

NAC Visit and Georgian Perspective



The North Atlantic Council (NAC) has visited Georgia for the fourth time in the last eight years. Media representatives, governmental bodies as well as civil society were discussing the importance of the visit of NATO's main decision – making body in Georgia.

7-8 September, 2016 will be written in Georgian modern history as one of the most important dates in Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration process. Why did this visit deserve so much attention? What is the real meaning of the NAC visit? Before discussing the importance of the NAC visit, we should outline dynamics of NATO- Georgia relations.

Georgia cooperates with the North Atlantic Alliance since 1992, but the dynamics of integration process began in 2004, when Georgia became the first country that received Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). Through positive evaluation, in 2006 alliance offered an Intensified Dialogue to Georgia on its aspirations to join the Alliance. Soon in 2008, at the Bucharest Summit NATO leaders agreed that Georgia will become a NATO member. This was an unprecedented statement by which allied countries partly highlighted their political

will regarding Georgia's NATO membership.

Since then NATO- Georgia relations were getting closer by creating following practical mechanisms for Georgia, which play important role on the way of membership:

- NATO – Georgia Commission (NGC)
- Annual National Program (ANP)
- Substantial NATO – Georgia Package (SNGP)
- NATO – Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Center (JTEC); NATO Core Team; DIB School.

All abovementioned instruments confirm that the dynamics of Georgia's NATO membership is positive. So in practical terms Georgia implements fundamental reforms to prepare for NATO membership. Now, Georgia needs the political decision of the Alliance for becoming a NATO member.

The NAC is the main political decision – making body in NATO. Therefore, all important political decisions, regarding NATO enlargement, are made by the NAC. As we mentioned NAC visited Georgia for the fourth time (previously in 2008, 2011 and 2013). During the two day visit representatives from both sides held meetings within NATO – Georgia Commission. Transatlantic security, regional security, and Tbilisi's reform progress were discussed during the NGC. NATO delegation held bilateral meetings with representatives of executive and legislative government, representatives of NGOs and media.

So what was the role of this visit?

- Visit of the NAC is a clear sign that demonstrates that Georgia has a considerable place in the agenda of the Alliance. According to Jorge Benitez, a Senior Fellow of Brentt Scowcroft Center on International Security, this visit has demonstrated that Georgia is perceived as a serious partner of NATO and the alliance is devoted to its commitments and obligations to Georgia.
- During the NGC, the outcomes of the Warsaw Summit were discussed. NATO pays more attention to its eastern part and has discussed latest events related to Euro- Atlantic security issues as well as current processes in the Black Sea Region with Georgian side. This means that Georgia is completely engaged and represented in the strategic discussions about new security agenda of the Alliance. It is obvious that engaging in strategic discussions with NATO delivers a significant role to Georgia during shaping collective security of the alliance.
- At the NATO Warsaw Summit allied countries have decided upon the new projects and initiatives providing practical support to Georgia. Implementation of these new initiatives and projects were also discussed during NGC session.
- Additionally, NAC visits are not held often in aspirant countries. Permanent representatives of 28 nations (and Montenegro), as well as the NATO Secretary General rarely leave the border of Brussels, once or twice a year. Four NAC visits during 8 years, and two visits of Secretary General in the last two years indicates the strong political support that NATO provides to Georgia and reaffirms the importance of Georgia as a valuable partner.
- According to Aleksandre Maisuradze, the permanent representative of Georgia to NATO, all the members announced their staunch support to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia, alliance once again encouraged Georgia for its foreign policy priorities and Euro- Atlantic Integration process.
- NAC visit also demonstrates that the North Atlantic Council expresses its interests regarding the current processes and circumstances in Georgia which are essential basis for becoming member of the alliance. That's why Secretary General emphasized for several times the necessity of democratic, free and fair elections, which will be the considerable factor for assessment of democratization process in an aspirant state. It sounded like a warning sign for Georgian officials.

Finally, Secretary General encouraged Georgia to continue implementing fundamental reforms to prepare country for the NATO membership. As well, he stressed that "the bonds between NATO and Georgia are stronger than ever".

All statements by NATO aimed at encouraging Georgia to proceed implementation of reforms (which plays the key role in the modernization process of the country) as well as these statements could be seen as politically strong support to the state which needs such forceful messages for effective struggle against the increased anti-western propaganda.