

My kind of **NATO...**

Perceptions from Albania



Publication prepared by Centre for European and Security Affairs
INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY AND MEDIATION



Institute for Democracy and Mediation

MY KIND OF NATO:

Perceptions from Albania

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With the support of the NATO Public Diplomacy Division (PDD)

Published by the Institute for Democracy and Mediation,
Tirana, Albania with the support of NATO Public Diplomacy
Division

Tirana, September 2012

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1 | INTRODUCTION

In 63 years, since April 4th, 1949, when the Washington Treaty was signed by 12 nations, officially declaring creation of NATO, tremendous changes have taken place globally. They have influenced and shaped politics, economy, security, demography, even environment and the climate of our planet. NATO, as well, have got to change and adapt, following and sometimes ahead of these changes.

During the whole Cold War era, NATO's purpose was to provide security for its member states, threatened by the East, in a dramatic political-ideological confrontation. Democratic changes in Europe, during 90's called for a new NATO, fundamentally concerned about stabilizing and transforming Central and Eastern Europe, providing a basis for these countries to transform themselves, to throw off dictatorship of the past, and become prosperous and real part of the West.

With the Lisbon Summit (November 2010) another transformative era was initiated. The New Strategic Concept adopted there, is a clear statement of what NATO's purposes and goals are about. It laid the basis for transforming NATO into a 21st-century alliance to deal with 21st-century threats and issues. The Strategic Concept identifies three core tasks for NATO: Collective Defense, Crisis Management, and Cooperative Security. Whereas "Collective Defense" comes from the past, since its founding Treaty, with the assurance that NATO Allies will always assist each other against attack, "Crisis Management" is a new commitment of NATO in helping to manage the full range of crises – before, during, and after they occur - when that contributes to Euro-Atlantic security. Both, "Collective Defense" and "Crisis Management" cannot be complete without

“Cooperative Security”, which means that the Alliance will engage actively to enhance international security, through partnership with other nations and international organizations. It is by carrying out these three tasks, together and effectively that NATO will be able to continue safeguarding member states’ security and values, and fulfilling their shared goals.

NATO that was projected at the Lisbon Summit has two fundamental characteristics. First, it is an alliance that is focused on operations. Last year there were six NATO operations on three continents. Second, it is becoming a hub for global security. NATO is today a revitalized, strong military alliance that brings together not only 28 countries, but also 40 other partner countries in all regions of the globe: in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and the Gulf, Latin America, Central Asia and the Pacific. In one way or another, they are related to NATO; want to be part of the hub of security building that NATO is providing. In Afghanistan, in addition to 28 NATO members, 22 non-NATO countries, 50 in all, are helping the Afghans to secure their own future. 19 partners are dealing together with NATO on counterpiracy along the coast of Somalia. Even in Europe, in Kosovo, 8 non-NATO countries are providing troops alongside NATO troops, to ensure security in Kosovo. And lastly, in Libya, in addition to the NATO members that dedicated themselves to the operation, there were four Arab countries – a certain legitimizing part of the operation. So NATO has now become a forum for bringing together not just the 28 member states but other countries in an effort to create and enhance cooperative security. All these countries have come to recognize that NATO is a hub for building security, it is a forum for dialogue, a forum for bringing countries together for collective action. And the most remarkable, it looks that most of the skepticism and criticism of the past, about the claimed “withering” of NATO, or even the end of this Alliance, are considerably receding and losing argument. In the contrary, NATO remains and is being perceived largely as a vivid Alliance. It is as strong as ever, as active as ever due to its ability to modernize, to adapt e transform in accordance with the new developments and challenges. Even in these times of economic austerity, NATO invented and is being applying



the “Smart Defense”, which in essence consists in 3 core things: prioritization, specialization, cooperation, whereas the final aim of this, is keeping or building the adequate capabilities to enable NATO stay “fit for the purpose”, now and in the future. On the other hand, there are a number of countries that want to join NATO, which is another indication of NATO’s vitality and its importance. NATO has been the path for emergent democracies to move both toward Europe and toward a relationship with the United States.

Collective defense remains a fundamental core principle for NATO. But the Alliance is today more than a collective defense organization. It is also a cooperative security organization, based on the recognition that today security at home requires security abroad, that security requires not just safe borders for each of the 28 members, but safety and security for others outside as well. Threats now can come across borders and from anywhere and at any time, and NATO needs to be able to cooperate with other countries in order to deal with those threats. The 21st century threats are different. They can come atop ballistic missiles, perhaps armed with conventional, nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. They can come through cyberspace as new networks are taken down by countries who wish one ill. They can come through terrorism, etc.

