

## **“STRATEGIC RETHINKING: NEW NATO’S STRATEGIC CONCEPT AND THE EU’S STRATEGIC COMPASS. PERSPECTIVES FROM THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN MEMBER STATES”**

On November 17, 2022, Sofia Security Forum conducted an international conference on: *“Strategic Rethinking: New NATO’s Strategic Concept and the EU’s Strategic Compass. Perspectives from the Central and Eastern European Member States”*. The event was co-organized by Crisis Management and Disaster Response Centre of Excellence and co-sponsored by NATO's Public Diplomacy Division and Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

The conference aimed at conducting a public discussion and an informed debate on the future of NATO and European security in a more unpredictable and competitive world by raising awareness of the outcomes related to the New NATO Strategic Concept and the overall process of strategic rethinking in Europe in 2022. A particular focus was given on the viewpoint of NATO's eastern flank countries, the shared commitment to the Washington Treaty, the importance of the transatlantic bond, fairer burden sharing and the promotion of Alliance values.



The event took place in Marinela Hotel, Sofia, Bulgaria in a hybrid format and gathered more than 100 participants. The conference was conducted throughout different panel sessions with the participation of representatives of NATO and EU structures, Bulgarian institutions,

Bulgarian Army, diplomatic corps, military and civilian experts from the member-countries, researchers and university professors from academic and civil society sectors, young people.

The keynote address was given by Mr. Kostadin Kodzhabashev, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs who underlined that: „*The NATO Strategic Concept is a foundational document that guides the Alliance and its purpose is to guide Allies in their actions to adequately counter the threats and risks coming from the changed geo-strategic reality...*“ Concerning the European Union he added that: “*As part of our collective methods to implement the EU Strategic Compass, we see the practical value to step up the support to Ukraine as well as to other Black sea countries on the near periphery of the war, mainly the republic Moldova and Georgia*”.

**The first panel session** focused the attention on the questions: “How does the war in Ukraine change the world? What implications for the global and regional security, international order and economies?”. The three panelists who tried to find the answers together with the audience were: Phillip Petersen, President, New Generation Warfare Centre, US; Velina Tchakarova, Director, the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES), Austria; Jarosław Książek, PhD, Minister – Councillor, Department of Foreign Policy Strategy, NFA, Poland.

Mr. Peterson shared that: “*This war has been waged by the principles of the new generation warfare which has nine principles. The first four are non-kinetic elements, the second four are kinetic elements and the ninth element is the threat of nuclear weapons. In Ukraine are used all nine elements. ...To be prepared for its mainly kinetic warfare, NATO should firstly understand what the new generation is and then provide non-kinetic aspects.*“

Ms. Velina Tchakarova, emphasized on the fact that: “*Despite all that has been done from the European NATO members we are in the middle of this war, so as long as we do not want to admit and we do not want to announce to our societies that we are in a Cold War 2.0, we also will not be able to initiate and to launch the adequate measures to deal with this non-kinetic war.*” According to her opinion: “*The Strategic Concept and The Strategic Compass are both addressing individually Russia and China, but the two countries need to be observed and analyzed as modus vivendi of coordination and as a threat in order to be able to react adequately to the repercussions.*”

Mr. Jarosław Książek gave a point of view of the Eastern flank, sharing that: *“Everything is possible but we should get ready to the brand new situation and to ask not for ending this war as “a break”, but for ending this war and creating this new situation where we Poles, Bulgarians and other nations will feel safe in our international environment”... “Changing the Russia’s leadership is the main context of the future that concerns not only Ukraine but the whole Europe.”*



**The second panel session**, moderated by the Director of Sofia Security Forum Mr Yordan Bozhilov, provoked the participants to reflect on the “the Future of the Transatlantic relations” together with Dragomir Zakov, Minister of defence of Bulgaria, Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to NATO, Raychel Ellehuus, Secretary of Defence Representative in Europe and the Defence Advisor (DEFAD) for the U.S. Mission to NATO.

