What threatens NATO – and what members can do? The case of Norway and Poland

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Abstract

This research paper examines the critical external and internal challenges that faced NATO at its 70th anniversary, and how the policies of two members – Norway and Poland – can influence the internal cohesion of the Alliance and thus its ability to provide security to all its members. The survival of NATO as a viable security actor will depend on its capacity to maintain internal cohesion, a crucial factor influencing its ability to address external risks, challenges and threats in the increasingly turbulent international environment. This study places the debate in the broader context of discussion on alliance survivability in general, maps the external and internal challenges facing the Alliance after seven decades of its existence, and examines possible risks that the policies of Norway and Poland may pose to NATO's internal cohesion and thus its ability to react to external challenges. Although the issue of "democratic backsliding" in some member-states poses an internal normative challenge to cohesion, effective cooperation in dealing with external security challenges seems to remain the main rationale and driver of cooperation within NATO.

Introduction

States join security alliances mainly to increase their security vis-à-vis external actors who may pose a threat. The logic of deterrence was the chief rationale for joining NATO in 1949 and in the later rounds of its enlargement. After the strategic reversal of 2014, with Russia returning as the main challenger, the need to deal jointly with possible external security threats, challenges and risks has returned as the central idea cementing the Alliance. Belonging to a military alliance provides opportunities to improve security by joining forces with others – but can also give rise to challenges and fears. The most important challenge is the loss of autonomy, creating a situation of dependence. The main fears are being abandoned by allies in a crisis situation, and being drawn into a conflict resulting from the imprudent actions of one or many allies – "entrapment" (Duffield, Michota and Miller 2008,295). This article focuses on how the policies of two member-states – Norway and Poland – can affect NATO's internal cohesion, perhaps making it less relevant (even irrelevant) as a provider of security to its members. To situate these questions in the broader context, this article begins by mapping the issues that have led to the demise of other alliances, to see if historical experience is relevant for NATO as it faces a range of external and internal challenges identified and listed recently in the NATO 2030 report prepared by the Reflection Group appointed by the Secretary General (NATO 2020).

Norway and Poland have been chosen for this study for several reasons. Norway is one of the founding fathers of NATO, joining already in 1949 and playing an important part in the Cold War context (Hilde and Widerberg 2014, Lindgren and Græger 2017, Friis 2018, Græger 2019, Hilde 2019). Poland joined in 1999 and has contributed to shaping NATO policies for the past 30 years, bringing in new perspectives and understandings of security challenges (Edmunds 2003, Zaborowski and Longhurst 2010, Longhurst 2013, Rodkiewicz 2017, Śliwa 2018, Ministry of Defence Poland 2019). Moreover, both countries are located on important flanks of NATO – Norway is sometimes referred to as NATO in the North (Friis 2018), while Poland is the most important member on NATO's exposed Eastern flank (Chivvis, et al. 2017, Frederick, et al. 2017, Cozad 2018).

What makes alliances work and collapse?

The body of literature on alliance formation, internal dynamics and persistence is huge (Liska 1962, Snyder 1982, Walt 1987, Duffield 1994, Snyder 1997, Oest 2007, Duffield, Michota and Miller 2008, Pressman 2008, Walt 2009, Masala 2010, Folly 2018). These works address questions concerning the logics behind alliance formation, the internal dynamics in alliances and possible exposure to problems that may cause their demise. Scholars have inquired into the conditions under which states form alliances, who aligns with whom, and what objectives alliances seek to achieve. Are countries motivated to join an alliance solely to address certain external challenges? Or is the idea of belonging to a club of states that share culture, norms and values the chief motivation – with the possibility of jointly addressing an external threat merely an added value of membership?

If addressing external threats is the main motivation for joining, factors external to the alliance may have huge impact on its internal development and cohesion. The disappearance of an external threat has historically been the main reason for the demise of many alliances. Also differing perceptions of external threats within an alliance may undermine internal cohesion, resulting in internal divisions and leading ultimately to its demise as a functional vehicle of interstate cooperation on security-related matters.

If alliances are formed mainly for internal identity-related reasons, as communities of states seen as sharing culture, norms and values, then internal developments within the member-states and the alliance as such may play a crucial role in shaping its internal dynamics and cohesion. Sudden internal developments in one or several partner countries that undermine the normative foundation of the alliance may lead to tensions and ultimately to its demise. On the other hand, shared identity may extend the life-span of the alliance so that, even after the external threat has disappeared or changed, it can persist because its members see themselves as integral parts of a larger political community.

What can make an alliance irrelevant? This question has attracted considerable attention, for academic as well as policy-related reasons. The literature on alliances offers insights on the types of challenges that alliances and their members may have to deal with (Snyder 1982, 1997, Kaplan 2004, Duffield, Michota and Miller 2008, Johnston 2017b, 2017a). There is also a good understanding of what can lead to the demise of an alliance (Walt 1997, Duffield, Michota and Miller 2008) – the worst-case scenario for smaller members whose security depends on the assistance of their more powerful alliance partners (Tamnes 2019).

In his seminal article, Walt (1997) offered several conclusions, linking the issue of alliance collapse to lack of interest on the part of one or many of its members, or to such 'irrational' reasons as domestic politics, personal pique or misperceptions. Specifically, Walt held that alliances may collapse due to changing threat perceptions, declining credibility, domestic factors such as demographic and social trends, domestic competition, regime change and ideological divisions.

Based on their examination of the most complete historical database with information on alliances, Duffield, Michota and Miller (2008) identified a major war as the main cause of the demise of historical alliances. They also argued that alliances may collapse when the conditions that promoted their creation are no longer present – because of the loss of power of the main actor or shifts in the international distribution of power, due to changes in threat perceptions, or sudden political change in one or several partner countries that loosens the bonds of affinity that had held the alliance together.

Similar conclusions were drawn by Warren (2010) in his study of NATO's ability to cope with future challenges. His statistical examination of historical alliances revealed four factors that had led to the collapse of alliances: defeat of a partner (45 per cent); partners' interests diverging (32 per cent); disappearance of the threat (21 per cent); failure of partner to abide by agreements (9 per cent). More generally, he argued that, in 66 per cent of all cases of historical alliances that had terminated, the main reason was a change in the status of the threat.

On the other hand, there are also factors that may contribute to the persistence of an alliance: hegemonic leadership, preservation of their credibility as providers of security to the members, domestic politics and "elite manipulation," a high level of institutionalisation of intra-alliance cooperation, and identity-related reasons like ideological solidarity, shared identities and security communities (Walt 1997).

