

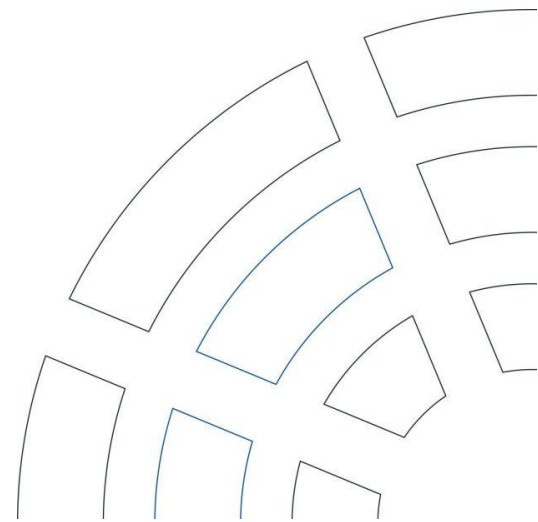
POLITICAL COMMITTEE (PC) SUB-COMMITTEE ON NATO PARTNERSHIPS (PCNP)

THE FUTURE OF NATO'S OPEN DOOR POLICY

Report
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029 PCNP 23 E rev.3 fin – Original: English – 7 October 2023

Founded in 1955, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly acts as a consultative interparliamentary organisation which is institutionally separate from NATO. This report was adopted by the Political Committee at the 2023 NATO PA Annual Session in Copenhagen, Denmark. It is based on information from publicly available sources or NATO PA meetings – which are all unclassified.



The accession of new members since the end of the Cold War reinforced NATO as the world's most successful military alliance and the pillar of transatlantic security. The future membership of current NATO aspirants – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Sweden, and Ukraine – would further expand the area of democracy and stability in Europe. The Rapporteur notes that NATO's Open Door policy is a flexible, political instrument and urges the Allies, in the context of Russia's paradigm-changing full-scale war against Ukraine, to demonstrate resolve to make bold strategic decisions.

In particular, the Rapporteur highlights the importance of the membership of Finland and Sweden in NATO and urges the relevant Allies to finalise Sweden's accession process without delay. The Rapporteur stresses that for the future European security framework to be robust and sustainable, Ukraine must become a member of NATO. At the Vilnius Summit, Allies committed to providing long-term practical support to Ukraine. Progress has also been made on the political track of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration, albeit the debate continues on the conditions to be met for Ukraine to become a full-fledged member. The report argues that the Allies should be in a position to invite Ukraine to become a full-fledged member when security conditions allow and when realistic and clearly spelled out reform objectives are implemented. NATO-Ukraine cooperation mechanisms should be used proactively to help Ukraine reach those clearly defined objectives. NATO should also continue keeping Georgia, a valued partner in the Black Sea region, high on its agenda, offering enhanced practical support. At the same time, Georgia is also urged to stay the course of reforms, to prevent democratic backsliding as well as to show more support and solidarity with Ukraine. Regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Rapporteur urges to continue offering additional tailored support to this vulnerable partner. However, it is ultimately up to Bosnian politicians to strengthen the country's internal cohesion and to advance reforms if this country's NATO and EU aspiration is to become a reality.

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I- INTRODUCTION

1. One of the Kremlin's stated goals concerning the Russian military buildup in 2021 and the subsequent full-scale invasion of Ukraine was to deter NATO's further enlargement. In diplomatic exchanges between Russia and Western leaders in late 2021 and early 2022, Moscow went as far as to demand that "NATO should pack up and return to the borders of 1997" (EURACTIV, 2022). Moscow continues to circulate a false narrative that NATO enlargement was the ploy of Western powers to encircle and undermine Russia. In fact, the enlargement process is exclusively demand-driven and the aspirants were required to implement painful, comprehensive reforms and conduct a multi-year campaign to convince older Allies to accept their membership bids. Moreover, the last round of enlargement, which included some of Russia's direct neighbours, took place back in 2004. In early 2022, despite a promise made at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, the Allies were very far from having a consensus on Ukraine and Georgia's membership to NATO. It is in fact Russia that has consistently bullied and destabilised its neighbours, fuelling frozen (and not-so-frozen) conflicts along its perimeter and waging hybrid wars against democracies, while stifling freedom domestically. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine was not a reaction to imminent NATO enlargement, but the choice of a delusional dictator, bent on imperialist expansion to restore Russia within the borders of the Soviet Union and concerned about the survival of his own regime, which this Assembly considers to be terrorist.

2. This report will argue that the steadfast commitment to NATO's Open Door policy remains as crucial to Euro-Atlantic security as it was over the last three decades, when Europe enjoyed an unprecedented period of peace, prosperity and freedom. The report will provide an overview of the current aspirants' accession bids, namely, the recent membership of Finland and the imminent accession of Sweden, the importance of Ukraine's membership in NATO and the challenges on the Euro-Atlantic integration path of Georgia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This report will build on the long-standing tradition of this Assembly to act as a champion of the Open Door policy and the vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace.

3. It is noteworthy that, in addition to Finland and Sweden, several other traditionally neutral European states are opening a debate about revisiting their stance and relations with NATO, following the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. These include Ireland (Webber, 2023), the Republic of Moldova (Lynch, 2023) and, to a lesser degree, Austria (Hoare, 2023) and Malta (Borg, 2023). These discussions have yet to result in policy changes. This report will focus on countries recognised as aspirants by NATO.

4. It is worth recalling that NATO's Open Door policy is enshrined in Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, which stipulates that "the Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty." Thus, the Treaty makes it clear from the outset that NATO's accession process is not only a technical one, but also has a crucial political dimension.

5. The Alliance has grown from twelve member countries in 1949 to thirty-one as of mid-2023, after ten rounds of enlargement. Any Ally has the liberty to leave the Alliance as per Article 13 of the Washington Treaty. However, no member has chosen to leave NATO in its 74 years of existence. During the Cold War, the twelve founding members (the United States, Canada, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Italy, Norway, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Iceland, France and Denmark) were joined by Greece and Türkiye in 1952, West Germany in 1955 and Spain in 1982.

Following the reunification of Germany in October 1990, the former German Democratic Republic also became a part of the Alliance. The Cold War era enlargements not only improved NATO's geostrategic posture, but also contributed to closer collaboration of former adversaries Greece and Türkiye (NATO, 2023a). The case of Spain reflected the democratic credentials of NATO, as the country, despite its strategic location, was not invited to join the Alliance until it completed its democratic transition.

6. After the demise of the Warsaw Pact, NATO adapted to the new security environment and opened up to new members and partners. At the November 1991 Rome Summit, the Alliance launched the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), which in 1997 evolved into the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), a platform for dialogue on political and security-related issues among Allies and partner countries. Shortly after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, Central and Eastern European countries began mulling the idea of NATO membership. In March 1992, NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner, during a visit to Poland, noted that "the door to NATO is open" (Government of Poland, 2019). In 1994, the Partnership for Peace (PfP) was launched to build practical bilateral cooperation with individual partners.

