NATO member states was held; it was dedicated to the adoption of a new strategic concept and of a number of other documents defining the Alliance's policy in the coming decade. For the first time in NATO's history, the strategic concept is purely political in nature, and contains no guidelines for a military planning process.
Reactions to the summit's decisions have highlighted persistent divisions among the allies from Central and Western Europe. Relative consensus has only prevailed with regard to changing the nature of the ISAF operations in Afghanistan as of 2014, but without determining its final form and mission. The thaw in the NATO-Russia relationship is primarily formal in nature, with little hope of any real rapprochement or enhanced cooperation on security in the Eurasian area. Due to the weakening importance of the 'open door' policy and the crisis in the concept of partnership with states outside NATO, the long-term consequence of this summit may be a drop in the Alliance's involvement in the CIS area.

1. The summit's main decisions

The Lisbon summit confirmed the earlier announcements of internal reform within the Alliance, as well as considerations of new threats to the security of the allies without violating its traditional mission of collective defence. The following decisions at the summit should be considered the most important:

- the adoption of NATO's new strategic concept (replacing the document from April 1999);
- the reform of the Alliance's command structure (scheduled for 2011) by changing the structure of the existing commands and agencies. This is to be achieved by simultaneously reducing both their number (the plan is to reduce the number of commands from 11 to 6, and the number of agencies from 14 to 3), and manpower (from 12,000 to 8950 in all commands; no information on the reduction of agency staff has been released);
- developing the Alliance's missile defence system, based on the elements of US 'missile shield' located in Europe, and supplemented by the missile defence systems for deployed forces from European NATO countries (the documents did not specify the final shape of the NATO missile defence system; it is assumed that it will serve for the defence of the member states' territories. Russia has been invited to a dialogue on the development of the Alliance's

‘missile shield’);
- the adoption of a plan for the gradual transfer of responsibility for Afghanistan’s security to local structures (starting from 2011 and running to the end of 2014), linked with the withdrawal of combat units, and the formal completion of the Alliance’s military operation (as a consequence of previous unilateral decisions and declarations by states participating in the ISAF mission that they withdraw their troops from Afghanistan. The summit’s documents do not settle the question of a NATO military presence in Afghanistan after 2014);
- deepening and strengthening cooperation with Russia (which was interrupted as a result of the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008, and was re-launched in 2009).

These issues have to varying degrees been tackled by the following public documents adopted during the summit:

- Active Engagement, Modern Defence - Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of The Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation;
- The Lisbon Summit Declaration;
- The NATO-Russia Council Joint Statement;
- Declaration by NATO and Afghanistan on an Enduring Partnership;
- The declaration by the leaders of the countries participating in the NATO-led ISAF mission in Afghanistan.

The summit’s documents are a compromise resulting from the need to reconcile diverse, sometimes contradictory demands relating to most aspects of how NATO functions, including its strategic objectives. In controversial matters, the definitions adopted are most commonly unspecific in nature, with a high degree of generality; this has been particularly apparent in the new strategic concept and the joint declaration by the NATO-Russia Council. The documents’ final form allows us to assume that the greatest influence on the final statements was wielded by the United States, whose requests have been considered to the greatest extent.
The most important document adopted during the Lisbon summit is a new strategic concept of the Alliance. In accordance with the logic of previous documents of this importance, the concept is intended to specify NATO’s objectives, the tasks which have been set before the Alliance, and how they are to be implemented by the end of 2020. In contrast to previous concepts, this present one shows changes in the approach to the very role of the NATO concept. It is now increasingly clear that the strategic concept is intended to form the basis for further discussions and negotiations among the allies on how to implement the points of the concept, rather than a clear interpretation for the process of NATO's defence planning and policy. This no longer constitutes a "guide for the further adaptation of the armed forces" (as recorded in the concept adopted in Washington in April 1999), but is in fact a "guide for the next phase of NATO's evolution", although it does not specify what this is based on, or how to proceed.
The document entitled *Active engagement, modern defence* formally maintains the *status quo* in terms of the Alliance’s three main missions: collective defence (which is listed first, with reference to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty), crisis management, and cooperative security. It does not assign a priority to any of these three missions, whose actual

importance can only be assessed on the basis of NATO's future activity. However, the largest part by volume of the new concept are crisis management and preventive actions: arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, as well as cooperation (partnership) to strengthen the security of countries outside the Alliance (principally Russia), and with international organisations, while maintaining the so-called 'open door' principle (i.e. the possible accession to NATO of more European countries which comply with democratic standards).