Mr. Zakov, underlined that: *“NATO has the firm political wheel and the military capability to act collectively and decisively and also the transatlantic unity is indivisible”.*

Ms Ellehuus shared that: *“The Strategic Compass and the Strategic Concept are both looking forward to NATO and EU collaboration and envisage maintaining peace and security. To reach*

*its goals the transatlantic security needs to implement the following strategic visions: Improving investment in the collective defence; Capability development and military modernization; Strengthening defensive anti access area denial capabilities, indications and warnings; Providing training exercises and promoting resilience including against hybrid and cyber actions; Consistency with national defence strategy; Strengthening the alliance with the new members- Finland and Sweden.” She emphasized on the fact that: “We must think of the Black sea region as much broader than just the Black sea and look at the challenges presented by Europe, North Africa and the Middle East in whatever strategy NATO comes up with”.*

**The third panel session** was about the New NATO Strategic concept and how the Alliance is preparing to meet the new risks and challenges? Nicola de Santis, Head of the Engagements Section of the Public Diplomacy Division, NATO and Velizar Shalamanov, Bulgarian Former Minister of Defence, Chairperson of the NATO Communication and Information Agency Supervisory Board tried to give an answer, by actively engaging the audience.

Mr. de Santis shared that: *“This is the first public strategic concept which is inclusive and it’s is trying to build a new security order by including all of the countries coming from the Soviet Union....; NATO’s ambition since 1991 is to move from confrontation to cooperation in Europe, however Putin is trying to bring back the vision of cooperation to confrontation...; The concept is not only about Russia, but for the entire international security environment. It promotes the ruled-based international order, which relies on values like democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.”*

Mr. Shalamanov underlined the importance of transformation in the technology sector of NATO, which should be the main area of concern, by saying that: *“We in NATO 30 years later after closing the Warsaw pact cannot continue rely on Warsaw pact equipment, especially on the most challenging part of European defence and Eastern Europe”.* He added that: *“Finland and Sweden as new members of NATO will give us the opportunity to use more of the Nordic region experience which is technology based, pragmatic and will contribute to the cooperation and capability development.”*





**The fourth panel session** asked the question: with a compass in hands. Where the EU is heading to? Mr. Jean-Pierre van Aubel, Defence Policy and Strategy / Strategic Compass penholder, European External Action Service, together with his moderator Ms Monika Panayotova, PhD, Vice President of Sofia Security Forum and university lecturer at UNWE.

Mr. van Aubel started his introductory remarks by saying that: *“The European Union is at the level of starting a strategic thinking with the help of the Compass.”*

Concerning the Russian aggression, he stressed on the fact that: *“This is not only a war for Ukrainians, this is also our war, we see the direct consequences of it and we haven’t seen the end of it yet so we need to be prepared for that”...*

Regarding the EU-NATO relations, he shared that: *“In the Strategic Compass all of the EU member states recognized that NATO’s rule of collective defence is unquestionable and there is no ambition in the European Union to take over that rule. There is no competition, but a strengthened cooperation between NATO and EU.”*

In the wrap up session, as a result of the active interaction with the audience, Ms Panayotova concluded that: *“the possible revision of the Strategic Compass in 2025 could be an opportunity*

*to be given a specific focus on the Black sea region as an intersection of geopolitical, economic, energy and other interests”.*

The **fifth panel session** provoked the intellectual imagination of the audience about the future leaders that Europe needs. It was moderated by Col. Plamen Iliev, Branch Chief “Education and Training”, NATO CMDR COE through the virtual participation of Mr. Holger Osterrieder, Head of the EU Security and Defence College.

Mr. Osterrieder said that: *“The future leaders should promote the values in terms of human rights, gender diversity and rule of law in democracy...Our leaders and experts should have the skills to implement an integrated approach and to have an overall view of prevention, addressing all conflicts”.*

To find a definition of the European strategic autonomy was a challenging moment for the participants. Mr. Osterrieder and Mr. van Aubel agreed that *“The strategic autonomy means having the capability to protect your own people and institutions, it’s about investing more in developing the necessary capability and all of this is done with partners such as NATO.”*

The European participants emphasized on the importance of collaboration between EU and NATO, stressing on the fact that it is not a question of “either-or”, it is a question about “and”.