NATO: external and internal challenges

NATO's main function – revitalised after the 2014 conflict with Russia – is to deal with external challenges to its members, but its ability to deal with external challenges will depend on internal developments in the Alliance that may influences internal cohesion and its ability to generate and project power. According to one study of alliances in the unipolar world (Walt 2009), four issues define the internal dynamics in an alliance: 1) the distribution of burdens within the alliance; 2) alliance cohesion and leadership; 3) how alliance members deal with the twin dangers of abandonment and entrapment; and 4) the impact of norms and institutions on intra-alliance dynamics and interactions (Walt 2009,90–91). What were the external and internal challenges facing NATO as 2019 drew to a close?

The 2014 Wales Summit Declaration (NATO 2014) identified Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine, which had fundamentally challenged the Alliance's vision of Europe as whole, free, and at peace, as the main external challenge to NATO. Growing instability in the southern neighbourhood, as well as transnational and multi-dimensional threats, were also seen as challenging NATO members as well as regional and global security.
The 2016 Warsaw Summit Declaration (NATO 2016) presented an even more detailed list of challenges facing

NATO. These challenges originated from the east and south, with both state and non-state actors involved. They could be generated by military forces, but also by actors exploiting various types of hybrid approaches and cyber vulnerabilities. The 2016 NATO Declaration identified Russia as a major source of strategic instability, and as an actor that posed various types of security threats and challenges. Further, the situation in what is broadly understood as the Middle East, especially the emergence of the Islamic State, was identified as a serious security challenge, also feeding instability in the core area of the Alliance by triggering a wave of uncontrolled migration (see also Friis 2017).

Instability in the Middle East, the impasse in Afghanistan and a resurgent Russia that challenges the existing security order in Europe – these still figure high on the NATO agenda (Eisen and Kirchick 2018). For instance, the 2019 London Declaration mentions Russia's aggressive actions, terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, state and non-state actors challenging the rules-based international order, instability beyond NATO borders as contributing to irregular migration, as well as cyber and hybrid threats as the main security challenges facing NATO (NATO 2019b).

These external challenges give the Alliance a new purpose and a new lease of life. However, NATO's ability to cope with these external challenges will also depend on its capacity to address several serious *internal* challenges that may, in the mid- and long-term perspective, undermine its internal cohesion and make it less relevant – perhaps completely irrelevant.

NATO has a long record of dealing with internal challenges and tensions, and disagreements on important mat-ters have been a constant theme. Contentious matters have included NATO's nuclear posture, its military strategy, burden-sharing, level of investment in national defence, out-of-area missions, and operations launched by the Alliance or by some of its members, as well as enlargement-related issues (Osgood 1962, Osgood 1971, Daalder 1991, 1999a, 1999b, Thiess 2007, Andrews 2009, Johnston 2017a, Sayle 2019).

What, then, are the critical external and internal challenges now facing the Alliance at its 70th anniversary? Jamie Shea argues (2019) that in the East it is a resurgent and aggressive Russia that makes the Eastern NATO mem-bers nervous. In the South the challenge comes from fragile states vulnerable to extremism, militias and crimi-nal gangs, entailing security headaches ranging from terrorist attacks to humanitarian crises and uncontrolled migration. Finally, there is a serious internal challenge that NATO must address – the challenge posed by the polarisation of many Western societies that struggle to control the dependencies created by globalisation as well new technological developments that have given malicious actors a new hybrid toolkit they can use to wreak havoc or to assert influence. NATO's success or failure in dealing with these internal and external challenges will be central to shaping its future as a defence alliance.

What can threaten the future of NATO as a trusted and reliable defence alliance? To provide an informed answer to this question we return to the results of Warren's study on the reasons for alliance demise in a historical per-spective (Warren 2010).

Strategic defeat

Can the future of NATO be threatened by *defeat of a partner*? So far, the Alliance has not faced a major defeat of any of its partners and has proven to be a reliable provider of security to its members. However, there are some strategic challenges. For instance, the inability of the core NATO power and its key NATO partners to deal with the Afghan security conundrum after almost two decades of military presence and engagement there has led some to wonder whether NATO will be able to address other grave security challenges effectively. There is also the mem-ory of the consequences of the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan for the future of this state project and its own alliance system (Hallams, Ratti and Zyla 2013).

With the renewed Russian military challenge returning to the top of the NATO agenda after 2014 and a possible confrontation between NATO's core power, the USA, and the rising China looming on the horizon, NATO may face a situation where military defeat might become a reality (Dreyer 2007, Denmark 2013, Ling 2013, Bonds, et al. 2019). For instance, a successful Russian military action and strategic *fait accompli* against one of the Baltic

members could undermine NATO's credibility as a security provider, especially if the other Alliance members were unwilling or unable to respond adequately (Radin 2017, Cohen and Radin 2019, Flanagan et al. 2019).

Moreover, NATO presents itself not only as an instrument of collective defence but also as a security community of liberal democracies based on a set of liberal democratic values and norms. A defeat of the liberal democratic project that NATO is meant to promote could seriously undermine its credibility, indeed its very existence – especially if the challenge to this liberal democratic order comes from within. The ascent to power of Donald Trump, his transactional approach to cooperation, also within NATO, his harsh anti-liberal protectionist rhetoric and his unwillingness to reconfirm the US commitment to the alliance – all these have contributed to weakening NATO's internal cohesion and its credibility as a provider of security to its members (Dombrowski and Reich 2017, Posen 2018, Zandee 2019). Also other member-states face problems with "liberal credentials" – to which we return below (Eisen et al. 2019, Polyakova et al. 2019).

Finally, the poor handling of the 2020 COVID crisis by the core NATO powers – the USA, Italy, France, Germany, the UK – and an apparent inability of NATO and member states to prepare to face this new societal threat may undermine the credibility of the security guarantee and efficiency of the help to be provided in a time of a serious future security crisis.

Diverging interests

Another issue that can have negative impact on NATO's credibility and lead to its demise is the question of whether its members have *diverging interests* and thus problems with designing and implementing a coherent strategy and response to external and internal challenges. Whether to focus more on territorial defence of member-states or on out-of-area operations seemed to be the main bone of contention in the post-Cold War period (Duffield 1994, Mayer 2014, Nurkin 2014). Today, however, the main interest-related tensions have mostly to do with two structural questions – how to combine NATO response to threats stemming from the East and from the South without compromising NATO's internal cohesion (Keller 2017)? and how is the Alliance as a whole to respond to "the US pivot to Asia," which can make the USA less interested in, or capable of, helping European allies deal with their regional security problems? (Herd and Kriendler 2013)

A recent survey from the Pew Center showed considerable variation in the willingness to send national forces to help other NATO member-states facing Russian aggression. In some key countries, like Italy, Germany and the UK, under half of the respondents expressed willingness to intervene in such a situation (Fagan 2018). Such doubts were further strengthened when, on his first visit to Brussels, President Trump described NATO as an 'obsolete' organisation and failed to express US commitment to Article 5 (BBC 2017).