Operation “Unified Protector”, in Libya, testified, and the Chicago Summit (May 2012) formalized, that NATO is an organization that is fit for purpose, ready to act, that can make a decision to act very rapidly, that can then sustain the unity of an alliance for a long period of time and bring in other countries to make sure that the maximum political legitimacy and the maximum military effect is achieved through a military operation, and that, in the end, it can succeed.

Considered as the Summit of continuity, in relation to Lisbon, Chicago Summit was at the same time, exceptional because, by addressing pressing problems of the day¹, it testified that NATO remains

1 Which were: Defense Capability Package, Deterrence and Defense Posture Review, Ballistic Missile Defense, Smart Defense, Afghanistan etc.

vibrant, relevant and ready for the purpose. It was the venue where the Allies came together, to decide how in an era of economic austerity, NATO is going to maintain the defense capabilities necessary to ensure that NATO tomorrow can do what NATO did in Afghanistan, Libya and in other parts of the world in years past. In addition they get together with partners to discuss and make sure that as many countries around the world as possible, will continue to want to be part of and partners of NATO, showcasing not only Alliance's partnerships, but most important – the strength of NATO as a hub for security.

NATO, in 63 years, has proven to be adaptable. It has proven itself to be enduring, and has proven itself to be an alliance that delivers. It delivers security for all. It has played a major role in guaranteeing peace in the Euro-Atlantic area for over sixty years. That was its purpose when it was created. It remains its purpose today. And it will remain its purpose for the predictable future. In serving its purpose, NATO should look outwards, beyond “the area” and beyond today's economic austerity, so it can stay ahead of the security challenges that tomorrow will bring. But NATO should look inwards as well, mostly concerned to gain the maximum support of its own public opinion. In that context, it is crucial for the Alliance to explain to its population the new emerging challenges and all necessary steps to be done.

Since becoming a member country in 2009, NATO agenda does not constitute in Albania a common debatable issue and therefore NATO' related major concerns of international importance are not brought into attention of its citizens. For that reason, IDM intended to share these issues of global importance with a specific target audience composed of representatives from academic community, media and civil society through a series of workshop activities in Albania's most important cities such as Shkodër, Durrës, Vlorë, Elbasan, Berat and finally Tirana.

The aim of this initiative was to raise awareness among this specific audience, enhance public debate and develop discussion. Therefore,



an interactive debate on NATO agenda and some of the main highlights and directions of the Alliance took place among a carefully selected audience to reflect their opinion on how they perceive NATO in general or how they would like it to be.

This report includes findings identified from a 9 month project that involved presentation workshops organized in six different universities in Albania's largest cities, combined with surveys carried out to collect the perceptions regarding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Accordingly, this study report highlights some of the most prominent reflections on NATO's current agenda and operations, how participants perceive the roles and functions of NATO and its continuous transformation, the relationship between Albania and NATO in general, as well as reciprocal benefits and costs of the Albania membership to NATO.

2 | METHODOLOGY & DESIGN

For the purpose of this study report, both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used to measure the perceptions of the targeted audience.

Six workshops took place in the period April-July 2012 in university and NGO centers in the following major cities of Albania: Elbasan, Durrës, Shkodër, Berat, Vlorë and Tirana. The purpose was to provide for some theoretical and practical knowledge on NATO's changing nature and challenges while at the same time to raise key questions, progressively enhance the debate among the participants and receive as much feedback as possible regarding their perception about NATO, its roles and missions in a security environment characterized by new threats and risks, as well as, more specifically, NATO – Albania relationship and the very complex process of the later in its objective to integrate in NATO as a full fledged member of it. Additionally, a survey was conducted alongside the workshops which sought to measure the knowledge foundation and perceptions of the participants regarding NATO and its position in the global security arena.

The overall sample of the participation and interviewees was 181 persons. From this sample, 71% were females and 29% were males. The majority, 69%, fall into the age range from 18 to 25, 15% from the age 26-35 and another 16% above 35 years old. According to the level of education, 75% of the participants either hold or are in the process of receiving a university degree, while the rest, 25%, had either acquired a MA or PhD degree. From the academia cycle, students made up the major participation rate of 65%, 14% were lecturers, researchers and university professors. The category of NGO



representatives represented 15% of the participants and the rest 6% of all participants were media representatives.

