

Meeting: 'NATO Enlargement: The Next Steps'

On 27 June the Netherlands Atlantic Association organised a lecture by Mr. Gabriele Cascone, from the Political Affairs and Security Policy Division of NATO. Dr. Peter van Ham, head of the Global Governance Programme at the Clingendael Institute in The Hague, was the co-speaker. The theme of the meeting was NATO enlargement, focusing on the future of the enlargement process. The lecture was held in the Press Centre 'Nieuwspoord' in The Hague and led by Mr. Piet Bukman, Chairman of the Netherlands Atlantic Association.

Enlargement is one of the main issues on the current NATO agenda. The borders of NATO are shifting, and the main concern is whether NATO will continue to function properly as more countries join the alliance. Mr. Cascone described the present situation regarding enlargement. He said that according to Article 10 of the 1949 Washington Treaty, any European country that can 'further the principles' of NATO and can make a contribution to the security of the North Atlantic area could be invited to join the alliance. However, countries can join only if they fulfil a number of conditions.

New NATO Members

To deepen the relationship between NATO and other countries, a mechanism called the Membership Action Plan (MAP) was approved by the alliance members in 1999. Currently, Action Plans are being implemented in three countries: Macedonia, Albania, and Croatia. In order to join NATO, these countries have to make progress on political and economic reform, the reform of the military, the allocation of sufficient military resources, and on legal reform. Bringing the armed forces under full democratic control and commitment to the rule of law and human rights are the areas of special attention. All three MAP countries have made significant progress towards these goals, but there is still work to be done. Apart from these three countries, Ukraine and Georgia have also indicated their willingness to become part of the integration process. The United States has already pledged support to the future integration of these two Eastern European states. Mr. Cascone also referred to a number of Western Balkan states. He stated that the question is not whether, but when, these states will join the alliance. Co-operation with NATO is important to secure stability in the Balkans. No concrete steps towards membership have yet been taken with Georgia and Ukraine, nor with the Balkan countries. Both for MAP members as well as for other interested countries, the road to NATO membership is defined by performance. No specific dates are being set.

NATO Partnerships

Dr. Peter van Ham focused on NATO partnerships as an alternative to NATO membership. NATO co-operates on various levels with non-member states in different forms of partnership, promoting political dialogue and co-operation in a wide range of areas. NATO, together with its partner countries, aims at increasing security and stability within and beyond the Euro-Atlantic community. An example of such a partnership is the Mediterranean Dialogue. This partnership was initiated by the alliance in 1994 to contribute to stability and security in the region and also to dispel misconceptions about NATO's policies towards North Africa and the Middle East. Beyond the Euro-Atlantic community contacts and exchanges take place with a number of countries, referred to by NATO as 'contact countries', which have indicated their wish to establish a dialogue with the alliance. Regular contacts at all levels are being developed with Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. China has also shown interest in establishing a dialogue with NATO. Mr. Van Ham warned, however, that these partnerships decrease the value of full NATO membership. Mr. Cascone did not agree. According to him, there is a clear distinction. NATO partners participate in activities and they deliver assistance to missions, but they have no influence on decision-making.

Conclusion

Both speakers emphasised that the enlargement of NATO is a complicated process that completely depends on the progress made in the countries concerned. Action plans or partnerships do not by definition lead to membership in the alliance. However, both through membership and partnership, NATO continues to contribute to peace and stability far beyond its region.

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