

**FOREWORD to the Volume of Speeches
from the Conference “10 Years Bulgaria in NATO”, 3-4 April 2014, Sofia**

By Dr Solomon Passy*)
President, The Atlantic Club of Bulgaria

A decade ago, on 29 March 2004, the Bulgarian Prime Minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha presented in Washington the ratification documents of Bulgaria's accession to NATO to US President George Bush and US Secretary of State Colin Powell. With this act Bulgaria officially became member of the Alliance. The modest ceremony in the White House crowned the fourteen years of Bulgarian national effort.

The consistent work on joining NATO and the EU was launched in the summer of 1990 by members of the Grand National Assembly, with the support of the first free elected President of Bulgaria Dr. Zhelyu Zhelev. The petitions for accession of Bulgaria to the EU and NATO were in a chain of unforgettable, for the contemporaries sometimes unbelievable events: Bulgaria joined the US-led coalition, which eventually liberated Kuwait from the Saddam's occupation; a group of Bulgarian MPs -- the first from Eastern Europe -- visited NATO HQ and raised with Manfred Wörner the question for NATO's enlargement eastward; the creation of the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria -- the only pro-Atlantic NGO ever operating on territory of the Warsaw Pact, the dissolution of the latter; the visit of Manfred Wörner to Sofia and his Trabant tour, which CNN made world news; the adoption of the new Constitution of Bulgaria, legalising its turn into a free and democratic state. And, to surmount this volcanic cycle of political events that had spread over a mere eighteen months, the XIV Dalai Lama visited Sofia in what became an unforgettable and unique event.

During that period two national causes of modern Bulgaria were formulated: memberships to NATO and the EU. They built on the three pillars of the Third Bulgarian state since the 1876 April uprising: the Liberation (from the Ottoman Empire) and the Unification (of the Principality of Bulgaria with Eastern Rumelia) in the 19c and the Independence of the Kingdom of Bulgaria, achieved in the 20c.

Yet, while there were no social doubts regarding Bulgaria's accession to the EU, several political generations were needed to master a stable national pro-Atlantic consensus. History has kept record of quite a number of political leaders who built this pro-Atlantic consensus, overcame various challenges and paid the political price: the era of President Zhelev (1990-1997) and his legacy: *Bulgaria -- member of all European structures*, the crisis in Kosovo with the roles played by President Peter Stoyanov and Prime Minister Ivan Kostov; the visits to Bulgaria by President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1999; the 9/11 terrorist attack, which crushed in 2001 the world's idea of security while at the same time provoked a far-sighted response from the government of H.M. Simeon II, which proclaimed Bulgaria a *de facto* ally of NATO; Afghanistan and Iraq, with the irreparable losses Bulgaria gave there; Bulgaria's work on the UN Security Council (2002-2003) and on the OSCE chairing Troika (2003-2005); the metamorphosis and evolution of Bulgarian political parties on NATO. And, of course, the charisma of King Simeon II that shaped a lasting image of Bulgaria as a European state at the time he was at the helm. But let me leave the task of elaborating the history to the historians.

Yet there are two landmarks on Bulgaria's road to NATO that I personally need to mention. The first one is the formal application for NATO membership issued on 17 February 1997 by the caretaker government of President Stoyanov and Prime Minister Stefan Sofianski. Fate has decreed that I should be the first to present (on 19 February) the fax message, containing the Decision by the Bulgarian Council of Ministers, to NATO Secretary General Xavier Solana in Brussels. How the world has changed since: we no longer work with faxes yet we now work within NATO and the EU!

The second landmark was the membership invitation presented to me as a Foreign Minister in Sofia by the then US Ambassador James Pardew a week before the Prague Summit, in November 2002. The Ambassador gave me a call at the end of one of my visits to Skopje to say he insisted on seeing me irrespective of the time of my arrival to Sofia, and would wait for me in the Ministry. I had no idea as to what fateful event would impose such a force majeure meeting but 9/11 had taught me to expect the unexpected. Indeed, after we met, I realised I had no reason to regret our midnight encounter, for Ambassador Pardew handed to me the invitation of President George Bush Bulgaria to join NATO. This had to remain a secret for another week, which proved to be the last major challenge before me to our membership. Albeit with difficulty, we managed to conceal this news till time came.

