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NATO'S ROLE IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC MANAGEMENT

Abstract:

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has created a state of insecurity in the international arena. To combat the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to reduce the detrimental consequences on international security, virtually all international organizations have been involved, including NATO. In the context of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, NATO's involvement in managing the pandemics deserves attention. Although some voices criticize NATO's work, it is worth noting the Alliance's efforts to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on international security. This article aims to highlight the main NATO activities in managing and mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on international security.

Keywords:

COVID-19 crisis, NATO, pandemic, impact, state, politics, international security

Introduction

Today, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is no longer a mere military organization, nor it is an exclusive defence organization. Since its inception in 1949, the main task of the Alliance has been to focus on collective defence operations. This was present until the early 1990s. But the reality of the world has helped NATO to adapt to new scenarios and geopolitical realities.

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Since 1991, NATO has become a defence and security organization. After the 2010 Lisbon Summit, NATO became a security and defence³ organization and it is not excluded the fact in the future NATO will become a classic security organization.

Although the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought criticism to NATO's work, as have other international organizations, the Alliance has worked hard to monitor the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, and all its member countries have taken precautionary measures⁴. In the current international context, NATO involves close cooperation between the 30 member states and the other 20 partner countries⁵.

NATO's involvement in managing the COVID-19 pandemic

For a better understanding of NATO's involvement in managing the COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary to make a brief analysis of the provisions stipulated in the text of the Treaty establishing the Alliance. Thus, Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty provides for the right to collective self-defence, clarifying the alliance's collective responsibility for a unified response to an attack on any of its parties. Article 3 is also quite significant, stating: „In order to achieve more effectively the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties shall, separately and jointly, through continuous and effective self-help and mutual assistance, maintain and develop individual and collective ability to withstand armed attack”. It follows from the provisions of Articles 5 and 3 that individual Member States have an obligation in peacetime to maintain a level of responsiveness and preparedness that allows them to address ‘vulnerabilities’ in carrying out collective defence missions. According to this interpretation, Article 3 complements the collective defence clause in Article 5 and shows that maintaining and strengthening the resistance of the Member States is also an obligation. This implies that ‘vulnerabilities’ that may affect Member States' response during emergencies should be eliminated in advance in peacetime, as part of the process of preparing a resilient system. The ‘vulnerability’ anticipated by NATO will gradually change with the environment surrounding the alliance, as evidenced by its new strategic and high-level concepts.

In this context, the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Member States of the Alliance on April 2, 2020, deserves attention. During this event the general secretary of NATO, Mr Jens Stoltenberg suggested that the spread of

³ *Gestión de Crisis en la OTAN*, <https://iugm.es/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/06-08_05_2015.pdf> (30.11.2021).

⁴ *Réponse de l'OTAN au COVID-19*, <https://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/news_174271.htm?selectedLocale=fr> (30.11.2021).

⁵ *L'OTAN, un acteur de la gestion du spectre en Europe*, <<https://www.anfr.fr/toutes-les-actualites/actualites/lotan-un-acteur-de-la-gestion-du-spectre-en-europe/>> (30.11.2021).

infected diseases, such as COVID-19, together with those related to transborder threats, such as international terrorism and attacks on cyber and external space systems, should be included in the category of vulnerabilities for NATO. It can therefore be assumed that NATO will hold wide-ranging discussions on developing resilience against pandemics⁶. Among NATO's core 'collective defence', 'crisis management' and 'collective security' missions, these actions may be included in the 'crisis management' category, but will be designed in response to pandemics such as COVID-19 in the future and will be carried out as part of a 'collective defence' mission.

At the NATO Foreign Ministers' Meeting in April 2020, the Allied Commander-in-Chief of Europe (SACEUR) was authorized to unilaterally carry out coordination activities for air transport and surplus cargo as part of the response to COVID-19. NATO has also formed a COVID-19 working group (CVTF) to accelerate SACEUR's decision-making process. NATO has created an environment in which it can react more quickly as a military alliance without being bound by adjustments of political interest between member countries⁷.