The limitations of the methods employed regard the mixed target group of the participants composed mostly of students (65%) and the other part (35%) of a more informed general public. Furthermore, the data collected from the survey do not necessarily correspond or link to the perceptions gathered during the discussions in the workshops.

The data collected from the surveys as well as the opinions expressed during the workshops are analyzed in details in the following sections in order to present the findings in a systematic way.

3 | MAIN FINDINGS

This study was important to understand the general perception on NATO amongst Albanian audience. Interesting variations were noticed from place to place, as regards both the general perception as well as specific issues that certain individuals or groups had concerning NATO and Albania's relations with it.

According to the majority of participants selected to take part in the presentations across the country, NATO is an organization with great global impact. This perception was further strengthened by the opinions expressed in the survey about NATO's geographic intervention in the international arena. Accordingly, for 64% of the respondents, NATO should have a global focus in addressing security threats from wherever they arise, compared to 21% that expressed the conviction that NATO should only focus on guaranteeing security within traditional Euro-Atlantic space.

The set of problems identified with NATO's continuous transformation, in its objective to effectively deal with the emerging security threats and adjusting its tactics and means to combat non-conventional adversaries, was duly raised and analyzed by the participants. In this regard, they shared their view that the frequent changes of the Strategic Concept of NATO show that this organization is in continuous transformation to respond to global security challenges (69% of the respondents) whereas for another part, its continuous transformation reveals also that security threats ask for a different dynamic and that security challenges are ever growing (24%).

From another viewpoint, some of the skeptical members of the audience draw the attention toward challenges that NATO faces in



its multilateral agreements and the need to better cooperate with third parties, while others were keener to show the legal and political framework where NATO operated. From the survey findings respondents' perception on which other international organization or partner should NATO cooperate more closely with, almost half or 47% of the participants pointed out that such international organization should be the United Nations, only 19% see European Union as a partner, and only 4% said Russia, whereas for 26% of the respondents all of the above, simultaneously, were equally important and pivotal to NATO's continuous existence.

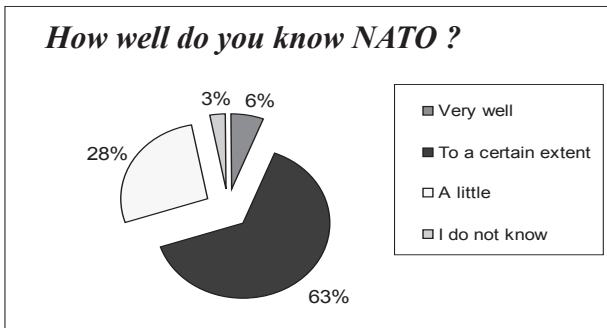
Especially important were the views of participants regarding NATO operations in the past and its potential involvement in today's rising threats (i.e. Syria). A shared perception, expressed during the discussions but also extracted from the survey opinion is that NATO's intervention in Kosovo was the most successful mission (66% of the respondents). Following this, part of the discussions was the legitimacy of interventions in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan, and Libya which interestingly reveals how much is digested and understood by public opinion in Albania, the role and functions of NATO, and its new strategic concept, especially after the last summits. The support for the interventions in these regions differed considerably from one auditor to the other, questioning the legitimacy of such interventions. The same divided opinions were shown from the survey findings. More than half, or 55% of the respondents, considered UN Security Council Resolutions allowing for NATO's military interventions, somewhat important, while less than half, 40% of the participants, qualified it as extremely important to the Organization's legal and political framework, as well as general principles of international law and diplomacy.

Interesting feedback was gained related to how they wanted NATO to be and function. Some of the answers received directly from the audience, especially comments regarding what participants identified as problems or things that need somehow to be addressed by NATO headquarters in the near future, are accordingly listed below.

