



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

A more global NATO as a long-term guarantee for containing Russia



Vilnius must not be the new Bucharest. It is as if some ominous threat has been hovering over the NATO summit in the capital of Lithuania next week.

Taking on an obligation and then failing to fulfil it remains a painful memory of the NATO summit in the capital of Romania in April 2008.

Then US President George W. Bush promised to convince allies to admit Ukraine and Georgia, but resistance came from the leaders of France and Germany, Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel.

They believed that the two candidates were not yet ready for membership, and even more so, that their admission could enrage Russia.

Ukraine and Georgia did not join NATO then. Russia attacked Georgia four months later and Ukraine six years later, and that aggression is still ongoing.

Ukraine's candidacy under new conditions

The first reason for rejecting Ukraine's membership 15 years ago - its unpreparedness - could still be justified today. The issues have been the state of Ukrainian institutions, the capacity of its democracy, economic parameters, and corruption.

But these are all peacetime prerequisites, which would place Ukraine on a longer waiting list for membership in the Alliance if peace prevailed in it.

However, from the rejection at the Bucharest summit 15 years ago to the debate on the same matter next week in Vilnius, the circumstances

regarding Ukraine have changed radically, and almost do not allow drawing any parallels between the two NATO summits.

The arguments that France and Germany once had against the membership of Georgia and Ukraine have proven to be tragic for security in Europe.

Their retreat in the face of Vladimir Putin's growing aggression to preserve economic ties followed all French governments and the entire era of Angela Merkel as head of the German government.

What kind of Russia does NATO expect after the war?

Taking into account Russia's reaction regarding NATO expansion has lost its meaning since it carried out aggression against Ukraine. The Alliance has confirmed it understood this by accepting Finland as a member, and probably Sweden soon.

The issue of relations with Russia will remain important for NATO and its members in the context of Ukraine, regardless of when Ukraine becomes a full member of the Alliance.

The summit in Vilnius must provide at least a draft of NATO's position towards Russia after the war in Ukraine, because the current containment policy has to survive modifications.

To achieve this, NATO leaders need to know what kind of Russia they expect after achieving peace in Ukraine.

Is it Russia with or without Putin? Defeated and humiliated aggressive state policy, or a

preserved authoritarian power structure to some extent?

What guarantees will NATO have to impose to avoid the risk of a new Russian imperial adventure similar to this one in Ukraine?

Ukraine's admission to NATO membership would be the strongest guarantee that this tragic experience will never be repeated.

But would this be a guarantee that Russia has given up its expansionist strategies, and therefore would not be a source of the greatest threat to security in Eurasia? It probably would not.

"Russia is run in such a way that orderly successions are virtually impossible...It is actually an autocracy that tolerates no real opposition, so the politics takes place in secret cabals in palace corridors, lubricated by money and vodka, enforced by pistol and swagger. Coups, intrigues, covens and conspiracies are the only ways to get anything done", wrote Simon Sebag Montefiore in The Times.

What are hard security guarantees?

From a military point of view, Ukraine mostly qualified for membership in NATO with its 500-day defence and by adapting its armed forces to a large number of weapons, systems and training it received from the members of the Alliance in wartime conditions.

At the summit in Lithuania, Ukraine will receive hard security guarantees that it will not be left in the lurch for as long as necessary for its effective defence and the expected objective - the liberation of the occupied parts

of the country.

The assistance package, which will enable its security system effectively to transition from the Soviet model and doctrine to NATO standards, has been widely implemented and will last as long as necessary.

Ukraine will most likely receive higher levels of political relations from the Alliance partners by raising it from the current NATO-Ukraine Commission to the NATO-Ukraine Council. This will enable Kyiv to sit permanently and equally "at the table" with its NATO partners, and invite them to talks whenever Ukraine deems this necessary.

Containment of Russia must be global

But raising Ukraine's defence capabilities will not remove the threat from Russia unless NATO's post-war strategy finds a long-term solution to this challenge.

One of the ways is to strengthen NATO's global role, raising its focus from Europe to global security challenges.

The aggression against Ukraine showed that Russian aggression has global consequences, not only in its immediate environment but also in Europe. Therefore, NATO should express its future long-term response through its strengthened global dimension.

The sources of support for Russian aggression and its aggressive policy are no longer in Europe, where NATO has been traditionally focused, but primarily in Asia (China, Iran) and partly in Africa.

The Alliance's greater involvement in those areas, directly or through specific cooperation models with regional partners, will represent a long-term sustainable guarantee that Russia will not repeat the tragic Ukrainian adventure in another part of the world.