7. The EAPC, PfP as well as subsequent initiatives such as Building Integrity, Science for Peace and Security (SPS), Enhanced Opportunity Partnership and Trust Funds were fundamental in strengthening partners' political dialogue and practical cooperation with the Alliance. These initiatives proved beneficial for those European partners who decided to join the Alliance as they created numerous opportunities for engagement, adaptation and trust building.

8. Following intense consultations and discussions, the Allies launched, in 1995, a Study on NATO Enlargement, which set the principles, objectives and framework for the following accession rounds. According to the Study, NATO enlargement would foster the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic space. The Open Door policy was expected to have numerous benefits for both the Allies and partner countries, including promoting good neighbouring relations, supporting the democratic reform processes and increasing the civil control over the military (NATO, 1995).

9. The Study set the requirements for prospective members (NATO, 2022a), including:

- a functioning democratic political system based on a market economy;
- the fair treatment of minority populations;
- a commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts;
- the ability and willingness to make a military contribution to NATO operations;
- a commitment to democratic civil-military relations and institutional structures.

10. Based on these principles and norms, NATO accepted the following European countries as members:

- In 1999, Hungary, Poland and Czechia;
- In 2004, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia;
- In 2009, Albania and Croatia;
- In 2017, Montenegro;
- In 2020, the Republic of North Macedonia;
- In 2023, Finland.

11. In 1999, the Alliance introduced the Membership Action Plan (MAP) as a tool to provide practical support, assistance and advice custom-made to the needs and requirements of each aspirant state. A crucial element of MAP is the requirement for each aspirant to submit an Annual National Programme (ANP) each year, outlining targets on all issues relevant to possible membership. NATO prepares individual reports for applicant countries, providing feedback and guidance focused on their progress in the areas covered by their individual ANPs. This mechanism proved pivotal for aspirant countries that joined in 2004, 2009, 2017 and 2020. Currently, Bosnia and Herzegovina is participating in MAP. Nevertheless, MAP is neither a prerequisite nor a guarantee of NATO membership – the Allies retain the right to decide on each aspirant's application on an ad hoc basis. North Macedonia completed 18 ANP cycles before it was invited to join NATO – only after it reversed democratic backsliding and found a political compromise with Greece over the country's name. Moreover, Georgia and Ukraine are participating in the ANP process without being granted MAP, which was considered for some member countries politically sensitive. It is noteworthy that neither Finland nor Sweden were required to go through the MAP process, and this requirement was also dropped for Ukraine at the Vilnius Summit. As such, NATO's Open Door policy is not a fixed policy and creative options are possible.

12. Some elements are non-negotiable, however. NATO Allies must unanimously agree to start the accession talks with an invited country. During these talks, various political, military, technical and financial requirements are assessed in addition to the aspirant's commitment to the Washington Treaty and the principles laid out in the Study on NATO Enlargement. Once Allies decide to sign the accession protocols, these must be ratified by NATO members according to their constitutional procedures. As soon as all NATO Allies ratify the accession protocols, the Secretary General invites the new member to accede to the North Atlantic Treaty and to deposit the accession instruments with the US Department of State, thus becoming officially a NATO member state. No third country can have a right of veto in the process.

13. For most of the new Allies, their NATO membership came ahead of, or hand in hand with, their European Union membership. Thus, their cooperation with the Alliance boosted their democratic reforms, security and stability which facilitated their European integration processes.

14. New members reinforced NATO as the world's largest military alliance and the pillar of transatlantic security. New members also enriched NATO's collective understanding of contemporary security challenges, including those posed by Russia. New Allies contributed significantly to NATO's post-Cold War posture and the focus on cooperative security and crisis management, including out-of-area missions and operations. Following the aggressive turn in Russian foreign policy articulated by Vladimir Putin at the 2007 Munich Security Conference and demonstrated in practice in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014), the new Allies were among the first to identify these threats and the leading proponents of NATO's return to its core mission of collective defence. According to NATO estimates, by 2023, out of eleven Allies spending at least 2% of GDP on defence, eight were 'new' Allies (Poland, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, Romania, Hungary, Latvia and Slovakia), while Poland now leads the Alliance in this regard with 3.9% (NATO, 2023b). Throughout this report, the Rapporteur will argue that the eventual membership of current NATO aspirants will further reinforce this Alliance and will expand the area of democracy and stability in Europe.

II- ACCESSION OF FINLAND AND SWEDEN TO NATO

15. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has sent geopolitical shockwaves across Europe and beyond, prompting a number of nations to urgently revisit their security paradigms. The support for NATO accession in Finland and Sweden has risen dramatically both among the population and the political elites. In Finland, popular support was as low as 19% in 2017 (Yle, 2022), but soared to 78% in November 2022 (Radio Free Europe, 2022). The swing was less dramatic in Sweden, which does not share a common border with Russia: the support for NATO membership grew from 32% in 2017 (Szumski, 2022) to 60% in January 2023 (Lindeberg, 2023).

16. After February 2022, formidable pro-NATO majorities have also emerged in the national parliaments of both countries. By May 2022, Swedish and Finnish authorities had conducted reports assessing the new security environment and concluding that joining NATO would increase the security of the state. Both countries presented official letters of application on 18 May. This marked the end of Sweden's and Finland's long-standing posture of military non-alignment¹. Then Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin has famously explained this dramatic shift by noting that "Russia was not the neighbour we thought it was." At the Madrid Summit, on 29-30 June 2022, the Allies invited the two countries to become part of the North Atlantic Alliance, and, on 5 July, their Accession Protocols were signed. By late September 2022, all but two NATO Allies (Hungary and Türkiye) had ratified the protocols.

17. The extraordinary speed with which the two Nordic countries reached the NATO membership threshold is emblematic of the Allies' view of Finland and Sweden as exemplary democracies that are closely interoperable with NATO and whose membership will contribute to collective security.

18. Politically, Finland and Sweden constantly have a perfect score (100) on the Freedom House ranking measuring the degree of civil liberties and political rights. However, NATO Ally Türkiye has expressed concern that the two candidates, in particular Sweden, were not sufficiently addressing the terrorist threat. The Madrid Summit declaration stressed that "[i]n any accession to the Alliance, it is of vital importance that the legitimate security concerns of all Allies are properly addressed" (NATO, 2022c). In the margins of the NATO Summit in Madrid, Türkiye, Finland and Sweden signed a Trilateral Memorandum under the auspices of the NATO Secretary General. According to the document, Sweden and Finland agreed to strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation with the Turkish authorities. The candidate countries acknowledged the PKK as a "proscribed terrorist organisation" and committed to not providing "support to YPG/PYD, and the organisation described as FETÖ". The three countries agreed to create a Permanent Joint Mechanism which oversees the implementation of the six agreed steps that include, inter alia, facilitating "extradition [of terror suspects] and security cooperation with Türkiye, in accordance with the European Convention on Extradition" as well as having no arms embargoes on each other (NATO, 2022d).

¹ Sweden professed various forms of neutrality or non-alignment since the end of the Napoleonic wars, while Finland was militarily non-aligned since the end of the Second World War.

