

Youth Forum 'NATO in 2020: What Lies Ahead?'

From April 1st through April 3rd 2009 I had the privilege to participate together with 350 international students and young professionals from 57 different countries in the Youth Forum 'NATO in 2020: What Lies Ahead?' The Forum preceded the NATO Summit that took place in Strasbourg/Kehl to celebrate NATO's 60th anniversary and discuss the future of the Transatlantic Alliance.



Outgoing NATO Secretary-General de Hoop Scheffer emphasised that history's most successful military alliance remained a pivotal instrument for international security and stability. Shortly before NATO's official 60th birthday Jamie Shea referred to Michel Montigny¹ in an effort to illustrate that NATO is an attractive and ever relevant organization that is increasingly occupied with international security challenges beyond the Alliance's traditional geographical boundaries. NATO's Director of Policy Planning echoed statements similar to those issued by the United States' president that synergy between the NATO and the European Union is crucial to strengthen the Alliance and increase its ability to adequately address challenges to international security in the 21st century.



The process of globalization and increased international interconnectivity has generated a situation wherein somebody's problem can rapidly become everyone's problem. As is illustrated by the current financial-economic crisis, challenges to the international economy are not isolated but may potentially have serious repercussions on the geopolitical level as well. Given the current critical economic situation, member states are

both less willing and less able to organize the appropriate funding for what is required to collectively address current and estimated future challenges to international security.

Although this global awareness has culminated in the establishment of global partnerships between the Atlantic Alliance and non-NATO member countries such as Australia, New Zealand and South Korea, it was once more emphasised that the Atlantic Alliance should not be perceived as a global policeman. Elaborating on the comprehensive approach, it was stated that the North Atlantic Treaty Association should strengthen its civilian component, a component that is as important as its military counterpart and may not only be important for success in Afghanistan alone. The process of globalization has transformed non-governmental organizations into entities that increasingly intervene on the international political level with suggestions on how to improve critical situations around the globe that seriously affect international security and stability.

¹ Montigny reportedly once stated on marriage that: "Those who are out want to get in and those who are in want to get out."

Environmental pressures seem to have replaced the potential threat of a nuclear winter that remained dominant throughout the Cold War. As the global climate continues to change and global consumption levels of non-renewable natural resources continue to increase, it seems



only a matter of time before NATO will intervene in order to enforce environmental-ecological regulations that will prove necessary to address this issue. According to Edward Lucas, climatological changes, energy security, and challenges to cyber space security, force NATO to continue its eastward expansion and to establish and maintain an intensive dialogue with Russia, China and rising powers like India, Brazil and South Africa.

The interconnectivity of challenges that is caused by the process of globalization was once more emphasised by American president Barack H. Obama in a speech during A Town Hall in the Rhenus Sport Stadium in Strasbourg before a large crowd of predominantly international students that took place on April 3rd. After hearing one of the most inspiring statesmen of our times reemphasising his election message of change and responsibility, the interesting and inspiring event was concluded and soon followed by the official celebration of the 60th anniversary of history's most successful military alliance.

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