WGA

An EU Survey on Whole-of-Goverment Approaches to External Conflict and Crisis

Bulgaria Report

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1 | Introduction

A whole-of-government approach (WGA) is not common in Bulgaria as a concept even at the level of rhetoric. 'Vseobkhvaten metod', the concept most common at the level of rhetoric, can be considered the proper translation of the English term 'comprehensive approach' (CA). In very broad terms, it implies the need for a complex, holistic and coordinated approach to problems and tasks in an increasingly complex environment.

In Bulgaria, well-established inter-ministerial councils facilitate addressing the multiple dimensions of the issues on the government's agenda. With regard to security issues, CA in the Bulgarian context implies awareness of the multi-level complexity of challenges that need to be addressed not only at the local and national levels, but also at the regional and global ones. Multilateral cooperation within the framework of NATO and the EU is considered crucial for addressing the multi-level complexity of security challenges. With regard to external conflicts and crises, CA has been adopted at the level of rhetoric, but it has not resulted in the introduction of new institutional practices in either the legal or administrative fields. Instead, decision making related to and the organisation of Bulgaria's involvement in external conflicts and crises are the result of an ad hoc, pragmatic approach.

If CA to external conflicts and crises is defined as a so-called 3D issue (i.e. one involving the coordination of diplomatic, defence and development instruments), the Bulgarian preference for the ad hoc approach rather than for any institutionalisation of a multi-dimensional CA is to be understood against the background of the complex transition from being part of the Soviet

sphere of influence – as a member of the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) – to membership in NATO (2004) and then the EU (2007).

With regard to the development D, it matters that Bulgaria's involvement with the 'third world' during the Cold War was linked to the ideological aspiration to convert 'fraternal' parties and countries to communism. Bulgaria's ideologically motivated support for loss-making projects during this period can hardly be viewed as useful knowhow for 'development policy'. On the eve of the fall of communism, the accumulated debt of 24 developing countries to Bulgaria amounted to USD 2.79 billion, with Algeria, Iraq and Libya being the major recipient countries (Vachkov and Ivanov 2008). Owing to its high level of indebtedness and economic mismanagement at the start of the transition, Bulgaria itself had to rely on development and humanitarian aid beginning in 1990 and lasting until its EU accession in 2007. Consequently, despite Bulgaria's stated commitment to EU development policy, its levels of development and humanitarian aid are low, and any enthusiasm for adopting a legal and institutional framework for development policy has been waning since 2016 (Fileva, Valkanova and Buchkov 2018).

With regard to the diplomacy D, Bulgaria's difficult economic transition is a major factor for understanding why the country did not have a capacity for active diplomatic involvement in issues that were not of immediate national concern. Furthermore, in its 15 years of NATO membership and 12 years of EU membership, Bulgaria has not been an active shaper of peace and security policies. This inaction can be seen in the results of the European Foreign Policy Scorecard, a project conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR 2010/11– 2016) between 2010 and 2016 to provide a systematic annual assessment of the EU's and its individual member states' performance in dealing with the rest of the world. Depending upon their performance, member states were assigned 'leader', 'slacker' or 'supporter' status. Bulgaria got mostly the neutral "supporter" status, but it did occasionally fall into the 'slacker' category. Indeed, except for its active involvement with the Western Balkans during Bulgaria's recent presidency of the Council of the EU (in the first half of 2018), Bulgaria cannot pretend to assume a leadership role with regard to the EU's CFSP and CSDP anytime soon.

Last but not least, with regard to the defence D, it is important to consider that defence reforms started late in Bulgaria and are still ongoing. Prior to 1989, Bulgaria was an appendix to the Soviet Union in military and defence terms. In 1968, the country was involved in the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. Throughout the Cold War, Bulgaria had to cover 6 percent of the military and logistic expenses of the Warsaw Pact, and it actually spent 12 percent of its GDP on Soviet military equipment (compared to the 2 percent that it has yet to achieve to meet its commitment to NATO). Whereas membership in the EU was accepted as a national priority early on (in 1990), political consensus on Bulgaria's security policy only emerged slowly. Until 1998, Bulgaria's political elite remained deeply divided over the nature of national security and the aspiration to join NATO. However, that same year saw the formulation of the National Security Concept (NSC), which stipulated integration into the EU and NATO as being among the country's foreign policy priorities. What's more, it was the first document of its kind to treat national security as being affected in a comprehensive way by global economic, political, scientific and environmental processes as well as by regional developments.

