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North Macedonia in NATO: a chance for an increased oversight role of the Parliament

Author: Marko Pankovski

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Author: Marko Pankovski

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The recent membership of North Macedonia in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is expected to mark increased activity in the defence and security reform processes, defence procurement in the country, and democratic control of the defence and security sector. Although NATO membership is expected to have a positive security and economic impact on the country,¹ increased activity related to full NATO membership will mean higher budget spending in sensitive areas, and thus increased pressure from corruption.² In addition, in the medium term, potential outsourcing processes, public-private partnerships, and offset arrangements,

and more significant participation in missions abroad may further increase the risks of corruption.³

This policy brief has three tasks. First, to draw the line between NATO and the fight against corruption. Second, to look at the technology of the process through which NATO can strengthen the oversight role of parliaments and their role in the fight against corruption in three areas: defence and security reforms, public procurement and oversight of the defence and security sector as a whole. Finally, to underline good practices to strengthen the role of parliaments in anti-corruption and enhancing good governance.

¹ The Republic Of North Macedonia: Political Change, NATO Accession And Economic Transition. Economics and Security Committee - Sub-Committee on Transition and Development, Ausrine Armonaite (Rapporteur). 12 October 2019. Available at: <<https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=sites/default/files/2019-11/REPORT%20142%20ESCTD%2019%20E%20fin%20-%20NORTH%20MACEDONIA%20-%20POLITICAL%20CHANGE,%20NATO%20AND%20ECONOMIC%20TRANSITION.pdf>>

² In addition to the growth of the defense budget to the expected 2.5% of GDP, NATO membership requires a changed structure of spending where 20% of the budget will be allocated for modernization and equipment.

³ *Building Integrity and Reducing Corruption in Defence: A Compendium of Best Practices*. Fluri et al., Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (2010). Available at: <<https://buildingintegrity.hq.nato.int/Compendium.aspx>>

NATO and the fight against corruption

The culture of secrecy and impunity makes the security sector particularly vulnerable to corruption.⁴ Although the fight against corruption is not NATO's primary task, this process is important for NATO given the impact of corruption on national and international security. NATO follows the logic that corruption affects the legitimacy of governments, trust in institutions and their effectiveness as a whole, as variables with direct security implications.⁵ In this context, NATO as an international organization whose primary concern is security, has an interest in reduced corruption in member states, but also other countries in which it operates. Integrity, transparency, and accountability

in the defence and security sector are processes that can contribute to reducing the risk of corruption.

NATO's efforts to address corruption have previously been largely part of the 2007 Building Integrity Programme⁶, established on an action plan to build defence institutions from the Istanbul Summit in 2004.⁷ The Integrity Building Programme focuses on the needs of NATO member states and partners and enables participating countries to strengthen integrity, transparency and accountability, as well as reduce the risk of corruption in defense and security. One of the key components of the program is understanding corruption and poor governance as security risks.⁸

Participation in this program is on a

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ NATO Building Integrity Policy. NATO, 8-9 July 2016. Available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_135626.htm?selectedLocale=en>

⁶ Karolina MacLachlan, 'Corruption and conflict: hand in glove', 6 of December 2018. Available at: <<https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2018/12/06/corruption-and-conflict-hand-in-glove/index.html>>

⁷ Building Integrity Programme, NATO, 7 of December 2012. Available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_93045.htm?selectedLocale=en>

⁸ The program consists of seven implementation cycles: (1) self-assessment questionnaire (2) peer review; (3) Recommendation report; (4) National Integrity Plan; (5) Targeted programs to address corruption in the security and defense sectors; (6) Implementation; (7) Regular review. Sipri, 2018.

voluntary basis, and North Macedonia has participated in the evaluation processes⁹ and training of employees in the Ministry of Defence.¹⁰ In 2015 as a result of the self-assessment questionnaire and peer review in the third phase of the program (2015-2018),¹¹ a number of recommendations have been prepared aimed at improving anti-corruption policies, integrity, and public procurement policies, in the field of security and defence, and in general.¹² As a result of this process, a working group was formed on issues related to the policy of Building Integrity, as well as a series of subsequent changes in internal procedures and practices.¹³

Although on a smaller scale, the Building Integrity Programme includes working

with members of parliament from NATO member states and partners aimed at their role in the fight against corruption.¹⁴ Previously, within the Partnership for Peace program, one of the main goals of the program was transparency in defense planning and budgeting.