Perhaps the most contentious issue as regards diverging interests is the question of burden-sharing within the Alliance (Sandler and Shimizu 2014, Kunertova 2017, Jakobsen 2018, Zyla 2018, Kivimäki 2019). This is also reflected in the 2018 report of the NATO Secretary General, which stated that, for an alliance facing numerous and complex security challenges, "continued investment in defence remains essential"(NATO 2019d,35) and "that all Allies continue to invest more in defence, develop the right military capabilities and make the necessary contributions to NATO's military operations and missions"(NATO 2019d,13). The Secretary General underlined how NATO "attaches great importance to ongoing efforts to ensure fair burden-sharing in all three elements of the Defence Investment Pledge: defence expenditure; investments in capabilities; and contributions to NATO's operations, missions and activities"(NATO 2019d,34), with fair burden-sharing as the foundation of the work of NATO, because effective defence is impossible without investment in the capabilities (Ibid). President Trump made the norm of spending 2 per cent of GDP on defence the key criterion for measuring the contribution of the European allies to trans-Atlantic burden-sharing. This has made political leaders in Europe to wonder whether the USA will remain willing to defend Europe if this commitment is not met (Zandee 2019).

Disappearance of the external threat

Next on Warren's list of factors that have historically led to the demise of an alliance is the *disappearance of the external threat*. Today the situation here is less dramatic than in the first years after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet system, which some experts had expected to lead to the demise of NATO. Paradoxically, the re-emergence of the Russian challenge in 2014 gave NATO a new purpose and a new lease of life – while also posing new challenges to its members (Vanaga and Rostoks 2018, Cohen and Radin 2019).

Failure to abide by agreements

Last on Warren's list is when *alliance partners fail to abide by agreements*. Here a recurrent question that still haunts the Alliance is the issue of internal burden-sharing. As Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said, commenting on the issue of burden-sharing, it is important that "they make good on the promises they made" (NATO 2018).

Another recurrent question is the issue of member-states not living up to normative expectations, which in turn creates normative and value-related tensions within the Alliance. Today, two issues seem to dominate the debate. The first one is the "Trump factor", viewed as a serious internal and normative challenge to NATO's internal cohesion because of the centrality of the USA in the Alliance structure (see Trump 2016, BBC 2017, Dombrowski and Reich 2017, Posen 2018, Zandee 2019). The second one is the question of how certain member-states – Turkey, Hungary and Poland – have embarked on policies that have, in the opinion of some observers, authoritarian or semi-authoritarian undertones and are therefore not compatible with the normative foundation of the Alliance (Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives 2019). Undermining democratic procedures and checks and balances domestically may have a negative impact on how a state is perceived by other member-states and how it deals with common challenges. Even more importantly, it affects the accountability and predictability of policymakers. In the absence of proper checks and balances, they may make grave miscalculations or take calculated but excessive risks, resulting in irrational or harmful decisions with negative consequences not only for their own countries, but for their allies as well (Katz and Taussig 2018).

The emerging issue of "democratic backsliding" illustrates how changing political alignments in member-states (see Sayle 2019) may still pose a challenge to the very existence of the Alliance as we know it. A dramatic implosion of NATO like that experienced in 1991 by the Warsaw Pact or a slow erosion of its internal cohesion leading to its demise would have negative consequences for all its members. They would have to learn how to operate and ensure their own security in a totally different international environment – one characterised by the end of collective defence in Europe, an increase in Russia's relative power in the region, diminishing military inter-operability, and greater regionalisation of security. Also for the USA such a development would have negative consequences: it "would lose allies, military bases and the political predictability established through daily multilateral consultations in the Alliance framework" (Rühle 2018).

Norway and Poland in NATO: opportunities and challenges

NATO is a military alliance made by states and for states. It is therefore important to understand how the actions of its members can weaken – or strengthen – NATO's internal cohesion and ability to act. Here we examine the policies of two member states, Norway and Poland, focusing on four major aspects seen as influencing their policy choices: 1) experiences of strategic defeat; 2) threat perceptions 3) perceptions of national interests and challenges; and finally 4) their ability and willingness to abide by written and unwritten agreements and rules that influence other members' perceptions of both countries as well as NATO's internal cohesion and ability to act.

Experience of strategic defeat

Historical experiences and self-understandings have had definite impacts on the national strategic cultures of both Norway and Poland. The historical experience of *strategic defeat* – in the case of Norway, 9 April 1940 and the Nazi invasion; in the case of Poland, multiple strategic defeats and abandonment by allies – have shaped the national identity and policies, providing motivation for joining NATO as a credible provider of security. With Poland, these historical traumas have clearly influenced strategic narratives and policies after the transfer of political power to the new PiS government in 2015 (Talaga 2018).

Threat perceptions: the Russia factor

Both Norway and Poland border on Russia, a fact that shapes both their own and NATO's security perceptions and policies (Paszewski 2016, Lindgren and Græger 2017, Wilhelmsen and Godzimirski 2017, Friis 2018, Hodges, Bugajski and Doran 2018, Shlapak 2018, Śliwa 2018, Bartkiewicz 2019, Cohen and Radin 2019, Bartkiewicz 2020). However, being Russia's NATO neighbours does not mean that the two countries have adopted same approaches. The Norwegian approach to the Soviet superpower, and now Russia, has been based on certain self-imposed restrictions, guided by the idea of balancing the need for deterrence with sending reassuring signals to Moscow

(Hilde and Widerberg 2014, Tamnes 2015). By contrast, the Polish approach to Russia has been heavily influenced by specific historic experiences, with Russia seen as an existential threat to the very existence of independent Poland (BBN 2013, Ministry of Defence Poland 2017). Further, the Norwegian strategic self-understanding is rooted in Norway's perceptions of itself as a small state (Tamnes 2015, 2019), whereas the Polish self-understanding is a mixture of Poland representing itself as a victim of history (and its neighbours) and also a country with historical memories of being a regional and European great power (Nowak 2008).

Post-2014 international and domestic developments have also contributed to a certain policy convergence between Norway and Poland, especially regarding perceptions of Russia as a security challenge and the need for NATO to focus more on its core task of collective defence. The re-emergence of *perceptions of Russia as a strategic challenge (Norway) or an existential threat (Poland)* have boosted support for NATO in both countries, providing important incentives for stronger cooperation, bilaterally and within the Alliance.

Norway, like most countries, must cope with various structural security challenges related to the asymmetry between the aims and the resources at its disposal. Over the past 70 years, its situation has changed dramatically in many aspects, but the strategic structural challenge has remained the same. Norway must pursue its security policy in a strategic environment dominated by Russia, which, given the clear asymmetry in economic, military and demographic potentials and the growing normative gap, is seen as posing a strategic challenge. NATO membership is still viewed as the best option for dealing with external security challenges, risks and threats in this complex strategic environment, where also the emergence of new technologies and China as a global player enter into the strategic calculus (Lindgren and Græger 2017, Bakke Jensen 2019).

