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TOWARDS THE NATO BRUSSELS SUMMIT

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On the 11th and 12th of July the Summit of NATO Heads of State and Government will be held in Brussels. These types of gatherings are aimed at evaluating and providing strategic direction to the activities of the Alliance and enhancing partnerships. The meeting is generally followed by the publication of an official communiqué that states the main decisions taken and, hence, NATO's strategy for the coming years. The previous Summit took place in Warsaw in 2016 and saw the introduction of new policies and major initiatives. Among the most remarkable outcomes is the launch of the concept of projecting stability beyond NATO's borders and the embracing of a 360° approach which looks at all fronts and all sources of instability. Indeed, it was decided to deploy four battalions in the Baltic states and eastern Poland, the so-called 'Enhanced Forward Presence', as a response to Russia's seizure of Crimea in 2014; as well as to help funding Afghan security forces and also maintain troops on the territory for training activities. Moreover, in Warsaw the cooperation between NATO and the European Union (EU) was strengthened with the signature of a Joint Declaration which deepened their collaboration in seven areas of strategic priority. In addition, allies agreed to support the EU mission in the southern-central Mediterranean Sea, EUNAVFOR MED operation Sophia¹; such statement resulted in the launch in November 2016 of NATO operation Sea Guardian². Finally, the 2016 Summit restated NATO's commitment to a mixture of both conventional and nuclear forces for guaranteeing deterrence, while increasing resilience.

It is evident that the decisions taken during NATO Summits are of great relevance for the future defence posture of the Alliance; hence the Brussels Summit of this summer will be another milestone in the history of NATO. It is worth noting that the upcoming Summit will be held in the newly established headquarters of NATO in Brussels. The facility,

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¹ The mission is aimed at disrupting the business model of migrant smuggling.

² For more on Operation Sea Guardian, Alessandra Giada Dibenedetto “Implementing the Alliance Maritime Strategy in the Mediterranean: NATO's Operation Sea Guardian”, Research Paper No.134, December 2016, NATO Defense College, available at: <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1005>

however, already hosted a special meeting of the Heads of State and Government of allied countries in May of last year. The latter gathering was the occasion to welcome the incumbent American President Donald Trump and the Prime Minister of Montenegro (State that would have a few days after became the 29th NATO member) and reaffirm the Alliance's unity in dealing with common threats and maintaining peace. In particular, the meeting focused on NATO's role in the fight against terrorism, achieving a more equitable burden sharing within the Alliance (also given President Trump's pressure on the matter) and the further implementation of a dual-track approach towards an assertive Russia.

In order to draft the possible items on the Brussels Summit's agenda it is necessary to look at the previous bilateral and ministerial meetings that took place in the past months. NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, in fact, has had a busy schedule encountering the various Prime Ministers and Head of States for discussing the single engagement and contribution of each country to the Alliance, defining priorities and preparing for the Brussels Summit. To cite a few examples, in June Stoltenberg met the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and their conversation covered a broad set of matters such as NATO readiness force, the fight against terrorism and defence spending. During the same month the Secretary General paid an official visit to Italy where he met the recently appointed Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and the Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs; in such occasion they particularly focused on NATO's efforts to project stability and adapt to the threats emanating from the south. In May Stoltenberg had, among the others, two key appointments on his agenda: a trip to Paris and one to Washington. While in France, the dialogue with Macron was centered on the current challenges in nowadays unpredictable world, with particular attention to the cyber threat, and NATO's process of constant modernization. Worth of notice is the meeting at the White House between Secretary General and US President Trump, during which they dealt with the topic of achieving a fairer burden-sharing within the Alliance and discussed about Syria, Iran and Russia.

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Besides the briefly mentioned bilateral meetings, in view of the July Summit, the high-level events held in Brussels, especially since the beginning of the year, give a detailed overview of NATO's current priorities. Therefore, based on the decisions taken and the matters examined in these occasions (namely the NATO Chiefs of Defence gathering of January and the Defence Ministries meetings of February and June) what follows are the possible core elements on the table of the Brussels Summit.

