

## The NATO Summit in Bucharest

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**Theme:** Expectations are high ahead of the NATO Summit to be held in Bucharest on 2-4 April 2008.

**Summary:** The Bucharest Summit arrives at a very important moment in the Alliance's life. It will therefore have to contend with a wide array of momentous issues, and although not all of them will lend themselves to achieving a full consensus during the 2-4 April 2008 sessions, the promise of another meeting in 2009 will facilitate the partial solving of some of them with the prospect of a final solution just one year later.

**Analysis:** For quite some time, NATO Summits have come –on average– at a steady rate of one every other year. This is not a hard-and-fast rule, unlike for Ministerial, Foreign, Defence and CHOD (Chiefs of Defence) meetings that are held with almost perfect regularity several times a year. Summits are, of course, more subject to the vagaries of the agendas of Heads of State or Government (HOSG in NATO parlance), but the established routine is strong enough to prompt the organisation of a new summit two years after the previous one –in Riga in 2006–. The fact that 2009 is the 60th anniversary of the Washington Treaty might have suggested the Summit's postponement to 2009, but finally the decision was taken to hold both, thereby allowing President Bush a final attendance before leaving the presidency. However, this has forced the 2008 meeting to be held earlier in the year to maintain a reasonable distance with the 2009 event, which is likely to be held in Berlin. This, along with some other more intrinsic circumstances, and a certain dissatisfaction with the paltry results of Riga's 2006 Summit, gives this edition –or rather the combination of the 2008 and 2009 meetings– a very special character that we will discuss in this ARI.

However, expectations are high ahead of the Summit of 2-4 April 2008, which will be made up of the usual set of individual meetings, namely the North Atlantic Council –which rightfully concentrates most of the attention–, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) –which nowadays gathers no less than 49 partners–, the NATO-Ukraine Commission and the NATO-Russia Council. Only the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) meetings will be lacking, probably because they are not yet considered to be ripe for Summit-level discussions. On the other hand, outside the more *classical* set, there will be a Council meeting in an ISAF format, implying that it will include the attendance of all ISAF-contributing nations, some of which are not chartered members of any other NATO forum.

These expectations have different causes, but the first to come to mind are related to enlargement. The *big bang*, which pushed membership from 19 to 26 just four years ago, only fuelled the aspirations to join of the nations still remaining in the Membership Action Plan (MAP), namely Macedonia, Albania and Croatia. The Summit itself will tell, but it appears that only Croatia, the MAP's most recent member, is more or less sure to accede

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this year, while the other two might have to wait a further year in addition to the seven they have already been on stand-by and under scrutiny for full compliance with NATO standards, especially as regards security-sector reform. Macedonia also has a very particular problem in that one of the Allies, Greece, does not accept its constitutional name (which is the same as one of the historic Greek regions), forcing it to be referred to in NATO by the convoluted name of 'The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)', which –along with some of the other Allies– it finds unacceptable.

But enlargement discussions should not stop here. Ukraine and Georgia are eagerly knocking at the door. Both pose particular problems, that are not shared by the Balkan candidates mentioned above, and –although of a different nature– they are both related to Russia. Georgia has a long-standing and complex dispute with its much larger neighbour, while its inclusion does seem to overstretch the concept of a Euroatlantic space (keenly watched by Armenia and Azerbaijan). The Ukraine is ambiguous about its Western convictions, and having Russia's Black Sea Fleet stationed in Sevastopol and other Crimean ports –with the potential for complications– is a problem that will not be solved in the short term, at least until 2017. Upgrading Nato's contacts with these two countries from an *Intensified Dialogue* to MAP status would immediately be a source of strong friction with Russia, which is still very mindful of its *near abroad* and sensitive to NATO 'expansionism'. On the other hand, backing away would be taken by Russia as proof of NATO's pliability to pressure, and a stimulus to increased use of such action in the future.

On the positive side, all these complications in the enlargement chapter will benefit from the proximity of the following Summit just one year later, providing a rain check to relieve some of the sense of disappointment with a rain check. Nevertheless, suspense is probably guaranteed until the last minute, although once it is dispelled, and enlargement or enlargements decided in 2008 or 2009, the Allies will have to consider whether the Euroatlantic space has reached its farthest borders. Whatever the decision, some type of outreach –short of full membership and even short of EAPC partnership– will have to be discussed in relation to like-minded nations that contribute to NATO operations – especially ISAF–, such as Australia, Japan and New Zealand. This has been on the Atlantic agenda for some time now, and will no doubt be discussed at the Summit with a view to formalising these relations. The traditional generic name of 'Contact Countries' –a psychological improvement over the previous 'triple non' (non Allies, non Partners, non MD)– might be changed to something like 'Global Partners', although any overtones reminiscent of 'global policing', 'global alliance' or 'global membership', with the implication that NATO would become an instrument of US global strategy, would have to be avoided.

