



## **WE RELY ON SLOVENIA AS A KEY PLAYER IN THIS REGION**

**The Supreme Allied Commander Transformation General Jean-Paul Paloméros visited Slovenia on 17 and 18 November this year. We had the opportunity for an interview in the building of the future NATO Mountain Warfare Centre of Excellence in Slovenia. We talked about the role of centres of excellence, what was discussed at recent NATO Summit and, of course, what were the key challenges of ACT and NATO transformation.**

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General Paloméros, welcome to Slovenia and to the Slovenian Armed Forces. During most of your career you were a fighter pilot. But after occupying many different positions, you were appointed Supreme Allied Commander Transformation in September 2012. Do you miss those earlier adrenaline-filled years?

Well, my job is fascinating; I mean when you invest yourself fully in your job, it becomes a part of you. But I should add that I do manage to fly jets occasionally, as I did a few weeks ago on a F18 in one of the US Navy's greatest jet bases on the East Coast

at Oceana. But while I may sometime miss the speed and adrenaline that comes with flying jets, my current job brings its own kind of excitement.

Since 2010, Slovenian defence expenditures have reduced dramatically. Slovenian Armed Forces are trying to rationalize, to do "more with less" and to allocate resources first to areas required to maintain combat readiness. Other Alliance countries have faced similar situations and NATO has responded with initiatives such as Smart Defence, the Framework Nations Concept, the Connected Forces Initiative, to encourage a cooperative approach towards military capability development through sharing knowledge and resources. During this year's NATO Summit member states reiterated the goal of spending 2% of GDP on defence and to al-

locate 20% of defence expenditure to capability development. Do you expect that this goal is achievable, and what is Allied Command Transformation's role in this endeavour? How important is this goal for future NATO military capability development in member states?

Defence is a long-term investment. Many people will focus on investing in equipment, which is fine, but when you deal with people for whom a military career is a long-term investment and a passion, you must have a long-term vision too. Reducing defence budgets over the long term, year after year, will have a long-term effect. Many European countries, including Slovenia, have significantly reduced their defence budgets. We must now assess the effects of this development and how to deal with them. The first and greatest impact is on force less -

training, fewer flying hours, fewer exercise days, and reduced maintenance will lead to a degradation of capabilities. We have to work together to restore our readiness, because the world remains full of challenges,

priorities. There is still much work to be done, but the prioritization work is of enormous help. This is because if everything is a priority, nothing is a priority.

**I see Allied Command Transformation very much as NATO's "think thank". One of your current projects is the conceptual Future Framework for Alliance Operations. Do you think that future operations**



threats and risks, and time is short. So what we try to do, in NATO and in ACT, is to promote training, education and exercises, to make sure that we are able to rebuild our readiness, both at the Alliance and at the national levels.

We clearly also have to find the right trade-off between very expensive high-tech capabilities and more affordable capabilities, while ensuring that we remain able to face our many demanding challenges. We have to be able to sustain operations over the long-term, as we did in Afghanistan - and don't forget we still have NATO and EU forces in the Balkans, not so far from here. We must spend intelligently and encourage more multinational projects, so that by spending together we complement one another. ACT is there to support this approach by identifying priorities. In the run-up to the Wales summit in September, we worked very hard to identify the key capabilities NATO really needs and from there developed a list of

With the Connected Forces Initiative, we will be working through education, training and exercises to keep our edge, maintain our skillsets and then invest in multinational capabilities, such as Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance to help with the strategic assessment which is required before any operation. These assessments are vital because we have but one single set of forces and so many challenges, up to and including collective defence, but also crisis management and who knows what next. You may recall that a year ago, nobody really foresaw what might happen in Ukraine or to our South and in Iraq. We must be very careful in assessing future needs, building on the strengths of today while trying to imagine what could come tomorrow. This is one of ACT's roles: we are developing a vision for the future, a strategic foresight to identify the main trends and to help the Nations to define their own national priorities, which is why the interaction between ACT and the Nations is so important.

