

Montenegro's achievements toward membership

Political and Strategic Implications of NATO Enlargement

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In recent years Montenegro achieved remarkable progresses on the way towards the Euro-Atlantic integration together with a significant economic and social development of the country. Actually, if we expand our focus from Montenegro to the Balkan region, from Southeastern to Central Europe and to the Baltic, we can list the many positive political and strategic implications resulting from the NATO and EU enlargements, as well as the many challenges still ahead. Such an assessment is particularly useful for the Atlantic Alliance which, while celebrating its 60th anniversary, is rethinking his Strategic Concept to better cope with the new threats of the present security scenario.

The enlargement constitutes the natural outcome of the Alliance's "open door" policy that was clearly stated in art. 10 of the 1949 Washington Treaty. Therefore, the enlargement does not represents a "new" process but is embedded in the DNA of the Alliance since the very beginning. In fact, the first enlargement took place in 1952 and embrace Greece and Turkey into the Alliance. The most evident political and strategic consequence of this first round of enlargement was that the two countries automatically committed themselves "to settle any international dispute in which they may be involved by peaceful means ... and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force " (art. 1, Washington Treaty). Even if the Greek and Turkish disputes made several times the achievement of consensus on relevant NATO and European Union issues time-consuming, and sometimes impossible, the Alliance always proved to be an extraordinary forum for political discussion.

During the Cold War two other significant countries joined the Alliance. In 1955, the Federal Republic of Germany secured itself under the NATO collective defense (art. 5) and in 1982 the newly democratic Spain also entered the Alliance. As a consequence, both countries were able to boost their economies and few years later, in 1986, Spain joined the European Community. What distinguished the post-Cold War enlargements in 1999, 2004, and 2009 is that for the first time countries that belonged to an adversary Pact joined the Alliance. At present, around the 40% of the NATO members are former "adversaries". Such an extraordinary "transformation" was envisaged in the new Strategic Concept of the Alliance adopted in 1999 and accompanied by new command and force structures. Politically speaking, the NATO post-Cold War enlargements definitely enabled the newly independent countries, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, to rejoin Europe and to consolidate their regained sovereignty and statehood in the face of their historical external threats. From a strategic point of view, the extension of the NATO security architecture to Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe prevented the security vacuum left by the breach of the Iron Curtain from becoming a permanent source of instability.

The Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, launched in 1994, has been the extraordinary instrument of such a policy. So much so that 1999 Strategic Concept included the projection of stability and the cooperation through PfP among the Alliance's new tasks. Based on a genuine commitment to develop stable and democratic institutions and a productive free market economy, PfP provided the new partner countries with the requested bilateral assistance and instruments for a comprehensive agenda of structural reforms, with a particular emphasis on the Security Sector Reform (SSR). Moreover, through the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), PfP has provided a forum for political and technical consultations not only between the Alliance and its partners, but also among the same partners as well. Thus, NATO has reasserted its traditional role in conflict prevention by helping to defuse conflicts and ease tensions within the EAPC. Finally, the stability and close cooperation provided by PfP and the enlargement process proved to be essential in attracting foreign direct investments for economic recovery and social and civil development. Security sector reforms, stability, and the economic development were also crucial in opening the way towards the European Union (EU) membership of new NATO members and partner countries and to speed up their full integration into the Euro-Atlantic institutional framework.

The concerted approach established by NATO and EU, as well as the "mutually reinforcing" cooperation with other international Organizations - such as the United Nations and OSCE - enabled the Western Balkans to achieve remarkable progresses.

However, several hurdles still must be overcome on the way to the full integration of the Western Balkans in the Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Regional stability and cooperation is still challenged by inter-ethnic historical rivalries that constitute a breeding ground for organized crime activities (illegal immigration, corruption, trafficking in human beings and weapons) which are hampering economic development and political reforms in the region. In fact, for some areas of the Western Balkans remains still valid the assessment of Leo Tindemans who concluded in his (1997) Report of the International Commission on the Balkans that what has been achieved in the region is an "Unfinished Peace", able to stop the war but not as yet self-sustainable. Against this background, the EAPC offers an added value in meeting the above-mentioned challenges by assisting partner countries in strengthening regional cooperation, inter alia, in the field of the rule of law and border control.