The scope of the challenges and risks included in the new concept highlights two approaches to NATO's future, which have competed with each other since the end of the Cold War. One sees NATO as a political-military alliance which deals with the defence of territory and the interests of its members; the other sees it as a political organisation which is responsible for the construction of cooperative security in Europe. Neither the new strategic concept nor the other documents from the summit have unambiguously resolved these discussions. This is demonstrated, among other things, by a description of the international security environment in which (while not excluding the possibility that risks of a military nature may emerge) the highest-priority challenges for the Alliance are listed as the following: the proliferation of missile technology and weapons of mass destruction; terrorism and all types of activity concerning cross-border organised crime; the security of telecommunications networks (cyber-warfare), communication and energy supply routes; the militarisation of space; epidemics; climate change, and water shortages. It should thus be assumed that the final interpretation of the new strategic concept will be made on the basis of international developments, the major allies' political interests, and financial constraints related to the global economic crisis.

2. The summit's main decisions from the perspective of the Alliance's members

The reactions of Germany and the countries of Central Europe to the results of the Lisbon summit demonstrate the deep political divisions which persist within NATO. Germany and its central European allies are basically agreed on ending the military operation in Afghanistan as soon as possible, and on formally maintaining the 'open door' policy, enabling further enlargement of the Alliance.

2.1 Germany: a qualified success in the shadow of unmet demands

German politicians and media gave muted or critical reactions to the results of the Lisbon summit, which demonstrates the scale of Germany's expectations of NATO. Information on what could not be implemented concealed the fact that the decisions taken during the summit did follow the general outline of German policy's essential demands in recent years related to strengthening the role of the Alliance as an organisation of cooperative security, changing the nature and slimming down the structures of NATO's command. Berlin justified the latter by the absence of any risks of a military nature, as well as a need to make savings during the global economic crisis. Considering the totality of the demands Germany made, however, it must be acknowledged that the summit did not meet all its demands, or met them to an unsatisfactory degree.

In the process of developing the new strategic concept and the objectives of NATO reform, Germany primarily sought to reduce the role of the United States (Germany opposed the American vision of the Alliance as a 'world policeman'), and in parallel, to increase the level of NATO's cooperation with international organisations and specifically with Russia. The new strategic concept has not, in Germany's view, considered the following important matters:

-- making actions 'out of area' by NATO conditional on obtaining a mandate from the UN Security Council;
-- a commitment to nuclear disarmament or the withdrawal of tactical nuclear weapons from the Federal Republic of Germany (the adopted postulates in the new strategic concept, which stress the importance of the Alliance's nuclear deterrent, are a *de facto* contradiction of the measures requested by Germany);
-- not extending Article 5 of the Washington Treaty with a consideration of new threats. From the statements in the concept, it is unclear whether this Article only covers defence against armed attack (Germany has agreed to maintain such an interpretation, recognising that at present NATO does not face any threats of a military nature, and in the medium term such threats are unlikely) or whether it covers any new threats (contrary to German wishes).
Paradoxically, Germany's desire to transform NATO into a cooperative security organisation is not the same as giving its full consent to the Alliance's agenda on new threats. In this regard, Berlin has proposed the closest possible cooperation with other international organisations, as well as the UN's legitimization of NATO's activities.
In current affairs, Germany's demands have also been met, although apart from the documents on the mission in Afghanistan, Berlin has deemed the accepted statements to be not fully satisfactory. In this context, this primarily refers to the decisions concerning the Alliance's joint missile defence system, which Germany sees as an instrument for closer cooperation with Russia (NATO has expressed 'only' a willingness to hold dialogue with Russia on the project), as well as what Germany sees as the overly conservative positions on cooperation with Russia.

2.2 The Central European members of NATO: the alliance with the US above all

The decisions of the Lisbon summit were welcomed and considered a success by all the Alliance's Central European member states. They unanimously emphasised the importance of including references to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty in the new strategic concept as a guarantee that NATO's defensive nature will be maintained. Their differences in assessing the summit's resolutions resulted primarily from the nature of the individual countries' relationships with Russia and the US. This is best illustrated by the commitment of most of the region's countries to the idea of constructing the NATO missile defence system, and the emphasis in the new concept on the strategic importance of the Alliance's nuclear deterrent, which is identified with a continued American military presence in Europe. It allows to assume that these countries primarily identify guarantees of meaningful security with their closest possible political and military cooperation with the United States.
Most of the Central European NATO members expressed support for the idea of creating a joint missile defence system. The Czech Republic has announced its readiness to host the necessary installations on its territory (specifically an early-warning centre, which is part of

the American ‘missile shield’ in its minimum variants), as has Romania (by linking the planned elements of the American system on Romanian territory with the NATO system). Although all the countries supported Russia’s official invitation to a dialogue on the Alliance's missile defence system, two groups of countries can be distinguished in their approach to the nature of Russia’s putative involvement in the plan. Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Romania see Russia’s introduction to the project in the role of a consultant or observer (Bucharest considers any Russian installations on Romanian territory to be unacceptable), whereas Bulgaria favours Russia’s full involvement in the construction of the system. The first group of countries could also include the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, which have indirectly expressed scepticism towards closer cooperation with Russia; the second could include Albania, Croatia and Slovenia, which did not attach any special importance to the project, although they did emphasise the importance of good relations with Russia. Similarly, opinions are equally split on retaining American guarantees of security for Europe in the new strategic concept; some of the new members of the Alliance see NATO’s ‘nuclear umbrella’ as just such a guarantee. (The disregarded German appeal for NATO to give up its nuclear deterrent was supported only by Slovenia).