**will demand major changes in NATO's current force structure, capability development requirements and training standards?**

We have a golden word in NATO: interoperability. This is how we make sure that all NATO forces, and those of our Partners - who have become increasingly important, are able to work together, to interact, to communicate, to share information, as well as some equipment, through multinational development. Interoperability in the future will be even more important because of the fast pace of technological progress. The danger, if we are not cautious and precise enough in defining our standards, is that we could see some nations - such as the USA - moving rapidly ahead, while other nations struggle to keep pace. Which is why ACT is focussed on developing a suitable, achievable and affordable level of interoperability. We must train our forces and make sure that our systems are at least compatible.



### **So is this why cyber defence is so important?**

NATO has always put a lot of emphasis on the protection of its own Command, Control and Communications systems. At the time, we did not use the word “cyber”, it was called electronic warfare for instance, but nowadays this is covered by the overall framework of cyber warfare. But whatever the name, it is clearly important. We cannot allow any weaknesses in this field, because we know that if NATO systems were compromised, all NATO Nations would be at risk. This is really a part of NATO’s core mission of collective defence, and, therefore, NATO’s credibility is at stake. But here again, we must work with Nations, because they alone are responsible for their own sovereignty. This is not just about military capability; it is about the economy, the banking system and privacy as well. This is a fascinating, but very complex issue. What I can tell you is that NATO is really moving forward with developing a complete ‘Cyber Concept’ with a training plan. We are working very closely with the

Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Estonia and will soon hold a large scale cyber-exercise for the Alliance. As we gain experience and skills, we must, however, remember that Cyber Defence is not only about systems, but also about skills and people.

**Allied Command Transformation is also NATO’s leading agent for education and training. Some important changes were implemented in NATO doctrines highlighting the importance of education and training quality. But the issue is how to be good at something when you have fewer resources? How can small nations find the opportunities inside NATO to train personnel and units to the same standards and requirements? Where do you see the main future challenges for NATO military education and training?**

Well, this is the key challenge. The good news is that two years ago it was not a priority for NATO, but we are now reinvesting in people, in training and

in education. To do that, we must convince the Nations to reinvest in their own individual training and education, but within an overall programme. We try to take the best every Nation has to offer and then designate a specific Nation as the lead for training in a specific area with NATO certification. This quality assurance process is important since we want to maintain the highest standards. We are really looking at Centres of Excellence, such as the future NATO Mountain Warfare Centre of Excellence in Slovenia, to be key players in that overall training and education programme. Not everybody can retain the full spectrum of the skills which are required to train and educate our armed forces. But we have a lot of very dedicated, high-level skills within the Member Nations. So, if we can share and make use of those skills in a smart way, we may be able to mitigate some of the effects of the reductions in defence spending. COEs represent a great return on investment allowing us to capitalize on real expertise and we are looking to networking those COEs to address problems collectively. Here you have a very special dedicated Centre for mountain warfare, while others are focusing on the civilian military interface, counter-IED, STRATCOM, energy security and when you put all that together you get a real synergy, which will help us deal with issues such as hybrid threats, which require a global approach. This kind of synergy will make our training and education system in NATO much, much, more efficient and much, much, more relevant.

**I received the publication describing all the COEs and I have to say it is very impressive, because every country does something very special and they can all contribute.**

It is impressive, because every single country has something to offer and that is where you can see the contribution made by nations, a contribution that goes beyond budgets and figures. We see this through their commitment to operations, the development of COEs and the sharing of skills with others, which is invaluable. Sharing skills, sharing expertise, is not easily quantifiable but at the end of the day it is very important we give all Nations access to this expertise.

