

NATO MILITARY COMMITTEE CONFERENCE, SIBIU, 2012: A MAJOR EVENT IN THE LIFE OF THE ALLIANCE

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The unfolding of the NATO Military Committee Conference in Sibiu, September 14-16, 2012 marked an important event in the life of the Alliance. The Committee is the highest decision-making forum within NATO and its decisions critically impact the latter's future. Romania hosted the conference based on a multiannual rotation schedule. Its designation as an organizer is actually an acknowledgment of its credibility as NATO member, as well as of its capacity to undertake such an endeavor. The aim of this article is to highlight the role of the Military Committee, as well as the commitments made by Romania as an Alliance member. Thus, this material actually bridges the gap in the coverage of this event at national and international level.

Key words: *Military Committee, NATO, security, military missions.*

As a NATO member state, Romania hosted events of importance to the Alliance's future development. For example: in 2004, the Informal Meeting of the Defense Ministers took place in Braşov, and in 2008, the NATO Summit was organized in Bucharest. In 2011, 14-16 September, the NATO Military Committee, the most important decision-making forum within the Alliance, held a conference in Sibiu. The agenda of the meeting included [1] topics of great interest and concern for the Alliance related to the global security situation, an analysis of the latest developments in North Africa and Middle East, the military endeavors

taken towards the implementation of the decisions made by the heads of state and government during the Chicago Summit unfolded in 2011, the Afghanistan mission, the military operations in West Balkans, the ongoing military operations, namely ISAF in Afghanistan and KFOR in the West Balkans, the status of NATO transformation and the structure review of the International General Staff.

The Conference was headed by the President of the NATO Military Committee, the Danish General Knud Bartels and attended by the Director of the International Military Staff (IMS), Lieutenant General Jurgen

Borneman (later replaced once his mandate was over by Christopher Harper, UK [2]), the commandants of NATO's two strategic commands, namely the Supreme Allied Command for Europe (SACEUR) represented by Admiral James Stavridis, and the Supreme Allied Command Transformation from Norfolk represented by both its acting commandant, General Stephane Abrial, and its future head (as of 24 September 2012), the French General Jean-Paul Palomeros, General John Allen, the Commandant of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), as well as by the heads of the General Staffs from the 28 NATO member states and by states' military representatives from Brussels.

The important role played by the NATO Military Committee in terms of the decisions made at the Alliances' level is derived from the following responsibilities:

- Assistance and counseling for the political-military structures of the Alliance (i.e. the North Atlantic Council and the Nuclear Planning Group);
- Information dissemination and counseling for the General Secretary and for the North-Atlantic Council (the most important political authority in NATO).

This extremely brief presentation of the MC's main responsibilities proves that the latter is actually the link between the political and military parts of the Alliance. In this context, we would like to emphasize that the President of the MC is also the main counselor of the Secretary General

and North-Atlantic Council, as well as the spokesperson of the military component of NATO.

As we have highlighted at the beginning of this article, by organizing this Conference, as well as previous NATO events Romania proved once again its important role as a member state. In this respect, we would like to underline the part played by of our country in the implementation of the decisions made by the Military Committee, all of which actually grants it credibility and a well defined place within NATO. Generally speaking, Romania participates to the whole spectrum of missions and operations of the Alliance by contributing personnel and military technology in accordance with its commitments made at international level. Since 1996, Romania has been part of NATO missions like the ones from Bosnia-Herzegovina (IFOR and KFOR), or later, in 2000 the KFOR mission from Kosovo. As a result, our country played and is still playing through its maneuver unit from SACEUR's Strategic Reserve, an important role in peace keeping in the West Balkans. To all of the above, there are also missions like the one of the air police in the Baltic countries, the participation into the Iraqi Freedom operation from Iraq, the NATO Training Missions for the Iraqi security forces. Moreover, worth reminding is Romania's participation with a frigate to the Active Endeavor Operation from the Mediterranean Sea (i.e. the UNIFIED PROTECTOR mission). One of the most important, efficient and long-lasting mission our country has been