Since the beginning of the health crisis, we have noticed a varied involvement of the armed forces in the fight against COVID-19, on which the states have communicated more or less. In many European countries, armies have for the first time played a logistical role, in the movement of equipment, the transfer of patients, the transport of masks and/or the (co) organization of repatriation flights. In addition, they have often provided care for civilians: receiving patients in military hospitals, setting up field hospitals and strengthening civilian care units, for example. In some states, in addition to the internal security forces, the military has also contributed to maintaining order, monitoring people and their property, and verifying compliance with containment measures⁸.

Beyond the political perception that NATO failed the solidarity test, the practical realities of the pandemic called into question the operational basis of NATO's deterrent mission: the ability to gain enough strength to deter or repel any possible incursion. The pandemic outcome has forced member states to withdraw their national contingents from missions outside NATO borders to focus on the COVID-19 battlefield. Norway has cancelled its regional 'defence' exercise, which was expected to take place in March 2020, and other

⁶ *Ministros de defensa de la OTAN evaluarán la respuesta de la alianza al coronavirus*, <<https://www.aa.com.tr/es/mundo/ministros-de-defensa-de-la-otan-evaluar%C3%A1n-la-respuesta-de-la-alianza-al-coronavirus/1805128>> (30.11.2021).

⁷ *NATO's Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic: Security Implication for Japan*, <https://www.spf.org/jina/en/articles/nagashima_01.html> (30.11.2021).

⁸ *Le monde militaire face au COVID-19*, <<https://theconversation.com/le-monde-militaire-face-au-COVID-19-141181>> (30.11.2021).

countries, such as Finland, have been reluctant to deploy their forces. NATO's main European exercise for 2020, 'European Defender', has been postponed.

NATO's role in the crisis has largely focused on providing military air transport to supplement civilian resources. As passenger traffic has fallen significantly, civilian airlines are offering increased support for freight in the current phase of the Coronavirus crisis. Military air transport provided support in transporting civilian goods, patients or medicines to critical points in the response chain during the crisis. On 2 April 2020, NATO's Rapid Air Mobility (RAM) capability was activated by the North Atlantic Council, which facilitated the possibility of moving military aircraft through European airspace. According to Camille Grand, NATO's Under-Secretary-General for Defence Investment, „COVID-19 is a different scenario than I anticipated [for RAM]”.

On April 10, 2020, Turkey launched the first COVID-19 flight using RAM in support of the United Kingdom. According to Tony Osborne of Aviation Week, the Turkish A400M aircraft carried medical equipment for the UK National Health Service. Turkey, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia and the United States have sent medical and financial assistance to NATO's new ally, Northern Macedonia. Turkey has also supplied medical supplies to the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain and Montenegro and NATO partners in the Balkans, including Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo. Germany, Denmark and Luxembourg have sent protective equipment to Italy and Spain⁹.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, there was European cooperation between NATO states through military air transport. Thus, Franco-German cooperation during the crisis deserves attention. „The French army has transported coronavirus patients to Germany, while German military transport planes have been transporting patients from France, signalling close bilateral relations”¹⁰. As Derek Chollet stated: „This crisis has tested NATO's ability to make quick decisions in exceptional situations. However, the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 crisis is forcing the alliance to adapt to the new realities. The ability to deliberate remotely via secure video conferencing, which NATO foreign ministers have done, demonstrates that this is possible. Improving the speed and accessibility of decision-making will strengthen and enhance NATO's ability to respond to future crises”¹¹. „COVID-19 is an unprecedented challenge for our nations”, he added. „It has a profound impact on our people and our economies and imposes historic shocks on the international system, which could have long-term consequences”. He noted that

⁹ *Ministros de defensa de la OTAN...*, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ R. Laird, *NATO and the Coronavirus Crisis: An Input to Crisis Management Learning*. <<https://sldinfo.com/2020/04/nato-and-the-coronavirus-crisis-an-input-to-crisis-management-learning/>> (30.11.2021).

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

in each country, the army plays a key role in supporting civilian efforts against the pandemic. „And using NATO mechanisms, the Allies helped each other to save lives”, he added¹². NATO Command – led by the Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, Air Force General Tod D. Wolters, coordinated the activities of the 30 allies. „Military forces across the Alliance have organized more than 100 missions to transport medical personnel, supplies and treatment capacity, facilitated the construction of 25 field hospitals, added more than 25,000 treatment beds and involved more than 4,000 medical staff. In support of civilian efforts, military air transport has been instrumental in the fight against coronavirus, and military personnel have been involved in activities from disinfecting public spaces to controlling border crossings, and NATO has helped mobilize and coordinate support for NATO allies”¹³.