Beginning with the Warsaw Summit in 2016, NATO has begun a process that should enable prevention and the fight against corruption to be incorporated into all key tasks of the alliance, such as collective defence, crisis management and security.¹⁵ The summit emphasized and reaffirmed the policy of Building Integrity as a key component in building integrity, anti-corruption and good governance in member states and partners.¹⁶

⁹ Self-assessment of integrity since 2015. Available at: <http://morm.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/NATO-BI-PEER-REVIEW-REPORT_DECEMBER-2015.pdf>

¹⁰ Building Integrity. Good governance and a culture of integrity. Ministry of Defense of the Republic of North Macedonia. Available at: <http://www.mod.gov.mk/?page_id=40426&lang=mk>

¹¹ Policy Impact Assessment on the NATO Building Integrity Programme. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2018. Available at: <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/sipri_nato_building_integrity.pdf>

¹² Building Integrity Self-Assessment Peer Review Report, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. <http://morm.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/NATO-BI-PEER-REVIEW-REPORT_DECEMBER-2015.pdf>

¹³ Sipri, 2018.

¹⁴ Building Integrity Workshop for members of Parliament. Building Integrity, 9 of November 2014. Available at: <[https://buildingintegrity.hq.nato.int/\(X\(1\)S\(dmognczq2bznqk2eevg2nfkf\)\)/News.aspx?id=25112014159](https://buildingintegrity.hq.nato.int/(X(1)S(dmognczq2bznqk2eevg2nfkf))/News.aspx?id=25112014159)>

¹⁵ Karolina MacLachlan, 'Corruption and conflict: hand in glove', 6 of December 2018. Available at: <<https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2018/12/06/corruption-and-conflict-hand-in-glove/index.html>>

¹⁶ Warsaw Summit Communiqué, NATO, 9 of July 2016. Available at: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm>

The role of the Parliament

NATO as an organization does not offer or promote a perfect solution for increased oversight of the Parliament. Neither NATO nor the member states have a single set of measures aimed at increasing surveillance of the security sector, rather it is a flexible approach.¹⁷ This situation is also reflected in the oversight role of the Parliament, and it remains largely up to the member states to determine their model of parliamentary oversight. Different NATO member states have different practices and levels of parliamentary oversight of the defence and security sector as a whole. The challenges in surveillance are probably best illustrated by the Transparency International Defence Anti-Corruption Index, according to which only in five NATO member states and

partners do parliamentary committees have unhindered access to classified budgets and documents, while in seven countries parliamentary oversight is hampered by secrecy, aggregated budget information and lack of capacity.¹⁸ During the last comprehensive review of the role of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia within the Building Integrity Programme in 2015, it was assessed that the control that the Assembly has over the defence is "limited" and "on paper". It was assessed that the Assembly could not fulfill its role due to the imbalance of power between the executive and legislature. Parliament has limited power to influence defence and security policies, and to account for budget spending, including public procurement. Lawmakers are often under-informed about security issues, while committees rarely use their powers

¹⁷ Hans Born, Philipp Fluri, and Simon Lunn, eds., *Oversight and Guidance: The Relevance of Parliamentary Oversight for the Security Sector* (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2010). Available at: <https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Vademecum_v2.pdf>

¹⁸ Results NATO members and partner states, Government Defence Anti-Corruption Defence Index 2015, Transparency International, December 2015. Available at: <<https://government.defenceindex.org/downloads/docs/GI-NATO-Results-web.pdf>>

¹⁹ Macedonia - building integrity in defence. An analysis of institutional risk factors. Direktoratet for forvaltning of IKT. Available at: <http://morm.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/difi-report-2015_11_macedonia_-_building_integrity_in_defence.pdf>

to oversee.¹⁹ Such types of reports can be an important source of information to improve the situation specifically for the areas of defence and security, but also in general.

