



AFTER MADRID

NATO, ASPIRANTS AND ENHANCED
OPPORTUNITY PARTNERS

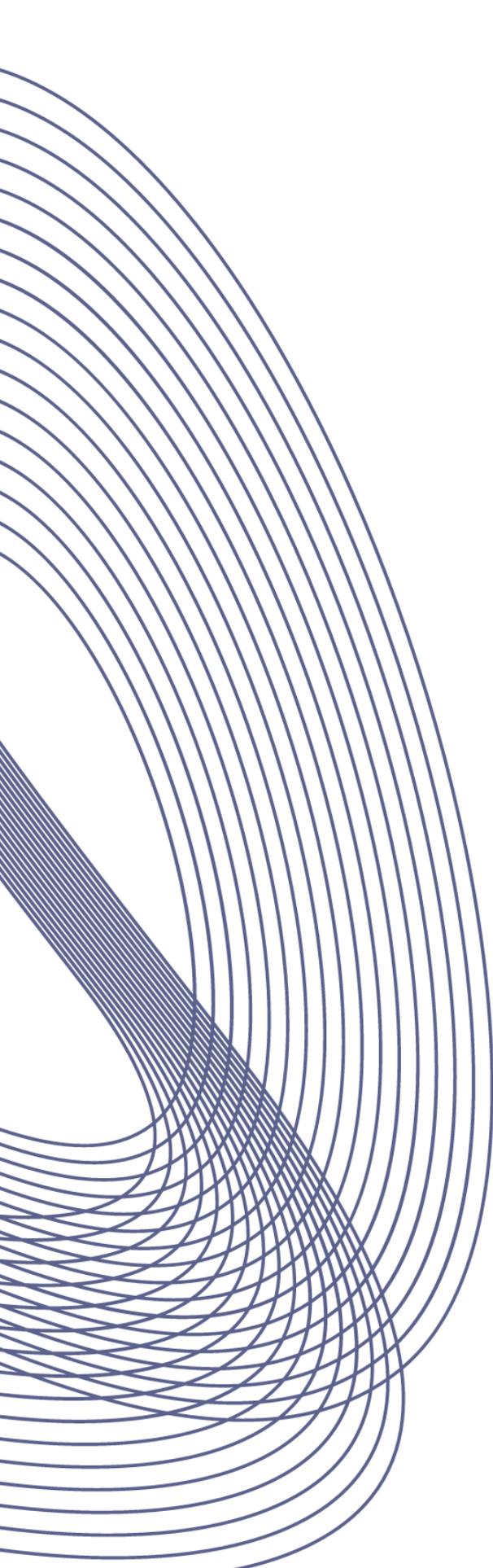
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AFTER MADRID:

NATO, ASPIRANTS AND ENHANCED OPPORTUNITY PARTNERS

Twelve years have passed since the adoption of the previous NATO Strategic Concept in 2010 that defined the main threats, partners and policies aimed at securing the Euro-Atlantic area. Since then, significant changes have taken place in the security environment in which the Allies and their partners operate. While it was reflected in numerous summit declarations, the accumulation of necessary transformations required a new strategic vision. A revision process held in 2020 by a group of independent experts appointed by the Secretary General presented their report 15 months before the full-fledged Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. Individual countries' experts also elaborated their proposals regarding the new strategy, including points raised by the Ukrainians, presented in April 2022. Still, the rapid changes necessitated by the Russian aggression made the member states re-evaluate many of the provisions, and renegotiate the new Strategic Concept 2022 within an extremely short period.



INTRODUCTION

This paper will not analyse the full scope of the new vision presented by the Allies at the Madrid Summit in June 2022. It will look only at one aspect of the new Strategic Concept – NATO's perceptions of its partners, and a vision of future cooperation formats. The authors compared the 2010 and 2022 concepts for provisions raised by the partners in general, with a specific emphasis on aspirants and enhanced opportunity partners – Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Jordan, Finland, Sweden, and Ukraine. Whether or not Finland and Sweden have already received their invitations for formal membership, at the time of final preparations for the Strategic Concept, as well as before all other 30 member states ratify the accession protocols, they remain in the partner category.

The 2010 Strategic Concept¹ expected to offer NATO's "*partners around the globe more political engagement with the Alliance, and a substantial role in shaping the NATO-led operations to which they contribute*". First and foremost, it concentrated on the potential conventional threats, and those resulting from ballistic missiles and nuclear weapon proliferation, terrorism, extremism, and trans-national illegal activities such as human trafficking, cyberattacks, energy security risks, technology-related trends, and environmental risks. This opened up quite a wide scope of issues for possible cooperation with partners. Not all have been equally instrumentalised since then, although the opportunities are still retained.

Compared to the 2010 Strategic Concept, where the global perspective was almost absent, the 2022 edition² already in the preface states: "*We will retain a global perspective and work closely with our partners, other countries and international organisations.*"

1 Strategic Concept 2010, NATO, November 2010, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_82705.htm

2 NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

However, most of the text does not provide details or clarifications of the priority spheres, leaving room for reinterpretations, mostly concerning side issues.

Twelve years ago, the member states pledged to “*enhance our partnerships through flexible formats that bring NATO and partners together – across and beyond existing frameworks*”³ (Article 30) a pledge which included political dialogue and practical cooperation with any nations and relevant organisations, consultation on security issues of common concern, a structural role in shaping strategy, and decisions on NATO-led missions, etc. Similar statements were repeated in 2022 only regarding the NATO-led operations – “*Partners make an important contribution to NATO-led crisis management. We will continue to ensure sustained political engagement and military interoperability with partners who express an interest in contributing to our missions and operations*”⁴ (Article 37).