The NSC of 1998 facilitated a CA to Bulgaria's preparation for EU and NATO membership. On its basis, Bulgaria made fast progress in establishing the operational and institutional infrastructure needed for EU and NATO accession in the form of various inter-institutional councils and working groups. They were good enough to allow Bulgaria to comply in a reactive way to the blueprints of the EU and NATO and to thereby join NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2007. However, they were not designed to facilitate proactive policymaking either in general or more specifically with regard to Bulgaria's stance towards external conflicts and crises.

On the eve of Bulgaria's accession to NATO, the scholar Blagovest Tashev criticised the slow emergence of fresh strategic thinking in Bulgaria and pessimistically predicted (Tashev 2004: 15): "If no change in strategic thinking is to take place, Bulgaria will then assume a relatively low profile in the Alliance, doing only the minimum required as a member and frequently refusing to take a firm stand on issues which do not appear to concern the narrowly defined national interest." A decade later, in a critical assessment of the post-Cold War defence reforms in Bulgaria, the scholar Georgi Tzvetkov also identified "a critical need for a strategic vision and governance in defence" (Tzvetkov 2014: 77).

In sum, owing to its complex economic and political transitions as well as its quite recent memberships in NATO and the EU (not to mention its still-pending negotiations related to OECD membership), Bulgaria does not aspire to assume a leadership role with regard to the management of external conflicts and crises. This lack of aspiration, in turn, most likely explains the country's lack of eagerness to consider any kind of institutionalisation of a CA to external conflicts and crises.

2 | What policies have been developed to further policy coherence?

As a result of the slow evolvement of strategical thinking, Bulgaria's National Security Concept of 1998 was not replaced until the adoption of a National Security Strategy in 2011 (National Assembly of Bulgaria 2011) after two failed attempts, in 2005 and 2008. Although the 2011 NSS did not explicitly refer to a CA, its mention of various related concepts (e.g. inter-institutional coordination, effectiveness and synergies) can be interpreted as implicit references to a CA. The 2011 NSS was elaborated with 2020 as a horizon, but it was already updated in 2018 (the horizon being respectively shifted to 2025) (National Assembly of Bulgaria 2018). A review planned for 2019 might result in either a new update or in a new document.

The updated 2018 NSS (ibid.) makes several references to the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) of 2016. Although it mentions a comprehensive approach (CA) on three occasions, it does so without providing any specific definition, thereby allowing for different interpretations. The CA mentioned in point 158 of the NSS comes the closest to the CA concept as used in the EUGS. Diplomatic, political, communication, economic, financial, intelligence and legal instruments are mentioned as being complementary to military instruments in a CA in order to achieve the goals of defence policy. CA is also mentioned once in the seven paragraphs of the NSS's new chapter on 'crisis management'. One should note, however, that CA in the framework of the crisis-management security policy does not have a special focus on external crisis management. Rather, the focus is on the multi-phased, -lateral and -level aspects of crisis

management as well as on the use of instruments and resources at all possible levels: local, regional, national and international. In the concluding point (204) of the 2018 NSS, there is a statement that the updated strategy builds upon "a comprehensive approach to security", but this creates the impression of having resulted from a 'copy-and-paste' operation.

Thus, CA has no doubt influenced the general approach to crisis management as one out of a total of 11 sectorial security policies in the 2018 NSS. These are: financial and economic security, transport security, communication security, social security, energy security, environmental security, justice and home affairs security, foreign policy security, defence security, cybersecurity and crisis management security. The section on foreign policy (points 144–156) makes reference to the countries from the Western Balkans (point 150), to the Black Sea region (151), to the Middle East (152) and to Afghanistan (153). Reference to the same regions or countries is already made in the descriptive chapter on the external security environment (III.1). Instability in these regions, which (with the exception of Afghanistan) are geographically close to Bulgaria, is the evident reason behind Bulgaria's interest in navigating the internal-external security nexus.

The assessment of the external security environment in the 2018 NSS covers important thematic priorities, such as geopolitical and military balance, terrorism, human trafficking, violent extremism, asymmetric threats, radical Islam, migration, energy security and cybersecurity. The 2018 NSS also refers to Bulgaria's commitments as a member of NATO and the EU, but it does not go into details regarding the possible fields of action.

At present, Bulgarian support for international peace and security is provided in line with the 2015 Programme for the Development of the Defence Capabilities of the Bulgarian Armed Forces 2020. According to the document (Council of Ministers 2015: 5): "The Armed Forces maintain state of readiness for participation in multinational allied and coalition crisis response operations. In terms of size, they contribute to prolonged operations with concurrent rotation of one reinforced battalion (Battle Group) or [a] greater number [of] smaller units and assets from the military Services exclusively within the resource equivalent to the level of ambition (on the average, about 1,000 troops). The Navy participates with declared forces within the resource equivalent to one frigate for a period up to 6 months per year. The Air Force participates with transport aviation without rotation for a period [of] up to 6 months per year with the necessary personnel. The needed logistics and other elements for participation in operations are also ensured."