Until the 2014 crisis, and especially after the 2010 Norwegian/Russian agreement on the delineation of their maritime border, the Russian challenge was perceived as less serious than during the Cold War. There were various reasons – unlike the other NATO members bordering on Russia, Norway had no negative historical experiences of having Russia as a neighbour. Also after joining NATO, Norway has conducted a relatively balanced policy towards the USSR/Russia, based on the three principles of (sufficient) deterrence, (self-chosen and necessary) reassurance, and (willing) engagement (Hilde and Widerberg 2014, Hilde 2019). An important structural reason for choosing a balanced approach to Russia was the fact that some key Russian strategic assets, including second-strike capabilities, are located at bases only some 100 km from the Norwegian border. This makes the border strategically important, especially given Russia's "bastion defence" policy. In the Norwegian security debate and policy, the prospect of Russia taking action in the High North to protect its strategic assets there, including taking control of some Norwegian territory, is a recurrent theme. When in 2014 Russia demonstrated both willingness and ability to use military power in its direct neighbourhood, that watershed change had to be factored into Norwegian strategic calculations. Today Norway's approach towards Russia does not differ substantially from that of many other NATO members, including Poland (Nilssen 2015, Norway and Ekspertgruppen for Forsvaret av Norge 2015).

To some extent, the situation of Poland is similar to that of Norway. Although demographically far larger than Norway, Poland has limited resources at its disposal and faces an asymmetric security challenge in the form of a resurgent Russia that has historically posed an existential threat to the very existence of Poland as an independent state. Like Norway, Poland sees NATO membership as the best measure for coping with the strategic asymmetry in its neighbourhood – the official Polish defence concept mentions Russia as source of strategic concern no less than 26 times and NATO 25 times (Ministry of Defence Poland 2017, Rodkiewicz 2017, Śliwa 2018).

Thus, the main factors shaping both Norwegian and Polish security policy today are the geographical proximity of the resurgent Russia, the asymmetry in potentials and differing strategic and political cultures in the shared neighbourhood, as well as strategic uncertainty caused by structural changes in the international system and some systemic tensions within NATO. Norway shares a 197 km border with Russia; Poland has a 210 km border with its eastern neighbour. However, if we add strategic and historic perspectives, the reading of the situation in the shared neighbourhood may become more complicated. For both strategic and historical reasons, the whole Polish border with the post-Soviet space is viewed by Polish and NATO policy-planners as posing a strategic challenge. The 104 km Polish–Lithuanian border is often referred to in Polish and NATO strategic parlance as the Suwalki Gap (Hodges, Bugajski and Doran 2018); the 418 km Polish–Belarusian border is the area where Poland

and NATO meet the Russia–Belarus Union state, and the 535 km Polish–Ukrainian border is a border between a NATO member and a country that has since 2014 been in open military conflict with Russia, a factor that must be taken into account by policymakers responsible for security of the country and in the NATO context.

Russia is considered a threat not only by policymakers in Norway and Poland, but also by the broader public. According to a public opinion poll conducted in Norway in July 2019, 67 per cent of respondents – ten per cent more than in December 2018 – felt that Putin's Russia posed a threat (Walnum and Gimse 2019). The figures were even higher in Poland – in 2015 83 per cent of Poles saw Russia as a threat; in 2017 this figure was much lower (65 per cent) but in 2019, 45.2 per cent of Poles felt that Russia posed a security threat (Bartkiewicz 2019, 2020). According to a 2017 PEW Research Study, Poles were the most sceptical towards Russia: 89 per cent of those surveyed had no confidence in Putin (Vice 2017). A 2018 PEW study showed that Russia was still considered as the main security concern by 65 percent of Poles (Poushter and Huang 2019).

Diverging security interests

Both Norway and Poland see Russia as the greatest source of strategic uncertainty in the shared neighbourhood, with NATO as the main security anchor. However, they do not share all threat perceptions, and have clearly diverging security interests. Indications of the differences between Norway and Poland here emerge from a comparison of national risk perceptions presented in the 2019 Global Risks report.[1]

Table 1 shows Norwegian and Polish perceptions of key risks facing the two countries, and how perceptions and thus interests differ. Percentage figures are presented in descending order in column 5 (PL vs N), showing where the perceptual and interest gaps are greatest.

Table 1. Norway and Poland: differences in risk perceptions (in %)

Risk type	Category	Poland	Norway	PL minus N
Geopol	State collapse or crisis	31.7	3.2	28.5
Geopol	Failure of national governance	38	12.9	25.1
Geopol	Interstate conflict	44.4	19.4	25
Geopol	Failure of regional or global governance	26.8	12.9	13.9
Ec	Fiscal crises	35.6	22.6	13
Techn	Cyber-attacks	38.5	25.8	12.7
Ec	Asset bubble	24.4	12.9	11.5
Societal	Profound social instability	13.7	3.2	10.5
Ec	Unmanageable inflation	9.3	3.2	6.1
Societal	Spread of infectious diseases	3.9	0	3.9
Ec	Illicit trade	6.8	3.2	3.6
Env	Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse	6.3	3.2	3.1
Ec	Food crises	1	0	1
Ec	Deflation	0	0	0
Ec	Failure of financial mechanism or institution	24.9	25.8	-0.9
Ec	Unemployment or underemployment	11.2	12.9	-1.7
Societal	Water crises	4.4	6.5	-2.1
Societal	Large-scale involuntary migration	26.8	29	-2.2

1. For a dataset on global and national risk perceptions as well as the methodology in this survey, see http://reports.weforum.org/global-risks-2019/survey-results/global-risks-of-highest-concern-for-doing-business-2019/#. We used data for Norway and Poland to map the differences in actual risk perceptions as a way of mapping perceptual gaps existing in the broader debate, not only in the narrow context of the debate on security policy.

Geopol	Terrorist attacks	19	22.6	-3.6
Geopol	Weapons of mass destruction	5.4	9.7	-4.3
Env	Natural catastrophes	11.7	16.1	-4.4
Techn	Data fraud or theft	26.8	32.3	-5.5
Ec	Failure of critical infrastructure	3.4	9.7	-6.3
Env	Man-made environmental catastrophes	4.4	12.9	-8.5
Societal	Failure of urban planning	1	9.7	-8.7
Techn	Misuse of technologies	6.8	16.1	-9.3
Ec	Energy price shock	15.6	25.8	-10.2
Env	Failure of climate-change mitigation and adaptation	3.4	16.1	-12.7
Techn	Critical information infrastructure breakdown	8.3	25.8	-17.5
Env	Extreme weather events	17.1	45.2	-28.1

As shown in Table 1, Poles are more concerned about the impact of geopolitical factors such as state collapse or crisis, failure of national governance, interstate conflict and failure of regional or global governance. Also questions related to possible fiscal crises, cyber-attacks, asset bubbles and profound social instability seem to worry Poles much more than Norwegians. By contrast, Norwegians seem far more concerned about the impacts of energy price shocks, failure of climate-change mitigation and adaptation, the breakdown of critical information infrastructure, as well as extreme weather events. In both countries, more than one-fifth of the respondents mention issues like failure of financial mechanisms or institutions, large-scale involuntary migration, terrorist attacks and data fraud or theft.