part of is the NATO-led ISAF mission in Afghanistan started in 2002 and which, nowadays totals 1763 military. It is absolutely necessary to mention that Romanian troops are actually displaced in a highly volatile area (*i.e* Zabul) and that makes the militaries' mission even more challenging. In accordance with NATO's decision to completely transfer the security and governance responsibilities to the local Afghan authorities by the end of 2014, as of 2013 Romania will gradually diminish its contribution to this theater of operations so that, by the already established deadline the Romanian troops' mission is over. In this respect, the statement made by Knud Bartels, the President of the NATO Military Committee is relevant: *"For the next 27 months, we will continue to train and support the Afghan forces so that by the end of 2014 they will be able to ensure the security of their country. There is still a hard fight to undertake, and that will be a challenge and an originator of unavoidable regresses. However, as a result of the support provided, Afghanistan has made remarkable progress in its development as a country. The new NATO mission will not be an ISAF by a different name, but will only be focused on enabling the Afghan people to ensure security and thus take over this mission from NATO."* [3]

Upon analyzing the statement above, we can conclude that NATO continues to maintain a responsible attitude towards the closing of its ISAF mission and the future development of Afghanistan. By taking great endeavors at the cost of human lives

and not only, NATO has made a great contribution to the development of Afghanistan in accordance with the principles of democracy, freedom and human rights.

All of the above considered, we believe it is our duty to highlight the efficiency of the Romanian participation to the mission in Afghanistan as long as that resulted in the loss of human lives, as well as in financial and material efforts at a time when the whole world is confronted with the economic crisis. However, Romania has succeeded in overcoming the inherent difficulties and thus, has proved a trustworthy partner for the Alliance and for Afghanistan.

Concerning the Conference from Sibiu, there are several issues from the press release that are worth mentioning.

The talks among the 28 defense heads from NATO member states during the Military Committee Conference unfolded in Sibiu focused on the Strategic Plan for Afghanistan of the Alliance (NSPA) endorsed by the heads of states and government representatives at the Chicago Summit. The plan establishes the premises for NATO's presence in Afghanistan after its ISAF mission closure.

As agreed at Chicago, the initial planning for a new mission focused on training, counseling and support of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) is under way. The heads of the General Staffs from NATO member countries talked about the plan based on which NATO is to be further involved in Afghanistan

after 2014. Based on the information provided by this plan, the North-Atlantic Council is to make more detailed plans in this respect.

Admiral Jim Stavridis, the Commandant of the Supreme Allied Command for Europe in charge of NATO operations and General John Allen, commander of ISAF provided the framework for the conference's discussions by expressing their viewpoints. Thus, the heads of the General Staffs from NATO member states were informed that the Afghan armed forces are getting stronger and more confident by day and, hence, are on the right track to assume control. In a matter of weeks, the AFNS would reach 352.00 members and take over leadership as a result of their capability to ensure the security of three quarters of the Afghan population. At the moment of the conference that was a process unfolding in all provinces. Moreover, it was underlined that 80% of the insurgents' attacks would occur in areas where approximately 20% of the population lives as a result of the ISAF and ANSF operations [3].

All of the above clearly suggests that NATO will continue to play an active part in Afghanistan even after 2014, even though not covering the same range of missions as with ISAF. Thus, its main goals will be to ensure the prerequisites to living a normal life in this country, and to connect it to the set of fundamental values characteristic of contemporary age.

All the decisions made at Sibiu underline the important role played by the Military Committee within the overall framework of the

Alliance. Moreover, they inherently involve Romania as an important and responsible member of the Alliance that is capable to uphold its international commitments as a reliable member and partner of NATO.

SOURCES

[1] Observatorul Militar nr. 36, 12-18 Septembrie 2012

[2] <http://www.ziarelive.ro/stiri/generalul-christopher-harper-vitorul-sef-al-dgims.html>

[3] <http://www.agerpres.ro/media/index.php/comunicate/item/147406-Comunicat-de-pres-Conferinta-Comitetului-Militar-NatoSibiu.html>

[4] <http://www.ziaruldeiasi.ro/national-extern/sefii-armatelor-din-nato-s-au-intalnit-la-sibiu-ni8t77>

[5] <http://www.ziare.com/stiri/armata/reuniune-la-inalt-nivel-a-nato-la-sibiu-1189447>