One of the key entities involved in increasing the role of the Assembly is the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, which is the key mechanism through which increased participation of parliaments in defense and security is represented.²⁰ Although this body is not formally linked to NATO, it is still a “key link” between NATO and member states’ parliaments and as a body is regularly consulted at the institutional level.²¹ The Parliamentary Assembly, in addition to promoting the

role of parliaments in decision-making, also supports parliaments in overseeing security and defense. The link that the Parliamentary Assembly is making between NATO and the parliaments is an attempt to increase the transparency of NATO’s policies.²²

Two committees in the Parliamentary Assembly cover the areas of good governance, democratic oversight, and the fight against corruption. The Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security covers the areas of democracy, good governance and the rule of law, as well as the mechanisms of democratic control of the defense and security sector.²³ In addition, the Economics and Security

²⁰ NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Available at: <<https://www.nato-pa.int/content/our-mission>>

²¹ Ibid.

²² The role of parliaments in NATO member countries in advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda. A Survey by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (2018). НАТО Парламентарно Собрание, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Force, 2018. <https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=sites/default/files/2018-11/NATO%20PA%202018%20report_DCAF_Final.pdf>

²³ Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security (CDS). NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Available at: <<https://www.nato-pa.int/content/committee-civil-dimension-security-cds>>

Committee focuses, among other things, on the economic transition and corruption.²⁴ Cooperation within the NATO Parliamentary Assembly also includes anti-corruption sections in public procurement.

The Parliamentary Assembly addresses the situation with the high level of corruption in the country, emphasizing the selection of the new composition of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption as a positive step in the

fight against corruption.²⁵ Additionally, through fact-finding missions, the Parliamentary Assembly checks and reports on the institutional and political set-up in the area of security sector oversight, including current initiatives within the working bodies of the Assembly.²⁶ Through visits to the country, members of this body advocate for increased fight against corruption,²⁷ a process that is positive but uncertain how it will continue once the country became a full member of NATO.

²⁴ Economics and Security Committee (ESC). NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Available at: <<https://www.nato-pa.int/content/economics-and-security-committee-esc>>

²⁵ The Republic Of North Macedonia: Political Change, NATO Accession And Economic Transition. Economics and Security Committee - Sub-Committee on Transition and Development, Ausrine Armonait (Rapporteur). NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 12 of October 2019. Available at: <<https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=sites/default/files/2019-11/REPORT%20142%20ESCTD%2019%20E%20fin%20-%20NORTH%20MACEDONIA%20-%20POLITICAL%20CHANGE,%20NATO%20AND%20ECONOMIC%20TRANSITION.pdf>>

²⁶ Mission Report. Economics and Security Committee - Sub-Committee on Transition and Development. NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 14-15 of March 2019. Available at: <<https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=sites/default/files/2019-05/115%20ESCTD%2019%20E%20-%20Mission%20Report%20North%20Macedonia.pdf>>

²⁷ A society free from corruption must and is our priority", Assembly of RSM, March 14, 2019. Available at: <https://sobranie.mk/2016-2020-srm-ns_article-opshtestvo-oslobodeno-od-korupcija-mora-i-e-nash-prioritet.nspix>

Regular oversight practice is required

Parliamentary oversight needs are changing in relation to reforms in defence, new threats, and the necessary capacities.²⁸ The new hybrid and unconventional threats impose the need for flexibility, cooperation, and quick solutions that can further complicate the oversight role of the Assembly. Having in mind the frequent election cycles and political crises in the country, the supervision in such conditions can be further aggravated and justify those that advocate minimal role of the Assembly in these processes. In this context, the Assembly will have to play an important role and it will be important to work in ways that will enable greater involvement of the Assembly in policymaking, and oversight.

