Multilateralism will not disappear; Europe will become more involved in its own security and the pressure on austerity shall drive sharing of responsibility. Ministers, ambassadors, and other experts from the domestic security scene share their opinions.

Leaders, professionals and regional security experts answer the question whether and how the transatlantic relations will change in the near future. Although they share similar perspective on the challenges faced by the Alliance not only from the external environment but also internally, they agree that NATO cannot be replaced or pushed to the background. They believe that the allies agree on the key issues as the Alliance represents a unique platform with possibilities that no other organization offers.

Moreover, the Alliance has recently launched a process of reflection on its future called NATO 2030. Slovakia nor the Central European region do not want to lag behind in this respect.

IVAN KORČOK
Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

In the context of the transatlantic relations, the Covid-19 pandemic has not brought any fundamentally novel development. To a large extent, it only accelerated the trends that we had been able to observe for a long time. But even in the post-pandemic world, the transatlantic partnership offers the best opportunities for Europe and North America to meet the challenges such as the crisis of multilateralism and the rule-based world order. NATO has been undergoing a major adaptation to the changed security environment since 2004. Its military forces are the strongest in the world but we should not be naive and pretend that everything in the transatlantic relations is well. The Alliance needs to deal with a number of “internal” matters.

The current American administration is modifying the role and commitment of the United States around the world. On the other hand, the EU is increasingly under pressure to step out of its own shadow in foreign and security policy. Still, NATO remains critically important not only in expressing the clear commitment of all its members to mutual solidarity assistance in case of an attack on any individual member. Moreover, NATO is the only platform of European countries, Canada and the United States to discuss and make decisions in a circle of like-minded countries sharing similar values.

JAROSLAV NAĎ
Minister of Defence of the Slovak Republic (OLaNO)

There is no alternative to the transatlantic alliance. It offers the best guarantee of security for the Slovak Republic. However, this does not mean that we always agree with every single step taken by our allies. But the Alliance will always find consensus on key issues. Slovakia will do its best to preserve and strengthen the transatlantic relations as they are based on common values such as democracy, respect for the rule of law and human rights, and not on the currently prevailing political mood.

The Corona crisis is not the first or the last test that the alliance has passed. The most fundamental impact of Corona on NATO’s activity is in reducing the performance of the allied economies and the corresponding cuts in their defence budgets and a slow-down of the modernisation process in the armed forces. COVID-19 also increased the requirements for deployment of troops in the domestic crisis management as well as in communication with the public. It is exactly the strategic communication and targeted information about the crisis that come as an essential condition for managing of future crises.

JURAJ KRÚPA
Member of the National Council of the Slovak Republic and Head of the Defence and Security Committee of the National Council of the Slovak Republic (OLaNO)

NATO has an irreplaceable role to play in the security and defence of the allies. I am convinced that despite the impending economic crisis associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Alliance will continue to play that role. It
will be able to adapt to the new challenges and threats caused by this crisis as it has demonstrated several times in the past.

Uncertainty and instability accompanied the international relations even before the pandemic. However, in the seven decades of its existence, NATO has developed processes and procedures that ensure the best readiness for any current and future crises and conflicts. The lesson we learned during the pandemic will be the allies’ ability to improve the population’s readiness to face unpredictable crises and therefore also improving mutual cooperation. However, the Alliance’s main role will continue to be coordination of the security and defence interests of its members. The ability to adapt and plan processes remains the condition for NATO’s success.

BRIDGET A. BRINK
*United States Ambassador to Slovakia*

NATO should emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic with a renewed commitment to the fundamental values that the Alliance is built upon. It is clear that the authoritarian, non-transparent instincts of the Chinese Communist Party as the virus emerged greatly facilitated its spread and prevented effective early containment measures. At the same time, the democratic nations that make up the NATO Alliance took immediate and transparent action to protect their own citizens and offer help to others. Others immediately began to spread disinformation about the origin of the virus and claim false credit for countering the spread of it. The lesson is clear—a commitment to shared, democratic values remains our first and most effective line of defence, whether that threat comes in the form of military aggression, hybrid warfare, or life-threatening pandemics. As Allies and partner nations emerge from the immediate crisis of the pandemic and begin to confront the challenge of restarting our economies, we must remember that security will continue to be the foundation for our stability and prosperity.