Aside from enlargement and partnership, Afghanistan will rightfully focus much attention, as the operation has been characterised –with typical media exaggeration– by many a commentator as the *litmus test* of NATO survivability. This will not be the first Summit since ISAF started –not even the first after taking responsibility for the entire country, since the previous Summit at Riga came in the wake of the decision–, but it will be the first since operations became stabilised –a phase which can only be followed by the transfer of responsibility to the Afghan authorities–. Afghan forces have already been involved in operations, thereby starting to acquire some responsibility, but it seems to be far too soon for any serious take-over, even in regional terms. Timetables for the declaration of endstate and the commencement of withdrawal might be discussed, but the Allies will no doubt be wary of the double-edged message this could convey: to the Afghan Government that it will have to make a real effort –because Western support will not last forever– and to the Taliban, that if they are patient and keep the insurrection going they

will eventually win. The discussion should include some reference to the benchmarks for success, which are currently somewhat obscure and simply glossed over by referring to 'self-sustained development'. Also, the HOSG might discuss the difficulties of coordinating with the EU's police mission, owing to Turkish misgivings about the applicability of the Berlin+ arrangements. And as to more down-to-earth operational problems, they might tackle the 'information dominance' achieved by the Taliban and how to counter it with improved and more objective media coverage, as well as the endemic problem of the shortage in national force contributions and the numerous caveats that undermine the Commander's ability to use the allocated forces to best effect, all of which is standard fare in the Ministerial and Ambassadorial meetings, but whose well-established resistance to being solved might push them up to the HOSG level.

We cannot leave the operations topic without mentioning Kosovo, although less for operational reasons than for purely political ones. Decisions on the province's final status have been postponed several times, and although they are taken elsewhere, NATO has a legitimate interest because of its role in providing a secure environment. The recent Serbian presidential elections gave rise to some slight optimism, only to be dashed 24 hours later. The Ahtisaari Plan, we have to conclude, has simply not provided the expected framework on which to build a consensus between the opposing sides, and disagreements are still very much present, even among the Allies. This is no surprise, since NATO went there in March 1999 with the message that different cultures, languages and religions should be able to live together in the same society; now, nine years later, in a striking turnabout, the international community –in giving its blessing to the proposed secession– is accepting precisely the opposite: because Albanian Kosovars and Serbians are different, the Ahtisaari plan proposes to coerce Serbia by allowing Kosovo to secede. With a perverse logic, this will force the international community to listen to the complaints of the Serbian population north of River Ibar, not to speak of the Republika Serpska and other troubled places. All this will certainly crop up in the Summit: it will have to, since few subjects belong so clearly to the HOSG's realm.

Within the transformation chapter, the NATO Response Force (NRF) will probably be placed on the table as well. The NRF was expected by the US to stimulate Europe's military transformation and an increased involvement of European nations in the use of force. While NATO was able to declare NRF's Full Operational Capability (FOC) by the end of 2006, it was only achieved through last-minute pledges of crucial, and numerically substantial, elements by the US –which expected the NRF to be basically European–. Since then, moreover, things have taken a turn for the worse, in no small measure owing to European commitments in operations inside and outside NATO. As a result, the NRF can no longer be considered to have FOC, and just four months ago, a proposal to downsize the NRF was tabled at the Ministerial Defence meeting in Noordwijk. The higher-level implications of this –including US frustration at Europe's unwillingness to contribute and even the concept's very viability– will have to be discussed by the HOSG.

The NATO-EU relationship has been nicknamed 'the frozen conflict'. Just about the only policy aspect in which both organisations agree is in the need to cooperate. Disagreements are many, but are mainly attributable to two causes: (1) those related to participation, essentially on account of the Turkey's unwillingness to have Cyprus enjoying the same privileges as other non-NATO but PfP EU members, along with the obstinate Cypriot refusal to facilitate any solution; and (2) those related to the different perceptions of some nations, notably France and the US, over their respective roles and visions. These are evolving, as a consequence at least in part of the mismatch between the EU's increasing ambitions and its declining willingness to contribute to the EU Battlegroups

project, itself a downsizing of the former Helsinki Headline Goal. The Summit may try to make a fresh attempt to reconcile both visions, if only because these difficulties are thwarting a proper coordination between the 'rule of law' and military missions led respectively by the two organisations in Afghanistan, as mentioned above, and in Kosovo.

But there is a development of momentous importance in itself, and with a significant impact on the NATO-EU subject as well. The French President Nicolas Sarkozy has already indicated at least twice –in an interview with the *New York Times* last September and recently in his address to the Diplomatic Corps in Paris– his desire to steer France back into NATO's mainstream business:

*'C'est dans ce contexte que la France entend rénover sa relation avec l'OTAN. Il faut maintenant nous mettre au travail et la France fera des propositions à la fois pragmatiques et ambitieuses, dans une double perspective: la présidence française de l'Union et le Sommet du soixantième anniversaire de l'Alliance'.*

This is understood to be predicated on the successful conclusion of the work being carried out in France on the new Defence White Book and on the French presidency of the EU, which is expected to boost its vision of the EU's future. However, just this intention seems to be important enough to warrant discussion in the Council, with all eyes focused on President Sarkozy's explanations –and, no doubt, on the quid-pro-quo he will demand– although as he indicated, his calendar is aimed at the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Summit for this watershed in NATO's history.