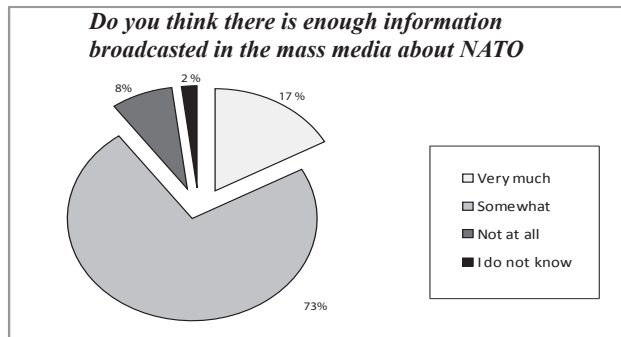
4 | SURVEY FINDINGS

- *Perceptions on the role and functions of NATO and its current metamorphosis.*

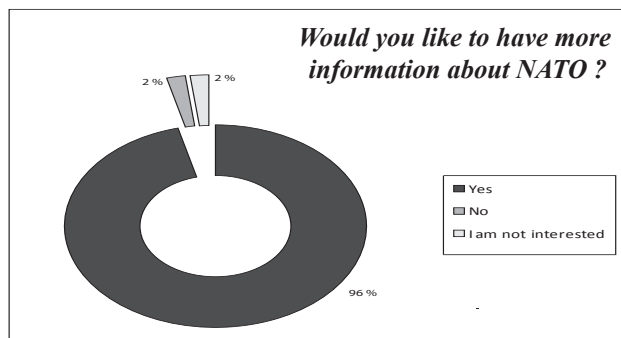
In the first few questions, the participants were asked on how much information they had about NATO and its security providing missions. Only 6% of the respondents said they knew a lot about NATO, while the majority of the respondents (65%) said that they had limited information about this Organization's role and function. 28% of the participants said they knew only a little and a small percentage (only 3%) admitted not to know anything.



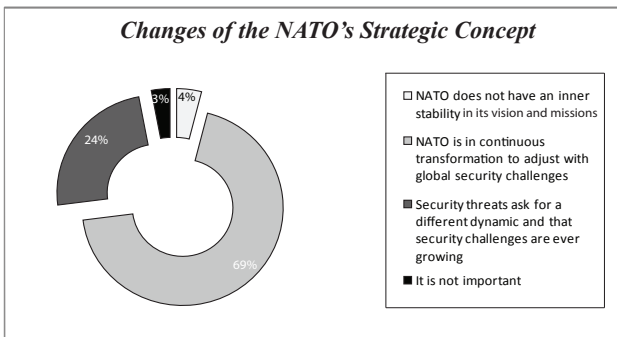
As these figures clearly indicate, there is much room for improvement in disseminating further information regarding NATO and its missions. Accordingly, when asked whether they thought enough information about NATO did already circulate in the mass media and other information outlets, the vast majority of the respondents 73%, answered that only a little information did, while only 17% said the information was plentiful. Additionally, 8% of the participants were not aware of such information.



These figures show that more needs to be done through mass media sources in order to make sure that enough information reaches common audience regarding NATO. It is more eminent given the particular Albanian public interest on NATO's objectives, roles and missions and current operations conducted. In this regard, when asked if they would prefer to have more information about NATO and its activities, 96% of them directly confirmed that they would want to see much more of NATO public relations in action as reflected in the information transmitted by television and other media outlets, while only 2% said the opposite, and only another 2% expressed no interest. These absolute figures, further confirm our aforementioned point that more coverage regarding NATO and its operations need to be elaborated and properly distributed so that people get a better understanding of NATO's role in today's globalized world.

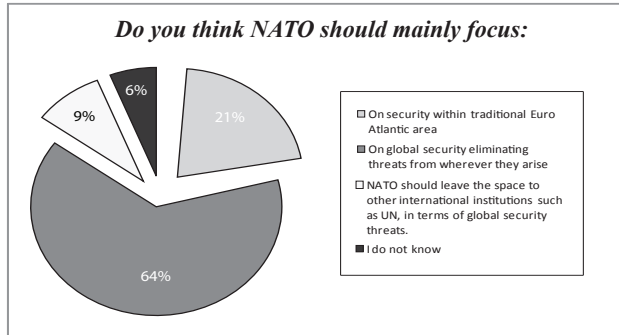


In terms of their general knowledge about NATO's roles and missions, the participants were also asked on their opinion about frequent changes of the Strategic Concept of NATO. The vast majority, 69%, clearly backed the view that this shows that NATO is in continuous transformation to respond to global security challenges. Furthermore, according to 24% of them, this reveals also that security threats ask for a different dynamic and that security challenges are ever growing. Only 4% of the participants considered this as an indicator that NATO does not have an inner stability in its vision and missions. The transformative nature of NATO to resist post-Cold War threats and to adjust with non-conventional war threats is duly noted by the participants and properly understood as our results amply testify.

