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The 2011 NATO annual report – the heralding of a new NATO?

The NATO annual report (*The Secretary's General Annual Report 2011*) is the first document of this kind published on the initiative of Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, presented by him at a special press conference held on 26 January 2012 in Brussels. The report summarizes the achievements made and the challenges faced by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in 2011. The organization was evaluated on four different fronts: external operations, new security challenges, restructuring, and partnerships. In the report the Secretary General aimed at showing that the transformations of the Alliance in 2011 consisted of the implementation of a new Strategic Concept adopted at the 2010 Lisbon summit.

First of all, the presentation of the report should definitely be treated as a means of an intensification of the Alliance's public diplomacy, and more specifically its disclosure policy. The publication of annual reports by international organizations (e.g. UN, IMF) is a well-known practice. As an important international institution, the Alliance merely refers to widespread solutions in order to finally break the passivity in the realm of public relations. According to the Secretary General's policy, the aim of the report is to initiate further discussion with sceptics, casting doubts on the effectiveness of the announcement and the modernisation measures taken by the Alliance to create favourable ground for developing the image of the organization promoted by Rasmussen in the Lisbon document.

Secondly, the report aims at clarifying the Alliance's policy and improving the addressed parties', e.g. *security communities* in the member states, perception of the predictability of its actions. In short, the aim of the document is something more than the promotion of the Secretary General's official optimism. At present, the problems of the Alliance may be evident, but Rasmussen is overtly hopeful about the success of the transformation and the consequent strengthening of the Alliance.

NATO operations conducted on three continents (Afghanistan, Libya, Kosovo, the Indian Ocean, Iraq) – have been treated as currently the most important type of the Alliance's activity. Even though the report presents them as generally positive and effective, whenever "greater stability", the successful onset of the transfer of power in Afghanistan, and "achieving considerable progress" (e.g. in decreasing the number of guerrilla attacks on the Alliance's troops) are mentioned, they sound overly optimistic and even give the impression that the difficulties are being underestimated. What runs counter to the annual report is NATO confidential document revealed by the British media almost at the same time – a report on the domestic situation in Afghanistan. It was quite critical of NATO military advancement, the possibility of introducing stability in the country and strengthening president Karzai's government. It questioned the success of the so called "transition period", i.e. the successful transfer of power to the government in Kabul. The discord between the two documents is evident and doubts are cast on whether the annual report is a realistic and reliable reflection of the situation in Afghanistan.

The aspect of the Alliance's activity which is essential to the Secretary General and deserves attention is the modernisation of NATO. As has been rightly pointed out, the Alliance derives its legitimacy from successful reforms in the military sphere (organization and capability), which add to its credibility. So called *smart defence* is mentioned several times in the report. The idea is to narrow the widening gap between the US and European military expenses and their rationalization. The discussion has undoubtedly been triggered off by the military operation in Libya, which exposed the enormous military superiority of the US over their poorly prepared European allies. Thus, the report called for the upgrading of military capability with the view of challenges of the "Libyan" kind. The idea behind *smart defence* is to increase security not by means of greater resources, but by tightening cooperation in order to create multinational solutions and move towards specialization and setting priorities in terms of military capabilities. The report stresses moreover that focusing attention on *smart defence* (i.e. the most critical reconnaissance and intelligence) has new value in the development of the Alliance, initiated by the new Strategic Concept adopted in Lisbon. The aim of the approaching NATO summit which will be held in Chicago in May is to confirm the direction set in Lisbon and to commit member states to the modernisation of the



Alliance, which includes the preparation and equipping of the Alliance's military forces for *out of area* operations.

It seems that a significant breakthrough in the conceptualisation of the future strategy of the Alliance may be achieved by establishing NATO partnerships, i.e. global networks of cooperation (their formation was deemed one of the three key tasks of the Alliance in the Strategic Concept from Lisbon), which is quite unambiguously suggested in the context of the US summit. Furthermore, "significant progress" in implementing this "Lisbon" goal was recorded as early as in 2011. The operation in Libya unexpectedly stimulated reformatting of partnerships. It intensified consultative mechanisms among regional partners interested in shaping decision-making process within NATO and cooperation with international organizations such as the UN, or more significantly the League of Arab States. Will it, however, become a precedent? Will it be a reason for establishing cooperation between NATO and Arab countries – as far as maintaining strategic balance in the Middle East is concerned? Looking at the problem with taking a stand on the issue of Bashar al-Assad in Syria that the international community is facing today, the question cannot be disregarded.

Conclusions

The overly terse account of the relation between NATO and the EU in the report is striking. Thus, especially in the context of the growing risk of destabilization in the region as a result of tensions in Syria and the nuclear program of Iran, the general nature of the document should be considered as its fundamental shortcoming. Moreover, since the report pays so much attention to *smart defence*, it could have been expected that the question of task delegation between NATO and the EU in terms of security would be discussed more extensively, as it is the central problem of mutual relations.

Exposing the whole variety of NATO's activities and stressing the organization's practical achievements in solving conflicts and working on security stabilisation, plays a substantial legitimating function, which enables the allies to focus on reforms in the spirit of the 2010 Strategic Concept, despite all the problems resulting from the above mentioned military and political shortcomings, including growing disproportions in military expenses among member states.

The report reflects the position of the Alliance in the initial stage of its transformation, prognosticated in the Strategic Concept from Lisbon. It is evident that the transformations



have not achieved critical mass yet. The first annual report is thus more of a record of the transformative ambitions of the Secretary General and a tool of persuasion to draw favourable perspectives for the Alliance, rather than a confirmation of its actual success. Still, it introduces a good practice which is an annual critical summary of the effectiveness of future reforms.

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