Although the Alliance does not have its own resources to fight coronavirus, it intends to coordinate the actions of its member countries. Specifically, NATO will deliver medical equipment quickly when needed. „NATO was created to deal with crises. So we can help”, Stoltenberg said. NATO's main task, according to Stoltenberg, remains discouragement and defence. „Our first priority is to make sure that the current health crisis does not become a security crisis”¹⁴. The alliance has responded quickly and effectively to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus spread in early 2020. To date, NATO has coordinated well over 350 missions to transport medical personnel and supplies, build field hospitals and provide tens of thousands of beds treatment. Demonstrating their key role in crisis response, Allied military forces are helping to save lives and extinguish the spread and impact of the deadliest pandemics in a century¹⁵. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis management, the activity of the NATO laboratory, the Centre for Maritime Research and Experimentation (CMRE), based in La Spezia, Italy, which assisted the American state in managing the blockade of COVID-19, also deserves attention. CMRE's collaboration with the University of Connecticut (UConn) has developed the ability to predict the expansion of COVID-19. Scientists

¹² *Ibidem.*

¹³ *NATO Defense Ministers Discuss Alliance's COVID-19 Response*, <[https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2151837/nato-defense-ministers-discuss-alliances-COVID-19-response/st-COVID environment](https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2151837/nato-defense-ministers-discuss-alliances-COVID-19-response/st-COVID%20environment)> (30.11.2021).

¹⁴ *Stoltenberg zajął o diejesposobnosti NATO, niesmotria na koronawirus*, Deutsche Welle, <<https://tinyurl.com/2p8b2d9h>> (30.11.2021).

¹⁵ *A. Mesterhazy, 2020 – The role of NATO'S Armed Forces in the COVID-19 Pandemic*, <<https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2020-role-natos-armed-forces-COVID-19-pandemic-mesterhazy-091-dsc-20-e>> (30.11.2021).

from the Centre and University professors contributed to the work of the Board of the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering¹⁶.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, foreign ministers from 30 NATO member states held a virtual meeting on 16 April 2020 for the first time in the history of the alliance moderated by Atlantic Council Executive Vice President Damon Wilson. Northern Macedonia participated in it for the first time as a new NATO member. The main subject of the video conference was the impact of the rapid spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus „on the alliance's readiness to defend itself”. „It is extremely important that NATO can continue to function during the crisis caused by COVID-19. After all, the threats and challenges we face have not disappeared”, said NATO Secretary-General, Jens Stoltenberg¹⁷.

NATO Deputy Secretary General, Mircea Geoana, provided an overview of NATO's role in the COVID-19 crisis. According to Geoana, NATO's defence ministers agreed that „anyone who has something in excess – because not all countries have been affected equally – [should] use the [NATO] coordination mechanism and ensure that the most needed states should receive support”. Mircea Geoana also mentioned that the first reaction of many governments to the pandemic was naturally „to take the best care of their own citizens”, but argued that „after the first shock, we began to realize that this is something you can't do on your own – we need each other”. We weren't perfect, „he argued, but I believe that, following the initial instinct to focus on our own [countries], we see now a renewed sense of solidarity from the United States to northern Macedonia”. Ongoing training is important because „common security threats and concerns have not disappeared due to the pandemic”. The main mission of NATO at the moment is „preventing the escalation of a global health crisis that could become a security crisis”. The main activity of NATO, according to Geoana's position, is to protect one billion people from the coronavirus pandemic.

COVID-19 crisis management issues also included the approval by NATO foreign ministers of additional measures to support Ukraine and Georgia – in addition to existing aid packages such as: exercises, access to NATO's educational programs, and the exchange of radar data, which will improve the understanding of the situation with air activity in the region. The Alliance will also more actively involve Ukraine and Georgia in its exercises in the Black Sea region¹⁸. The foreign ministers of external affairs from NATO member states, joined at the video conference, the first in its history, assured that the

¹⁶ *Coronavirus response: NATO scientists help Connecticut forecast the spread of COVID-19*, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_177078.htm> (30.11.2021).