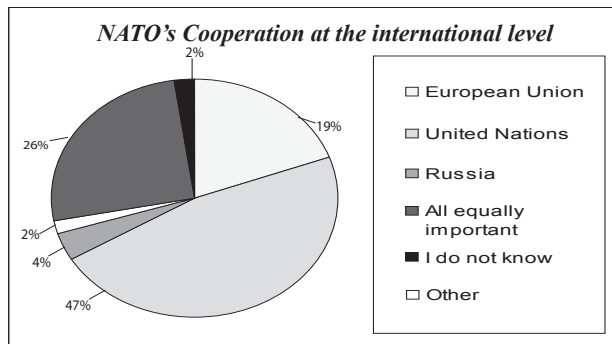


This perception was further strengthened by the participants when they were asked to express their opinion on NATO's geographic intervention in the international arena. The majority of the respondents, 64%, said that NATO should be focused on global security confronting security threats from wherever they arise. Only a small part of the respondents (21%) answered that NATO should only focus on guaranteeing security within traditional Euro-Atlantic space, and a small minority of 9% shared the conviction that NATO should actually withdraw from dealing with such security threats and leave other international organizations instead to engage with them. Increasingly involvement of NATO in global security issues, declared explicitly in its New Strategic Concept, is being perceived by

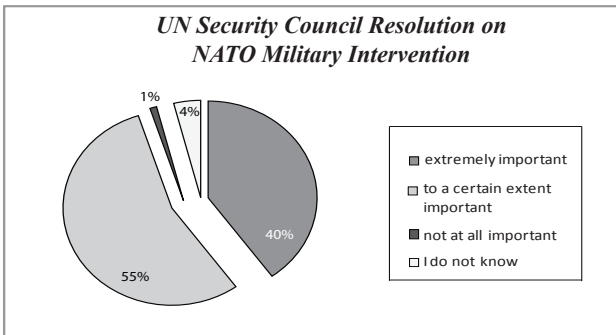
many of participants in our study, as an indication of NATO expanding interest and capacity to deal with new challenges in a more globalized and interdependent world, in conjunction with increasing willingness of some other “out of the area” countries, even in other continents, to cooperate and align their efforts in their struggle for a more secure world.



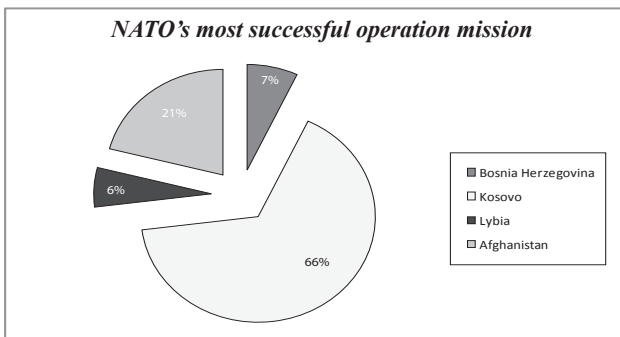
In trying to capture respondents' perception on which other international organization or partner should NATO cooperate more closely with, almost half, or 47% of the participants, pointed out that such international organization should be the United Nations, only 19% see European Union as a partner, and only 4% said Russia. For 26% of the respondents all of the above partners, simultaneously, were equally important and pivotal for NATO to succeed in its function as a major security provider.



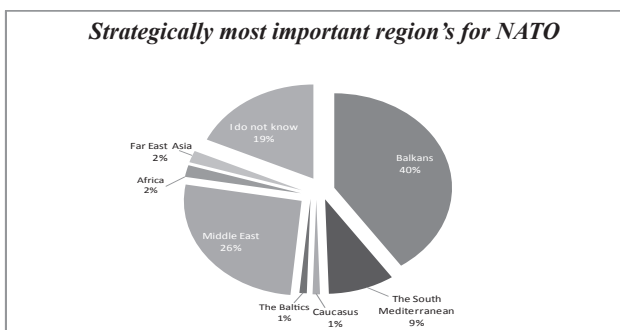
Even though UN was considered as the most important partner for NATO, when asked about UN Security Council Resolutions allowing for NATO's international military interventions, more than half, or 55% of the respondents, considered it somewhat important. Less than half, 40% of the participants qualified it as extremely important to the Organization's legal and political framework, as well as general principles of international law and diplomacy. A minor part, only 1%, said this was not important at all. It is interesting to observe the predominance of the view shared by the ultimate majority of respondents that the legitimacy deriving from the explicit authorization of the UN Security Council is considered either highly or to a certain extent important for NATO successful conduct of operations.