An eventual French return to NATO's structures, from which it is now absent, would also prompt a long overdue task for which the Council's top-level authorisation is required: a new Strategic Concept. The current one, dated April 1999 and approved at the Washington Summit, is badly outdated. Suffice it to say that it predates the 11 September 2001 attacks, as well as the subsequent Madrid and London terrorist attacks, to show how much the concepts of defence and security have changed since then. But many more things have changed as well: the Strategic Concept itself was approved half way through the Kosovo campaign, the first time that NATO had ever unleashed a military campaign, thus sponsoring the concept of humanitarian intervention; ESDI, considered at the time of the approval of the current Strategic Concept as an internal task of the Alliance, became obsolete just a few months later with the demotion of WEU to a dormant status and the emergence of the ambitious and independent ESDP in the EU; and last in this far from complete list, NATO's 16 Allies, increased to 19 just before the approval of the 1999 Strategic Concept, became 26 in the intervening period. All this, and more, calls for the full revamping of the current Strategic Concept, indeed for the drafting and approval of a completely new one. The fact that, as mentioned above, there will be another Summit in around a year's time, should provide an excellent opportunity for the Secretary General to ask for the HOSG Council's authorisation to commission the task, with completion due by the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary meeting.

We should not ignore the political difficulties in achieving a consensus even on starting work on the project, nor the fact that they are of a high-level nature, making it a subject appropriate for HOSG discussion. Rather than being conceptual, the difficulties relate to the change of Administration in the US in between the two Summits, which makes it unlikely for the current US President to accept work on a new Strategic Concept that he will not be able to influence in its final phases, and that will therefore not be a part of his legacy. His successor, likewise, will not be keen to take on something that has been heavily influenced by the preceding Administration and will prefer to start quite some time

after his inauguration. Add to all this the prospect of German elections not very long after, with the attached threat of pushing the task even farther into the future, and the urgency to somehow gain approval to begin as soon as possible will be apparent. But to reach this decision questions will have to be posed and answers provided, such as the extent of the overhaul, the mechanism to harmonise it with the EU's own security strategy and the relative importance of common defence –the bedrock of the Alliance– vis-a-vis the new tasks.

Finally, energy security is also a likely candidate for discussion by the HOSG. In the Riga Summit declaration the HOSG gave the Council in Permanent Session the task to 'to consult on the most immediate risks in the field of energy security, in order to define those areas where NATO may add value to safeguard the security interests of the Allies and, upon request, assist national and international efforts'. Two years later, these consultations have not produced any tangible results, while energy security is becoming a more pressing issue, as a result among other factors of the Russia-Ukraine dispute in 2006, a growing number of piracy incidents and an increasing concern on the potential use of the sea as a scenario of terrorist action, perhaps including attacks on tankers and gas carriers. NATO can indeed 'add value' to the protection of the vital flow of energy and, through its Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), help to contain the effect of potential catastrophes in energy transportation, processing or storage. However, it will take the HOSG to tease out the areas jealously preserved as a national responsibility, and issue a clearer mandate than Riga's to steer the International Staff and International Military Staff's work in defining NATO's role in this very important field.

**Conclusion:** The Bucharest Summit arrives at a very important moment in the Alliance's life. It will therefore have to contend with a wide array of momentous issues, and although not all of them will lend themselves to achieving a full consensus during the 2-4 April 2008 sessions, the promise of another meeting in 2009 will facilitate the partial solving of some of them with the prospect of a final solution just one year later. It will remain for the media and the politicians themselves to decide how to characterise this Summit for the future, as we can be sure it will deserve a place of its own, not just as one of the many that made no relevant history and are merely part of the historical background. Whatever the result of the interlocked enlargement decisions, and despite their importance, what it definitely will not be is 'the enlargement Summit', that title having already been taken by the Prague Summit of November 2002, as the simultaneous addition of seven new members is difficult, if not impossible, to top. It is to be hoped that neither will it be another 'Summit in search of a reason', as the Riga meeting was nicknamed, in a negative bid to fame. But if the North Atlantic Council in its HOSG session –spurred by such members of a renovated Atlanticist faith such as Chancellor Merkel and President Sarkozy, since US leadership will be constrained by the presidential campaign– succeeds in giving a positive answer to at least a fraction of the many difficult questions posed above, it will surely be remembered as the one that really renovated NATO by giving it a fresh purpose, a task badly overdue and sorely needed since the end of the Cold War. As discussed above, we might have to wait until the 2009 Summit to pick up the remaining pieces and complete the picture, but it will be worthwhile. Historical significance, then, will not be attached solely to the Bucharest Summit, but to the 2008/2009 tandem, and it will be the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary that will be remembered as the moment when the Alliance started in earnest to adapt to its 21<sup>st</sup> Century tasks.

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