The **sixth panel session** addressed the challenges in the Black sea region and beyond.

The three panelists were Ambassador Tacan Ildem, Chairman of EDAM Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies, Turkiye (Former Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy at NATO HQ), Ambassador Gheorghe Magheru, Member of the Scientific Council of the New Strategy Center Romania and Wojciech Lorenz, Head of International Security Programme, PISM, Poland.



The main messages of this palette of experts and diplomats were as follow:

*“The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the ongoing war in Ukraine have already profoundly changed the security environment of the Black sea region...If there is a need as part of the security architecture for Black sea and beyond, with arms control and confidence building measures, we can build on the cooperative schemes of the past”. “Turkey certainly will continue to be in solidarity with its two allies- Bulgaria and Romania in whatever deterrence and defense measures that we may think of “. H.E. Tacan Ildem*

*„The Black sea region can be considered as an ensemble of accumulation, of contradictions and challenges, starting from the bigger to the micro”. “The Snake island has a strategic importance. By occupying it, Russia can control the Danube delta and the transport corridor between Odessa and Istanbul, so an analysis of this threat is needed before adopting an agreement in the Black sea region.”, H.E. Gheorghe Magheru*

*“If Russia succeeded its special military operation in brief 3 days war against Ukraine, then it would shift its focus to our region”. Therefore by supporting Ukraine with everything that we have, we are basically fighting for our security and preventing Russia’s buffer zones extension to the eastern NATO and EU members”. “Russia destroyed the security architecture that the US and the*

*European states with Russia tried to build consequently since 1975... We entered a completely new era, an era of confrontation with Russia. Russia chose this confrontation with the West despite all the positive developments, all the offers of cooperation... We need to have the capacity to defend every inch of NATO's territory and we have to be prepared to prevail in the conflict with Russia".*

The **seventh, last panel session** focused on: the Future of the International system. The panellists were from the academia, think tank and diplomatic sectors: Associate Professor Plamen Ralchev, Head of Department of International Relations at University of National and World Economy, Bulgaria, Daniel Smilov, Associate Professor, University of Sofia and Programme Director of the Centre for Liberal Strategies, Bulgaria and Ambassador Batu Kutelia, the Atlantic Council of Georgia. Mastering the art of moderating, Greg Melcher, Chief Operations Officer, New Generation Warfare Centre, US provoked a discussion about the geopolitical future. Mr. Ralchev shared that: *"To establish a new international system we need agencies which are not only the Western powers, but also non-Western countries, and structures like the United Nations Organization and NATO... NATO is the only organization that evolved after the end of the Cold war into a mechanism of cooperative action, not only in terms of collective defence, but in terms of inclusive cooperation for collective security". "Whatever the architecture would be, the shared principles should be leading".*

Mr. Smilov, underlined that: *"The collective West should move from "reaction to crises to coordination in advance". We have to be prepared for the future conflicts, potentially coming from China, Russia and Iran."* *"A preventive coordination is essential for the countries of the EU."*

H.E. Kutelia said that: *"Our Western free war strategy should be to keep Russia down, China out and Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova in to the NATO... To create a solid state architecture and a solid system we need to start with a nucleation center of a new European and Euro-Atlantic security."* *"The Black sea strategy should be exactly the first starting point when EU's Strategic Compass and NATO's Strategic Concept really complement each other, and this type of synchronization on the Black sea can be considered as a first successful crystallization center of the new global security architecture".*





The international conference was a very dynamic exercise of collective intelligence.

The event had a good media coverage in traditional and social media as well as on the websites of the organizations and institutions involved in the project implementation. The event was broadcasted in YouTube and more than 320 people viewed it.

Sofia Security forum has received many very positive messages, emails and feedbacks from the participants.