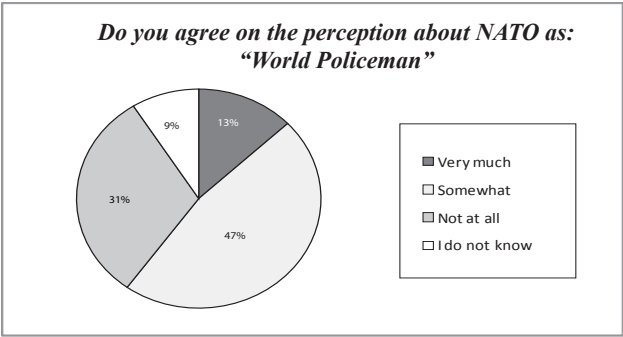
More specifically on the issue of military intervention, the participants were asked for their opinion on the most successful NATO operations/missions. The majority, or 66% of them, valued NATO's intervention in Kosovo to prevent Milosevic's regime ethnic cleansing as the most successful operation. Afghanistan came second with 21%, valuing particularly the legitimacy of the intervention which received support from majority of international community, including skeptical NATO partners, such as Russian Federation. Then, Bosnia-Herzegovina with 7%, and lastly Libya with only 6%, were positioned respectively in the third and fourth places. Kosovo choice may be somewhat expected, given the proximity and traditional connections on both sides of the border, in addition of the Albania's population support on the humanitarian relief and life saving efforts of NATO intervention against Milosevic's regime ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.



In this context, likewise perceptions maybe observed when asked about which regions they perceived as being the most important for NATO, based on geopolitical considerations. 40% of the respondents considered the Balkans as the most important, to be immediately followed by Middle East with 26% of the respondents, the Southern Mediterranean Region with 9%, Africa with 3%, Far East Asia with 2% and Caucasus and Baltic Region in the end with 1% for each respectively. Hence, since being part of the Balkan regions, most significance was attached to what is perceived closer to home, but also because NATO operations in the Balkan neighborhood (be it Kosovo or Bosnia-Herzegovina) have often been perceived as the most important ones in the Alliance's history.



Following NATO’s involvement in different operations, the participants were also asked if they perceived NATO as a ‘World Policeman’. The majority of the respondents, 47%, answered “somewhat”, while 31% said categorically “no”. Only 13% expressed an affirmative opinion. From the respondents, 9% decided not to express an opinion on the matter. The answers show that the majority of respondents do not think of NATO as a global policeman, referring to the pejorative connotation that this label bears. Mostly, it is being viewed as a positive transformative force that guarantees peace and security, rather than global policeman that enforces its own code of rules and conduct.



5 | WORKSHOP FINDINGS

- *Perceptions on NATO's current focus and operations*

Measuring the perception that participants have about NATO's current focus and operations has been one of the primary goals of these workshops, together with the informing part which is well enshrined during the presentations. Several common threads, as well as differences, were noted in perception from one location to another, which allows for some tentative findings and conclusions. It is interesting that what was identified as a problem in one place was not particularly considered as such in the other, while also the solutions offered/ suggested differed from place to place. Quite on the same lines, differed the perception of "what NATO is and symbolizes" for the participants, what are its main challenges in the ever interconnected world and emerging security threats and what could Albania offer to NATO and vice-versa.

One of the issues brought about from the Elbasan University audience was terrorism, which needs to be continuously encountered with a combination of forces amongst NATO and its allies, including minor ones, such as Albania, whose intelligence services, in addition of its operational troops, regardless of the size, could add value in NATO operations. A couple of participants shared the view that our intelligence services have already been successful in providing NATO with enough information regarding potential sources of terrorism financing in and from Albania.

Some of the main criticism for NATO's role in international intervention came from Durrës audience, which was the most mixed one in terms of representation. Members of civil society, researchers, academic staff and students offered some valuable, albeit critical

view on some of the NATO operations. Some members of the audience criticized the intervention in Libya based on the analyses that since Khadafy's regime repression was continuing for decades, why NATO intervened only now. They also questioned the legal and political basis of such intervention, based on the premises of international law and lack of an expressed Security Council resolution¹. For one of the respondents, given "the strange timing" and the fact that Khadafy was given reception across European countries chancelleries only a few months before his demise, NATO operation in Libya was a bit questionable, even doubtful. Skepticism on that operation was expressed by at least some of the participants in Durres, by far the most critical venue on NATO operations that was encountered during all the workshops' series.

