



Georgia's Expectations from the upcoming NATO Vilnius Summit

Russia's war against Ukraine has posed a direct challenge to the rules-based world order. The war made it clear that Ukraine, as one of the leading countries of the Eastern European Partnership (EaP), was being punished for its consistent European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Russian aggression has demonstrated that even Eastern European NATO member states cannot feel safe unless the eastern flank is strengthened substantially.

Nowadays, when the international community is looking forward to the upcoming NATO summit (to take place in Vilnius in July) it is crucially important that the summit sends a clear message to the world: NATO is as strong as ever and no external aggression can put under any question the security of its member states. NATO Vilnius Summit will definitely welcome Finland (and possibly Sweden too) as a new member.

It is also expected that the upcoming Vilnius Summit will announce the further strengthening of NATO's eastern flank, particularly, by increasing conventional armaments and military personnel for multinational brigades in the Baltic states, Poland and Romania. Hopefully, the Summit declaration will also focus on further strengthening of the security measures on the Black Sea and take specific steps with the involvement of NATO's partner Black Sea littoral countries, too.

Another very important issue is a clear and firm military support and humanitarian aid to Ukraine for fighting more effectively the ongoing Russian aggression. In addition to this assistance, it is necessary to declare NATO's clear political support to this country and to outline a roadmap for the accession. The most relevant way for that would be a Membership Action Plan (MAP), which was not granted at 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit.

At the same time, the Alliance should not forget about Georgia, which has been knocking on NATO's door for a long time and suffered heavily for its European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The past decades have shown that Georgia, which successfully modernized its armed forces in accordance with NATO standards, has established itself as a reliable partner of the West, contributing to different international missions, be it Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, etc.

Apart from contributing to the above-mentioned missions, it is quite obvious that Georgia has been meeting most of the NATO standards and even outperforming some NATO members in certain areas. Under these circumstances it is safe to say that granting the MAP to Georgia has become a political issue for some NATO member states. This state of affairs understandably causes frustration in Georgian society that has regarded the alliance as the only possible guarantor of security and territorial integrity.

However, the outbreak of the war in Ukraine created a window opportunity for Georgia, as the EU is trying to diversify energy sources and thus decrease its dependency on Russian hydrocarbons. Under these circumstances the establishment of a new corridor for the Caspian resources through Georgia should strengthen its role as a reliable transit country. That implies developing even closer ties with the West by making itself a valuable partner whose independence and security matters for international community.

The war has already sped up the process of the EU accession for Georgia. Now the Vilnius summit is going to demonstrate whether it has affected the NATO accession process too. The alliance has more than a few reasons for granting Georgia the MAP. It is not only about strengthening its positions in the Black Sea, but also establishing itself in the South Caucasus where Georgia is the only country committed to the pro-Western course and where Russia still enjoys a huge influence due to its military presence.

Undoubtedly, the recent political developments in Georgia have casted some shadow of doubt over its democratic future with some uneasy questions asked about the certain statements and actions of its authorities. All that said, we believe that in its decision-making process the alliance should take into account not the above-mentioned controversies but the fact that despite all challenges Georgian people has been stayed loyal to its NATO aspirations (according to the recent polls, 75-80% of the population supports Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration). It also has to be mentioned that NATO integration is one of the main foreign policy priorities of Georgia supported by the Constitution of the country, not to be undermined or revised by any government.

We also hope that the alliance leaders realize that only granting the MAP does not imply security guarantees for Georgia (as it does not equal to membership), especially in face of the ongoing Russian aggression. The most appropriate thing to do would be to accompany the MAP with some tangible presence of NATO in the country that could serve as a deterrence against any possible attack or provocation.

There is also a high expectation in Georgian society that the Alliance will take into account the lessons from the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit and sends a proper signal of support to both Ukraine and Georgia. It would also be a strong message to Russia that no aggression can stand in the way of NATO enlargement and the sovereign right of independent countries to shape their fate and chose their partners.

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