Just three weeks after NATO invitation from Prague was in, we agreed in Copenhagen that the year 2007 would be our EU accession year. Thus, as early as 2002, it became obvious to us that we had embarked on the right way to establish the future Euro-Atlantic framework for Bulgaria. The latest proof that we presented at the very end of our mandate: on the 25 April 2005 we signed the European Accession Treaty, which smoothly took us in the EU on 1 January 2007.

Perhaps that same year, 2002, proved to be fateful for Bulgaria, for it was the year of the historic visit to our country of Pope John Paul II -- resulting from, i.a. eight years of campaign by the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria. The Pope disproved the vicennial slander for Bulgaria's connection in the assassination attempt against him. The Pope restored our national image before the world and gave his blessing to our foreign policy aspirations (and symbolically to my mother's Trabant, still full of memories of Manfred Wörner's riding tour)!

Nowadays only people above 30-35 still keep direct memories of the onset of our Euro-Atlantic integration. In another 25 years those people will be over 55-60; in yet another 50... I cannot predict their age and shape! Here is the precise reason for holding conferences such as this one: to preserve memories while they are still vibrant, and use History in upgrading the Future.

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the Unification of Germany (which de facto enlarged NATO with the vanishing German Democratic Republic), NATO has been extending a friendly hand to the East at regular five-year intervals: 1994 initiated *Partnership for Peace*, 1999 enlarged NATO by incorporating Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, 2004 brought the *Big Bang* with the accession of Bulgaria and 6 more newcomers, while 2009 added Albania and Croatia. We had hoped that 2014 would continue the course of further expansion, all the more that there were worthy and well-

prepared candidates. Regrettably – and this is a major mistake of our Alliance – it did not happen.

Ten years is a period requiring summing up. Tragically, the Crimea events in 2014 facilitated both our analysis, and the task of the conference panelists: President Plevneliev under whose patronage this conference takes place, His Majesty Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Bulgarian Prime-Minister (2001-2005), Ambassador Terry Stamatopoulos, NATO Assistant Secretary-General (and, until recently, Ambassador of Greece to Bulgaria), the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of Defense Kristian Vigenin and Angel Naydenov, as well as the US Ambassador H.E. Marcie Ries – let me remind that the US is a depositary of the North-Atlantic Treaty and a key ally in its implementation.

The events in Ukraine pushed beyond any visible horizon the expectations of the Atlantic Club to see a reformed Russia joining NATO in the foreseeable future. Personally, I remain confident that democracy will continue to spread throughout the East and the South and the day will come when we shall be realistically able to consider that above scenario. On the other hand, those developments gave a decisive, succinct and digestible answer to the question: *Why did Bulgaria need to join NATO?* This answer reads simply: *To prevent Crimea happen to Bulgaria!*

Over the past ten years, whenever I hear the National Anthem played, I willy-nilly succumb to two instinctive visions. The first is the vision of how the National flag was being raised over NATO Headquarters in Brussels on 2 April 2004. This brief moment was amongst the most memorable in my professional life so far and crowned my 14-year Atlantic saga. From there, I raise my eyes and, slightly to the left, I either look for the Bulgarian flag fluttering over the latest national achievement, or the third Bulgarian astronaut on one of NASA spaceships.

I believe that the present volume will form a part of the history of Bulgaria's membership in NATO since the published texts always reflect the past that had brought to fruition the efforts of an entire political era!

25 November 2014 (Sent for Publishing)

*) Minister of Foreign Affairs (2001-2005)

President of the UN Security Council (in 2002 and in 2003)

Chairman-in-Office of SC (2004)

Chair of the Parliamentary Committees on Foreign Policy and Defence; Bulgarian MP (1990-1991 and 2001-2009)