Skepticism, even criticism was addressed for the NATO Mission in Afghanistan as well, where one of the participants expressed the opinion that it depends on how you measure success there and it looks like present situation there, cannot really be called a success story. Although NATO new strategy, as agreed in the latest Chicago Summit of May 18-21, 2012, called for a full withdrawal until 2014, providing that Afghan National Security Force is fully operational, equipped, trained adequately capable to take over by this deadline, the major part of the audience was skeptic that situation is evolving in the right direction and that things were better now than before. Yet, the audience was overwhelmingly supportive of NATO's intervention in Kosovo where the general perception was that it was done to prevent ethnic cleansing and other war related atrocities, thus considering it a NATO humanitarian intervention, complying with new metamorphosis of international public law. Their support seemed to be particularly motivated by the fact that the absolute majority of Kosovo inhabitants are ethnically Albanian and NATO in this sense has been hailed as savior of the other half of the nation.

2 Actually, in this case, the UN Security Council, on 17th March, 2011, issued Resolution Nr.1973 authorizing any action to protect the civilian population in Libya, which allowed NATO to start the Operation "Unified Protector", 5 days later, on March 22nd.

While in Vlora, the audience was much in support of the interventions in Libya and Afghanistan. Quite surprisingly, even though they accepted the necessity of intervention in Kosovo, they were somewhat skeptical in regard to the fact that lacking an explicit mandate from UN Security Council, NATO intervention there, was followed by some questions about the international law and its provisions in such cases. The discussion turned more legal in Vlora than in other locations, probably due to the fact that the majority of discussants were professors or students of law, thus deliberately stressing the legal framework where NATO operates and how that impacts the Alliance's activities.

In Berat, special attention was given to Russia- NATO relations in the debate the audience members were having with the panelists. According to the perception of a couple of participants, for example, the problem that NATO has with Russia is the fact that Russia remains a Great Nuclear and Military Power. While others shared the view, that although Russian Federation cannot be called a military superpower right now, it has regained a lot of economic status since its mid-nineties decline, following the end of Cold War. This has allowed Russia to remain aloof of any potential alliance with NATO, since it considers itself a full Great Power on its own. This view is also grounded on traditional power games and spheres of influence that Russia has positioned itself as viewed from a geopolitical and geostrategic viewpoint.

The biggest problem in NATO-Russia relationship was best put in the words of one of the participants who said that dominance in global area and sharing of spheres of influence were the biggest impediments. Another one pointed out that Russia and China are two strong regional powers with global reach which have to be approached as strategic partners of NATO, especially Russia based on proximity factor. Another participant from the audience noted the continuous tensions between NATO and Russia in the Balkans, particularly concerning Kosovo, based on the traditional Russian strategic relationship with Serbia, a tension which in June 1999, right after NATO intervention in Kosovo, went close to a clash with Rus-

sian troops in their attempt to control Pristina airport. Furthermore, Serbian recent President Nikolic's statement regarding Serbia's refusal to even consider joining NATO in an immediate future, further testify to this inherent tension. Another participant expressed the view that it is enough to see how great is Russian space and population, to understand how important its own security has historically been and still is. A Russian main drive in its strenuous relationship to NATO is largely determined by its own security perimeter and NATO has to take that into consideration in every potential cooperation framework aiming to include Russia.

As for geographical limits of NATO, members of the Berat audience shared the view that a global presence of NATO would inevitably lead to NATO's growing authoritarianism, meaning NATO's hegemony over various aspects of security and power distribution that now is controlled by major states. One of the participants said that a power balance is needed to set the equilibrium straight. A balance of power is necessary to avoid the rising of a hegemonic power, which in this case, instead of a state in the traditional sense, could be NATO itself.

A common shared perception in all audiences we had was that NATO's role and functions have changed after the fall of Iron Curtain in order to adjust to more non-conventional/not-traditional threats. This was especially accelerated and come to the fore after September 11, 2001 and the terrorist attacks in New York City, which caused the intervention in Afghanistan. Also the latest Arab Spring and NATO's intervention in Libya, made most of the participants believe that potential interventions in Syria and Iran under the umbrella of NATO were not excluded.

- *Albania and NATO*

Regarding the mutual benefits of Albania from NATO on one hand and NATO from Albania on the other, a shared opinion is that Albania has benefited security, which translates into stability and a clear message of security given to the multinational companies and other international investors for new opportunities to invest in Albania.

Another finding is that Albanians are bettering their chances for a faster process in EU integration, and although there is not necessarily a direct connection and causative relation in these integration steps from NATO to EU, many respondents identified that NATO can provide advantages and serve as a trampoline for EU Integration. Nevertheless, this was not a commonly shared view, since in at least one of the audiences (Berat) some participants objected the automatic passing from one integration process to the other. As one of them succinctly put it, in the case of the Albania accession to NATO, the geostrategic and geopolitical interests overcome Albania's lack of reforms and the Powers turned a blind eye to the multitude of problems that Albania faces, while European Union integration is directly related to Albania's fulfillment of the 'home works' implying the structural reforms that need to be taken in accordance with Copenhagen criteria, in order to be qualified as a potential future member.