¹⁷ *NATO și UE pe fundal de coronavirus*, <<https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/nato-%C8%99i-ue-pe-fundal-de-coronavirus/30608266.html>> (30.11.2021).

¹⁸ *Wirtualnoje zasiedanije NATO na fonie COVID-19: o czem szla riecz?*, Deutsche Welle, <<https://tinyurl.com/yv4jzfd>> (30.11.2021).

Alliance remains fully operational so that the coronavirus health crisis does not lead to a security crisis, and engaged in the fight against COVID-19 by coordinating transport used to evacuate the sick and provide medical equipment¹⁹.

Thus, in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, NATO has taken on the responsibility of undertaking the following steps:

Reducing defence budgets. A few months after the COVID-19 emergency, much of the global economy is facing a deep recession, the impact of which, according to the International Monetary Fund, could outweigh the global financial crisis of 2008/2009. Due to the unknowns about how the pandemic will continue to evolve, economic forecasts range from a 5-10% drop in global GDP. Once national restrictions are lifted, national governments will have to focus their political energies on reviving economic productivity, encouraging public consumption, reducing mass unemployment and providing basic public and social services. Depending on how long COVID-19 continues to destroy Europe, North America, Asia and other continents, the economic recovery will take years, not months. Despite substantial financial support from the European Union's financial institutions, the vast majority of European countries will be extremely reluctant to allocate limited financial resources to improve their national defence capabilities and maintain costly procurement programs. NATO allies will need to find smart ways to adjust their defence capabilities to traditional security threats (nuclear, conventional, cybernetic and hybrid) and the new challenges posed by climate change, pandemics, mass migration or disruptive technologies. The coronavirus pandemic has changed the nature of the alliance's threat perception. The pandemic threatens the personal security and economic prosperity of millions of NATO citizens. NATO is currently undergoing a coronavirus test. To deal with coronavirus (and future pandemic outbreaks), the organization needs the involvement of military capabilities on the part of the Member States. If we consider that one of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic is that military spending in many alliance member states will be reduced, then it is likely that they will be dedicated to strengthening humanitarian assistance/rescue missions, as well as improving internal security and the protection of land and sea borders. The British decision to withdraw forces from the Iraqi training mission to redeploy them for internal service may become a defining trend in the future²⁰.

¹⁹ NATO se implică în lupta împotriva pandemiei și lucrează pentru ca această criză să nu se transforme în una de Securitate, <<https://www.jurnal.md/ro/news/587c12010020c812/nato-se-implica-in-lupta-impotriva-pandemiei-si-lucreaza-pentru-ca-aceasta-crizsa-nu-se-transforme-in-una-de-securitate.html>> (30.11.2021).

²⁰ N. K. Gvosdev, *The effect to COVID-19 on the Alliance*.< <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/03/the-effect-of-COVID-19-on-the-nato-alliance/>> (30.11.2021).

Leadership without leading. In recent years, political relations between the two sides of the Atlantic have worsened due to the transactional policies of US President Trump and his style of administration. Transatlantic solidarity has reached a low point since the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis. Instead of accumulating political solidarity among America's closest allies, providing practical support to Europeans in great need (such as Italy and Spain) and leading a strengthened effort to alleviate the global health crisis, President Trump has made it clear that he goes without saying that he is only concerned with personal interests and political gain. More significantly, the US president has continued to question the threat of the pandemic. The prospect of building a US-led grand coalition to fight COVID-19, using, for example, NATO or a coalition of the willing, seems distant. Meanwhile, there is evidence that the United States is dramatically affected by the pandemic; both in terms of the number of people infected and, more broadly, economically and politically. America's economy appears to be on the verge of a major blow, with potential long-term consequences for its world leadership status. Finally, in NATO and EU countries, where governments are severely managing the coronavirus crisis, top leadership changes could also occur in NATO countries, public health systems are under severe stress, and governments lack the financial resources to relaunch the national economy. Regardless of the long-term political downturn of the current health crisis for NATO member states, America's reputation as a global leader has already had a serious effect.