Firstly, NATO has declared to be working on the biggest adaptation process the Alliance has undergone since the end of the Cold War. As the security threats and challenges menacing the stability of allies have developed and grown, the Alliance felt the necessity to adapt its response and whole structure. A clear example of this process is the establishment of two new commands, already announced and that will fully be implemented during the Summit. Norfolk, in Virginia (USA) will host a Joint Force Command for the Atlantic which will be responsible for ensuring that NATO can efficiently pursue the full spectrum of its activities in the northern Atlantic, and, in particular, helping protect the sea lines of communication between North America and Europe. While Ulm in Germany will be the base of the new Enabling Command that will be in charge of logistics, reinforcement and military mobility within Europe. Furthermore, NATO Defence Ministers decided to designate some additional land component commands in Europe for further improving coordination and rapid response on the territory and to set up a new Cyber Operations Center at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Power Europe (SHAPE), in Belgium, for increasing cyber defence³. Decisions on timelines and staff levels will apparently be taken during the Brussels Summit, occasion in which it is likely to expect more details on the new NATO commands.

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³ The cyber threat, in fact, has been a key element of NATO's agenda already since the Warsaw Summit, during which a cyber pledge was made aimed at enhancing cyber capabilities; now allies have agreed on a framework for the integration of sovereign cyber effects into Alliance operations.

Another key topic already discussed at high NATO level and that will in all likelihood be brought on the table in July is the fight against terrorism. Firstly, allies have declared that the activities of the Global Coalition to defeat ISIS will further shift from combat operations to stabilization efforts. Such developments are part of the broader project of projecting stability on all fronts, particularly on NATO's southern border. In fact, the Alliance is planning a new training mission, under the request of the Iraqi government and the Global Coalition, for helping Iraqi forces increasing their level of operative readiness, thanks to the establishment of military academies and the involvement of several hundred personnel. The goal is to support Iraqi forces in their fight against terrorism and prevent the re-emergence of ISIS. Indeed, NATO's objective in the medium-long term is to improve the time and ability of response to possible future crisis in the region through operative readiness, planning and exercises. In Afghanistan the Alliance will maintain Resolute Support mission and increase contributions to it, moreover NATO leaders will have to agree in July whether to extend funding the Afghan Security Forces to 2024. Worth of notice is also the intention to deliver a capacity building package to Tunisia and Jordan for enhancing stability in these countries and the areas nearby through helping improving border security. The outcomes of the Summit will unveil details in regard. Completing the framework of the project of projecting stability is the plan to declare fully operational the NATO Strategic Direction South Hub. Inaugurated last September, the center, located in JFC (Joint Force Command) Naples, through its holistic approach that enhances dialogue and the exchange of information between allies, partners and experts, is charged with monitoring the developments taking place in NATO's south and informing strategic leaders to anticipate and overcome possible challenges emerging from the area.

Moving to the eastern front, in Brussels the attention of NATO leaders will also certainly focus on the current Russian posture and the Alliance's response. From previous official statements and the ongoing NATO's stance, it is

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possible to correctly assume that allies will maintain a dual-track approach which keeps open both the dialogue⁴ and the operative readiness window. A novelty at this regard is the announcement made by Stoltenberg about the launch in July of a Readiness Initiative, which would complete and probably be integrated under the framework of the more structured NATO Readiness Plan⁵. Also called as the 'Four Thirties', the initiative, in an ambitious manner, foresees the operative readiness in 30 days of 30 mechanised battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 combat vessels by 2020.

Another topic part of the Brussels Summit's agenda will surely be the NATO-EU cooperation, aimed at strengthening the collaboration between the two organizations in many areas of common interest and security concern. From recent statements it appears that on the margins of the Summit a new Joint Declaration will be signed, which would follow the 2016 document⁶ undescribed by NATO Secretary General and the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission. It is possible to assume that the new document will update and reinforce the previous one also in view of the progresses made in the past two years, and focus on the core matters of military mobility, countering terrorism and cyber defence.