At the same time, as the threat perceptions changed, with Russia moving from partner to threat category, and closer attention paid to non-military threats, thus the Strategic Concept 2022 also reflected new spheres for cooperation with partners – “*We will significantly strengthen deterrence and defence for all Allies, enhance our resilience against Russian coercion and support our partners to counter malign interference and aggression. In light of its hostile policies and actions, we cannot consider the Russian Federation to be our partner*”⁵ (Article 9).

Still, the 2010 Concept presented better differentiation between the partnerships and partners, while the 2020 Concept was mostly more generalised, despite the creation of the new formats. The NATO Strategic Concept 2010 emphasised that “*the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and Partnership for Peace are central to our vision of Europe whole, free and in peace. We are firmly committed to the development of friendly and cooperative relations with all countries of the Mediterranean, and we intend to further develop the Mediterranean Dialogue in the coming years. We attach great importance to peace and stability in the Gulf region, and we intend to strengthen our cooperation in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative*”⁶.

3 Strategic Concept 2010, NATO, November 2010, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_82705.htm

4 NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

5 NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

6 Strategic Concept 2010, NATO, November 2010, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_82705.htm

In 2014, a decision was taken to launch an Enhanced Opportunity Partnership format, to accentuate those states with the highest level of cooperation and trust. However, de facto, this format has not been shaped after eight years, giving limited additional benefit to both sides. The more political rather than operational significance of this format has been proved by a total absence of mention of it in the Strategic Concept 2022.

The last but not least topic is crisis management, which has always been among NATO's top priorities and has had both transborder consideration and partner involvement.

The Allies envisaged in 2010 that *“Crises and conflicts beyond NATO’s borders can pose a direct threat to the security of Alliance territory and populations. NATO will therefore engage, where possible and when necessary, to prevent crises, manage crises, stabilise post-conflict situations and support reconstruction”*⁷ (Article 20) and *“Where conflict prevention proves unsuccessful, NATO will be prepared and capable to manage ongoing hostilities. NATO has unique conflict management capacities, including the unparalleled capability to deploy and sustain robust military forces in the field. NATO-led operations have demonstrated the indispensable contribution the Alliance can make to international conflict management efforts”*⁸ (Article 23). However, these considerations and later plan elaborations did not prepare the Alliance for the war on the territory of their close partner, neither in 2014 nor in 2022.

The 2022 Strategic Concept elaborated on crisis prevention and management, recognising common challenges. However, the approach remained the same – partners are seen purely as recipients of the security support from NATO, and their contribution of experience and knowledge is neglected, despite the opposite situation being salient on the ground – *“We will increase our efforts to anticipate and prevent crises and conflicts. Prevention is a sustainable way to contribute to stability and Allied security. We will enhance support for our partners, including to help build their capacity to counter terrorism and address shared security challenges. We will scale up the size and scope of our security and capacity-building assistance to vulnerable partners in our neighbourhood and beyond, to strengthen their preparedness and resilience and boost their capabilities to counter malign interference, prevent destabilisation and counter aggression”*⁹ (Article 38).

7 Strategic Concept 2010, NATO, November 2010, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_82705.htm

8 Strategic Concept 2010, NATO, November 2010, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_82705.htm

9 NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>



FROM PARTNERSHIP TO MEMBERSHIP

- FINLAND AND SWEDEN



Russia's ongoing war has – as it escalated from the starting point of the invasion of Ukraine in Crimea and in Donbas in 2014, to the full-scale invasion eight years later – led to fundamental changes in security and defence policies in both Finland and Sweden. At the 2014 NATO summit in Wales, the Alliance identified both countries as eligible for the Enhanced Opportunities Partnership (EOP), which was aimed at enhancing the Alliance's focus on Baltic Sea security. At the ensuing summit in Warsaw in 2016, NATO adopted a resolution positioning four multinational battalions in its Baltic Sea-region states of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland (the 2022 Summit Declaration stated that these “*be scaled up from the existing battlegroups to brigade-size units where and when required*”¹⁰), thereby striving to reassure those member states concerning the Alliance's commitment and support.

When approved, Finland's and Sweden's applications to join NATO, jointly submitted in May 2022, will have a significant impact on the Baltic Sea region, but also on NATO as a whole. The NATO Summit in Madrid in June 2022 saw both the organisation's recognition of those applications and its adoption of its new Strategic Concept, superseding the one from 2010.

Clearly, the overall dominant factor in the Alliance's strategic thinking – and its changes since 2010 – is the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine. In light of the blatant invasion of one of its EOP Partners, NATO's collective and consensual attitude proved to be “*exclusively defensive*” – explicitly focusing on containment, while excluding a non-member from actual military support from the Alliance. As indicated in the new Strategic Concept's omission of the former versions' commitment to “*stop ongoing conflicts where they affect Alliance security*”¹¹ and the now

10 Madrid Summit Declaration, NATO, June 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm

11 NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

somewhat less prominent position of its description of the “Open Door policy”, Russia’s war would therefore be the driver behind an overall strategic *shift*, between 2010 and 2022, which might be described as “from projection to protection”. For Finland and Sweden, self-perceived to be non-aligned by choice only, this came as a bit of a wake-up call, leading to them applying for membership just one month before the Summit.