19. In the subsequent months, Finland and Sweden have taken steps to implement the agreement, such as Sweden's adoption of constitutional amendments tightening anti-terrorism provisions. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has stated repeatedly, including at the NATO PA Annual Session in Madrid, that both countries have delivered on the memorandum and called for a finalisation of the accession ratification process. The trilateral talks, temporarily suspended in January 2023, have resumed on 9 March. Throughout the talks, Turkish representatives have been acknowledging positive steps taken by Sweden but also noting that further actions were needed. It is noteworthy that when Türkiye was hit by catastrophic earthquakes on 6 February 2023, Sweden demonstrated solidarity and provided considerable humanitarian support. Holding the presidency of the EU, Sweden convened the EU's Integrated Political Crisis Response mechanism to coordinate all EU support for Türkiye and Syria as well as initiating an international donor conference. In June 2023, Sweden adopted new, tougher anti-terrorism laws. While Budapest officially voiced no political objection to Finland and Sweden's membership, it continually postponed the ratification process for months (EURACTIV, 2023).

20. In late March 2023, the parliaments of Hungary (with an overwhelming majority) and Türkiye (unanimously) approved Finland's accession to NATO. On 4 April 2023, exactly 74 years after the Washington Treaty was signed between just twelve founding members, Finland officially became NATO's 31st Ally (as well as a full-fledged member of the NATO PA). During the official ceremony in Brussels, Secretary General Stoltenberg stressed that Finland's membership "is good for NATO as a whole" and a signal to Putin that "he failed" and "that aggression and intimidation do not work" (NATO, 2023e). Assembly members are committed to continue encouraging prompt ratification of Sweden's accession in all Allied parliaments.

21. The breakthrough on the Swedish membership was announced on 10 July, following a meeting of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson of Sweden, and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Vilnius on the eve of the Summit. The NATO Secretary General confirmed that Sweden will become a full member of the Alliance following President Erdoğan's commitment to submit the Accession Protocol for Sweden for ratification in the Turkish parliament. A joint statement emphasised that Sweden has made legal changes, expanded counter-terrorism cooperation, and resumed arms exports to Türkiye. Additionally, a new bilateral Security Compact will be established, and Sweden will present a roadmap for its ongoing fight against terrorism (NATO, 2023). As part of the agreement, a Special Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism position will be created at NATO. The announcement was welcomed by Allied leaders. The ratification of accession protocols in the Hungarian and Turkish parliaments was expected to take place in autumn when legislators reconvene after the summer recess.

22. From the standpoint of military standards and interoperability, Finland and Sweden were well prepared to join the Alliance. Both countries have been NATO partners since 1994 when they joined the Partnership for Peace. The Swedish and Finnish armed forces, since the early 1990s, have embraced NATO's military standards and have adopted the Alliance's interoperability norms having taken part in NATO-led operations, including in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan.

23. Since 2014, both Sweden and Finland have been part of the Partnership Interoperability Initiative, which strengthens their military interoperability and political cooperation with NATO even further. Stockholm and Helsinki have signed Host Nation Support agreements with NATO, which allow for Allied militaries to transit or station logistics on their territory in case of trainings or crises (NATO, 2022e). The two countries were involved in the Strategic Airlift International Solution (SALIS) and Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC) programmes and contributed to the NATO Response Force.

It is also worth noting that both countries participate in Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO), a Nordic military regional structure that fosters collaboration among the Nordic states and in the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), a UK-led expeditionary force bringing together some of Northern Europe's armed forces. Following Finland's and Sweden's accession to NATO, JEF will consist solely of NATO Allies.

24. The primary motivation of Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO is to increase their national security and be covered by the security guarantees of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. However, their membership will be beneficial for the entire Alliance. Politically, Finland's and Sweden's accession reaffirms that NATO remains the indispensable security provider in Europe and beyond. NATO, as a community of values, will be strengthened by having within its ranks two Nordic countries that are stable, democratic and high-income, with solid constitutional institutions. They are strong supporters of transatlantic relations and defenders of multilateralism and the rules-based international order (Wieslander et al., 2023).

25. Militarily, the two countries are well placed to be solid security providers. In particular, they can boost NATO's capabilities in hybrid and unconventional warfare, cross-governmental coordination, societal resilience and comprehensive security. Stockholm's psychological defence agency and Helsinki's security of supply strategy might provide insights and standards for other Allies. In addition, their in-depth understanding of Russian actions and capacities and advanced technological assets in telecommunication, climate change adaption and surveillance will extend NATO's intelligence capabilities (Germanovich, 2022).

26. In 2022, Helsinki spent EUR 5.1 billion, approximately 2% of its GDP, on defence. Moreover, after the start of the Russian aggression, the Finnish leadership disclosed the plan to increase the military budget by an additional EUR 2 billion. Finland has a substantial and highly trained defence force which comprises also an extensive reservists list and conscription. Finland has 19,000 active troops and approximately 22,000 annually instructed reservists (Jokela, 2022). In case of a war, the country can mobilise 280,000 military troops and around 870,000 reservists (Ålander, 2022). Finland has a formidable artillery force and outstanding intelligence and cyber capabilities. Additionally, it has 61 F/A-18 Hornet fighter jets, to be replaced, as of 2026, by 64 F-35A jets (Kauranen, 2023).

27. Territorial defence is a key element of Finnish security culture together with comprehensive security. After the demise of the Soviet Union, Finland preserved the size of its armed forces, being one of the few European countries to do so. The concept of comprehensive security means that Finland relies on advanced societal resilience – thanks to its highly educated population – to disinformation and foreign interference, as well as on state-of-the art security of supply chains administered by public-private partnerships (Jokela, 2022).

28. For its part, Sweden spent 1.45% of GDP on its defence budget (USD 7.3 billion) in 2022 and aims to increase military spending to 2% of GDP by 2026 and invest USD 12 billion in military preparedness and defence by 2028 (O'Dwyer, 2022). Currently, the Swedish Armed Forces consist of around 14,600 active officers and 10,000 reservists. Despite relatively low numbers, Sweden's military personnel are highly skilled. At the start of 2023, Stockholm announced its plans to reactivate the conscription of civilians for emergency and rescue services (Rolander, 2023). The country has a high-tech and modern defence infrastructure buttressed by its advanced defence industry. Swedish military capabilities include 120 German-built Leopard 2A tanks, locally produced CV90 infantry fighting vehicles, the Patriot air-defence system as well as advanced offensive cyber capabilities and sophisticated surveillance skills. Furthermore, the Swedish Air Force is considered

to be one of the best air forces in Europe with almost 100 multi-role Gripen JAS 39 jets. Its navy uses the locally made Gotland diesel-electric submarine, one of the most advanced submarines in the world (Deni, 2022).

29. Geographically, the Swedish membership, like the Finnish one, will reinforce the defence of the Baltic Sea, helping to secure the sea lines of communication and to constrain Russian A2/AD capabilities in the region. The location of Sweden's Gotland island is particularly advantageous: it could provide important strategic depth to NATO's Baltic defence plans and reduce the strategic potential of Russia's exclave Kaliningrad, only 330 kilometres from Gotland. The membership of Finland with its 1,343 km border with Russia affects the density of Russia's forces on its western flank (Ålander & Albuquerque, 2022).