Obviously, NATO membership can help these countries to deal with only a limited number of the risks listed above – mostly with those that have to do with geopolitical developments, and partly with those related to technology. Poles seem most worried about the impact of these factors where NATO is a natural partner, whereas Norwegians are most concerned about issues not directly dealt with by NATO. One might therefore assume that Polish policymakers could be keener than Norwegian to get NATO to deliver on these issues, and would thus be more motivated to conduct policies that could make NATO – and its main security provider, the USA – more willing to show greater involvement in providing long-term security. Poles are deeply concerned with the impact of a possible inter-state conflict, with Russia as the main challenger. That provides strong policy incentives for implementing measures that will be assessed positively by NATO – and by the US administration, with which the current Polish government seeks to build a strategic partnership as extra security insurance (Buras and Pełczyńska Nałęcz 2018a,b, Goure 2020).

However, Polish attempts to bilateralise security relations with the USA are sometimes criticised as undermining NATO's internal coherence and joint European efforts to provide for Europe's own security, leading also to Poland's strategic isolation (Pełczyńska-Nałęcz 2016, Buras and Pełczyńska-Nałęcz 2018a,b, Kulesa 2018). Also some other Polish actions, such as the launching of the Three Seas Initiative, with clear geopolitical reference to the Intermarium project of building a strategic buffer area between Russia and Germany with Poland as the key power (Chodakiewicz 2012), or various official and semi-official propaganda campaigns aimed at key NATO allies (Germany and France), or at certain groups in Polish society (migrants, judges, LGBT, PiS critics) (Krzeminski 2016, Wigura 2016, Cywiński, Katner and Ziółkowski 2019) have led others to doubt whether Poland's strategic interests are completely compatible with those of other NATO members.

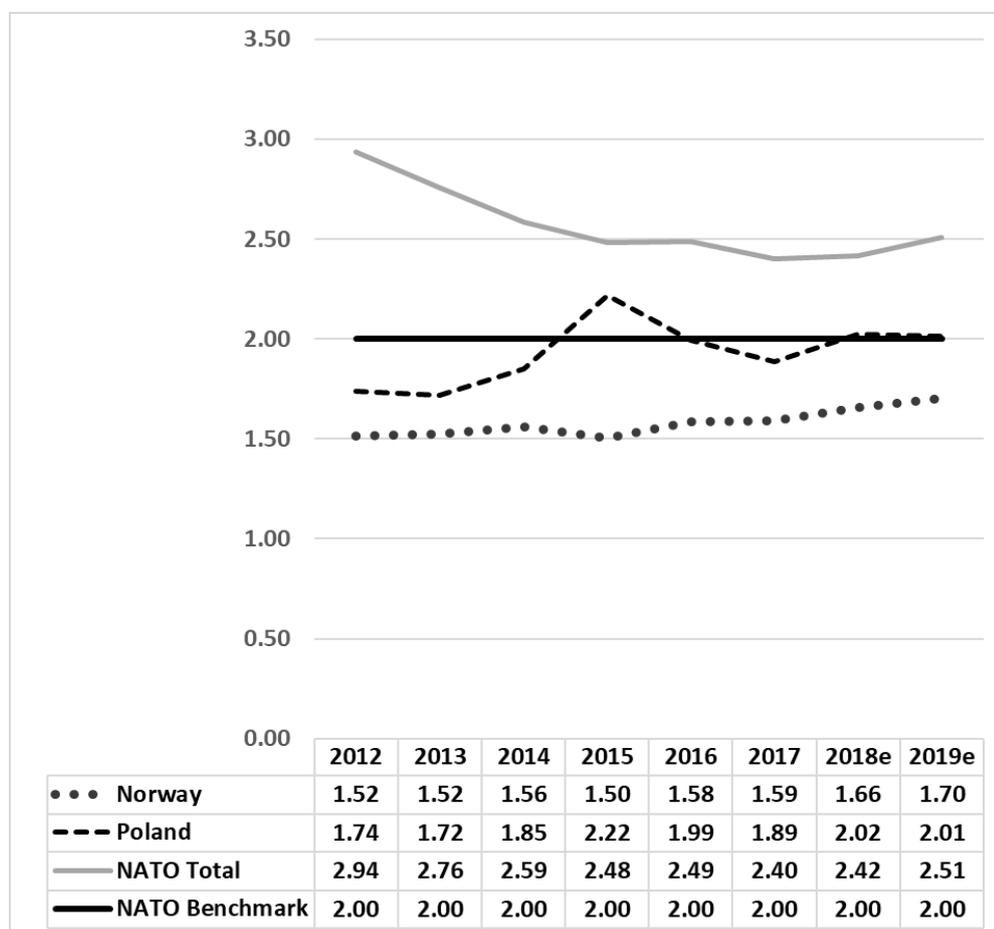## Problems in abiding by agreements

This brings also the issue of what impact member-states' *inability or unwillingness to abide by agreements and written and unwritten rules* may have on NATO's internal cohesion and its ability to act in a crisis. On joining the Alliance, states have had to assume various types of obligations. The more technical ones have to do with managing to produce the military capabilities needed for national and allied defence, as with the pledge to spend at