The suddenness of those applications, but even more so the fact that application doesn’t equate to membership, naturally would not have allowed for tangible implications for the new Strategic Concept, but they *did* make an impact on the Summit Declaration. The Strategic Concept, with the broader strokes one would expect in such a document when it comes to its regional foci, describes the Western Balkans and the Black Sea region as being of “strategic importance” but does not explicitly mention the Baltic Sea region in this regard (and much less Finland and Sweden). The Summit Declaration, however, states that the “*accession of Finland and Sweden will make them safer, NATO stronger, and the Euro-Atlantic area more secure*”¹².

Where the 2010 Strategic Concept stated that the Alliance did “*not consider any country to be its adversary*” and, by implication, did not highlight specific actors or areas as challenges, its superseding version of 2022 *does* identify the Russian Federation and “*Moscow’s build-up, including in the Baltic, Black and Mediterranean Sea regions, along with its military integration with Belarus*”¹³ as challenging NATO’s security and interests. The new Concept, thus, as opposed to its predecessor, gives the Alliance an Eastern and Southern focus – but also states that Russia’s capability to, in the High North, disrupt Allied reinforcements and freedom of navigation across the North Atlantic, is a “strategic challenge”. Generally, naming Russia and the Baltic Sea region only adds to NATO’s attractiveness, from a Finnish/Swedish perspective, as that is at the very core of what they now seek in NATO membership. For both of them, however, including those Southern and Northern aspects in their *factual* defence planning would be slightly less familiar, having for many generations made “Security Policy-virtue” of the perceived necessity of considerably more narrow, national, geographical scopes.

12 Madrid Summit Declaration, NATO, June 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm

13 NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

For slightly different reasons, both Finland and Sweden have historically had the Baltic Sea as a focus for their Security Strategy; Finland perhaps as a bit of an umbilical cord and Sweden as somewhat of a moat. In this regard, the geographically dominant islands and archipelagos of Gotland and Åland have had and will continue to have importance, despite the nowadays longer ranges of technical systems. Both countries are, each in their own way, major littoral states in the region and in terms of length of coastline, they are by far the largest coastal states in the region. Since both countries are EU members, 30 per cent of the total number of states in that union already have a national interest in the Baltic Sea. With the upcoming NATO enlargement, the corresponding share of *that* Alliance's focus on the Baltic Sea would rise from 20 to 27 per cent. Allied defence of, not least, its members east or south-east of the Baltic Sea will, of course, be heavily dependent on safe and secure lines of communication across it.

Though significant parts of Finland's and Sweden's territories are geographically within the Arctic Region, historically, neither one has chosen to let their military focus expand northwards beyond *indirect* consequences of Great Power frictions in the High North. Having said that, the last decades have seen a considerable increase in cross-border training, mainly but not only between the air forces of Norway, Sweden, and Finland. There have been precious few larger military exercises of any kind in the Nordic countries, national or within the NATO context, where there has not been participation from the Nordic neighbours. Multi- and bilateral military cooperation in the Nordics is commonplace, and the bilateral cooperation between Finland and Sweden even entered into actual Defence Planning, already some years ago. NATO membership for Finland and Sweden will naturally enable building on and furthering that regional cooperation substantially.

While NATO militaries, also those outside of the Nordic community, have trained and operated with their Finnish and Swedish counterparts for a long time, actual membership will deepen the current level of integration and, naturally, apart from taking Finnish and Swedish national needs into consideration, will also allow their military capabilities to be part of the basis for NATO Defence Planning. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Finland and Sweden will bring to the table 62 F/A-18

combat jets (to be replaced by 64 F-35s) and 96 JAS-39s.¹⁴ Also, according to the Madrid Summit Declaration, the Alliance has endorsed a strategy to “ensure the seamless delivery of the next generation Airborne Warning & Control System (AWACS) and related capabilities”, which corresponds with the Swedish capabilities brought in through the two fully NATO-interoperable ASC S100d/ASC 890s (to be reinforced by two GlobalEye AEW&C aircraft - more capable than the E-3A AWACS the Alliance currently operates).

On the naval side, the two countries bring with them, among other assets, corvettes, mine warfare ships and submarines, accustomed to and interoperable with NATO counterparts and outstandingly well suited to aiding in safeguarding NATO lines of communication in the Baltic Sea (their Ice Breaker capacities might also mitigate what, in the short term, is an Alliance capability gap in the Barents region). Their Ground Forces are historically focused on “national counter-invasion operations” but are also long-term contributors to NATO-led non-article 5-operations and will probably be required to partake in defending other members’ territory within NATO. Finland, with M270 MLRS and hundreds of towed howitzers, have more artillery than Germany, France or the United Kingdom - and together, Finland and Sweden’s forces comprise 220 active Leopard Main Battle Tanks. Finland operates the NASAMS Air Defence System, whereas Sweden boasts Patriot PAC-III (both countries are also considering acquiring Israeli AD-systems).

As NATO partners, Finland and Sweden have both, for many years, participated in NATO’s uncontentious “Partnership for Peace” Planning and Review Process. As members, however, they will partake in the Alliance’s quadrennial NATO Defence Planning Process, which is substantially more intrusive and, as opposed to all other NATO processes, based on “consensus minus one”. Therefore, while NATO membership for Finland and Sweden may not carry any dramatic changes at the tactical and technical level, with most units in both countries already being interoperable within NATO, the implications at higher levels and in the long term may prove more profound. Changing priorities regarding resource allocation in planning, and plans for both development and employment, but also changing processes and methods from what has been purely national business, will mean less flexibility and room for ambiguity

14 “The Military Balance 2022”, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, February 2022, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance/the-military-balance-2022>

on strategic, military strategic and even operational levels. Also, the realms of Capability Development and Procurement, not least for Sweden with its rather large Defence Industry, may be affected – for better and worse – by NATO membership.