According to Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) data from April 2019, 334 Bulgarians are deployed in NATO missions (157 in the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan and 153 in the Operation Sea Guardian mission in the Mediterranean) and 55 in OSCE missions (44 in the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine). What's more, 72 Bulgarians are currently participating in 12 of the 17 CSDP missions. A review of Europe's civilian capacities published a decade ago (Korski and Gowan 2009) divided EU member states into four categories: professionals, strivers, agnostics and indifferents. With only 46 civilians deployed at that time, Bulgaria was put in the 'indifferents' category. Although larger, the current deployment of Bulgarians in CSDP missions can hardly foster expectations that Bulgaria could qualify for a higher category anytime soon.

With regard to development policy, 2011 was a turning point for Bulgaria, as it marked the first time that development policy was formally classified as being part of the country's foreign policy (Council of Ministers 2011). With regard to the financial implications, Bulgaria had committed itself to achieving the level of 0.33 percent of GDP for development policy by 2015. However, owing to the international financial and economic crises, this target date was pushed back to 2030. Only a small part (3.41% in 2015) of Bulgarian development aid is spent on a bilateral basis, but there is no direct or indirect link to external conflicts and crises. Bulgaria's response to the 2015/2016 refugee crisis led to a temporary spike in bilateral development and humanitarian aid (18.03%) because of ad hoc aid provided to the Middle East.

3 | Who are the main actors involved in cooperating in a WGA?

With regard to dealing with external crises and conflicts, the main actors that cooperate in Bulgaria are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of Interior.

Parliament can play an important role with regard to Bulgaria's positioning on external conflicts and crises. Article 84 (11) of the constitution stipulates that parliament must give its consent to any deployment of Bulgarian military forces abroad. The proposal for the deployment is prepared by the government.

The parliament also adopts the annual state budget proposed by the government. Budget lines linked to humanitarian aid, development policy and Bulgaria's participation in NATO and CSDP missions are not issues that trigger extensive debate.

The parliament or individual parliamentary committees have the right to put questions to ministers and to invite representatives of the executive to attend hearings on any issues of interest, including external conflicts and crises. One format for debate on politically controversial foreign policy issues can be the Consultative Council for National Security (CCNS), which is chaired by the president of Bulgaria. The CCNS includes representatives of the political groups in parliament; the speaker of the parliament; the prime minister; the ministers of foreign affairs, defence, the interior and finance; the chairman of the state security agency; and the chief of the general staff of the Bulgarian Army (President of the Republic of Bulgaria 2012). Depending on the issue under discussion, other government or political parties may be invited to either the regular (quarterly) or extraordinary meetings (ibid.).

With regard to crises in the last 10 years, the CCNS had a meeting in March 2014 in the immediate wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea. Although there was agreement that the sanctions which would eventually be imposed on Russia would also have negative impacts on Bulgaria, this did not prevent the government from supporting the sanctions. However, at present, the incumbent president and the incumbent government are quite often at odds on several foreign policy issues, especially when Russia is involved in a direct or indirect way. Most recently, the president also criticised the government for its support for Juan Guaido as the de facto head of state of Venezuela.

4 | How does your country operationalise a WGA?

Bulgaria has opted not to operationalise its involvement with external conflicts and crises under the 2016 EUGS. However, this does not mean that ad hoc decisions are not taken in a coordinated manner.

There are two inter-ministerial councils that can be used for coordination on issues related to external conflicts and crises. First, there is the Inter-ministerial Security Council (ISC) chaired by the prime minister, which was introduced by a decree of the Council of Ministers in 1998. Second, there is the Inter-ministerial Council on Bulgaria's Participation in NATO and the EU's CSDP (IC NATO/ CSDP), which was introduced by a degree of the Council of Ministers in 2005. The latter council is jointly chaired by the minister of foreign affairs and the minister of defence. Furthermore, the Consultative Council for National Security (CCNS) (discussed above) is another body that can be used to facilitate the elaboration of national positions on external conflicts and crises. All three of these bodies have much broader tasks than external conflicts and crises, but they can be used in an ad hoc way for this purpose.

If necessary, the Situational Centre attached to the Security Council at the Council of Ministers and its secretariat also have the potential to fulfil coordinating tasks in a CA manner. This was the case, for example, at the peak of the refugee crisis of 2015, which mainly affected the Western Balkans but also impacted Bulgaria.

Moreover, discussion about external conflicts and crises involve the intelligence and counter-intelligence services in different formats and can be linked to the international exchange of intelligence information.