least 2 per cent of GDP on defence. Further, the political and normative obligations are important in an alliance that presents itself not only as a defence organisation but also as a community of values guided by democratic and liberal norms. In examining the NATO contributions made by both Norway and Poland, we must assess how the two countries meet their obligations in these two areas.
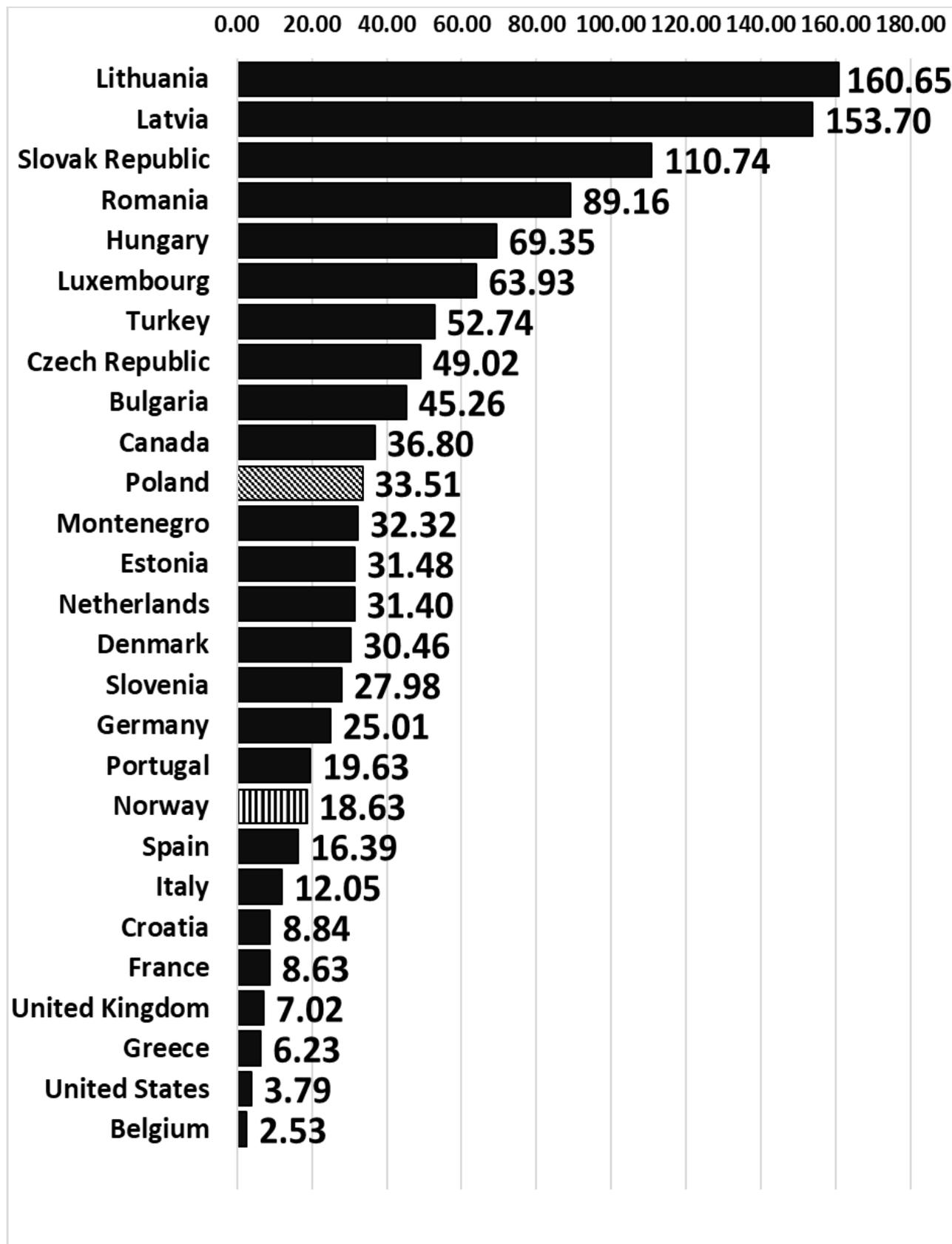
It is relatively easy, using official data (NATO 2019a), to measure contributions to NATO's military capabilities – which should be seen as a top priority. Figure 1 shows how Norway and Poland have delivered on their obligation to spend at least 2 per cent of GDP on defence. Figure 2 presents the recent dynamics in the spending on national defence at national levels in Poland and Norway, showing clearly that Poland has been more willing to demonstrate its commitment than Norway – the former increased its defence spending by 33.5 per cent between 2014 and 2019, the latter by only 18.6 per cent. Also as regards making military personnel available to NATO, Poland – for obvious demographic, but also for political reasons – does much better than Norway, as seen in Figure 3.

However, it seems that at least in three areas relating to military capabilities, Norway has been performing slightly or much better than Poland. The share of spending on personnel decreased in Norway from 42.38 per cent in 2012 to 32.80 per cent in 2019, while in Poland the decrease was very steep from 2012 to 2015 (from 57.34 per cent to 41.96 per cent in 2015); then rose to 50 per cent in 2017, and went down again in2019, to 48.26 per cent. These dramatic cuts in personnel costs in Norway resulted in greater allocations to equipment – the share increased constantly, from 17.76 per cent in 2012 to 29.51 per cent in 2019. By contrast, for Poland the share of expenditures on equipment fell from 15.16 per cent in 2012 to 13.90 per cent in 2013, climbed to 33.20 in 2015, went down to 21.62 per cent in 2016, rose to 27.49 in 2018 and then fell to 23.87 per cent in 2019. These ups and downs can be interpreted as the result of lack of policy coordination, poor governance and long-term vision in Poland, but also as a result of political infighting within the ruling elite, which led to the dismissal of the controversial Polish Minister of Defence Antoni Macierewicz in January 2018.
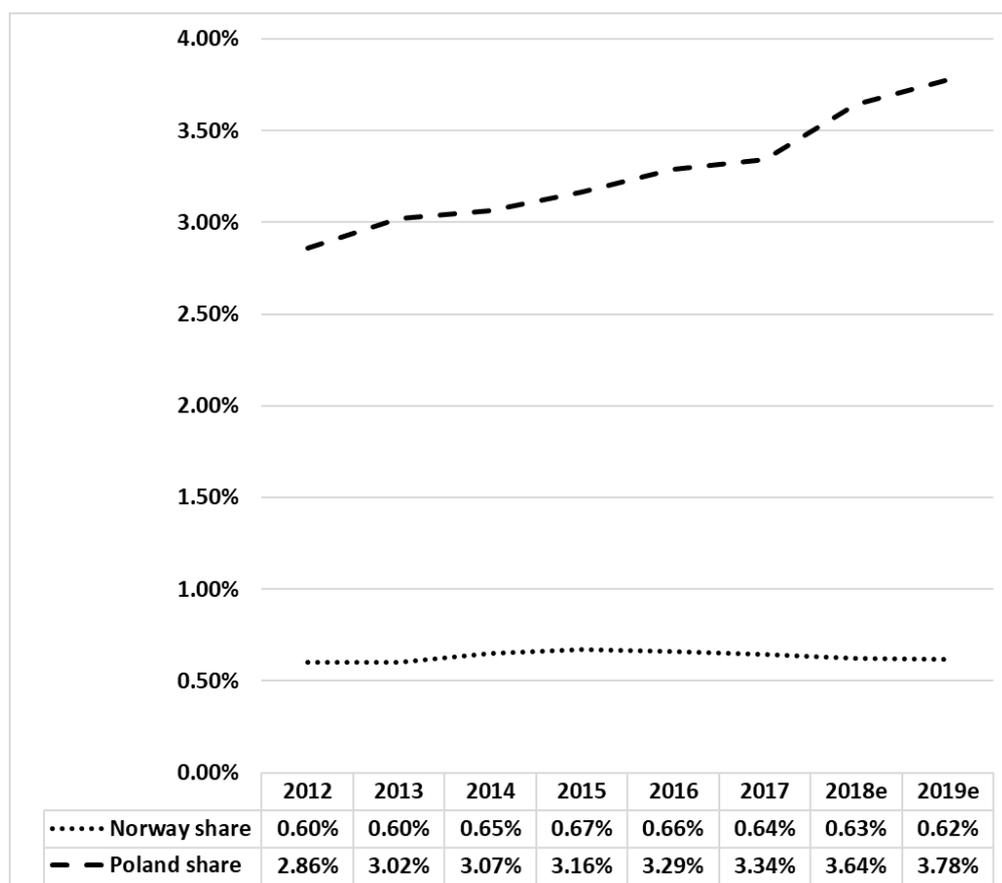
Figure 1. Share of defence expenditures in Norway and Poland