To add weight to the burden of changing long-established cultures (Culture, as the saying has it, eats Strategy for breakfast), this transformation will also have to be made soon *and* fast. Participation in – and allotment of permanent staff, military and civilian, to – functions within NATO will be an important part of this, but the very same capabilities and experience that these individuals would have to bring with them will be equally needed within the often sparsely staffed national functions they will have to be torn from. For NATO, having experienced gradual affiliation and enlargement throughout its existence, subsumption of new members might be less of a struggle, but on the other hand, the NATO of today is a different organisation from the way it was historically, and it also now suddenly finds itself facing a dramatically enlarged threat.

In conclusion, NATO's Strategy (reflected in its Summit Declaration and Strategic Concept) *has* already changed due to its threat perception, and will do so again with Finland and Sweden becoming members. Increased NATO attention in the Baltic Sea region and movement across the Baltic Sea is a likely consequence of that. Likewise – but more profoundly – the security policies and strategies of those two countries will naturally evolve and indeed, already have, with their mere *applications* for membership. The two countries' parallel histories from 1994, of gradually deeper cooperation and interoperability with each other and with NATO, however, means that those consequences in the short term and on tactical and technical levels will be significantly less tangible than at higher hierarchical levels.



ENHANCED OPPORTUNITY PARTNERS OR ASPIRANTS?

– GEORGIA AND UKRAINE

For Georgia and Ukraine, the significance of the New Strategic Concept and the Madrid Summit was determined by three main factors:

- Russian aggression – both countries are victims of Russian aggression because of their western aspiration and refusal to remain in Russia’s backyard. From February 24, Russia launched a large-scale war with Ukraine that has significantly influenced NATO’s perception of threats and possible involvement. Therefore, both countries anticipated that the New Strategic Concept would properly respond to Russia’s illegal and aggressive policy.
- NATO integration – both Ukraine and Georgia were promised at the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008 that they “will become members of NATO”¹⁵; however, due to the allies’ incoherence, neither Georgia nor Ukraine since then have received Membership Action Plans (MAP), which are considered as an integral part of the membership process. At the same time, Ukraine and Georgia’s NATO membership was highlighted as a red line in the Russian Federation ultimatum sent to NATO in December 2021. NATO has repeatedly declared that it stays committed to the open-door policy and that no third party can veto aspirants’ membership. Nevertheless, the new Strategic Concept had to respond to enlargement issues and at least reiterate adherence to the Bucharest commitments, though neither Georgia nor Ukraine expected radical or immediate decisions towards their NATO integration.
- Black Sea security – for years, NATO has been demonstrating growing attention to that region. The Alliance has been

¹⁵ Bucharest Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008; https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm

developing active measures and initiatives to strengthen its eastern flank but has not formulated its Black Sea strategy. However, Ukraine and Georgia are the most vulnerable areas in overall Black Sea security, and both remain outside of NATO's security umbrella.

All three abovementioned issues were part of the Madrid summit discussions, and the New Strategic Concept somehow responded to these issues.

Russian Aggression

Ukraine (primarily Russian aggression against Ukraine) was at the top of the Madrid Summit agenda. For the first time in the NATO-Russia relationship, the Russian Federation was unquestionably designated as a threat to trans-Atlantic security (in previous statements and declarations, only certain "aggressive actions" were recognised). *"The Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area",*¹⁶ – stated the Madrid Summit Declaration. The New Strategic Concept goes even further: *"The Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. It seeks to establish spheres of influence and direct control through coercion, subversion, aggression and annexation... Moscow's military build-up, including in the Baltic, Black and Mediterranean Sea regions, along with its military integration with Belarus, challenge our security and interests."*¹⁷

By way of contrast, NATO was very moderate in assessments of the Russian invasion of Georgia (August 2008), and the Strategic Concept of 2010 talked about "strategic cooperation" and "joint actions" with Russia. Such inequitable perceptions generated critical miscalculations and mistakes in NATO's policy planning and threat assessment, processed later. However, today NATO has apparently learned lessons from past mistakes and does not mince words any more. The Madrid Summit demonstrated coherence and firm support for Ukraine. The New Strategic Concept highlights that "a strong, independent Ukraine is vital for the stability of the Euro-Atlantic area"¹⁸.

16 Madrid Summit Declaration Issued by NATO Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Madrid 29 June 2022; https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm

17 NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

18 NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

Consequently, the Allies approved a Comprehensive Package of Assistance to Ukraine, which includes communications equipment, fuel supplies, medical equipment, equipment to counter biological, chemical and nuclear weapons, and anti-drone equipment. In the long term, NATO leaders agreed to help Ukraine transition from Soviet-era military equipment to modern NATO equipment. As Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said: "Ukraine can rely on us for as long as it needs to".¹⁹

The New Strategic Concept also stresses that NATO strongly supports the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of aspirant countries. That declaration has been translated into specific decisions of the Madrid Summit to step up tailored political and practical support to partners, including Georgia. NATO confirmed its readiness to work with aspirants to build their integrity and resilience, develop capabilities, and uphold their political independence. As a result, Georgia has got a New Support Package designed to strengthen the country's resilience and defence capabilities. The new package contains a number of specific elements, including Georgia's increasing participation in NATO's cybersecurity exercises, and measures to develop critical infrastructure and strengthen security communications.²⁰

NATO Integration

The New Strategic Concept, as well as the Madrid Summit decisions, firmly demonstrate the Alliance's unshakable commitment towards an open-door policy. The member states emphasised that the enlargement has been a historic success, which has contributed to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area, and has generated benefits for the partners and the Alliance itself. The allies reaffirmed that the enlargement policy, consistent with Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty, "*is an expression of Alliance's fundamental values and strategic interest in Euro-Atlantic peace and stability*"²¹. NATO keeps the door open for all European democracies that share the Alliance's values, and which are willing and able to undertake appropriate responsibilities. Along with that, the New Strategic Concept affirms that "*decisions on membership are*

¹⁹ NATO approved a comprehensive assistance package for Ukraine; Front News Ukraine; June 2022, <http://frontnews.eu/en/news/details/34705>

²⁰ Pre-Summit press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg; NATO, 27 June 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_197080.htm

²¹ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

taken by NATO Allies and no third party has a say in this process".²² That affirmation sounds highly appropriate when Russia tries to interfere as a third party in NATO-Aspirants relations.