As already mentioned, the Central European members of the Alliance have raised the question of a guarantee in case of more traditional threats. In this context, we may note the lack of any broader reflection on reforming the command structure, the first consequence of which will be the further limitation of NATO’s military functioning. In the new structures, it is most likely that there will only be room for a narrow group of units which would specialise in operations outside the area of the Alliance’s mandate. It is doubtful that any operational allied command would function on the territory of any of the region’s countries (especially given the reduction in the total number of commands), and it will also be more difficult for officers from the new member states to recruit for positions in the structures of other commands, which will most likely need to address new threats. (It cannot be ruled out that officers of the armed forces will increasingly be replaced by representatives of the internal ministries.)

The Central European allies’ differentiated approach to the issue of new threats is noteworthy, as is the range of NATO’s future activity as expanded by these threats. Lithuania and Estonia, which in recent years have been affected by cyber-warfare, and depend on the supply of raw energy materials from Russia, see the relevant statements in the new strategic concept as constituting the implementation of their demands; Lithuania has received justification in its efforts to open a new Alliance-funded Training Centre on energy security on its territory. Bulgaria and Hungary have also drawn attention to this particular issue. The support of a group of states for increasing NATO involvement in Afghanistan also deserves mention, irrespective of the plans already accepted to terminate the military mission. Bulgaria and Romania, as well as Lithuania and Latvia, favour this idea in order to defend the benefits which they have been reaping from having their ports and air bases used for NATO activities.

3. The summit and the question of NATO’s relations with its eastern partners

In the documents of the Lisbon summit, important place was dedicated to questions of cooperation with the partner and candidate states.

3.1 Renewed cooperation with Russia: an excess of form over content

Russia's importance for NATO is best reflected in the amount of space devoted to it in the new strategic concept, which was disproportionately high compared to all the other partners of the Alliance taken together. The seriousness of this relationship was emphasised by the meeting of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) organised on the second day of the summit, which was not accompanied by the Alliance's analogous meetings of NATO-Georgia and NATO-Ukraine committees (this was most likely a Russian condition for organising the NRC meeting).

In the course of the meeting, both sides made many lofty declarations on the subject of their strategic partnership. Meanwhile, the measurable results of the meeting were reflected in the relatively short joint statement from the Council, and a non-public document on a joint review of common security challenges (terrorism, Afghanistan, piracy, the protection of so-called critical infrastructure; no agreement was reached on the most important question for both parties, namely assessment of the risks associated with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and missile technology).

During the NRC session, an agreement on Afghanistan was signed which concerned the extension of cooperation in training anti-narcotics officers in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. NATO and Russia agreed on the return transit by land across Russian territory of non-military cargo from countries participating in the ISAF mission on a commercial basis and on the establishment (in 2011) of a trust fund to finance the use of helicopters which Russia would provide for the Afghan army. Both parties also agreed to devise a comprehensive outline for cooperation on missile defence in Europe (although no specific timetable was announced), and to resume dialogue on the so-called theatre missile defence (TMD), which Russia suspended; this was a subject of the Council's work prior to August 2008. Russia and NATO failed to reach any agreement on substantial issues such as a comprehensive agreement on military transit to Afghanistan, which the Alliance has requested for several years.

Russia's first reactions to the results of the Lisbon summit show that the offer of dialogue on creating the NATO missile defence system will most likely end in failure. Russia has expressed scepticism towards the formula of creating a NATO missile defence system on the basis of the planned US system. President Dmitri Medvedev, who was present in Lisbon, made any positive response conditional on a guarantee of Russia's equal participation in the system's creation and functioning (otherwise, Russia "will defend itself"). At the same time, he made a counter-offer concerning the so-called sectoral missile defence, as part of which no joint NATO system would be created, and the Russian missile defence system would assume responsibility for the defence of NATO territory from the East.

The amount of space devoted to Russia in the new NATO strategic concept, and the desire it shows (as in other documents from the summit) to improve relations and strengthen cooperation with Russia, have not changed the fact that the concept has not considered the most important Russian demands concerning the following matters:

- the marginalisation of the mission of collective defence (as understood in terms of Article 5) to the advantage of the mission of crisis management in close cooperation with other international organisations (including the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), which Russia treats as a counterbalance to NATO);

- making the use of force by the Alliance conditional on a mandate from the UN Security Council;
- removing the statements in the new strategic concept concerning defence against cyber-warfare and threats to the security of energy supplies.