30. Finland's accession and Sweden's upcoming membership lead to three important observations regarding NATO's Open Door policy. First, Moscow tends to threaten retaliation should NATO accept new members, but once the Allies make that decision, it becomes a non-issue for Russia. After Russian officials' repeated warnings about severe "military and political consequences", Putin later reacted to Finland and Sweden's accession processes by stating that "There is nothing to worry us in terms of Swedish and Finnish membership of NATO...They can join whatever they want" (*Deutsche Welle*, 2022). Second, if there is a strong political will among the Allies to accept new members and those members meet the requirements, the accession process can take place in a fast-track mode: the Allies can be flexible. Third, it is important to take collective steps to shore up the security of aspirants in the period between their invitation to join and their formal entry into NATO: this is a vulnerable period as the invitees are not yet covered by Article 5. Since their application, Finland and Sweden have received enhanced access to NATO intelligence and confidential information sharing under the Modalities for Strengthened Interaction (MSI) arrangement (Hindrén, 2023). The Allies have increased their presence in the Baltic Sea region and bilaterally, the United States, United Kingdom, Iceland, Denmark and Norway gave security assurances for Finland and Sweden (Edwardsen, 2023).

III- UKRAINE'S NATO MEMBERSHIP PERSPECTIVES

31. Ukraine and NATO have forged a unique bond which is now beyond anything ever imagined in the original partnership cooperation with Kyiv. On the battlefields of eastern and southern Ukraine, this country is fighting not only for its freedom and survival, but for the security and the values of the Euro-Atlantic community. In this fight, the future of the rules-based world order, of which NATO is a bulwark, is being decided. Currently concentrated on helping Ukraine win this war, the Allies will soon have to make strategic decisions regarding the future European security framework. As Allies stated unequivocally at the Vilnius Summit, "Ukraine's future is in NATO". Indeed, Ukraine's fully-fledged membership of NATO should be an indispensable element of the future European security framework.

32. NATO relations with Ukraine date back to 1991, gradually developing into the most ambitious NATO partnership agenda. In May 2002, Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma announced his country's goal of becoming a NATO member and Allied leaders, at their 2008 Bucharest Summit, expressed their support for this aspiration. However, at the time, Ukraine still had a long way to go in shedding its Soviet baggage and overcoming the deep divisions within its society. Ukraine's path towards Euro-Atlantic integration was not irreversible and it experienced setbacks such as the election of a pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich as president in 2010. Yanukovich presided

over a corrupt and increasingly authoritarian regime. He officially abandoned the NATO integration objective, signed a deal with Russia extending the presence of the Russian fleet in Crimea until 2042 and jailed his main political opponent, Yulia Tymoshenko.

33. However, a new Ukraine emerged from the dramatic events of 2014, when the Revolution of Dignity forced Yanukovich to flee. The nation and its democratically elected new leadership overwhelmingly embraced the European and Euro-Atlantic choice. This choice has been further consolidated by the ensuing Russian military aggression in Crimea and Donbas. In 2019, the goal to become a member of NATO and the EU was enshrined in Ukraine's constitution. NATO-Ukraine cooperation has flourished since 2014, centring around the 2016 Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP), a framework comprising tailored capacity building activities, and the Annual National Programme (ANP), a document that defines the range and pace of reforms. In addition, NATO launched several Trust Funds to grant resources for capacity building, as well as developed targeted programmes such as the NATO-Ukraine Platform on Countering Hybrid Warfare and the Resilience Advisory Support Team (RAST). These initiatives and programmes proved useful in the transformation of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and instrumental in enabling Ukraine to curtail Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

34. Ukraine has also been an active contributor to NATO-led missions and operations, including the Active Endeavour, Ocean Shield and Sea Guardian maritime operations and missions, Allied missions in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Iraq as well as the NATO Response Force. In 2020, Ukraine was recognised as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner, allowing it to benefit from enhanced access to interoperability programmes, exercises and sharing of information to help sustain its contributions to NATO-led operations and missions (NATO, 2020).

35. Since the new stage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Alliance has coordinated Allies' non-lethal and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. At the 2022 Madrid Summit, Allies agreed to accelerate Ukraine's transition from Soviet-era to modern NATO equipment and to further strengthen Ukrainian defence and security institutions as well as to play a role in the future reconstruction process. For that purpose, Allies have so far committed over EUR 500 million. At the Vilnius Summit, Allies decided to further develop the CAP into a multi-year programme for Ukraine with sustained funding, designed to rebuild the Ukrainian security and defence sector and help Ukraine achieve full interoperability with NATO. The Russian war has further cemented the pro-Western orientation of Ukraine and its citizens. According to opinion surveys, a staggering 83% of Ukrainians are in favour of their country's membership in the North Atlantic Alliance (Reuters, 2022).

36. That said, the political track of NATO-Ukraine relations fell short of Ukraine's expectations. Over the years since the 2008 Bucharest Summit, Allies were unable to reach consensus and grant Ukraine the Membership Action Plan. Meetings of the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) above the level of ambassadors were blocked, since 2018, by NATO Ally Hungary. Since the beginning of the full-scale war in 2022, the Allies also did not agree on authorising NATO to act as the clearing house of military support to Ukraine, thus making it necessary to create alternative formats, namely the US-led Ukraine Defence Contact Group in Ramstein, Germany. In the 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO reaffirmed the validity of the 2008 Bucharest Summit declaration. Following Russia's announcement of the illegal annexation of four regions of Ukraine in September 2022, Kyiv has requested fast-track NATO membership. However, NATO representatives have been stressing consistently that currently the focus is on "providing immediate support as Ukraine defends itself against Russian aggression" (NATO, 2022f), while postponing discussions on NATO membership.

37. The question of Ukraine's future membership in NATO was on top of the Vilnius Summit's agenda. Prior to the Summit, a number of Allies and other international voices, including this Assembly, have expressed support for Ukraine's membership bid and urged NATO to agree on the next steps towards full membership. In June 2023, the European Parliament adopted a resolution – with an overwhelming majority voting in favour – which called on NATO leaders, at the Summits in Vilnius and Washington, to extend an invitation to Ukraine to join NATO, with an understanding that “the accession process will start after the war is over and be finalised as soon as possible” (EP, 2023a). Your Rapporteur has also been advocating for issuing an invitation to Ukraine to join the Alliance, with a view to signing the accession protocols and starting the ratification process at a certain point in the future, when conditions allow.

