
NEWS

VII. PRAGUE SECURITY CONFERENCE EU, NATO AND RUSSIA 20 YEARS AFTER. AND WHAT NOW?



SUMMARY

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On 11 November 2011, Prague's National Technical Library hosted already the seventh Prague Security Conference, subtitled "EU, NATO and Russia 20 Years After. And What Now?" Held during the Polish presidency of the EU Council, the conference took place under the auspices of Jerzy Buzek, Chairman of the European Parliament, Štefan Füle, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, H. E. Sergei Kiselev, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Czech Republic, Jakub Končelík, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Marie Kousalíková, Mayor of the Metropolitan District Prague 6, H. E. Jan Pastwa, Ambassador of Poland to the Czech Republic, Václav Petříček, Chairman of the Board of the Chamber for Commercial Relations with the CIS, Libor Rouček, Deputy Chairman of the European Parliament, and Karel Schwarzenberg, Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The aim of the conference was to review developments in the political, economic and security field since the collapse of the USSR, and analyze the possibilities and likely trends of future cooperation between the EU, NATO and Russia in these areas. In an opening speech, one of the organizers, Miloš Balabán of the Center for Security Policy, CESES CU, formulated the main thesis of the first session, namely that *"...during the collapse of the USSR, there was much talk of integration in Europe, but never with Russian representatives. This is why, to date, we have not been able to say what role Europe should play in Russia and vice versa."*

SESSION 1: EUROPE AND RUSSIA: COMMON FUTURE?

NATO-Russia relations

Session 1 of the conference was opened by guests from Poland, Germany and Russia. Their speeches focused on whether, or to what extent, the EU and NATO could meaningfully cooperate with Russia. The differences and tensions between the parties are, indeed, considerable. Russian foreign policy puts emphasis on security issues, sees international relations as a zero-sum game, and, due to Russia's imperial past, believes in the balance of power, seen by Moscow as the only real guarantee of security.

For these reasons, Russia could hardly understand the symbolic value that NATO represented for Central European peoples after 1989. Still, in the wake of the communist collapse in Poland, not all Poles declared themselves in favor of NATO membership. Some believed the country would get better security guarantees within OSCE. However, all was changed after the 1993 events in Moscow that revealed the full extent of Russia's instability and suggested the previously unthinkable possibility of a revision of Yalta.

In the 1990s it was automatically assumed that Russia would transform itself into a western-type democracy. This transformation has not taken place, however. Not prepared to accept the position reserved for it by Washington and Brussels, Russia felt itself a great power and acted accordingly, taking advantage of its relatively solid financial standing (improved around the turn of the millennium) and of American tendencies to limit US international engagement. The policies of the present-day Russian leadership can be best described with the concept of "sovereign democracy". Moreover, Russian foreign policy is permeated by the belief that the present system is "unfair" to Russia and should be revised. Moscow thus finds itself in a paradoxical situation: outside Europe it acts and is seen as a defender of the *status quo*, while pushing for a revision of the existing order in Europe.

It should be noted that the Alliance to which Central European countries acceded in late 1990s was no longer the Alliance of the Cold War era. NATO underwent fundamental transformation even while Poland, the Czech Republic and other countries of the region were preparing for membership, and continued to develop after their accession. One NATO crisis was caused by the Afghan operation: when the United States turned down the offer of its allies to conduct the operation under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty (it would have been the first application of the article in NATO history), some countries refused to send troops with the appropriate mandate. The US decision not to accept the offer bore witness to a general lack of interest in NATO that characterized the previous US administration. Fortunately, this trend seems to be a thing of the past, as the current Obama administration is turning away from unilateralism back toward a central role in NATO.

And what are the prospects for potential Russian membership in NATO? From NATO's viewpoint, this is a viable option, provided that both parties realize NATO is not a collective security organization, but a collective defence organization. As such, it is based on the premise that no security threat may arise from within, a condition that presupposes mutual trust and regular exchange of even top-secret intelligence between members. As for Russian views on NATO membership, in a recent public opinion survey, 6 % of respondents were in favour of it, 25 % considered that Russian security interests would be better served by the creation of a rival security organization, and 43 % favoured cooperation with NATO, but only if NATO's future functioning adequately reflects Russian views. Cooperation with NATO is favoured mostly by people with higher education and women, while men and less educated people predominantly reject the idea. Most Russians believe NATO should limit its activities only to fight against terrorism, providing aid during natural or man-made disasters, and preventing WMD proliferation.

Russia-EU relations

Moscow sees the EU as a temporary experiment, interesting to watch, but not one in which Russia would wish to get substantially involved. The very idea of an integration that changes the nature of nation states is completely alien to Russian understanding of international relations, and incomprehensible in its very essence. In contrast to this clear stance, Europe is far from clear about its own relation to Russia. The approaches of EU member states differ on this point, a fact that plays into Moscow's hands, enabling it to pursue its interests and preventing the EU from acting as Russia's equal in mutual relations.