Periodic oversight practices can prove to be a successful mechanism for increasing parliamentary oversight. For example, the mechanisms of parliamentary involvement in drafting national action plans for Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) are a practice that can be replicated in other areas. As part of this process, in several parliaments there has been a shift towards periodic oversight practices such as debates or submission of reports.²⁹ This approach can prove to be an effective way to enhance oversight because it announces a continuous assessment of the performance of the executive branch and is expected to report regularly instead of sporadic reporting.³⁰

MPs are also required to participate in the preparation of sector strategies and action plans. This model is a simple and effective way of direct participation in the defence and security policymaking. In addition, apart from the participation

²⁸ Hans Born, Philipp Fluri, and Simon Lunn, eds., *Oversight and Guidance: The Relevance of Parliamentary Oversight for the Security Sector* (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2010). <https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Vademecum_v2.pdf>

²⁹ The role of parliaments in NATO membercountries in advancing the Women, Peaceand Security agenda. A Survey by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (2018). NATO Парламентарно собрание, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Force, 2018. <https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=sites/default/files/2018-11/NATO%20PA%202018%20report_DCAF_Final.pdf>

³⁰ Ibid.

and direct oversight, this practice increases the capacity of parliaments to oversee the work of the security sector, which is a long-term challenge for all countries, including North Macedonia. Our Assembly should deepen cooperation with other parliaments and undertake and implement successful oversight practices.³¹ In this context, it is important to actively work on increasing the capacity of the committees in order to have qualified staff, budget, access to information, as well as the opportunity to hire external expertise.³² Finally, the involvement of CSOs can be an added value given their expertise and ability to conduct regular monitoring and create additional accountability pressure to the executive branch.

on Defence and Security and establish regular and substantive thematic cooperation with the Committee on Political System and Inter-Community Relations, the Legislative Committee, the Committee for Supervision of the Work of the Agency for National Security and the Intelligence Agency, the Committee for Supervision of the Implementation of Communications Monitoring Measures, as well as with CSOs. Despite the full membership in NATO, it is important for the Assembly and MPs to actively cooperate with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and other bodies and programs in order to exchange good practices and pursue active involvement of MPs.

The Assembly and MPs should work actively to increase the capacity of the Committee

³¹ Ibid.

³² Building Integrity and Reducing Corruption in Defence: A Compendium of Best Practices. Fluri et al., Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (2010). <<https://buildingintegrity.hq.nato.int/Compendium.aspx>>

Conclusion

NATO recognizes fight against corruption as a security risk for member states, partners, as well as the success of its missions. From 2007 until today, NATO has continuously increased its activities related to good governance and the fight against corruption for the most part through the Integration Building program. Regarding the oversight role of parliaments, NATO has a limited role, but there are still opportunities to promote greater parliamentary involvement in policy-making, managing corruption risks, and overseeing related institutions.

Summary

NATO's North Macedonia membership will mark increased activity in defence and security reform processes, defence procurement in the country, and democratic control of the defence and security sectors, which could increase the risks of corruption. Within NATO, there are active programs and bodies that can contribute to the successful management of these risks and influence the increased oversight role of the Assembly. It is important for the Assembly to revise the existing supervisory practices, to work on regular periodic oversight practices and to continuously build the capacity of the committees to perform their function.

Project information

Anti-corruption talks in the Parliament is a project aimed at strengthening the oversight role of lawmakers in the fight against corruption. The project is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy.

Information about IDSCS

IDSCS is a think-tank organisation researching the development of good governance, rule of law and North Macedonia's European integration. IDSCS has the mission to support citizens' involvement in the decision-making process and strengthen the participatory political culture. By strengthening liberal values, IDSCS contributes towards coexistence of diversities.

Contact information about IDSCS

Address: Str. Miroslav Krlezha 52/2,
1000 Skopje

Phone number/ Fax: +389 2 3094 760

E-Mail: contact@idscs.org.mk

Information about the author

Marko Pankovski is a Senior Researcher at the Center for Good Governance at the Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” in Skopje, and Rethink.CEE Fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

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