38. In Vilnius, Allied leaders agreed on a compromise text which, while stopping short of setting out a clear roadmap to membership, nevertheless sends the “strongest ever message on Ukraine membership that this Alliance ever made”, as the Secretary General put it (NATO, 2023d). The Allies stressed unequivocally that “Ukraine's future is in NATO”. The Allies agreed that they “will be in a position to extend an invitation to Ukraine to join the Alliance when Allies agree and conditions are met” (NATO, 2023c). They recognised that “Ukraine has become increasingly interoperable and politically integrated with the Alliance, and has made substantial progress on its reform path.” However, they noted that Ukraine needs to implement additional democratic and security sector reforms, and Ukraine's progress will be assessed regularly by NATO Foreign Ministers in the framework of the ANP process.

39. In Vilnius, in addition to the abovementioned multi-year support programme for Ukraine, Allied leaders also agreed to drop the requirement for Ukraine to obtain MAP, thus making the integration path a simpler, one-step process, akin to the path of Finland and Sweden. Furthermore, the Summit upgraded the NUC into a NATO-Ukraine Council, which was one of the recommendations of the first draft of this report. In the Council, Allied and Ukrainian senior representatives will meet and debate security matters and hold crisis consultations as equals. In the framework of the Council, the high-level NATO-Ukraine political dialogue will be able to take place regularly, after the hiatus since 2018. The inaugural meeting of the Council took place on the second day of the Vilnius Summit with the participation of President Zelenskyy.

40. While the exact conditions to be met by Ukraine in order to receive an invitation have not been specified, it is politically significant that the term “invitation” itself features in the Summit communiqué in the context of Ukraine. Undoubtedly, Allied leaders will be revisiting the question of Ukraine's membership in their future meetings. The decision on extending an invitation should be primarily political and depend on strategic considerations and the security situation in Ukraine. With regard to other conditions relating to Ukraine's reform agenda and interoperability requirements, their parameters should be clearly specified, including identifying realistic end goals. The Alliance should also use cooperation mechanisms to proactively help Ukraine reach those end goals. NATO should consider clarifying that an invitation to Ukraine will be issued when security conditions allow² and when clearly identified reform objectives are implemented. Furthermore, given the Summit

² Such a formula would be preferable to directly linking the decision on Ukraine's NATO membership with the end of the war as it could incentivise the Kremlin to continue the war effort indefinitely.

communiqué's reference to the need for all Allies to agree on Ukraine's accession – something already made clear in Article 10 of the Washington Treaty – NATO Parliamentarians must redouble their efforts to help forge the transatlantic consensus on Ukraine's membership without undue delay.

41. Issuing an invitation to Ukraine when security conditions allow and clearly identified reform objectives are implemented would be a further example of the strategic leadership that NATO's founding fathers demonstrated when creating NATO. For instance, in 1955, the Allies took a bold decision to accept West Germany, despite the legacy of two world wars and fears of its remilitarisation. It proved to be a success story and a major reinforcement of the free world. At its Annual Session in 2022, this Assembly has called on Allied nations "to recognise fully the value that Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration would add to Allied collective defence" (NATO PA, 2022). Indeed, Ukraine has demonstrated in practice that it can tackle what the new Strategic Concept has identified as the key threat to Euro-Atlantic security – the aggressive Russian Federation.

42. In terms of meeting the practical parameters of NATO membership, over the years, and especially since the full-scale invasion, the Ukrainian armed forces and defence institutions have made enormous strides in adapting to NATO standards. The Ukrainian army's structure has been modernised to put more emphasis on leadership skills at the middle level. Ukraine began using NATO tools such as Logistics Functional Area Service, designed to facilitate multinational logistics and to ensure transparency of equipment supplies to Ukraine. Ukrainian personnel are now receiving training on operating heavy equipment – from 155mm howitzers to advanced systems such as Patriot batteries – from NATO countries. As President Zelenskyy noted, "[d]e facto, we have already proven interoperability with the Alliance's standards, they are real for Ukraine – real on the battlefield and in all aspects of our interaction" (President of Ukraine, 2022a). It must be noted that Ukraine's transition to Western standards benefits significantly from the country's EU accession process, in the framework of which Ukraine conducts reforms, such as empowering anti-corruption agencies and drafting new legislation on national minorities, even while fighting the war of survival (Stefanishyna, 2023).

43. While Ukraine awaits an invitation to the Alliance, pundits and influential figures have been suggesting that, as a temporary – or long-term – substitute for NATO membership, Ukraine should be provided bilateral security guarantees by individual Allies, akin to the US-Republic of Korea Mutual Defense Treaty. The head of the office of the President of Ukraine, Andriy Yermak and former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen have published, in September 2022, a proposal for the Kyiv Security Compact (KSC) designed to ensure Ukraine's post-war security. The Compact would rest on two key elements: first, bilateral security guarantees from several North American and European countries. The second element is international guarantors' sustained investment in Ukraine's defence industrial base, scalable weapons transfers and intelligence support from Allies, intensive training missions and joint exercises (President of Ukraine website, 2022b). This multi-decade effort would essentially help turn Ukraine into a heavily armed 'porcupine' able to deter future aggression. Variations of the approach focusing on special security arrangements for Ukraine had been gaining traction in the run-up to the Vilnius Summit.

44. The meeting of G7 countries with President Zelenskyy, which took place in Vilnius on the second day of the Summit, produced important decisions in this regard. G7 leaders pledged to negotiate with Ukraine long-term, bilateral security commitments and arrangements in order to help deter and defend against any future Russian aggression against this country. These arrangements would involve sustained provision of modern military equipment, including long-range fires and combat air capabilities. G7 nations will help Ukraine develop its industrial base and its economic resilience, while increasing cost for Russia through sanctions and international justice mechanisms.

Ukraine, on its part, committed to continue judiciary, anti-corruption, economic and other reforms, further strengthen democratic civilian control of the military as well as transparency and accountability measures with regard to partner assistance. Other countries are also invited to join the G7 Joint Declaration (G7, 2023), and by the end of July 2023, all Nordic countries as well as Belgium, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain joined the declaration, while Ireland and Romania declared their intention to do so too.

45. The commitment of numerous democratic countries to provide and sustain bilateral security and economic assistance to Ukraine demonstrates strategic leadership and sends a powerful signal of hope, encouragement and recognition for the armed forces and the people of Ukraine as they fight and pay the ultimate price for the security of the European continent. But it is noteworthy that the Joint Declaration does not refer to 'security guarantees', opting for 'security commitments and arrangements' designed to help Ukraine defend itself. This formula, however, does not prevent G7 members from offering bilateral security guarantees to Ukraine. Such bilateral arrangements should be as binding as possible, while not being seen as an alternative to Ukraine's membership in NATO. Your Rapporteur is convinced that full NATO membership of Ukraine is the most feasible and efficient way to prevent a repetition of a long and exhausting war on the European continent. In this context, it is commendable that the Joint Declaration stresses that the bilateral track "will be taken forward while Ukraine pursues a pathway toward future membership in the Euro-Atlantic community" (G7, 2023).

IV- GEORGIA'S NATO INTEGRATION PROCESS

46. Georgia is among NATO's closest partners and, as decided at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, a future member. Georgian citizens have shown remarkable consistency over the years in their overwhelming support for NATO membership: in February 2023, 73% of surveyed Georgians supported their country's alignment with the North-Atlantic Alliance (NDI, 2023). Euro-Atlantic and European integration is clearly a civilisational choice of the Georgian people. Georgia is a victim of Russian aggression with some 20% of its territory de facto occupied by Russia. Nevertheless, Georgia seeks to be a security provider and is an active contributor to NATO and EU missions and operations.