It would be advantageous to "enmesh" Russia in a network that would give the EU a certain measure of control over Russian foreign policy activities. Creating such a network is possible in principle, but the success of this strategy largely depends on close coordination of all member state positions (e. g. Germany must monitor steps made by France and Poland etc.).

SESSION 2: DO EUROPE AND RUSSIA NEED A NEW SECURITY ARCHITECTURE?

The second conference session featured experts from Russia, Poland, Germany, France, Slovakia and, naturally, the Czech Republic. The discussion was once again opened by Miloš Balabán from the Center for Security Policy CESES CU. His deliberately provocative contribution cited the open letter "It's time to Invite Russia to Join NATO", written by a group of former German state officials. The letter says, amongst other things, that the task of the Alliance has changed fundamentally since 1949. Its present task can be defined by paraphrasing Lord Ismay's famous saying – it is "to keep the Americans in, the Europeans up and the Russians with".

Recent years have shown that, despite the purported readiness of both parties to cooperate, little real effort has been made on either side. This is due to many factors, *inter alia* a lack of trust between Russia and the West. Many questions still remain unanswered, among them the following:

- What kind of organization is, in fact, the Collective Security Treaty Organization? Is Moscow at all interested in deepening cooperation between CSTO and NATO?
- How to reconcile Russian interest in legally binding security guarantees with NATO's utter lack of interest to provide such guarantees?
- At present, Russia shows no interest in entering any organization in which it would not have at least veto power. This obstacle could perhaps be removed through the concept of an "alliance within the Alliance" that would grant Russia an effective veto power in relation to NATO. It is not certain though whether the US would consent to such an arrangement, and China's position is a complete unknown.

It should be taken into account that all proposals and initiatives for a new security architecture in Europe are at least twenty years old. The Russian party wants to either create a wholly new institution for this purpose, or adapt an existing one, such as OSCE. But Europe is currently not lacking in security organizations: its problem is rather the opposite. Moreover, Moscow will not

accept membership in a security organization unless it can exercise direct influence over its activities. The problem is that Russian national interests (and the very process of their formulation) differ fundamentally from those of the EU. Also, historically speaking, changes in security architecture have usually resulted from major geopolitical events, i. e. wars, and a military conflict in Europe is a highly improbable scenario at present. The EU and Russia do have certain truly common interests, but these are not numerous: mainly fight against terrorism, WMD proliferation and piracy.

But Russia is not the only party that should be blamed for problems in mutual relations. The West has also treated the Russians unfairly at times. During the negotiations on the unification of Germany, for example, Mikhail Gorbachev was promised that NATO would not spread eastwards. In Russia's eyes, the West has broken this promise. This is not to say that Russia wants the integration efforts represented by the EU to fail. Unfortunately, as the EU (but also NATO) spreads eastwards, it loses flexibility and perhaps veers toward collapse. At present, the Union resembles a ship without a captain and without the slightest idea where it is heading. For some crew members this is a welcome adventure, but others consider it an unacceptable risk.

Russia's vision of the future is a multipolar world in which all actors respect international law and the economic union between Belarus, the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan functions as an important bridge between the EU and Asia.

SESSION 3: MODERNIZATION OF THE RUSSIAN ECONOMY

The concluding economic section was dedicated to economic cooperation. Its *leitmotiv* was expressed in its very subtitle which asked whether and to what extent the modernization of Russian economy represented an economic opportunity for the Czech Republic and the EU. All speakers gave more or less similar answers, agreeing that Russian modernization did, indeed, generate economic opportunities, but also highlighting the concomitant problems and conditions.

The most critical stance was taken by Michail Delyagin, Director of the Institute on Problems of Globalization. He is convinced that, with the exception of the Skolkovo project, Russia is seeing no real modernization. The problem lies in the very nature of the Russian state whose key sectors and representatives do not believe in pursuing public interest and seek chiefly personal gain. The political system is rooted in corruption.

While none of the speakers denied that corruption was, indeed, a problem, the estimates of its seriousness differed quite widely. E. g. Stanisław Ciosek ar-

gued that the chief problem of modernization was actually the lack of trust between the state and its citizens, as it is often fear of local authorities that hampers the creation of small and medium-size businesses.

Notwithstanding the opinions cited above, and other widely held beliefs, Russia does offer many advantages. For example, it is inaccurate to presume that the Russian economy based on oil and gas extraction has little potential for modernization. As a matter of fact, these sectors are in urgent need of modernization and represent a great potential market for hi-tech projects and innovation. These will have large multiplication effect and may help trigger growth in other industries that will take part in modernizing the oil and gas sector.

Such modernization could in turn generate major opportunities for Czech suppliers. As an export-oriented economy, the Czech Republic needs the Russian market. Russia offers Czech companies the opportunity to diversify export and enter markets that are both unsaturated and geographically close. This distinguishes them from both the EU markets, where further expansion is difficult, and the fast-developing countries, such as China or India, where the potential for growth is great, but effectively limited by geographical distance.