Despite declarations that mutual relations had improved, NATO has not ceased its criticism of Russia's policies on former Soviet territory. NATO's support for the territorial integrity of Georgia, which has been linked to simultaneous criticism of Russia for its recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, emphasises this.

3.2 NATO formally maintains its offer to Georgia and Ukraine

Of the former Soviet states (with the exception of the Alliance's present members Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), Georgia and Ukraine have shown interest in cooperating with NATO. Both countries are covered by the so-called 'intensive dialogue' formula. However, although Georgia is still seeking recognition of its aspirations to membership (as reflected in the documents of the Lisbon summit) and the granting of the MAP, Ukraine has decided not to apply for membership, in favour of maintaining a policy of equal distance towards the Alliance and Russia. In the summit's documents, Ukraine's non-bloc status has been noted, although the fact that the 'open door' remains open to Kiev has been emphasised.
In formal terms, the summit should be treated as a success for Georgia; its aspirations to membership and its territorial integrity have been confirmed. However, the adopted resolutions did not lead to any closer cooperation, and still less to any closer prospect of membership. Ukraine for its part, although it has not ceased its cooperation with NATO, did not set itself any goals for the Lisbon summit, and its inclusion in the adopted documents should be considered primarily as a manifestation of its partners' activity within the Alliance. Kiev's interest lay primarily in questions of NATO's relationship with Russia.
Moreover, the undeniable lack of interest in decisions concerning the Alliance from the other CIS states, highlights the crisis in the concept of the Partnership for Peace, which since the Cold War has been one of NATO's main mechanisms for international cooperation.

3.3 The lack of NATO's interest in Balkan candidate states

Although NATO is generally agreed on admitting those Balkan countries which remain outside its structures, the process of their accession has been slowed down, and the Lisbon summit has not taken any decisions in this matter, apart from vague references in the final declaration. The implementation of the MAP by Bosnia and Herzegovina has been blocked, largely due to the country's internal situation (the Republika Srpska, which makes up close to half the country, is not interested in accession), and the parties have not show any willingness to compromise. Greece is blocking Macedonia's membership, pending the resolution of the bilateral dispute about the state's name (Athens has not agreed to the use of the name 'Macedonia'), and the large NATO states have shown no interest in resolving the dispute. In contrast, the membership of Montenegro, which received its MAP in 2009, is not generally considered, as premature at all. Taking this into account, it must be assumed that the membership of the aforementioned countries, although formally just a matter of time, is not a priority for NATO. It should be emphasised that the most important player in

the Western Balkans, Serbia, is not interested in NATO membership.

4. Prospects for implementation of the summit's resolutions

The decisions taken during the NATO summit in Lisbon will be implemented over at least the first few years of the second decade of this century.
The future nature of the Alliance has not been determined. Giving priority to one of NATO's three main missions will depend primarily on how the international situation and the policies of the most important member states continue to develop. However, the greater emphasis on new challenges is evident in the guidelines adopted in Lisbon for reform of the command structure.
The principles of the new strategic concept for the Alliance will only partially help to solve the problems which NATO will face in the coming years. Insofar as they are a convenient tool to implement the current policies of the strongest NATO members (primarily the United States), enforcing a common response will not be an easy task, due to the high level of generalities and the ambiguity of the concept. Indeed, taking any decision will be preceded by discussions on the measures necessary to achieve the desired aim, and sometimes on defining the very aim which NATO has set for itself.
The end of NATO'S military operation in Afghanistan and the maintenance of the Alliance's presence in this country in a different form must be seen as highly likely. The allies are in basic agreement on this; extending the operations and incurring human and financial losses, without any hope of achieving any spectacular success, negatively influences the level of support for the ISAF mission among the public in NATO countries.
The Lisbon summit has not established what form the Alliance's missile defence system will take, nor when it will come into effect. Important members of NATO (including Germany) have made their support for the construction of a joint US-NATO 'missile shield' conditional on Russia's participation in the enterprise. If the Russian Federation does not accept the invitation to cooperate in creating a joint system (which is very likely), it cannot be ruled out that some of the member states will withdraw their support, and the 'shield' will be constructed in accordance with Washington's original objectives.
The position adopted regarding the NATO missile defence system should be seen as a test of Russia's real intentions. The Alliance's summit did not bring about the expected breakthrough in NATO-Russia relations, nor did it determine what form those relations will take in the future. It should be considered highly likely that they will be diverted into secondary matters, which will not help to resolve the important security issues in the Eurasian area. The consequence of the efforts being made by at least some NATO members to maintain a dialogue with Russia may be the Alliance's ongoing disengagement with the situation in the area of the former USSR.

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