The Alliance has committed to strengthening political dialogue and cooperation "with those who aim to join the Alliance, help strengthen their resilience against malign interference, build their capabilities, and enhance our practical support to advance their Euro-Atlantic aspirations"²³. NATO will continue to develop "*partnerships with Georgia and Ukraine to advance our common interest in Euro-Atlantic peace, stability and security*."²⁴ The New Strategic Concept has reaffirmed the decision the Allies "*took at the 2008 Bucharest Summit and all subsequent decisions with respect to Georgia and Ukraine*".²⁵ That statement has particular importance to Georgia and Ukraine, as they both consider NATO membership as an ultimate goal.

The NATO Strategic Concept 2022, as well as the Madrid Summit Declaration, are silent on the next steps that should be taken to fast forward the integration process. Meanwhile, the Madrid Summit has demonstrated that the membership process can be accelerated, as Finland and Sweden received their invitation a few months after submitting applications, bypassing the Membership Action Plan (MAP), which since April of 1999 had become an integral part of the integration process. The MAP was designed and launched to help aspirant countries in their preparation for membership. Nevertheless, in the case of Georgia and Ukraine, it had actually become an obstacle to their further integration. The Madrid Summit decision on the membership of Finland and Sweden could be considered a new and innovative model for NATO's further enlargement.

The Black Sea Security

The 2010 Strategic Concept keeps silent about the Black Sea. That region was considered a collateral part of collective security. Nonetheless, aggressive Russian policy towards their neighbours has turned the Black Sea into the frontline. An overwhelming majority of the threats and challenges that NATO is facing today are concentrated on the Eastern flank, including the Black Sea.

²² NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

²³ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

²⁴ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

²⁵ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

Therefore, its future is essential for European security, energy dependability, and trade and transportation connections between Europe and Asia.

The Strategic Concept 2022 highlights that the Black Sea region is of “*strategic importance for the Alliance*”. NATO will continue to support the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of interested countries in these regions and will enhance efforts to bolster their capabilities to address the distinct threats and challenges they face and boost their resilience against malign third-party interference and coercion. The Allies have emphasised that maritime security is key to Euro-Atlantic peace and prosperity and have expressed their strong desire to ensure a cloudless future for maritime cooperation. “*We will strengthen our posture and situational awareness to deter and defend against all threats in the maritime domain, uphold freedom of navigation, secure maritime trade routes and protect our main lines of communications*”.²⁶

Those statements demonstrate that NATO has finally started developing its policy towards the Black Sea, and that region has been gradually becoming part of the Alliance’s political-security agenda. However, still, a lot needs to be done lest the future of the Black Sea should become synonymous with a zone of permanent instability. It is obvious that a unified strategy for long-lasting security is still a long way off. Diversity of visions and perceptions of member-states still require further scrutiny and consultations. Nonetheless, Ukraine and Georgia are significant stakeholders. Their credentials as burden-sharing partners have to be acknowledged, and both countries have to become full members of the Black Sea strategy elaboration and development process.

The New Strategic Concept highlights NATO’s three core tasks: deterrence and defence; crisis prevention and management; and cooperative security. Success in all those dimensions considerably correlate with the situation on the frontlines – in Ukraine and Georgia. Therefore, it firmly states that the security of countries aspiring to become members of the Alliance is intertwined with NATO’s security²⁷. That ground-breaking statement can open new doors to NATO-Aspirants cooperation, to counter military and non-military threats, such as maritime security (including naval, air and land force interoperability), protection of digital and physical infrastructure, cyber security and data protection, crisis

²⁶ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

²⁷ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

management, etc. Recognising the security of aspirants as “intertwined” with it, NATO can deeper engage Ukraine and Georgia in the threat assessment process. That will sufficiently enhance threat detection, early warning, prevention and response mechanisms, will improve the security environment in Europe, and will contribute to the realisation of the key objectives of the New Strategic Concept.



THE ASPIRANT

- BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Significance of the NATO Madrid Summit for Bosnia and Herzegovina could be examined through several elements, such as the Summit programme, activities on the margin of the Summit, the Summit decisions, the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, and the Summit Declaration. Other important considerations for Bosnia and Herzegovina could be derived from several paragraphs, whether or not the country was directly mentioned but which may have implications for its cooperation with its allies.

It is noteworthy that the Programme of the Madrid summit foresaw Bosnia and Herzegovina to be discussed under item IV, “Reinforcing partnerships and maintaining an Open Door”, immediately after the two invitations – to Sweden and Finland. This illustrates that the country is placed fairly high on the NATO agenda. And it clearly suggests that Bosnia and Herzegovina, as an aspirant country, is perceived differently from ordinary partners, but rather as the one which is the next in line to be reviewed for NATO membership. Otherwise, Bosnia and Herzegovina would have been considered within subtopics 14 or 15, when other EAP or PfP countries were debated.