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018e	2019e
• • • Norway	1.52	1.52	1.56	1.50	1.58	1.59	1.66	1.70
- - - Poland	1.74	1.72	1.85	2.22	1.99	1.89	2.02	2.01
—— NATO Total	2.94	2.76	2.59	2.48	2.49	2.40	2.42	2.51
—— NATO Benchmark	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00

Figure 2. Increase in defence expenditures, all members, Norway and Poland 2014–2019

	Value
Lithuania	160.65
Latvia	153.70
Slovak Republic	110.74
Romania	89.16
Hungary	69.35
Luxembourg	63.93
Turkey	52.74
Czech Republic	49.02
Bulgaria	45.26
Canada	36.80
Poland	33.51
Montenegro	32.32
Estonia	31.48
Netherlands	31.40
Denmark	30.46
Slovenia	27.98
Germany	25.01
Portugal	19.63
Norway	18.63
Spain	16.39
Italy	12.05
Croatia	8.84
France	8.63
United Kingdom	7.02
Greece	6.23
United States	3.79
Belgium	2.53

Figure 3. Force contribution. Norway and Poland – share of NATO total military personnel.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018e	2019e
⋯⋯ Norway share	0.60%	0.60%	0.65%	0.67%	0.66%	0.64%	0.63%	0.62%
– – Poland share	2.86%	3.02%	3.07%	3.16%	3.29%	3.34%	3.64%	3.78%

One area where Norway does much better than Poland is the level of defence spending per capita – it is outperformed by only one NATO member, the USA. In 2019, Norway's per capita spending was more than 4 times higher than in Poland – USD 1308 in Norway versus USD 296 in Poland. This reflects the economic differences between the two countries and their ability to bear defence-related costs.

We find even more dramatic differences in how the two countries deliver on what could be termed the "normative scale". Norway is a well-functioning liberal democracy with a strong social democratic tinge, whereas Poland has been perceived as a democratic backslider over the past five years, often mentioned together with Hungary and Turkey as NATO's most problematic members. Although in the past NATO has coped with various normative challenges, it was expected that countries that had accepted the formal membership requirements on enlargement would be both willing and able to follow the liberal, democratic principles laid down in NATO's founding documents and repeated in 1995 (Reiter 2001, Waterman, Zagorcheva and Reiter 2002, Thies, Hellmuth and Millen 2006, Rhodes and Baranowski 2013). That the issue of democratic backsliding has returned to the agenda has been taken as proof of NATO's inability to socialise its new members, and thus as a political problem (Katz and Taussig 2018, Eisen et al. 2019, Polyakova et al. 2019). Although this question is rarely mentioned in official statements, NATO officials have been challenged on this particular issue several times (for two recent examples see NATO 2019c, 2019e).

In her recent hearing before the US Congress Susan Corke from the German Marshall Fund of the United States, presented five reasons why democratic backsliding may pose a challenge to NATO. First, some of the countries in question may let Russia into NATO through the "back door". Second, democratic backsliding may facilitate growth in corruption and more organised crime. Third, it may result in a weakening of links between these countries and the core NATO power – the USA – as was the case when the Hungarian authorities decided to put pressure on the joint US–Hungarian Central European University. Fourth, Hungary has scuttled NATO's efforts to build closer relations with Ukraine. Fifth, this democratic backsliding also results in the growth of antisemitism and xenophobia, unacceptable in functioning liberal democracies (Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives 2019).

Perceptions of some of NATO countries as not living up to democratic standards and pursuing imprudent policies may also influence public opinion in other NATO member-states and the willingness to come to the rescue in a security crisis – in turn, further eroding mutual trust, intra-alliance solidarity and readiness to help. NATO, which defines itself as a normative community of values based on liberal and democratic principles, can have problems with having to deal with member-states that do not live up to these shared expectations, especially as regards democracy (Eisen and Kirchick 2018). It has been argued that NATO should take steps to address this "intra-NATO cancer" that can pose serious problems to the functioning, even the very existence, of the Alliance (Polyakova et al. 2019).

Poland, Hungary and Turkey are often mentioned in connection with democratic backsliding, but they are not the only "problem countries". According to the 2019 Economist Democracy Index (Economist 2019a) only nine NATO members were deemed "full democracies" (Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Canada, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, UK and Spain); 17 members, including Poland, USA and Hungary, were "flawed democracies", and three members (Albania, Montenegro and Turkey) were listed as "hybrid regimes".

Summing up, as of the end of 2019 the situation was as follows:
- the re-emergence of Russia as a strategic challenge or threat has put the fear of a strategic defeat again on the top of national agendas in both Norway and Poland;
- the same re-emergence of revisionist Russia has contributed to cementing cooperation among the NATO members, especially those sharing borders with Russia – including Norway and Poland, whose policies towards Russia have partly converged;
- this has provided strong incentives to make NATO and the USA more committed to European affairs, which has proven more challenging because of Donald Trump's transactional approach to cooperation, and his repeatedly raising the issue of burden sharing – the main intra-NATO contentious issue;
- these recent developments have given Norway a more central role in NATO because of the renewed focus on the Atlantic connection (Chivvis et al. 2017, Lindgren and Græger 2017, Flanagan 2018), but Norway faces a challenge of achieving the 2 per cent/GDP defence spending benchmark as well as improving its military capabilities, especially its land forces;
- the same developments have turned Poland into a pivot country on NATO's Eastern flank, where new NATO and US forces have been deployed and new NATO infrastructure is being developed in response to the Russian challenge;
- Poland shows commitment to deliver on military capabilities, but faces problems with coordination of this policy (Palowski 2019); it belongs to the exclusive club of NATO members who have met the 2 per cent/ GDP benchmark;
- however, Poland is often referred to as a 'democratic backslider': a country that does not live up to democratic expectations, which is sometimes viewed as an issue undermining internal cohesion in both NATO and the EU.

Conclusions

This research paper has examined what threats can undermine the functioning or the very existence of alliances in general, and how these possible threats may undermine the credibility or continued existence of NATO at its 70th anniversary. The empirical examination has assessed how the actions of members – focusing on Norway and Poland – may serve to strengthen or weaken NATO's ability to act and survive as a viable instrument of security.