JOACHIM BLEICKER
*Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Slovakia*

NATO is and has been a success story, NATO does not need to be reinvented. It is and has been successful because its principles are sound: democracy, individual liberty, rule of law. Its core promise — that an attack against one is an attack against all and all are prepared to help each other — provides more than just collective defence and deterrence. It provides peace of mind, allowing member states to stop worrying about survival and prosper, thus contributing to international stability. This will be the case also in the future and is also the reason for the attractiveness of NATO, especially among the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe.

But NATO needs to improve its military capabilities and readiness. Far-reaching crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic are dangerous beyond their immediate effect on our health and the economy. NATO is indispensable at such a time of growing uncertainties. The transatlantic cooperation in NATO will help us prevent a health crisis from turning into a security crisis. Germany remains committed to NATO’s capabilities corresponding to its size and economic strength — today, tomorrow, and also a decade from now. The transatlantic cooperation is essential for us, also after this pandemic.
RADOVAN JAVORČÍK
Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to NATO

I do not see the demise of multilateralism, but rather a process of adaptation to new realities. The way we are managing COVID-19 proves the strength of international cooperation and the high value the Alliance offers us. We can retain the ability to dominate and set trends only if we remain united.

However, the Alliance will never represent the first instance in response to this type of crisis. Still, the tools possessed only by NATO, such as ensuring the operating efficiency of transport corridors or provision of material resources and coordinating assistance are simply essential.

The impact of the pandemic on the wider geopolitical competition cannot be estimated yet. There are forces that are opportunistically seeking our weaknesses trying to divide and weaken NATO and the EU. We have witnessed this in the form of spreading of hoaxes and we will see this also in the attempts to provide “assistance” in overcoming the economic consequences of the pandemic.

When it comes to Slovakia, our strength is in our ability to offer untraditional solutions to practical issues. In the Alliance, we call this “smart resilience”. It is not about who has what and how much. Instead, we focus on how to use one’s own capacity and provide it for the benefit of one’s allies and closest partners. And NATO simply excels in this respect.

PAVEL MACKO
Retired Lieutenant General and Vice-Chairman of the SPOLU Party

Neither NATO nor the European Union grasped the wider risks posed during the Covid-19 pandemic. Global competition did not cease during the pandemic, instead it was stepped up. A difficult period of economic recovery and uncertainty lies ahead. That is why we need to strengthen our alliance commitments more than before. Not only Slovakia, but even larger countries cannot cope with major crises and emerging threats that are less kinetic in nature, such as hybrid activities, cyber security and the impact of climate change. These challenges will certainly hit us with full force, as did the pandemic – a threat that we had been theoretically discussing in strategic documents for years.

We should do everything we can to maintain transatlantic ties and alliances. At the same time, we must be prepared for a significantly greater responsibility of Europe for its own security. Within NATO, the time is ripe to develop and implement a new strategic concept. Slovakia and its allies should not sacrifice maintaining and building of their defence while going through a crisis, as we did during the most recent one. On the contrary, we need to work closely together and honour each other’s commitments in order to maintain a credible alliance. The pressure to implement austerity should motivate us to an even closer cooperation within NATO and the EU and to share responsibility and capacity for common defence – also by building joint military units.

JANA KOBZOVÁ
Chief Foreign Policy Expert, Office of the President of the Slovak Republic

Most allies face a similar question after the pandemic: How to continue to invest in defence at a time of economic crisis so that we do not undermine our own security. The pandemic may have paralyzed our daily lives for a while, but it did not erase the risks and threats we faced; instead, it rather amplified them. Ranging from the recent cyberattacks on hospitals in the Czech Republic to gaps in strategic supplies or lack of coordination with the partners. However, any crisis presents an opportunity to think about what is necessary and essential and what needs to be changed. In my view, in addition to strengthening of traditional areas where NATO is irreplaceable (collective protection of the allies from external aggression), it will increasingly be the question of how the allies can deal together with the threats and risks posed by the advance and spreading of new technology. Naturally, these goals will be difficult to achieve if the disagreement between the two sides of the Atlantic increases. Preventing this will be the responsibility of all the allies, including Slovakia. After all, there still is much more that we have in common compared to what divides us.
NAĎA KOVALČÍKOVÁ
Program Manager at the Alliance for Securing Democracy, The German Marshall Fund of the United States