The NATO Strategic Concept 2022 particularly envisioned the importance of partner countries, specifically mentioning those that aspire to membership, like Bosnia and Herzegovina. By elaborating on the actual and future complex strategic environment, the Alliance openly considered the security of its partners, committing itself to providing concrete support to them. The concept clearly emphasises that the Russian objective is to destabilise countries to the East and South, the region which features Bosnia and Herzegovina too. That includes countering destructive interference from the Russian Federation by conventional, cyber and hybrid means, not even excluding the possibility of aggression.

The partners are specifically elaborated in paragraph 40, which defines Cooperative Security. It is important for Bosnia and

Herzegovina that NATO's new Strategic Concept reaffirms the *Open-door* policy as a strategic interest in terms of Euro-Atlantic peace and stability, highlighting the fact that the Alliance's door remains open to all European democracies, whose membership contributes to the common security. This is crucial for Bosnia and Herzegovina as an aspirant country, which could additionally motivate all relevant actors to participate in achieving the goal, but at the same time, could send a message to NATO pessimists, which obstruct the integration process. Thus, the challenge of responding to the diverse threats is also an opportunity to enhance the security of Bosnia and Herzegovina and accelerate the Euro-Atlantic integration processes.

The previously stated significance of the Strategic Concept for Bosnia and Herzegovina is accentuated in paragraph 41, where it is openly acknowledged that the security of countries aspiring to become members of the Alliance is interlocked with NATO security. This comes at a time when the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been destabilised by some external as well as internal actors. This statement has two implications for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Firstly, the Alliance's commitment to engage in defending the country from any kind of security threat and in strengthening resilience against destructive intrusion. Secondly, being perceived as an aspirant country, Bosnia and Herzegovina will be backed by the Alliance to advance the integration process.

The strategic significance of the Western Balkans has been explicitly reaffirmed in paragraph 45, directly referring to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the statement that NATO will “*continue to support the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of interested countries in these regions*”²⁸. This means that Bosnia and Herzegovina is definitely considered a credible aspirant country, and that any moves will be a joint endeavour sponsored by the Alliance. The stated position has been made concrete by the commitment that the allies will truly engage in enhancing aspirants' capabilities to deal with the apparent challenges and threats, and to enhance their strength against any destructive intrusion from outside. The seriousness of NATO's stated positions was confirmed immediately after the summit by the decision of the UK to deploy military experts in Bosnia and Herzegovina²⁹, thus providing political and practical

28 NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

29 Azem Kurtic, UK to Send Military Experts to Bolster Bosnian Security, Balkan Insight, June 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/06/30/uk-to-send-military-experts-to-bolster-bosnian-security/>

support to the state institutions in preventing hybrid threats, all in accordance with the decisions of the Madrid summit.

Comparing the contents of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept with the one from 2010, one notices that the three core tasks have remained the same. However, there is a quite different perception of the security environment, which affects the amplification of the tasks. Consequently, it is obvious that the conventional threat was not considered as imminent as it is today. Therefore, in the NATO 2010 Concept, more attention was paid to asymmetric threats, including WMD proliferation, terrorism, cyber threats, climate change and so on. It is important to notice that in the paragraph on cooperative security, Bosnia and Herzegovina was not mentioned at all, but in the new Concept, this was the case at least twice. Furthermore, in the subtopic Open Door in the 2010 Concept, there was a mention of the Western Balkans, yet without emphasising Bosnia and Herzegovina as an aspirant country.

Apparently, the new Concept, unlike the previous one, clearly brought out Bosnia and Herzegovina's aspirant ambitions to be backed by the Alliance, but also its commitment to consider the security of the country as an integral part of the security of the Alliance, which is an evident advance. Emphasising the significance of the partnership, and highlighting Bosnia and Herzegovina as one of the special partners, provides an opportunity for the country to enhance its relationship with NATO, strengthen its security, and accelerate its integration process.

The 2022 Madrid Summit Declaration also contained statements and decisions which relate to or are essential for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The fact that engagement with the country during the summit is mentioned in the document, as one of the rare partners invited to take part, suggests a special status in future arrangements. This has been even more strongly underlined by the commitment that NATO will further enhance partnerships to be beneficial for both, which includes a joint response to security concerns as well as stronger political reassurance. In this regard, the declaration revealed that new tailor-made measures of political and practical support are to be adopted, which in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina implies the defence-capability building package³⁰ that includes an increase of cooperation on weapons, counter-terrorism, crisis management, counter-disinformation efforts, cyber security,

30 NATO. Madrid Summit Declaration. 29 June 2022. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm

etc. It also contains measures related to the reinforcement of NATO HQ in Sarajevo, which is a direct reaction to the announcement by the Russian Federation to veto the UNSC decision on the extension of the EUFOR Althea mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina³¹. Therefore, alternative options were discussed, which entail the stronger engagement of NATO in the country, all with the aim of implementing the measures mentioned in the declaration and the package for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was also discussed on the margins of the NATO summit within the NATO public forum debate. The report³² presented by the Atlantic Council particularly highlighted the importance of Cooperative Security as one of the core tasks of the Alliance, which predominantly focus on NATO's partnerships. The status of Bosnia and Herzegovina is specifically mentioned as a first category partner that seeks NATO membership. In that context, it has been acknowledged that the country, together with Ukraine and Georgia, requires urgent support because of the Russian threat to its security. The importance of cooperative security has been furthermore emphasised by a shift in the Alliance approach, from one that was demand-driven and largely voluntary, to a new one where partnerships are used more strategically, prioritising those that may best advance Alliance interests. This report was presented even earlier to the NATO decision-makers responsible for drafting the new Security Concept, thus contributing to its final version. This indicates that Bosnia and Herzegovina has also come to be perceived as a contributor to international security that could deliver substantial political support and interoperable military forces to NATO.