With regard to development policy, one should mention the UN and Development Aid Cooperation unit within the MFA, which serves as the secretariat of an inter-institutional International Development Aid Cooperation Council chaired by the minister of foreign affairs. The council's members also include the deputy ministers of foreign affairs, finance, economy, education and interior. Unfortunately, a draft law from 2016 on international development got stuck in the pipeline. With provisions for establishing a special agency for development aid and for facilitating the financing of NGOs to enable them to participate in big international development projects, it had the potential to become an operational enabler of better coordination with regard to development aid. However, given the scarcity of resources, the medium-term development programmes operate with a limited geographic (Western Balkans and Black Sea region) and thematic (democratic and economic transition) scope.

Political disagreement as well as public opinion can be powerful disablers for involvement in external conflicts and crises, especially in regions that are perceived as not being linked to narrow national interests and not presenting any threat to Bulgarian nationals or interests. Cases in which there was political polarisation and negative public opinions regarding Bulgarian involvement in foreign conflicts have included the UNTAC mission in Cambodia between 1992 and 1993 as well as the Multi-National-Force – Iraq between 2003 and 2005 (see Slatinski 2005 and Cantir 2011).

A good example (though not a recent one and thus not linked to the 2016 EUGS) of a successful application of a CA to an external crisis is Bulgaria's involvement in the 1999 Kosovo refugee crisis. Instead of taking refugees from Kosovo on a quota basis, as proposed by the US, the Bulgarian government decided to assist in the management of Radusa, one of the four refugee camps on Macedonian territory, as well as to provide aid to the other camps. A Bulgarian-run crisis centre operated around the clock coordinating both information and assistance in terms of food, shelter, clothing, medication and transport supply. In addition, the centre included a hospital as well as operations to transport patients to Bulgaria for treatment. The crisis centre was so successful, in fact, that some thought was given to maintaining it as a permanent coordinating structure. However, worries that this might trigger public anxiety about a permanent Bulgarian involvement in the crisis led to a decision not to keep the centre in operation.

Regarding the nexus of internal and external security policies, one should not neglect to mention that Bulgaria's decisive involvement in the 1999 Kosovo refugee crisis primarily resulted from concerns about Bulgaria's internal security. More recently, this nexus also played an important role in Bulgaria's decision to support a CA to the 2015/16 refugee crisis and to the migration dossier in general. In this case, however, a CA should be interpreted as a common European solution to border control and migration rather than as a matter of coordination at the national level.

Last but not least, it deserves to be mentioned that, since 2013, Sofia has hosted NATO's Centre of Excellence for Crisis Management and Disaster Response (CMDR COE), for which Bulgaria is a 'framework nation' and Poland and Greece are 'sponsoring nations'. The centre's activities are based on a shared understanding of the importance of cross-cutting matters within a framework of a comprehensive approach to peace and security. With its strong education and training branch, the centre organises events under the auspices of the European Security and Defence College (ESDC). Since the centre trains and educates leaders and specialists from NATO member and partner countries, this COE can be considered an important asset in Bulgaria for the promotion of strategic thinking and the adoption of a comprehensive approach to peace and security.

5 | Conclusions

Bulgaria has opted not to operationalise or institutionalise a WGA to external conflicts and crises at the national level. What's more, to presuppose that the eventual institutionalisation of a WGA would increase the level of Bulgarian involvement and effectiveness in responding to such events would be highly speculative.

However, Bulgaria does explicitly support the 2016 EUGS, and general references to it are part of both public and internal documents of various ministries and the government. The 2018 National Security Strategy (National Assembly of Bulgaria 2018) concludes with a statement that it builds upon "a comprehensive approach to security", but it does not include any explicit definition of comprehensive approach. In the Bulgarian context, a 'comprehensive approach' implies awareness of the multi-level complexity of challenges that need to be addressed not only at the local and national levels, but also at the regional and global ones. This

understanding explains the importance that Bulgaria attaches to multilateral cooperation within the framework of NATO, the EU and other multilateral organisations and operations.

With regard to development policy, bilateral aid is only a small part of Bulgaria's rather low level of overall contributions, with the lion's share being channelled through the relevant multilateral body or bodies. Similarly, coordination at the EU, NATO, OSCE and UN levels is essential for the effectiveness of the missions in which Bulgaria participates in fulfilling its membership obligations. This might explain why Bulgarian tends to view the need for a WGA to external conflicts and crises as an issue to be addressed at the European and international levels rather than at the national one.

References to external conflicts and crises in Bulgarian political debates and policy documents are always related to the nexus of internal and external security. Political consensus and a supportive public opinion are important preconditions for Bulgarian involvement in external conflicts and crises.

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