Last but not least, in Brussels NATO leaders will also cover the topic of the Open Door Policy and the progresses made by aspirant countries, as part of NATO's ongoing enlargement process. At this regard focus will be given on Georgia and Macedonia. The first has implemented important reforms aimed at strengthening Georgia's democracy and rule of law, which have led allies to confirm their commitment to Georgia's eventual membership to the Alliance. Georgia, in fact, will participate in the upcoming

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⁴ Through the meetings of the NATO-Russia Council.

⁵ The NATO Readiness Action Plan was agreed during the Wales Summit of 2014 and enhanced in the following Summit of Warsaw in 2016. For more information see: https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics_119353.htm

⁶ The 2016 NATO-EU Joint Declaration outlines seven areas of cooperation between the two organizations and the practical actions to be undertaken for enhancing strategic partnership and overall security, and avoiding a mere duplication of efforts. In December 2017 a total of 74 concrete actions were on the table for the efficient implementation of the Joint Declaration.

Summit. For what concerns Macedonia, the dispute over its name with Greece has been the impediment to its accession talks with NATO; following the agreement between the two Prime Ministers on the issue, allies are expected to take a decision over the opening of the membership process.

If the above described represent some of the items that will be discussed and part of the decisions that will probably be taken in Brussels this week, there are many knots that will need to be untied and many others that will likely remain unresolved. First on the list is the issue of budget and the commitment of NATO members to spend 2% of GDP on defence by 2024. Despite the positive trend of some allies on the matter⁷, it seems that many are quite far from reaching the objective set. Further complicating the picture is the pressure US President Trump has been putting on the allies not meeting the 2% threshold. As already mentioned, since his first approaches with NATO, Donald Trump has strongly insisted on the necessity of all member states to share the burden of defence expenditure more fairly. More recently, precisely last month, the US President sent letters to the leaders of some NATO allies expressing his frustration in noting that they have not increase their defence budget and, therefore, they are failing to meet their security obligations within the Alliance. Given the proximity of the Summit, the sharp words Trump expressed are of great importance as they preannounced the possible attitude the President is assuming in view of the event. Therefore, the position Trump will maintain in Brussels remains so far an incognita, especially if added to the fact that he has been calling into question the USA's role inside NATO. In spite of Secretary General remarks during his speech in London last month, where he strongly underlined the bond between Europe and North America, the US President's current commitment to NATO will be soon put into test, including the possibility of a withdrawal of American troops from the European territory. Adding fuel to the fire is Trump's planned meeting with Russian President Putin

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⁷ NATO has been experiencing four consecutive years of real increases in defence spending. Moreover, for 2018 it is expected an increase of 3.8%.

shortly after the Summit, the outcomes of such bilateral talks could further shake stability inside the Alliance.

A second topic that will surely be addressed in Brussels and that will test NATO cooperation with the EU is the one of military mobility⁸. The subject, in fact, has become a crucial feature of NATO-EU cooperation and will require a deep and coordinated approach in order to jointly achieve the goal of rapidly moving troops on the European territory. Thirdly, NATO will have to prove its ability to adapt to current challenges and continue the process of modernization for strengthening its deterrence and defence posture in view of being effectively able to project stability beyond its frontiers. Lastly, the Alliance will have to keep on coherently embracing a 360° approach⁹ which looks at all its borders and, most importantly, foresees different responses for diverse menaces coming from all possible fronts. At this regard, for instance, as Stoltenberg declared during his stay in Italy, NATO could think about playing an active role in Libya through training local forces, thus contributing to stabilizing the country, dealing with the current migration crisis and supporting allies and the UE that are fully engaged with the phenomenon. To conclude, the upcoming Summit will be a determining moment for restating and demonstrate the well-established solidity of the Alliance and its commitments.

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⁸ For more on the EU project of military mobility, see: Alessandra Giada Dibenedetto, “European Defence and the project of Military Mobility”, Ce.S.I. Focus Report, June 2018, available at: <https://www.cesi-italia.org/en/articoli/869/european-defence-and-the-project-of-military-mobility>

⁹ As opposed to the previous NATO strategic division between the eastern and southern front.