In addition, some students from Tirana audience identified the security features as influenced by and evolving in accordance with perceived, potential threats and risks of the future. Also, they noted that democratization of Albania would profit a great lot by being tied up to the member countries of NATO which are all liberal democracies that greatly respect human rights, rule of law and independence of institutions, while creating the right and secure environment for investors.

As for benefits of NATO from Albania, a similar shared conviction was that NATO expands its security area by incorporating Albania as a member country, plus Albania is important from a geo-political and geo-strategic point of view, based on its geographical position in the midst of Balkans. In addition, as most of respondents easily agreed, NATO benefits from adding Albanian troops to its multinational force in NATO-led operations, being them "Article 5", or "Non-Article 5" ones, as well as in missions mandate by the UN. In this context, at least some of the participants were outright skeptical, expressing an opposite view. One of them from Berat audience said that it is not that NATO has gained anything substantial in

terms of human resources from Albania joining it. Most of NATO's interests in incorporating Albania actually lay in its territory and the geo-strategic position that Albania has and which bears considerably significance for the Alliance. Whereas one participant in Shkodra finds some cost-sharing motives in the NATO decision to go ahead with Albania accession ahead of "scheduled time", considering as such the annual financial contribution of Albania in the NATO Common Fund.

It is commonly accepted that Albania has gained in exchange more security and stability, combined with more credibility in the international community, as well as increasing opportunities (at least in potency) to attract foreign investments, since it is now considered a safer country to invest. In addition, one participant said that if it was not for NATO, Kosovo would have still been an occupied territory. According to him, it was the strong commitment of the US and UK leadership, supported by some other NATO countries' leaders, which stopped violence in Kosovo and ethnic cleansing there, providing for Kosovo building its own governing institutions and paving the way for an independent and democratic state of Kosovo after a century of struggle for primary individual and collective rights. Thus, as one of the members of the audience summed it up, both parties seemed to have gained from such a fruitful cooperation.

6 | CONCLUSIONS: *“MY KIND OF NATO”*

One of the primary and most important rationale for this project was to measure how NATO is thought to be, or better yet, should be, in the perception of the audience members and it was important to draw prescriptive inferences regarding the current and future status of this Organization.

Generally speaking, the audience perceived NATO to have played a great role in the global arena determining to a large extent also the international relations of Albania, as well as its inner developments. Regarding this last part, it is important to mention the impact and role NATO is perceived to have in Albanian state-building and institutional reform, especially the armed forces, police and judicial reforms that have greatly impacted rule of law and Albanian overall security.

The findings are salient in light of their originality since it is a first time, in our knowledge, such a study to be undertaken, aiming to measure public opinion and its awareness regarding NATO in one of the newest member countries. The respondents share the view that there is an integral, albeit symbolic relationship between NATO and EU integration although not a direct one, which is based particularly in the fact that both are perceived as genuine normative powers that seek to integrate Albania and provide a stronger impetus in improving democratization and enhancing rule of law.

Most of the participants also agreed that international law had lots of loopholes and on the other hand, there were a lot of overlapping functions amongst some international organizations (such as United Nations), which prevented or delayed NATO from successful (humanitarian) interventions in some cases. While, on the other hand,

eroded or put into jeopardy the overall legitimacy of NATO in some countries/ areas and people who often have viewed its operations with skepticism and sometimes, approach them with hostility.

In the overwhelming opinion of our respondents, when asked on “how they wanted NATO to be” resided conviction that greater openness, cooperation and joint efforts of NATO with similar international and regional organizations, state, non-state and other transnational actors, would make NATO a more powerful and righteous security actor, and most importantly, more acceptable as such by a larger international community.

On the overall participants’ perception, there is a lot of faith in the future of NATO and its transformative capacity and role in an era where the challenges are growing in their versatility, frequency and impact to our societies. They need to be confronted with new, non-conventional thinking and comprehensive measures to succeed. As such, it was noted that NATO’s role was not perceived as a global policeman in its pejorative meaning about an organization that imposes its hegemony without regard to international law practices. Instead, it was mostly viewed as an organization that functions in tandem (but should do it better in the future) with other partners, be them states or other international organization, including those close at home, such as European Union institutions, in order to guarantee peace, security and prosperity for international community.