

NATO

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The countries of the former Warsaw Pact, concerned about the stability of their frontiers because of the revival of nationalism in Central Europe and a possible resurgence of Russian imperialism, needed a credible guarantee and found it not in the OSCE nor in the European Union but in the Atlantic Alliance and, through it, the United States. Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary — which, on 15 February 1991, formed the Visegrad Group (named after a small town on the border between Hungary and the Czech Republic) in order to coordinate the foreign policy of the three countries — asked to be formally integrated into NATO and affirmed, on 6 May 1992, that ‘their long-term objective was full membership of NATO’.

For its part, the Atlantic Alliance had taken note of the profound transformations which had taken place in Eastern Europe and the ‘London Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance’, which sought to establish a new type of relations with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe based on cooperation (6 July 1990). There was no question, therefore, of expanding towards Eastern Europe, since that would upset Russia. The Alliance adopted a new strategic concept. There was no longer a global military threat in Europe. The danger now lay in regional conflicts arising from economic, social and political issues as well as from those concerning defence. This resulted in the need, while still maintaining the potential for collective defence, to develop dialogue and cooperation in order to contribute — along with the other organisations — to the peaceful resolution of the crises which were threatening European security.

This resulted in the creation, on the initiative of the United States and Germany, of a North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), which, on 20 December 1991, began to organise periodic meetings of Ministers, ambassadors and military experts to discuss defence and security issues. The number of Member States began at 25 (the 16 from NATO, Russia representing the USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania and the three Baltic States). It expanded with the inclusion, in March 1992, of 11 other Republics from the new Commonwealth of Independent States, to which were added Albania and Georgia. There were 38 members in total. Cooperation developed in all areas and intensified against the background of the Partnership for Peace (11 January 1994), which aimed to establish a military cooperation relationship with NATO (planning, joint exercises) in order to improve the capacity to successfully carry out United Nations and CSCE/OSCE peacekeeping missions, through the setting up of combined joint task forces at international level. This Partnership, it was hoped, would play a crucial role in the process for the enlargement of NATO as now envisaged by the Alliance governments. This enlargement was to take place progressively, several years later.