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DOI: 10.2478/cmc-2024-0002

EDITORIAL

20 YEARS IN THE ALLIANCE

Introduction

In the run-up to the informal meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Prague on 30-31 May 2024, the NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, expressed his satisfaction that it would be in the same city where it was agreed in 2002 that the Alliance would invite seven new members to join its ranks (NATO, 2024). Slovenia was one of them; in 2004, we joined the Alliance along with Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia. Two months later, we also became a member of the European Union. This year, several countries have cause for celebration, but also for increased concern for their security. The countries on the eastern wing of the Alliance are close to a war zone. Alongside the anniversaries at which we rejoice, there are also those that are unacceptable from the point of view of cultural, legal and democratic values. This certainly includes the second anniversary of the war in Ukraine, which is a major test for all of us as to what our values are, how firmly we are committed to our goals and to our mutual agreements, and to what extent and in what way we are prepared to implement them. Anniversaries and their commemorations can be seen as a protocol event and a social occasion, but in the case of NATO, it is a very important international political and security organization, a key actor in the international security environment. What this means for the country and its development in the field of defence and security can be seen from the articles published in the thematic issues of Contemporary Military Challenges every five years over the last twenty years. The purpose of the comparative analysis based on these contributions is to provide a summary of the content of each author's research over time, with a focus on their understanding and the lessons they have learned and gained during this period.

1 ANNIVERSARIES AS MILESTONES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRESS

The fifth anniversary of our joining the Alliance, in 2009, which was also very much marked by the fifth anniversary of our joining the European Union, had a very different meaning for the relatively new Member States than for those who were founding members of NATO (Jelušič, 2009). The various authors noted that we as a country had learned a great deal during the first five-year period, had adapted and further integrated ourselves into various international activities, and had gained valuable experience in them. An overview of the development of the Alliance from its inception to its 60th anniversary (Jazbec, 2009) and Slovenia's path to membership (Bebler, 2009), was followed by an analysis of the experience in defence planning (Šavc, 2009), the international aspect of securing Alliance funding (Giegerich, 2009) and the integration of the Slovenian Armed Forces into international military structures (Humar et al. 2009). Due attention was paid to the transformational challenges (Šteiner, 2009), the activities of the international community in Afghanistan (Grizold and Zupančič, 2009) and in the field of intelligence and security (Črnčec, 2009), and networking capabilities (Svete and Jankovič, 2009). The enthusiasm, motivation, satisfaction, and pride of being part of an important international security organization were recognized in the contributions. The thematic issue at that time was of great interest to the countries in South-Eastern Europe which were embarking on a path to the Alliance following in the footsteps of the Republic of Slovenia, which were very interested in the lessons learned, recommendations and warnings (Brožič, 2014).

On the occasion of the Alliance's tenth anniversary, the authors' contributions focused on the changes in the international security environment and in the Alliance itself (Lampret and Novak, 2014), on the political (Jazbec, 2014) and military aspects (Osterman, 2014), on the intelligence and security aspects of the Alliance's activities (Črnčec and Urbanč, 2014), on the preparations for the Alliance's withdrawal from Afghanistan (Selan, 2014), and on the cyber defence of the Alliance's activities (Dvoršak, 2014). A change in the undertone of the writing can be detected in the contributions. The authors shared with the readers not only the perspective of lessons learned but the attempt to find future solutions within the Alliance. The initial enthusiasm, satisfaction and pride were replaced by professionalism, experience, and awareness of the complexity of burden sharing. The role of a mentor country to other aspiring countries became more pronounced and responsible.

On the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the Republic of Slovenia in the Alliance, the thematic issue was very much marked by the consequences of the global financial crisis, which were still present in the defence sector in our country despite the fact that we were already in 2019. Its consequences were felt most acutely in the low allocation we had given to defence expenditure. The range of authors in the previous issue dedicated to the Alliance was very diverse, and included views on Slovenia's membership from the perspective of foreign authors from other Member States. Changes in international politics, and thus in the sphere of international