47. These contributions include sending personnel to NATO's operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan, maritime operations Active Endeavour and Sea Guardian, as well as the NATO Response Force. Georgia was the top non-NATO troop contributor to ISAF and provided invaluable assistance to the evacuation process following the fall of Kabul in August 2021. While Allied leaders have not reached consensus on granting MAP to Georgia, practical cooperation between NATO and Georgia has flourished. Since 2014, Tbilisi has been the recipient of the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package (SNGP), a cooperative security initiative to help Allies strengthen Georgia's defence capacity, increase the interoperability of Georgia and NATO forces and prepare defence institutions for eventual NATO membership. The SNGP, especially after its upgrade in December 2020, is one of the most comprehensive partner defence capacity building initiatives in the Alliance's history. NATO supports Georgia's reform goals through the Annual National Programme, submitted every year since 2008. Georgia regularly participates and hosts military exercises with NATO Allies, including the NATO-Georgia Exercise 2022 involving 20 Allies and partners. Since 2015, Georgia has hosted the NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Centre (JTEC) designed to foster interoperability and interactions between Georgian and Allied military personnel in accordance with the norms and standards of NATO. Georgia is also an Enhanced Opportunity Partner (NATO, 2022g). While, according to the Georgian authorities, the country's defence budget has grown by

18% (some USD 489.7 million were allocated to the Ministry of Defense in 2023, up from USD 414.3 million in 2022), it still falls short of the 2% GDP benchmark (Civil.Ge, 2022).

48. In September 2023, the Georgian Parliament voted on a major overhaul of the defence sector by adopting a new 'defence code' – a unified defence-related legislation designed to transition to a total defence approach by boosting the compulsory military service as well as to improve the social welfare of the servicemembers, among other changes (Kiliptari, 2023).

49. At the 2022 Madrid Summit, taking into account the changed security environment in Europe, NATO Allies agreed to refresh the SNGP via a new "tailored support" package, designed to help strengthen resilience and develop capabilities to protect Georgia's political independence. At the 2023 Vilnius Summit, Allied leaders welcomed the progress made in implementing the enhanced SNGP, especially in areas such as crisis management, cyber security and secure communications, among others. Allies reiterated their commitment to "deepening political dialogue and practical cooperation with Georgia" (NATO, 2023c). In sum, while this enhanced and entrenched partnership is not a substitute for membership, it does provide an important degree of reassurance to Georgia. De facto, the current relations between NATO and Georgia exceed the framework of a MAP.

50. This Assembly has been consistent in its support for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration and its territorial integrity. However, full integration into the Euro-Atlantic family requires continued and sustained efforts to reform. Since the 2003 Rose Revolution, Georgia has made remarkable progress building democratic institutions, tackling corruption, modernising and digitalising state services, and creating conditions for a vibrant civil society. Yet, in recent years, Georgia has witnessed repeated political crises and it faces continued political polarisation. 2012–2013 remains the only period in Georgia's modern history when a democratic, peaceful transition of power took place. The "winner-takes-all" mentality remains a prominent feature of political life, manifested in the fact that the ruling party tends to receive the lion's share of all donations from business groups (Civil.Ge, 2023a). The country's rating on the Freedom House index measuring democratic credentials has been slightly but steadily deteriorating over the last several years (Freedom House, 2023).

51. In recent months, Georgia faced criticism from its international partners, focused predominantly on three issues. First, in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, Tbilisi was seen as not pulling its weight in supporting Ukraine. While Georgia provided humanitarian aid, generously hosted Ukrainian refugees and supported resolutions condemning the Russian aggression in the UN, Tbilisi refrains from providing any, even symbolic, military support and did not join the international sanctions imposed after 24 February 2022, despite Georgia's standard practice, in the spirit of its EU integration aims, to align with most of the EU's external policy positions (Emerson & Kovziridze, 2021). The EU Sanctions Envoy David O'Sullivan has expressed disappointment that Georgia did not join the European sanctions against Russia. He did stress, however, that the Georgian government is committed to not allowing this country to be used as a platform for circumvention of sanctions (EEAS, 2023b). Tbilisi argues that it cannot do more for Ukraine than it currently does given its own precarious situation with Russian troops stationed in the occupied Georgian territories and because unlike NATO Allies, Georgia is not covered by any type of security guarantees. The government's subdued stance contrasts with frequent and spirited expressions of solidarity with Ukraine on the streets of Tbilisi and across the country.

52. It is also noteworthy that, according to Transparency International Georgia, the country's economic dependence on Russia increased in 2022: exports to Russia increased by 6.8%, while imports from Russia increased by a staggering 79%. In 2022, Russian visitors, many of whom fled to avoid mobilisation in Russia, spent five times more money in Georgia than in 2019 (TI, 2023).

The Georgian economy stood out in Europe, achieving an impressive 10% growth in 2022, mainly, according to IMF, due to “limited adverse spillovers from Russia’s war in Ukraine, buoyant tourism, a surge in war-related migrant and financial inflows, and a rise in transit trade through Georgia” (IMF, 2023). When in January 2023, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov implied that direct flights might resume between Georgia and Russia, Georgia’s ruling party’s leadership called it “a welcome development” (Civil.Ge, 2023). Despite the criticism from numerous actors, from the President of Georgia to US officials, Russia and Georgia have resumed direct flights in May 2023, following the Russian decision to lift the 2019 air travel ban. The decision not to align with EU sanctions on Russian aviation further decreases Georgia’s already low alignment rate with EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which dropped from 44% in 2022 to 31% in 2023. The spokesperson of the EU External Action Service commented that “this step raises concerns in terms of Georgia’s EU path and its commitment to align with the EU in the foreign policy” (EEAS, 2023a). There were reports in Western media about Russia’s use of Georgia, among other countries, to circumvent Western sanctions (Nechepurenko, 2023) (Soric, 2023). The US, UK and the EU representatives note, however, that Tbilisi has demonstrated genuine commitment to address these concerns (Civil.ge, 2023c).

53. In the context of Georgia’s relations with anti-Western powers, it is worth noting that, on 31 July, during Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili’s visit to China, the two countries announced their “strategic partnership”, committing to deepen their political, economic and cultural ties and co-operate on new infrastructure projects. Georgia expressed its support for China’s external endeavours such as the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative. At the Vilnius Summit, the Allies reiterated their position that China poses systemic challenges to Allied interests, security and values.

