



An Opinion on NATO's 70th Anniversary

NATO MUST HAVE AN 'OUTREACH POLICY' TO ENGAGE CITIZENS IN ALLIED AND PARTNER NATIONS

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We are living in a new era of plural and open societies which demand greater protection from national authorities against new risks, threats and security challenges. Our democratic states have to address them under the auspices of national laws and other treaties and political commitments, agreed by the international organizations to which they belong.

In this context, NATO is an international organization not sufficiently known among our citizens. Despite important academic efforts made at national level, the new generations, especially the "millennials", are not fully aware that NATO is a political and military alliance based on democratic values, namely democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, according to the Washington Treaty, whose 70th Anniversary we celebrate on 4 April, where decisions must be reached by consensus among all 29 states (30 very soon). Moreover, a not negligible percentage of citizens have a negative public perception of NATO policies.

In 70 years of history, NATO has responded to different changes with success: the Cold War, the post-Cold War, September 11th, etc. Particularly, during the last decades, NATO has forged an impressive network of partnerships with partner countries to consult on security issues, to build trust and confidence, and to prevent and manage conflicts, when and where it was agreed by the North Atlantic Council.

The time is now ripe to develop a "comprehensive approach" at inter-governmental level. In my opinion, there is a need to invest in a common "citizen's security culture", to which NATO can contribute in order to count on civil society organizations (CSOs) and activists' efforts, "willing and able" to improve NATO's image among our citizens, with full respect to different cultures and viewpoints.

NATO should not "lead", but the Alliance's role "in support of" this goal is essential. Promoting NATO's common understanding through new CSOs partnerships could reach out more citizens, changing the perspective of the new generations, who are unaware of what NATO has achieved for so many decades and continues to adapt.

NATO's Civil Society Advisory Panel (CSAP) on Women Peace and Security – to which Spanish Women in International Security (SWIIS) has been part of for the last two years- could be considered an excellent example of engaging representatives of CSOs and activists that can exercise influence in their own societies. A wide network of relationships could be expanded to other NATO policies through concrete actions, moving beyond Public Diplomacy towards Allied Citizens Programs.

We are shifting from representative democracies to participatory democracies. As other International Organizations have acknowledged - for example, the Council of Europe, the European Union and the Organization of American States - CSOs can play a role in "decision shaping" processes. It is time to open a new "window of opportunity" for NATO to come closer to our citizens, as an Alliance which protects its own population and contributes to the protection of others, through its fundamental tasks: collective defense, crisis management and cooperative security.

"Si vis pacem et securitatem, defende"
"Si quieres paz y seguridad, defiéndelas"

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