Unity and intra-alliance cohesion, are two terms – that NATO uses in its strategic messages. Before the coronavirus pandemic, controversial issues ranged from Turkey's intervention in Syria and the division of tasks to how to respond to security challenges at NATO's southern borders. At the heart of these issues and related political disagreements is an extremely fragile consensus on NATO's core threats and how to respond to them. These and other political disagreements will certainly not go away in the future, but intra-European rivalry over access to financial funding and EU-sponsored ways of economic recovery will emerge strongly when national blockades are lifted.

The presence of disagreements between NATO allies over their future relations with China is also noteworthy. Before the outbreak of COVID-19, Washington pressed hard on European capitals to ban Huawei G5 technologies in their markets. Under US pressure, China has been described as an 'aggressive strategic competitor' in NATO documents. But will this view be equally strongly supported by all allies now in the case where Beijing has provided considerable medical support to Europe? While China's communist leadership will not reconsider the country's long-term strategic goals, in the absence of a credible role for the US leadership in this global emergency, several European allies may be tempted to look more closely at Beijing and a

little less Washington, as they are absorbed. At present, it is difficult to assess how the global pandemic will affect the West's relationship with Russia. Much will depend on the extent to which Russia is affected by the disease and whether President Putin will be prepared to use the current political crisis management provision in Europe to signal his readiness for 'emergency cooperation' with some European countries. However, we should expect him to try to take advantage of the current political turmoil in the United States. For that to happen, we can expect Putin to stress the importance of lifting economic sanctions against Russia.

NATO military force capability. The military forces (and their families) are not immune to disease. Quarantine measures and an increasing number of infected military personnel can seriously jeopardize the planning, deployment and operation of forces, as well as logistical, supply and transport activities. The ongoing performance of key assets (eg special forces, command and control units, and missile forces) is vulnerable because they require specialized knowledge and training, which means that infected units cannot be easily replaced. The alliance has already begun to feel the effects of the pandemic. Norway has called for a major regional exercise (Cold Defender 2020) and another major 'European Defender' exercise aimed at demonstrating both NATO's firm resolve towards Russia and the US's ability to consolidate quickly the continent.

In the meantime, the U.S. European Command has released a list of other long-planned exercises that will be cancelled or postponed until the end of this year. On March 25, 2020, the Pentagon ordered all U.S. forces abroad to stay for 60 days; that is, they are not allowed to move in any direction. The British, German and Dutch decisions to withdraw the remaining forces from the NATO training mission in Iraq to redistribute them for internal services, may be followed by other NATO allies. It is also to be expected that other missions and operations abroad, such as NATO operations in Afghanistan, will have to deal with the postponement of troop rotation and withdrawal plans due to quarantine measures affecting both Afghan troops and security forces. Moreover, Germany, France and Italy have begun to rely on their military to set up medical facilities and provide transport in support of home hospitals.

NATO actions on the southern region. In recent years, NATO has viewed its southern borders primarily through the threat of terrorism and illegal migration. On a case-by-case basis, the Allies have decided to contribute to the stabilization of the countries of the Middle East and North Africa through security training and capacity-building programs. In the future, NATO allies' political readiness to deploy military forces and resources in the southern region may diminish. This is because, first and foremost, financial and military resources are likely to be limited, so national governments will face tough

political choices; and, secondly, the countries of the Middle East and North Africa may have to deal with an exponentially increasing number of COVID-19 infections. A worst-case scenario would certainly be an aggressive outbreak of coronavirus infections in countries such as Egypt, Algeria or one of the refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan or Syria. In such a scenario, European countries would most likely consider sound border control operations to prevent the massive influx of infected migrants into Europe's shores²¹.

As COVID-19 cases have spread across Europe, threatening the lives of 1 billion people in member states, NATO, as a collective defence mechanism, has maintained a low presence, perhaps due to the principle that each country has authority over its medical health care. Even when the WHO warned in mid-March that „Europe has now become the epicentre of the pandemic”, the supreme decision-making body, the North Atlantic Council (NAC), did not begin discussing the COVID-19 outbreak.

COVID-19 presents a new set of security challenges. The pandemic shocks open up new areas of vulnerability for the Euro-Atlantic family, many of which could be exploited by Russia and China through hybrid campaigns. Resistance to hybrid activity is essential to ensure states are prepared for all military challenges. NATO's 2015 strategy to combat hybrid warfare needs to be updated to include lessons learned on COVID-19 and the intensification of Russian and Chinese hybrid activity against NATO, the EU and their Member States. Priority must be given to building sufficient capacity on NATO's eastern flank to enable the most exposed states to withstand hybrid risks and threats²².

