

# NATO 3.0: Resilient Societies, Stronger Defence

*The whole-of-society approach at the heart of NATO's new deterrence agenda*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Discussions at Allies in Ankara repeatedly returned to one idea: NATO 3.0 is not only about higher defence budgets or stronger military capabilities, but about whether societies themselves are resilient enough to withstand hybrid threats. Information manipulation, economic vulnerability, and social division now target citizens directly, making societal resilience an equally important pillar of deterrence. Meeting this challenge requires investment well beyond the defence sector — in education, media literacy, civic awareness, and social cohesion.

*Security can no longer be delivered by the military alone.*

## **The Whole-of-Society Imperative**

One of the concepts that repeatedly emerged throughout the Allies in Ankara discussions was the whole-of-society approach, highlighting that NATO 3.0 is not simply about increasing defence spending, strengthening military capabilities, or expanding defence industrial cooperation. It also requires societies themselves to become more resilient. While discussions focused on higher defence budgets, closer cooperation between governments and the private sector, and even ambitious ideas such as regional defence industrial cooperation leading to common companies among Black Sea countries, perhaps the most significant common denominator was the recognition that security can no longer be delivered by the military alone. Building resilient societies has become an equally important pillar of deterrence. As reflected in Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty, national and collective resilience are described as an essential basis for credible deterrence and defence, and therefore vital to safeguarding NATO's societies, populations, and shared values.<sup>1</sup>

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## **Hybrid Threats and the Limits of Military Power**

The need to strengthen societal resilience has become imperative in the new security environment in which we live. Hybrid threats refer to the integrated use of conventional and non-conventional means to achieve strategic objectives by targeting both the state and society. Rather than focusing solely on military forces, hybrid threats exploit vulnerabilities across political, economic, informational, cyber, and social domains, making every citizen a potential target in efforts to weaken national resilience and societal cohesion.

The whole-of-society approach encompasses all these security concerns, including information manipulation, threats against critical infrastructure — including the recognition of food security as critical infrastructure — economic vulnerabilities, social cohesion, societal divisions, elections, and related challenges. During the Allies in Ankara panels, alongside discussions on aggregating demand and strengthening cooperation with the defence industry, equal emphasis was placed on the broader contribution of the defence sector to economic development. Creating new employment opportunities, promoting industrial specialisation, and supporting long-term economic growth were all presented as integral components of societal resilience.

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## II Democratic Resilience, Welfare, and Labour Markets

Preparing society for the changes taking place in the security environment and raising awareness of these issues is important for two reasons.

First, hybrid threats directly affect every individual in society, regardless of age. Information manipulation affects all age groups, beginning with children, influences the security of elections and the ability to hold free and fair elections, and is therefore critical to the survival of democracy. Increasing resilience against information manipulation is critical to decrease polarisation in a society.

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### A Widening Trust Gap

Remaining vigilant against information manipulation is also essential to prevent extremist and far-right actors from exploiting societal divisions. As public confidence in democratic institutions declines, it becomes easier for populist and far-right movements to gain support through democratic processes themselves. Unfortunately, confidence in the functioning of democracy is decreasing worldwide. Belief that liberal democratic systems are capable of addressing citizens' concerns remains fundamental to the survival of democracy. The 2024 Perceptions of Democracy Survey (PODS)<sup>2</sup> reflects this trend, finding that many people around the world have limited confidence in the performance and accessibility of their political institutions and are more dissatisfied than satisfied with their governments. It also finds that women, minorities, and lower-income groups tend to perceive greater barriers to political participation and express lower levels of trust in institutional performance. Furthermore, the survey highlights a noticeable gap between expert assessments and public perceptions, with citizens generally viewing democratic institutions more sceptically than experts do.

Second, as investment in the defence sector increases, spending on welfare policies is likely to come under increasing pressure. This has the potential to create a vicious cycle: reduced investment in welfare policies may weaken public confidence in mainstream political parties, leading to growing support for far-right parties. It is therefore essential to inform citizens about existing threats and their consequences and, if not to convince everyone, at least to ensure that a majority understands the necessity of allocating greater resources to defence.

A defence-oriented economy will also reshape labour markets, making it essential to prepare young people for these changes well in advance. Taking these developments into account when making high school and university choices will be important for maintaining employability. This, in turn, requires a review of existing university and vocational education programmes, the adaptation of curricula to emerging needs, and the reconsideration of Europe's lifelong learning agenda in light of these new realities. The whole-of-society approach envisaged under NATO 3.0 therefore requires transformation across multiple sectors, from education to labour markets and civil society.