54. Second, the condition of imprisoned former President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili, a vehement opponent of the current government and a citizen of Ukraine, has caused an international outcry. While the authorities claim that his declining health was a result of “self-harm”, many of Georgia’s partners expressed deep concern about his treatment. The EU has issued a formal diplomatic warning to Tbilisi (Radio Free Europe, 2023a). The European Parliament adopted a resolution – with 577 MEPs voting in favour – where it noted that the treatment of Saakashvili is a litmus test of the Georgian government’s commitment to European values (EP, 2023b). While the European Court of Human Rights has rejected the request for the immediate transfer of Saakashvili to Poland for treatment in May 2023, Saakashvili’s defence insists that this is a procedural decision rather than a final ECHR ruling (Civil.Ge, 2023b). The extremely frail condition of Saakashvili appearing at a court hearing in July 2023 has caused a new wave of international outcry and prompted President Zelenskyy to expel the Georgian ambassador in Kyiv.

55. Third, the Georgian authorities have attempted to adopt a law on “transparency of foreign influence” which the opposition parties and civil society organisations widely criticised, drawing parallels with the Russian law on “foreign agents”, which is de facto a tool to silence government critics. When the parliament voted for the bill in its first reading on 7 March 2023, massive protests broke out in Tbilisi, demanding not only the immediate revoking of the bill, but also the reversal of the government’s political course, perceived as pro-Russian by the protesters. The massive demonstrations and clashes continued on 8 March, with police using water cannons against the protestors. Georgia’s partners, including the President of the NATO PA, expressed grave concern about the bill and called on the Georgian authorities to uphold the people’s fundamental right to peacefully assembly. On 9 March, the ruling party announced it would be withdrawing the bill, followed by a formal vote in the parliament on 10 March rejecting the bill (Radio Free Europe, 2023b).

56. It is evident that the current optics are unfavourable for Tbilisi as it aims to accelerate its European and Euro-Atlantic integration. In June 2022, the European Union granted candidate status to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, but not to Georgia. To achieve this status, the European Commission drafted a list of twelve reform areas where Georgia needs to demonstrate progress, including “de-oligarchisation”, reducing political polarisation and enhancing the independence of the Anti-Corruption Agency and the judicial system (European Commission, 2022). The progress made by the Georgian government has been inconsistent. For example, in June 2023, the Georgian Parliament proceeded to vote on the draft law on “de-oligarchisation” despite the recommendations from the Venice Commission, an advisory body for the Council of Europe, that it should not be adopted as it carries the risk of arbitrary application (Civil.Ge, 2023). The European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi noted that by July 2023, Georgia had “fully met” three of the twelve conditions, “partially met” seven, showed “limited progress” on the de-oligarchisation and “no progress” on media pluralism (European Commission, 2023).

57. NATO continues to be committed to its long-standing partnership with Georgia. The NATO Partnerships and Cooperative Security Committee as well as several high-ranking officials travelled to Georgia in recent months as a sign of NATO’s continued support for the country. In May 2023, the NATO Military Committee held a meeting with the Georgian military leadership to discuss the security situation and the implementation of the enhanced SNGP. Javier Colomina, NATO’s special representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia, recently has urged Georgia to “continue on its Euro-Atlantic path, and whenever Georgia is ready to access NATO, it will do so”, while adding that “right now is not the time for a breakthrough in the open-door policy” (Tavberidze, 2022).

58. The Vilnius Summit communiqué reaffirmed that Georgia remains high on NATO’s agenda as a key partner in the Black Sea region and the South Caucasus. The Allied leaders reiterated their support for the territorial integrity of Georgia and expressed their concern over the ongoing militarisation and ‘borderisation’ by Russia of Georgia’s regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The communiqué stressed the need to continue deepening practical cooperation between NATO and Georgia. With regard to the political track, the Summit did not produce a breakthrough. The Allies reiterated the commitment they made at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, including the need for Georgia to receive a MAP before it can become a member. It is also notable that the paragraph dedicated to Georgia did not include a sentence from previous NATO Summit communiqués stating that “Georgia’s relationship with the Alliance contains all the practical tools to prepare for eventual membership”. Thus, Georgia’s and Ukraine’s pathways to NATO have been effectively separated. The Allies also urged Georgia to “make progress on reforms, including key democratic reforms”.

59. The current security situation in Europe is highly unpredictable, and it is unclear when a window of opportunity will present itself for an Allied consensus on Georgia’s NATO membership. However, it is imperative for Georgia to be prepared when that moment comes – it must stay the course of European and Euro-Atlantic reforms, adhere scrupulously to NATO’s shared values and principles, and address the concerns that the Allies have with regard to the consolidation of Georgian democracy. Arguably, Georgia’s quest to join NATO and the EU would be greatly bolstered if Tbilisi chose to provide more support and show stronger solidarity with Ukraine, including joining the EU sanction regimes and providing more practical assistance to Ukraine as it defends itself against the aggression. It is also essential for Georgia’s own security that Ukraine prevails in this war.

V- BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA'S NATO INTEGRATION PROCESS

60. Almost 30 years since a devastating conflict, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) remains a deeply troubled state, navigating from crisis to crisis. The 1995 Dayton Accords put an end to the war in this multinational and multicultural country which cost about 100,000 lives, and ensured power-sharing mechanisms between its three equal constituent peoples: Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. While the country is at peace since 1995, its state and sub-state institutions largely failed to deliver on the citizens' expectations, leading to a widespread sense of despair and neglect. BiH remains one of Europe's poorest and most corrupt countries with many young people voting with their feet (Kraske, 2022).

61. Regular political crises routinely require the involvement of the international community's High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina to resolve deadlocks. In 2022, the Republika Srpska announced its intention to pull out of the federal tax, judicial and military systems and to establish its own instead, leading to a paralysis of government and budgetary gridlock. The High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Christian Schmidt, was forced to invoke the so-called Bonn Powers to ensure the functioning of the country's institutions and the conduct of general elections in October 2022. The crisis somewhat subsided after the elections, but the process of forming governments at the state and Bosniak-Croat entity level was marred with problems. In April 2023, the High Representative imposed temporary constitutional changes to facilitate the formation of a new regional government (Radio Free Europe, 2023c). Nevertheless, the political crisis continues to simmer as the Republika Srpska (RS) entity effectively disregards the decisions of the international envoy (Radio Free Europe, 2023d).

62. NATO and EU integration remains the most powerful driver for positive change. Both organisations took bold, strategic steps to encourage Bosnian and Herzegovinian people and institutions and to give new impetus to reforms: NATO and the EU have dropped their initial pre-conditions for the activation of the candidate status. NATO offered a MAP in 2010 on the condition that BiH would finalise the registration of all immovable defence properties in the country as state property, for use by the country's defence ministry. However, this seemingly technical issue has been politicised and sabotaged by the RS entity, where anti-NATO sentiments are prevalent³. NATO foreign ministers broke the deadlock in December 2018, when they decided to accept the submission of BiH's first Annual National Programme (ANP) under the MAP, even if the defence property issue was not resolved. NATO has made it clear, however, that BiH's participation in the MAP does not prejudice any decision on future membership, underlining that BiH still needs to continue pursuing democratic and defence reforms. Nevertheless, the RS continued to oppose and delay the submission of an ANP, until a compromise was reached and BiH submitted what it termed the "Reform Programme" (NATO, 2022h). In 2021, BiH created a Commission for Cooperation with NATO to coordinate the implementation of activities under the Reform Programme. In April 2023, the president of the RS, Milorad Dodik, announced that the RS will unilaterally suspend all cooperation activities with NATO. Meanwhile, the US embassy to BiH responded that Dodik does

³ According to a December 2021 NDI poll, 82% of Bosnian Serbs are opposed to NATO membership, while more than 90% of Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats are in favour.

not have the power to unilaterally suspend or amend the 2005 Law on Defence, a law that authorises the RS cooperation with NATO (Security Council Report, 2023).