Reflecting all that has been previously mentioned, it can be concluded that the NATO 2022 Security Concept highlighted the importance of partner countries, evidently specifying some of them, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. This has been verified by the commitment to interlock the security of aspirant countries with NATO. As never before, the new concept has foreseen the commitment of the Alliance to strengthening the resilience of Bosnia and Herzegovina against diverse threats, as well as to support its Euro-Atlantic ambitions. As a direct outcome, NATO has

31 Peace of the action: The Kremlin's plans in Bosnia and Ukraine, ECFR, February 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/article/peace-of-the-action-the-kremlins-plans-in-bosnia-and-ukraine/>

32 Majda Ruge, One Plus Four: Charting NATO's Future in an Age of Disruption. NATO Task Force report. Ed. by Daniel S. Hamilton and Hans Binnendijk, Transatlantic Leadership Network, February 2022, <https://www.transatlantic.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/NATO-TF-SC-final-feb-16-2022.pdf>

already debated courses of action to develop adequate alternatives to the Russian veto to extend the executive mandate of EUFOR.

Recognising the MAP status of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Madrid Summit decisions could ensure more proactive cooperation in developing and submitting the Annual National Programs, thus accelerating reforms but also setting conditions for the country to be invited to join NATO sooner rather than later. However, this decision was not made, thus, Bosnia and Herzegovina may still face uncertainties and obstacles, which can slow down its NATO path. Therefore, the positive momentum created in Madrid should be exploited, and the integration process must be accelerated by joint efforts.

The NATO membership would certainly enhance stability in the long term, encourage internal integration, attract foreign investments and, thus, economic benefits, stressing the position of the country as a relevant contributor to international security.



PARTNERS WITHOUT FUTURE MEMBERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

- JORDAN AND AUSTRALIA

Australia and Jordan, for a long time, have been important global partners for NATO, whose active collaboration went beyond regional affairs. Even when NATO attempted to narrow its activities to the North Atlantic region, both the Indo-Pacific and the Middle East were among the priority destinations important for many member states. Relations with Australia were established in 2005, while Jordan has a longer history of cooperation, since the Mediterranean Dialogue was established in 1994.

In 2014, both countries were named as Enhanced Opportunities partners, although, during the first years, this concept had quite vague frameworks. This led to the situation where de facto countries continued their bilateral dialogue with the Alliance or within the frameworks of the previously established frameworks. However, this decision singled out Australia from other global partners in the Indo-Pacific (Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand) and Jordan from the Mediterranean Dialogue partners (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia).

The NATO Strategic Concept 2010 united all partners under a joint umbrella, in terms of the cooperation priorities: *“The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and Partnership for Peace are central to our vision of Europe whole, free and in peace. We are firmly committed to the development of friendly and cooperative relations with all countries of the Mediterranean, and we intend to further develop the Mediterranean Dialogue in the coming years. We attach great importance to peace and stability in the Gulf region, and we intend to strengthen our cooperation in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative”*³³ (paragraph 35). Neither Australia nor Jordan received individual attention.

However, later, in NATO summit declarations, like that made in Brussels in 2018, we already see elaborated and detailed priorities:

³³ Strategic Concept 2010, NATO, November 2010, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_82705.htm

“We remain committed to our longstanding partnership with Jordan in the framework of the Mediterranean Dialogue. We look forward to building on the successful implementation of our Defence and Related Security Capacity Building (DCB) assistance to Jordan in such priority areas as cyber defence; counter-improvised explosive devices; and civil preparedness and crisis management. We are grateful to Jordan, an enhanced opportunities partner, for its valuable contributions to NATO-led operations and for hosting our DCB training activities for Iraq”³⁴.

The 2022 Strategic Concept also does not present clear diversification or a framework for the partnerships, and does not single out either Australia or Jordan. Even in Madrid Summit Declaration, paragraph 16 it is stated in general about all existing and potential partners beyond the traditional region of NATO, including: *“We will further enhance our partnerships so that they continue to meet the interests of both Allies and partners. We will discuss common approaches to global security challenges where NATO’s interests are affected, share perspectives through deeper political engagement, and seek concrete areas for cooperation to address shared security concerns. We will now move ahead with strengthening our engagement with existing and potential new interlocutors beyond the Euro-Atlantic area”.*

Even more significantly, there is no evident mention of the Mediterranean area separately (except for being named as one of the regions where the Russian military build-up is taking place). Attention is turned to the Middle East, North Africa and Sahel regions, in particular: *“Conflict, fragility and instability in Africa and the Middle East directly affect our security and the security of our partners. NATO’s southern neighbourhood, particularly the Middle East, North Africa and Sahel regions, faces interconnected security, demographic, economic and political challenges. These are aggravated by the impact of climate change, fragile institutions, health emergencies and food insecurity. This situation provides fertile ground for the proliferation of non-state armed groups, including terrorist organisations. It also enables destabilising and coercive interference by strategic competitors”* (paragraph 11).³⁵

At the same time, the Indo-Pacific region received less attention – *“The Indo-Pacific is important for NATO, given that developments in that region can directly affect Euro-Atlantic security. We will strengthen*