Adequate defence funding in a transformed post-COVID security environment is essential if NATO East Side members are to meet their Article 5 and non-Article 5 obligations and commitments. For this reason, the Wales Summit investment commitment Summit (DIP) should be updated to reflect the new global economic outlook. The agreed guidelines on the allocation of two per cent of GDP for defence are valid only in the context of projected economic growth. Increasing defence spending probably requires more capacity and consolidation. To avoid this scenario, all NATO allies should consider a commitment to increase defence spending in real terms, including during periods of negative economic growth. The enduring pressure on defence spending will certainly be felt throughout the Alliance. Central and Eastern European allies are likely to be even more affected. They will need significant investment in new NATO interoperable systems and platforms. These countries

²¹ *Koronawirus mieniajet plany uczenij SSZA i NATO: mien'sze uczestnikow, opieracyi — tolko na morie*, <<https://www.kurier.lt/koronavirus-menyayet-plan-y-uchenij-ssha-i-nato-menshe-uchastnikov-operacii-tolko-na-more/>> (30.11.2021).

²² *Ibidem*.

will have to simultaneously decommission the military equipment inherited and manufactured by the Soviets, which consumes a large part of their resources. NATO should give priority to strengthening the defence capabilities of its East Side member states. Given the funding gap, the only way forward is to share the task of capacity building. This would mean launching and carrying out joint multinational capacity-building projects within NATO, as well as the framework for permanent structured EU cooperation (provided they do not overlap). Better spending, therefore, means spending together and sharing capacity. Joint capacity-building projects should become a priority. This is particularly relevant concerning the continued military construction of the NATO presence (in the Baltic Sea) and the adapted presence (in the Black Sea), as agreed at the 2016 Warsaw Summit. This is an important component of NATO's enhanced deterrence and defence stance that would allow it to meet any challenge from the East and revengeful Russia in particular. Ideally, this would be done at the regional level to allow cooperation between the Baltic and the Black Sea allies.

The eastern flank of the Atlantic Alliance and the most vulnerable to Russian and Chinese subversive activities. China is trying to penetrate the Black Sea countries primarily through economic means, using foreign direct investment as the main tool to ensure long-term impact. The COVID-19 crisis will cause further complications, as it will open up new opportunities for the expansion and exploitation of the vulnerabilities of the Black Sea countries. Stronger deterrence would require an adaptation of the NATO Defense Planning Process, especially the capacity targets of the eastern flank members. The eastern military adaptation would be particularly useful in prioritizing future military acquisitions, given the limited financial resources of these countries and the enormous investments required to rearm their armed forces. Prioritizing deterrence in defence planning - while focusing on cost-sharing through joint capacity-building projects and joint defence investment - is the only possible path for NATO's eastern flank members in a post-COVID strategic context²³.

Defence reform among NATO's eastern members and NATO's valuable partners in Eastern Europe is an unfinished activity, with the best results yet to come. COVID-19 presents new and complex challenges for both allies and national security and can be seen as a perfect catalyst for change. NATO, no doubt, must try to bring about change, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, where defence institutions are still under-reformed and under-transformed. The rapid transformation of defence institutions will

²³ *NATO gotowitsia k dolgosrocznym posledstwijam pandemii COVID-19*, <<https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2020/05/12/7251384/>> (30.11.2021).

ensure that states are better prepared in a security environment aggravated by COVID-19.

Conclusions

The way, in which different actors (nations) organize their comprehensive approach and crisis response mechanisms to combat the COVID-19 crisis, should be carefully analyzed and studied, as there are gaps in the organization, implementation of interfaces and optimization of the crisis through mechanisms of response to combat these challenges. Crises provide an opportunity for deep, long-term and systematic learning, from combating COVID-19 to combating hybrid threats, conflicts and wars²⁴. The main lesson so far is that there is a close link between civilian efforts to combat the health crisis and the military's ability to support these efforts. NATO cannot shift its core responsibility in defending the Member States, but there are good reasons to further strengthen cooperation between civil society fighting a health crisis and military capabilities that support these civilian efforts.

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