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### III Civil Society and Education as Pillars of Resilience

Civil society must also adapt to this changing environment. It needs to broaden its focus beyond traditional areas of work. The United Nations Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda recognised both the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls, and the essential role women play in peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery. However, it is also argued that as the character of conflict evolves, so too must the WPS agenda.<sup>3</sup> While civil society organisations working on women and international security have long focused on increasing women's representation at the negotiating table, they should also address women's role in defence, resilience, and on the battlefield more directly. Today's conflicts leave far fewer negotiating tables than before, making it equally important to prepare women as active contributors to national resilience and security.

Education is another essential pillar of societal resilience. Some countries have already begun integrating these new security and societal requirements into their national education systems through citizenship education or courses similar to Türkiye's Hayat Bilgisi (Social and Life Skills). Such courses equip children with the fundamental knowledge and skills needed to function and thrive in everyday life by teaching responsibilities, social awareness, communication, practical skills, and respect for others. In today's security environment, resilience should be regarded as one of these essential life skills — preparing individuals to navigate hybrid threats while protecting their rights and preserving the democratic way of life.

Although citizenship and life skills curricula already cover topics such as media literacy, local government, civic responsibilities, and democratic institutions, greater emphasis should be placed on information manipulation and the ways in which hybrid threats exploit societal vulnerabilities. Developing critical awareness of disinformation and foreign information manipulation from an early age would strengthen both individual resilience and the resilience of democratic societies.

The Netherlands<sup>4</sup> — Citizenship education is legally required in primary, secondary, and specialised education, aiming to promote active citizenship, social cohesion, democratic values, and civic skills. Students learn about freedom, equality, solidarity, human rights, diversity, participation, decision-making, and compromise, while schools function as democratic practice grounds.

Finland<sup>5</sup> — Media literacy is integrated throughout the education system, covering misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, advertising, and misleading statistics. Implementation extends beyond schools to libraries, universities, civil society organisations, media actors, and government institutions, treating media literacy as a whole-of-society effort.

NATO 3.0 therefore represents much more than a transformation of military capabilities. It requires societies that understand the nature of hybrid threats, can resist information manipulation, adapt to

changing labour markets, and actively contribute to democratic resilience. Defence spending, industrial capacity, and military modernisation will remain essential, but they will not be sufficient unless accompanied by investments in education, civic awareness, media literacy, and social cohesion. The whole-of-society approach is therefore not simply a complementary element of NATO 3.0 — it is one of its defining characteristics.

## ENDNOTES

1. NATO, "Resilience, civil preparedness and Article 3," 13 November 2024, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/deterrence-and-defence/resilience-civil-preparedness-and-article-3> ↪
2. International IDEA, "Perceptions of Democracy: A Survey About How People Assess Democracy Around the World," 10 April 2024, <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/perceptions-of-democracy-survey> ↪
3. ASPI, "International Women's Day 2026: balancing the scales in security," 9 March 2026, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/international-womens-day-2026-balancing-the-scales-in-security/> ↪
4. Government of the Netherlands, "Citizenship education in primary and secondary school," <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/themas/onderwijs/basisvaardigheden/burgerschapsonderwijs-op-de-basisschool-en-middelbare-school> ↪
5. OECD, "Media literacy education system," 20 February 2023, [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/mis-and-disinformation\\_b00de6dc-en/media-literacy-education-system\\_d067f517-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/mis-and-disinformation_b00de6dc-en/media-literacy-education-system_d067f517-en.html) ↪

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Prof. Dr. Çiğdem Üstün graduated with honours from the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Bilkent University and received her M.A. in European Studies and International Relations from the University of East Anglia, United Kingdom. She completed her Ph.D. at the University of Limerick, Ireland, where she conducted research on European and Turkish security cultures; her doctoral research was later published as a book by I.B. Tauris. She is currently Professor of International Relations at Istanbul Nişantaşı University and Secretary General of EDAM (Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies). She has been a visiting researcher at the University of Limerick, the University of Catania, and the University of Cambridge, and has delivered lectures on Black Sea security at the NATO Regional Cooperation Course of the NATO Defense College. Her research focuses on European integration, EU enlargement, EU-Türkiye relations, European security, Turkish foreign policy, NATO, and the EU's neighbourhood policies. She has published extensively in these fields through books, journal articles, book chapters, and policy papers, with commentary appearing in outlets including the GMF On Turkey Series, the Australian Institute of International Affairs, and E-International Relations. In 2024, she served as guest editor of the special issue "Future of Europe: Reflections from Turkey" in the Ankara Journal of European Studies.



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