63. As a result of these compromises and delays, the BiH-NATO integration process has not been used to its full potential. Ultimately, in order to become a NATO member, it is up to BiH politicians to strengthen the country's internal cohesion, to improve the functioning of its institutions, to advance reforms in the defence, economy, rule of law and anti-corruption sectors and to increase its resilience against foreign interference, including the influence of Moscow in the RS. While defence reform in BiH has possibly been the most successful reform in the country (unified armed forces – at regimental and higher levels – have been created, and inter-ethnic relations within this sector have been exemplary), even this achievement is under threat following the latest secessionist initiatives by the RS leadership.

64. The EU membership track could be more promising for BiH because it enjoys popular support among all three constituent peoples. The EU has also identified pre-conditions for the country's further progress towards accession, including making changes in the Constitution to comply with the Sejdić-Finci ruling⁴ and conducting the population census law at state level, which is a sensitive issue in a multi-ethnic country where peace mostly relies upon the principle of balance between the three constituent peoples (NDI, 2021). These pre-conditions were de facto dropped or resolved by 2014, and, in February 2016, BiH, encouraged by a positive European Commission report, officially applied for EU membership. However, further progress was stalled by the RS leaders' criticism of allegedly non-inclusive mechanisms to coordinate the activities of various BiH institutions in pursuit of EU membership. Nevertheless, in the context of new geopolitical realities brought up by the Russian full-scale war on Ukraine, the EU took a strategic decision, in December 2022, to grant BiH EU candidate status, on the condition that it undertakes actions in 14 key priorities, including strengthening the rule of law, fighting corruption and managing migration (European Council, 2022). It must be noted that in 2004, the EU, with its operation EUFOR Althea, took over the responsibility from NATO to implement the peacekeeping objectives of the Dayton Accords. EUFOR's mandate was renewed by the UN in November 2022 and its personnel was increased by 500 people to reassure the Bosnian citizens in the current uncertain geopolitical circumstances. Russia chose not to veto the renewal of the EUFOR mandate: pundits argue that Moscow feared that EUFOR's withdrawal might be replaced by a much more robust US-led NATO redeployment to the country for which NATO Allies feel special responsibility since the 1992–1995 war (Karčić, 2022).

65. The case of BiH's EU and NATO integration process shows that setting pre-conditions for membership could essentially give opponents to the process – in this case the RS leadership – the right of veto. Therefore, to avoid the impasse, strong political will, flexibility and strategic thinking are the key attributes that the EU and NATO leaders should be demonstrating in their approach to the enlargement process.

⁴ This 2009 European Court of Human Rights ruling requires BiH to change its Constitution in order to allow ethnic minorities to run for top governing posts that were originally reserved for the three constituent peoples: Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats.

66. The membership issue notwithstanding, NATO should continue investing in the Western Balkans' security, building on the new NATO Strategic Concept's recognition that the region is of strategic importance for the Alliance. Your Rapporteur welcomes the Madrid Summit decision for the Alliance to enhance tailored political and practical support to BiH. At the Vilnius Summit, Allies have encouraged domestic reconciliation, and reiterated commitment to support reform efforts, including through the newly agreed Defence Capacity Building package and other tools. Allies urged BiH political leaders "to work constructively" and implement "the much-needed political, electoral, rule of law, economic, and defence reforms".

VI- CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

67. The Kremlin's attempt to roll back history and recreate its spheres of influence was met with a robust response from NATO. The Alliance strengthened the deterrence and defence of the Eastern Flank and boosted its collaboration with aspirant countries and partners at risk. In the long term, lasting peace in Europe will depend on the Allied leaders' unity and resolve to make strategic decisions. The Vilnius Summit was an important step forward. The Alliance will need to build on its decisions and continue advancing its Open Door Policy, based on a notion that a refusal or indefinite postponement of admission of those applicant countries that share NATO values and are able to contribute to collective security generates the danger of creating a grey zone and inviting aggression. NATO's Open Door policy is not a rigid set of requirements: it is a flexible, political instrument driven by strategic imperatives.

68. In this context, your Rapporteur would like to reiterate some of the observations and recommendations of this report:

- The NATO accession of advanced democracies Finland and Sweden will strengthen the Alliance politically, militarily and geographically. Finland's accession and the upcoming membership of Sweden send a powerful message to Putin and his terrorist regime that their full-scale invasion of Ukraine failed completely in its stated goal to prevent and roll back NATO enlargement.
- Ukraine is demonstrating on the battlefield that it belongs to the Euro-Atlantic community of democracies, paying the ultimate price to protect it. For the future European security framework to be robust and sustainable, Ukraine must become a member of NATO. While conditions for Ukraine's membership have yet to be fully clarified and are subject to interpretation, the Vilnius Summit adopted important decisions on the political track of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration, including dropping the requirement to go through the MAP process. The momentum should be kept, and the Allies should be prepared for strategic decisions as soon as the security conditions allow. Other conditions, namely reform objectives, should be realistic and clearly spelled out. NATO-Ukraine cooperation mechanisms should be used proactively to help Ukraine reach those clearly defined objectives. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly must redouble its efforts to help forge the transatlantic consensus on Ukraine's membership without undue delay. G7 bilateral security arrangements with Ukraine should make Ukraine stronger and send a signal to Putin that the world's leading democracies will support Ukraine as long as it takes. These arrangements should facilitate Ukraine's preparation for NATO and EU membership, not replace it.

- Georgia is NATO's crucial and valued partner in the Black Sea region and the Caucasus and it merits sustained and enhanced practical support from NATO Allies. Georgia will eventually become a member of NATO as long as it stays the course of reforms and addresses the concerns that the Allies have with regard to the consolidation of Georgian democracy. Arguably, Tbilisi's strong support of and solidarity with Ukraine would help advance Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration.
- NATO has a vested interest in maintaining stability and supporting progress in the Western Balkans, a region of strategic importance to the Alliance. NATO should continue supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina's NATO integration process and offer additional tailored support to this vulnerable partner. However, it is ultimately up to BiH politicians to strengthen the country's internal cohesion, to improve the functioning of its institutions and to advance reforms if this country's NATO and EU aspiration is to become a reality.

69. Parliaments play a crucial role in supporting and implementing NATO's Open Door policy. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly has been a leading international advocate of enlargement and this proved to be a strategically farsighted position. At this crucial juncture of modern history, a proactive leadership of parliamentarians, as representatives of citizens, is again essential: decisions taken today will shape the future of the Euro-Atlantic community for years and decades to come.

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