NATO faces several realist, institutional, and identity-related internal challenges – all with potential negative spill-over effects on its ability to act. In *realist terms*, NATO as a military alliance has returned to its core task as provider of collective defence and territorial security to its members, especially in relation to a more assertive and challenging Russia. NATO also has to deal with other security challenges, such as terrorism, instability in its neighbourhood, uncontrolled migration, cyber- and hybrid threats, issues of energy security and protection of critical infrastructure, and national resilience. The need to keep the USA interested in European affairs has the same realist rationale: US military capabilities are indispensable to give NATO deterrence the credibility necessary for dealing with the challenges posed by Russia and by other state and non-state actors (Mazarr et al. 2018, Bonds et al. 2019, Flanagan et al. 2019). Also the issue of internal burden-sharing within the Alliance should be understood in realist terms: the member-states need to develop military capabilities to ensure an adequate level

of credible deterrence and make resources available in a possible crisis situation. Viewed in purely realist terms, Poland seems to deliver better on its obligations than Norway as regards military spending and making relevant contributions to the joint NATO forces pool.

As for *institutional challenges*, NATO has developed as an institutional framework for security cooperation among its members. Such a multilateral institutional framework was viewed as a better solution than bilateral agreements or unilateral actions. NATO was never intended to deal exclusively with military questions: it should also serve as a platform for multilateral political cooperation and coordination. This highly institutionalised framework has helped the Alliance to cope with such challenges as no longer having an external existential threat to deal with after the end of the Cold War. Today, the key institutional challenges facing NATO are related to the possible weakening of the trans-Atlantic link. In a time of growing strategic uncertainty, some members may seek to strengthen their bilateral ties with the USA as additional security insurance. This in turn might trigger dynamics that could further undermine internal cohesion in NATO as well as mutual trust among its members (Hodges 2019). In addition comes the need to strengthen the European leg of the Alliance and find a viable platform for security cooperation with the EU (Smith 2011, Græger 2016, 2017, Howorth 2017, Perot 2019). These questions were recently raised by French President Macron in an interview with The Economist that has attracted considerable critical attention (Economist 2019b). NATO will have to work to (re)create a viable pan-European collective security framework in a situation when many of the institutional solutions that helped to reduce tension levels are no longer present, or have come under pressure. Further, organising relations with like-minded European non-NATO states poses an institutional challenge – as with NATO's relations with aspiring members like Ukraine and Georgia, or with Sweden and Finland.

Here Norway's key contribution to improving NATO's chances to remain relevant as an institutional manager of security and cooperation among members and with non-members was delegating one of its best and most effective consensus-builders, former Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, to the position of NATO Secretary General. That the Alliance decided to extend his mandate until September 2022 is a clear sign of how his services as NATO consensus-builder have been appreciated at a time when NATO has been facing many serious challenges to its internal cohesion and even ability to act. Regarding Poland, its main institutional achievement was organising the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw, where many important decisions were made. Also Poland's willingness to increase its level of defence spending and host important elements of NATO's organisational infrastructure on its territory has been appreciated by other allies.

Finally, as to *normative challenges,* it is important to remember that, from the very beginning, NATO has had a normative justification that functioned as its 'normative glue'. NATO was to be an alliance of states built on solid democratic foundations, although there were periods when some members had serious problems delivering on these normative aspects. When new states wanted to join the Alliance, their decision was motivated not only by shared threat perceptions and interests in coming under the NATO/US military umbrella, but also by their commitment to live up to democratic ideals. However, as noted, this normative and identity-related dimension of the Alliance is coming under increasing pressure and some members face serious problems with living up to democratic standards. The main guarantor, the USA, is experiencing what has been called an "anti-liberal turn", while certain European members – Turkey, Poland, Hungary, and, more recently, also Italy – are pursuing policies with a clear anti-liberal or even anti-democratic tinge. When Norway and Poland are compared through this normative lens, it is clear that Norway is viewed as a democratic NATO champion, whereas Poland is often referred to as a democratic backslider.

What will the combination of the realist, institutional and normative challenges mean for NATO's future? Some statements made by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg can help to provide an understanding of how NATO can deal with this political conundrum. Replying to German journalist Elmar Thevessen at the Aspen Security Forum, who had asked whether he was concerned about the erosion of core values in some members, including Poland, Stoltenberg referred to some concerns expressed by various NATO allies. He underlined that NATO is a platform where all questions, also those related to how members deal with their normative obligations, can be discussed openly and freely. He added that NATO consists of 29 allies who are different and sometimes disagree. At the same time, Stoltenberg praised NATO for being able to unite around its core task: to protect and defend its members, and that it was important that NATO should continue to do so (NATO 2019c).
Stoltenberg presented a similar assessment in responding to a similar question on NATO's normative challenge by Steven Erlanger of the *New York Times*, at the Munich Security Forum in February 2019. He recognised the

existence of some normative problems, noted that NATO is an organisation with many types of members – 'Some are liberal, some are conservatives, some are social democrats, some are Christian democrats, some are different things' – but again underlined the importance of all NATO members delivering on the core task which is 'to protect each other'(NATO 2019e).

The statements, underlining the importance of the realist dimension of NATO – delivering on the core task of protecting each other – are probably still highly representative of the current mood in the organisation. This may mean that paying lip service to its normative commitments will remain a part of the official rhetoric, whereas NATO *practices* will be guided by purely realist concerns, with key attention to how to use its institutional capacities to smooth over internal tensions and deliver on the core task of protecting each other.

The election of Joe Biden as the new president in November 2020 and clear signals coming from the new US administration that shows much more interest in values and norms as the backbone of cooperation than its predecessors in Washington may mean that the issue of democratic backsliding may come higher on the NATO agenda as a more serious challenge to NATO's internal cohesion.

However, what seems to be most important is to make NATO functional as a defence alliance facing real security challenges and threats. This may therefore mean that NATO will focus on achieving consensus on key security-related aspects of cooperation, leaving normative issues aside as questions to be dealt with by other actors, for instance the EU.

This also means that, in today's situation, delivering on what is relevant for NATO's core functions will be still deemed far more important than living up to normative standards. That is completely in line with NATO's historical record as a highly adaptive vehicle of interstate cooperation, tackling core security tasks in a constantly changing international environment (Duffield 1994, Rynning 2005, Smith 2007, Aybet and Moore 2010, Webber, Sperling and Smith 2012, Herd and Kriendler 2013, Johnston 2017a, Sayle 2019). This ability to cope with varying challenges under changing international conditions was often thought to be the result of the Alliance's relatively high level of institutionalisation as well as the normative affinity of its members (Johnston 2017a). The level of institutionalisation remains high; but with increasing problems related to normative backsliding, the Alliance may face serious challenges to its internal cohesion, in turn triggering internal tensions and undermining its normative justification for cooperation. For the time being, with what is viewed as a serious Russian challenge consolidating the Alliance, normative questions may play a less prominent role in the debate on the future of cooperation – but any weakening of the normative glue can undermine its longer-term cohesion, should the imminent external threat change its nature.

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