34 Brussels Summit Declaration, NATO, July 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm?selectedLocale=en

35 NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

*dialogue and cooperation with new and existing partners in the Indo-Pacific to tackle cross-regional challenges and shared security interests*³⁶ (paragraph 45). These interests are not identified in the Concept and can just be stipulated from previous meetings in this format. Among others: “NATO and its Asia-Pacific partners have agreed to step up political dialogue and practical cooperation in several areas, including cyberspace, new technology and countering disinformation. Because global challenges demand global solutions, they have also agreed to work more closely together in other areas such as maritime security, climate change and resilience”.³⁷

Two important provisions envisaged in the Strategic Concept 2022 can be considered important both to Australia and Jordan and incorporated in future cooperation. NATO pledges to “*support our partners to counter hybrid challenges and seek to maximise synergies with other relevant actors, such as the European Union*” (paragraph 27) and states that “*Political dialogue and practical cooperation with partners, based on mutual respect and benefit, contribute to stability beyond our borders, enhance our security at home and support NATO’s core tasks. Partnerships are crucial to protect the global commons, enhance our resilience and uphold the rules-based international order*”³⁸ (paragraph 42).

Partners across the globe are also usually mentioned in provisions regarding international law and security, such as “*We will strengthen our ties with partners that share the Alliance’s values and interest in upholding the rules-based international order. We will enhance dialogue and cooperation to defend that order, uphold our values and protect the systems, standards and technologies on which they depend. We will increase outreach to countries in our broader neighbourhood and across the globe and remain open to engagement with any country or organisation, when doing so could bolster our mutual security*”³⁹ (paragraph 44).

In June 2022, in Madrid, the four Asia-Pacific partners participated for the first time in a NATO Summit. However, neither Jordan nor Australia were directly mentioned in the final declaration. The Middle East is not named in the Madrid Summit Declaration at all, while Jordan is mentioned only regarding the participation of their Minister of Foreign Affairs, which is a striking difference from, for

36 NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

37 Relations with Asia-Pacific partners, NATO, July 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_183254.htm?

38 NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

39 NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO, June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

example, the 2018 Brussels Summit Declaration. The Indo-Pacific region was enshrined with the Asia-Pacific and also received only a short mention: *“The participation of our partners from the Asia-Pacific region, alongside other partners, demonstrated the value of our cooperation in tackling shared security challenges”*⁴⁰ (paragraph 15).

Neglecting Australia and Jordan, not stressing their special relations with NATO both in the new Strategic Concept 2022 and Madrid Summit Declaration, on the one hand, could be explained by the timing, when the Russian aggression and Chinese challenge were attracting all the attention of the allies. However, if it might have been true for the Summit Declaration, this looks strange in the Strategic Concept which was expected to become a document proposing a vision for the next decade. The concentration of the member states on the internal security of the Alliance is explicable, but overlooking the strategic regional partners can be considered a mistake.

⁴⁰ Madrid Summit Declaration, NATO, June 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm



CONCLUSIONS

Despite their greater involvement outside of the NATO perimeter, and years of talks regarding the necessity to review the approach of the NATO partnership relations, nevertheless, the new Strategic Concept 2022 predominantly concentrates on the Allies themselves, barely mentioning their partners. Moreover, it does not present any differentiation between the partners. Most of the articles mentioning cooperation with partners do not give prominence to those with intense cooperation and limited dialogue, or even those who are formally still part of the Partnership for Peace program but emerged from another side in the conflict. Compared to the 2010 Concept, the new document did not bring out any clarity or evaluation of the relations with partners.

The Partnership for Peace does not receive a mention, even though it is outdated in its current stance, and for a long time has needed a substantial review. Even more significantly, an Enhanced Opportunity Partnership framework was not even named, thus emphasising its temporary political value rather than operational significance. Only three aspirant states – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine, received a separate mention.

The Enhanced Opportunity Partnership “advertised” for the last few years as the highest level of trust and interoperability did not get any attention or development. De facto, the New Strategic Concept, together with the Madrid Summit Declaration, demonstrated several tendencies regarding relations between the Alliance and its partners:

- The Alliance still refer to the partners only as recipients of security.
- There are no clear priorities or vision regarding developing relations with partners on different levels.
- The approach to partners still remains on an individual case by case basis, with the Enhanced Opportunity Partnership

losing its appeal, as, after eight years, it has not received any instrumentalisation except through political significance. With Sweden and Finland achieving membership, the role of the EoP will decrease further.

- The Open Door Policy remains the main approach towards three aspirant states – BiH, Georgia, and Ukraine – which has not developed since 2008 and adds ambiguity to further relations development.
- The clarity in understanding threats and challenges that are predominantly shared with partners in different geographic domains presents a possibility for increased cooperation; still, the understanding of threats has not resulted in a clear formulation of means and instruments of cooperation beyond political dialogue and consultations.

At the same time, the ambiguity within the document left room for manoeuvre and reinterpretations. Such spheres as resilience building, maritime security, climate influence on security, innovations, disinformation and cyber security should become an integral part of the NATO dialogue with its partners. Considering the threats and challenges named both in the Concept 2022 and the Madrid Summit Declaration, it would be logical for the EoP states and Bosnia and Herzegovina to join a newly established Defence Innovation Accelerator that will allow for the bringing together of governments, the private sector, and academia to bolster the technological edge, as well as other projects aimed for increased security and innovation readiness. Cyber security and defence should become among the priorities in relations with the partner states, some of whom have greater experience than other allies; thereby, they should become an integral part of strategy and protocol elaboration. The process of sharing mutually learnt lessons should become a norm to reduce “recipient-provider” relations between the partners and the Alliance to improve interoperability and efficiency of cooperation.



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