NATO’s three core tasks of collective defence, cooperative security, and crisis management have shaped its enduring mission for the past 10 years since the adoption of the current Strategic Concept in 2010. In my conversation on June 8 with the NATO Secretary General at the occasion of the public launch of the process of reflection on the Alliance’s future, Jens Stoltenberg pointed out that NATO has been constantly adapting to the evolving security environment. Today, while facing the global health pandemic and other threats of the 21st century, NATO is at a crossroads reviewing its strategic posture. In order to fully implement the lessons learned from the last seven decades, NATO allies should seek further adaptation and innovation of their methods and capabilities. In addition to conventional security threats, they should get better understanding of opportunities and risks of advanced dual-use technology (civil and military), and efficiently address disinformation, cyber threats, health crises, climate change, gender-based violence and geopolitical shifts, which contribute to the growing tension between authoritarianism and democracy. All of these threats cannot be addressed efficiently if not tackled in partnership with state and non-state actors in the spirit of transnational cooperation. Slovakia showed some degree of leadership in its rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic and is capable of doing so in also in other areas mentioned above. Slovakia must continue to defend and protect democratic principles and remain a reliable partner for the other 29 members of the Alliance. NATO’s security role in the future is critical as it brings allies together around one table and helps defend them against external threats. But the idea of NATO expressed in the motto “We are stronger together” should not be applied only when facing adversaries and security threats on the NATO borders, but also when witnessing injustice within them. A resolute attitude towards the rising and new threats that is based on the values of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law, is what will define the Alliance’s success in the upcoming years.

KATARÍNA KERTYSOVÁ
Policy Fellow, European Leadership Network

To a large degree, the future of the transatlantic relations depends on the results of the November US elections. The re-election of Donald Trump is likely to mean a continuation – if not deepening – of the current transatlantic crisis. On the contrary, electing of a democratic candidate will bring an opportunity for change. I see great potential for expanding cooperation in the field of conventional and nuclear weapons control, as well as in the field of climate and other non-military security threats. I see the fight against climate change, in which the EU is the global leader, as the key area for deepening of transatlantic cooperation.

SOFIA MARIA SATANAKIS
Research Fellow, Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy

The Transatlantic Alliance often evokes a reminiscence of past times, and yet it has proven to be an adaptive institutional relict from the Cold War, even though many have declared it to be obsolete over the years. NATO has thus far not only proven its ability to adapt to a changing environment by constantly developing new tools and instruments to interact with it, but also demonstrated comparative advantages in dealing with a potential new rival such as China, based on its past experience with the Soviet Union. It is important that the EU countries and the United States communicate with Russia. Relations between Russia and the West are at an all-time low: military channels of communication are not working, while military exercises near the common borders continue despite the coronavirus. A military accident caused by an incorrect estimate or misunderstanding on one side or the other can bring about catastrophic consequences. This is why it is important to focus on measures building mutual confidence and security between Russia and the countries of the North Atlantic Alliance. As an active member of the OSCE, Slovakia can make a positive contribution to the structured dialogue.
2020 is already proving to be a crucial year for both NATO and the EU because of the Covid-19 crisis, which (apart from its disruptive socio-economic and political consequences) is expected to have a negative impact on defence budgets and planned expenditures, leaving many countries in a more vulnerable position. Moreover, current security threats are too complex for a single nation or organization to cope with. NATO must therefore adapt to the new global political reality and find ways to better protect what has been built and achieved over the decades. For Europe, NATO has represented the main security framework since 1949 and current development only confirms that it remains the most important collective defence organization for European security to this day. Thus, the importance of continuing to cooperate closely on all defence-related issues and efficiently addressing the complex security challenges facing both sides of the Atlantic cannot be overstated.