security, had had a significant impact on the Alliance and its Member States, and consequently on the European Union and its Common Foreign and Security Policy. The Alliance, as so many times before, had come back together and strengthened its ranks with new Member States reacting differently to the changed security trends (Rutar, 2019), and in Slovenia we had been evaluating our membership and the mutual satisfaction that had resulted from it (Lampret and Grilj, 2019). The security situation had changed, especially for members bordering the Russian Federation (Veebel and Ploom, 2019; Falkowski, 2019). As a consequence, the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) had also faced new challenges (Osterman, 2019), and had been strengthened by past experience and become even more professional over the years (Šteiner, 2019). A comparative study between the projection of the costs that a country incurred for its defence as a member of the Alliance and in the event of not being a member was published. NATO membership was cheaper for Slovenia than it would be to provide its own defence without it (Furlan and Barjaktarević, 2019). The view of the fifteenth anniversary was marked by a focus on the underfunding of the state, which was allocating insufficient resources to defence expenditure, thus weakening not only national but also international security and, consequently, the Alliance as a whole (Čehovin and Grayston, 2019), including from the point of view of those who wanted membership (Kožljak, 2019).

Unlike in the thematic issue of 2014, the authors' contributions were more realistic, critical and honest about the security situation and defence capabilities of the world, the Alliance and at the national level. There was a greater awareness of what the Alliance and its members needed and what was still required to make it more effective. As many times before, the fact that the Republic of Slovenia needed to spend more on its defence in order to be able to contribute to the Alliance as promised at the NATO Summit in Wales in 2014 was highlighted.

2 A LOOK AHEAD

Since 2019, Slovenia has gradually started to increase its share of defence spending, which was 1.23% of GDP in 2021, 1.33% of GDP two years later and will reach 1.36% of GDP in 2025. The proportion of defence spending allocated to research, development and innovation has also been increased. This was 0.2% in 2021, 1.5% two years later and will reach 2.4% in 2025. In this way, we want to contribute constructively to the increased activities of the Alliance and the European Union towards the greater common security and defence capabilities that we need.

In this thematic issue dedicated to the twentieth anniversary of the Republic of Slovenia's membership of NATO, **Andrej Benedejčič**, in his article *Putin's dilemma: Russia and the Slavic dimension of NATO enlargement*, reflects on some of the aspects of Slavicness, from the perspective of history and today, which may be less obvious but nevertheless are permanently present in the culture and politics of the Slavic countries, with an emphasis on Russia.

In his in-depth analysis *NATO@75 – The future of the Atlantic Alliance in tumultuous times*, **Fritz Rademacher** examines the phenomenon of the Alliance's success in the face of the turbulence in the international security environment and the constant changes it is undergoing. What is the key that binds together the Member States in all their diversity and the transformational activities of individual countries and the Alliance as a whole? This is the central question to which the author seeks an answer.

The title of **Igor Kotnik's** contribution is *20 years of the Republic of Slovenia in NATO: some impressions about a tiny part and the whole*. It focuses on Slovenia's experience in NATO's so far, the changing security environment and NATO's role in it, and the path of the Republic of Slovenia within the Alliance, with an emphasis on the instruments of national power. He says that we need to be honest about these issues in order to improve. Will that be enough, or will we have to do more?

Hanna Samir Kassab's paper *Prestige, humiliation and saving face: national identity and great power politics* begins with the premise that the more powerful a state is, the more it can seek to redress past humiliation through aggressive prestige-seeking actions. The state seeks to reaffirm its power and status in order to erase past humiliation and achieve prestige at the expense of others. He explores this through the example of three countries and comes to some interesting conclusions. One of these countries is the Russian Federation and its history through time. Is it making an effort to become a great and powerful country again at the expense of others, to achieve prestige at the expense of the Ukrainians?

How to compare the strength and effectiveness of each country's military power and, in doing so, explore ways of striking a balance between them, is the subject of **William Lippert's** research. Existing pathways and methodologies are being tested in Ukraine and in some other conflict locations. New experience suggests a reflection on different aspects of striking a balance. The author presents his proposal in the paper *Military balancing for future conventional arms control agreements in Europe*.

During the various anniversaries of the Alliance, we have watched the beginning and the end of the war in Afghanistan. Perhaps the next anniversary will be marked by the cessation of hostilities in Ukraine, not as a result of prolonged military attrition, but as a triumph of reason, of philanthropy, of democracy, of intelligence and of political and diplomatic skills.

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