## How can Slovenia contribute to ACT's transformational efforts?

There are many fields where Slovenia is keen to invest, which are of great interest to NATO: such as CBRN protection capabilities and Special Forces, and I believe this would be a particularly good investment for your country. You cannot develop the full spectrum of capabilities, this is understood. So focusing on what we might call niche capabilities, but particularly useful capabilities, like JTACs (Joint Terminal Air Controller), is very important. Because even if you do not get the fighters or the advanced helicopters, you get the people who are able to use them in a coalition setting, which is crucial for the support of our forces. Medical support is another outstanding capability. Many nations have considerably reduced their medical support facilities and we will need to reinvest, as well as modernize and optimize this support in the field. This is also crucial because military forces have a role to play in dealing with pandemics, such as Ebola for instance, or in providing natural disaster relief, which your forces do so very well. Those are key niches that Slovenia is ready to invest in and they are all the more welcome since few nations are able to offer that kind of expertise.

## Being the Supreme Allied Commander Transformation is a great honour but also a tremendous responsibility. ACT's work is dedicated to transformation, a constantly evolving process. But when you leave this position what would you like to see accomplished?

I will give you my vision of what transformation is. The more I go into this business, the more I find it fascinating, motivating and really thought-provoking. Every day, I find myself asking a lot of questions about the future and the present and I see transformation as a kind of golden thread uniting the past and the future. We must begin by drawing the lessons from the past. We need to capitalize on what we have learned in Afghanistan, with two decades of crisis management, and what we have learned here in the Balkans, where I served some 20 years ago. But we must also adapt to the present, because we need to win in the present. Finally, we also need to look to the future, to define our way

for the future, taking into account the past, the present and our assumptions for the future. If we can do that together, that is what I would like to pass on to my successors.

Transformation is not a given, it is both a mind-set and a new approach to problems. Not a revolution, but continuous living progress. The day you stop transforming is when you stop living. After the Cold War, and the crisis we faced in the 90s, we suddenly discovered that the world was moving so fast that we needed a single body in NATO to cope with that. I find it fascinating that we are the only military organization in the world dealing with transformation. Today, I believe it is very much at the heart of NATO and of the Alliance and I would also like to see this culture of transformation as my legacy. In NATO's military commands, as in many national military organizations, you have a huge turnover of people and you have to build up an identity or ethos for your organization and ensure it is preserved, rather than constantly reinvented. What I have tried to do is to help people understand why we do what we do and to firmly establish a culture of transformation within NATO. Transformation should never be seen as a sideline, as a nice-to-have, which we can put aside when we do operations. No, it's not like that. Transformation should be embedded within NATO's culture. We don't do transformation for transformation's sake, but to become more effective in operations. ACT's work is clearly linked to operations and our responsibilities in training, education and exercising have made it more so. We are drawing lessons from our operations, while trying to invest in the new capabilities needed for future operations. ACT is a strategic command intent on transformation with an operational focus. We want transformation to extend beyond NATO, we need to encourage this transformational mind-set, spirit and skills within the Nations as well to make sure that together we transform the Alliance as a whole. The best evidence of this common purpose I have seen since I arrived are the people that the Nations send to us, who when they go back home become ambassadors for transformation. The object is not to rebuild or reinvent ourselves every day, but to work with a common aim and goal, to develop efficient processes which allow us to connect better with

others. In ACT, we work with all NATO stakeholders in NATO, especially the Nations, but also academia, industry, NGOs, the UN, and the EU. That is how you really transform your organization, your command, or NATO. By opening minds and creating links between the people thinking about these issues, is how you find solutions to very complex problems.



## Have you been here before? How do you feel in Slovenia?

No I have not. I find it a wonderful country, although, unfortunately, mine will be a short visit. But I fully intend to come again. I can tell you that I am particularly proud to be here in Slovenia, because I was in the region some 20 years ago and I am very happy to see your country and Croatia as full members of the EU and of NATO. That should provide us with a lot of confidence. Twenty years is not a long period in the historical context, but you have achieved so much and while things may be difficult now, we should remember that they were far worse not so long ago. Let's make sure that we can capitalize on that.

There are other challenges that we discussed with your President, your Minister, and your Chief of Defense. We are looking to the East, which is a real issue, and we are looking to the South too because this region is crucial for the future of the EU and of NATO. We rely on Slovenia as a key player in this region.