International cooperation is particularly necessary in the present security scenario where no State can alone effectively cope with such new global threats as terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), cyber attacks, and energy security. In this respect, NATO enlargement produced both political and strategic consequences. Actually, while NATO membership provides a country with a unique collective security guarantee, NATO enlargement contemporaneously strengthens the Alliance itself. In addition, the enlargement, by reinforcing the European pillar of the transatlantic "bridge", makes the "burden and risk sharing" between European and American Allies more equitable. The enlargement to Albania and Croatia and the peculiar status of the FYR Macedonia - which is more than a NATO membership candidate country - most recently confirm that these countries have met the necessary requirements to transform themselves from security consumers to security providers.

While every nation's path toward Euro-Atlantic integration is unique and the political timetable must be respectful of domestic public opinion, the recent enlargement should be a stimulus for all the countries of the Western Balkans to improve their regional cooperation and to fulfill their respective political, military, and economic commitments in the clear perspective of full Euro-Atlantic integration. Such a policy will also help Serbia overcome its concerns, play its role for the economic development of the region, and become more confident in paving the way toward Euro-Atlantic institutions. In this regard, the EAPC can provide a crucial contribution by strengthening its capability to settle disputes and foster regional cooperation and integration.

Since its independence in 2006, Montenegro has been a leading nation in improving regional security and cooperation under the NATO framework, as well as an observer in the Adriatic Charter Group (A-3) and in the Southeastern European Defense Ministers process (SEDM). In the light of its Euro-Atlantic aspirations, the government of Podgorica in just a few years has met many of the requirements essential for NATO membership. In the PfP framework, Montenegro implemented significant defense and military reforms with remarkable outcomes in the political as well as in the economic field. A professional Army and civilian control of the military have been introduced, while the Parliament approved a defense policy and a national security strategy. Civilian and military personnel are today trained for NATO-led peacekeeping and crisis management operations. Together with the other countries of the Western Balkans, a contribution of weapons and ammunitions has been offered by Montenegro to the ISAF operation in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, public opinion in Montenegro remains reluctant to embrace the Alliance. Although 50% of the population in Montenegro acknowledges the positive relation between NATO membership, economic growth, and political stability, only 35% supports NATO accession while approximately 70% is in favor of EU membership: a low figure compared to other NATO candidate countries that calls for an adequate information and public diplomacy plan. Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans has always been advocated by Italy in all the proper international fora.

In this perspective, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Franco Frattini, proposed last April in Prague at the EU-USA Summit a "road map" plan of 8 points invoking, inter alia, the liberalization of visas in order to facilitate the mobility of persons. Beginning in January 2010, Montenegro-Italy relations would be among the first to benefit from such a provision, since the two countries could further enhance their economic partnership. With respect to trade with Montenegro, Italy holds second place after Serbia and has shown a growing interest in Montenegro's potential in several sectors, including energy, telecommunications, infrastructures, services, and the ongoing privatization process.

Montenegro ranks today among the fastest growing European economies with the third largest direct fixed investment in the continent. However, due to the international economic crisis, the 2009 GDP is expected to decrease from 7.5% achieved in 2008 to 5.25%. Under such critical circumstances, membership in the Euro-Atlantic community becomes even more necessary. Economic development needs security and stability and "Stability is equal to integration", as it was said in the

early Fifties by Paul Hoffman, the European Cooperation Agency Director coordinating the Marshall Plan. It was true at that time as it is today. Montenegro's aspiration to obtain soon the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) and the EU accession request, submitted last December, suggests a deep understanding of the fruitful political and strategic implications as well as of the opportunities for development that Euro-Atlantic integration would afford to the people of Montenegro today and in the years to come.

Intervento di apertura del Segretario generale del Comitato Atlantico Italiano, Fabrizio W. Luciolli, alla School for International Relations di Budva, Montenegro.

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