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THE RECENT GEOPOLITICAL TURNABOUT AND SECURITY POLICIES IN CENTRAL EAST EUROPE

by Anton Bebler

Paper presented at the Conference "Security in Europe after the Cold War: what Role for
International Institutions?"
Rome 10-11 December 1993

ISTITUTO AFFARI INTERNAZIONALI

Dr. Anton Bebler

(DECEMBER 1993)

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Former East Europe has undergone, since the late 1980s a dramatic and in some respects a revolutionary and multifaceted change. It affected the region's make-up, geographic configuration, the total number of states and relationships between many of them, the region's international position and relations with important continental and world powers, etc. All these shifts have occurred more or less simultaneously and remained have inseparably intertwined. Several crucial aspects of the change need to be mentioned:

- the decay and largely non-violent dissolution of the external, somewhat later and also of a good deal of the internal Russian empire (USSR); the dissolution of the former "Holy Alliance" between ruling East European communist parties; the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact, Comecon and other instruments of the Soviet/Russian control and dominance in East Europe; the retreat of mostly Russian

* Views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the positions of the Slovenian government and of its Foreign Ministry.

(Soviet) troops and of associated elements from four Central East European states; a very considerable reduction in Soviet air, naval and presumably also intelligence activities in and around Central East Europe;

- more or less radical mutations in political, economic and social orders of the states in the region; corresponding transformation within the armed and paramilitary forces, as well as in civil-military relations in all states of the region, without exception;
- the breakdown of two smaller multinational conglomerates (SFR of Yugoslavia and CSFR), the disappearance of GDR. The considerable increase in the total number of sovereign states and in the number of national armed forces;
- alteration in the region's geographic configuration, largely bringing it back to the pre-1938 shape ("the zone between Germany and Russia") - the exclusion of East Germany, inclusion of the three Baltic republics, Ukraine, Belorussia and Moldova;
- a radical realignment of security ties which the states of the region strive to establish with extraregional powers and, to a lesser extent, also the factual realignment of security relationships;
- (re)appearance of several flash-points of instability and conflict within the region, mainly on the territory of the former SRF of Yugoslavia and USSR. Armed conflicts and a war in three former Yugoslav republics (1990-1993).

Overall security of the region has been most thoroughly affected by tectonic shifts at the global and continental level

withering away of the "Cold War" and the demise of the Soviet Union as the global opponent to USA, with many ensuing security consequences. The populations as a whole of all countries gained security-wise from the considerable demilitarization in the region. Former East Europe ceased to be the most heavily armed region in the world - containing the biggest concentration of foreign troops, weapons of mass destruction and heavy conventional weapons per capita as well as bearing very heavy burden of military and security expenditure. The withdrawal of most dangerous weapons of mass destruction removed a credible danger of the region's annihilation. The considerable reductions in military manpower and spending constituted "peace dividends" which made it easier, at least in principle, to make improvements in economic conditions, social, environmental and other aspects of over-all security.

But not everybody gained from the warming up in global climate. One state vanished altogether (GDR), soon followed by the breakdown or dissolution of three multinational conglomerates. Within the former East European states several social groups, particularly those closely associated with the central state bureaucracy, the ruling party's apparatus and with the military-industrial complexes collected in fact mostly negative "peace dividends".

With the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact has gone also bloc discipline which contained or, at least, restrained intraregional conflicts from erupting. The clout exercised over all lesser actors by the dominant power (Soviet Russia) had kept at bay, for decades,

many destabilizing tendencies within the region. It not only provided external and internal security to the communist regimes but for the smaller and militarily weaker states also constituted effective guarantees against territorial and other claims by their neighbors both within and without the region. The demise of the Soviet Union reopened the Pandora's box of the old and relatively new conflicts among the former WTO members, within them (ex-USSR itself and ex-CSFR) and between some former WTO states and some successor states of USSR and CSFR (e.g. Poland vs Lithuania, Hungary vs Slovakia etc.). Indirectly this reopening has stimulated similar relapses into potential or real conflicts which involved the formerly self-isolated Albania, the successor states of the formerly non-aligned Yugoslavia as well as their neighbors (e.g. Albania vs Serbia, Albania vs Greece, Hungary vs Serbia etc.).

The geopolitical change in the region has thus produced contradictory and variable impacts on security of the present (old and new) state actors. In this respect it bore similarity with the two previous dramatic turnabouts in this century which followed the two world wars - in 1918-1921 and 1945-1948. As then the gains and losses were distributed highly unevenly. The biggest beneficiaries were this time the two previously most exposed former "Northern Tier" WTO countries - Poland and CSFR (as well as most population in the former GDR). Lesser security gains were made by the three Baltic states, by Ukraine, Belarus, Hungary and still less by Romania, Bulgaria, by the successor states of the former SFR of Yugoslavia (among them mostly by Slovenia) and only nominally by Albania.

The security gains were however tied up with the corresponding losses in geopolitical importance of these states from the stand-point of both the West and Russia. This side of the coin has been overlooked by many among the Central East European elites and consequently led to their disappointment with the West's presumed shortsightedness, carelessness and incomprehension. The negative security impact of the change has been most pronounced in several successor states of the SFR of Yugoslavia (fatal in Bosnia/Herzegovina, dramatic in Croatia, much less so in Macedonia and still less in Slovenia), followed by Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Albania.

The geopolitical change proved to be thus a mixed blessing for Central and East Europe. The region as a whole, but mainly the former WTO states, lost the role of a buffer or of a cordon sanitaire in reverse between the communist fortress Russia and the "bourgeois" West. In this respect the region's new and still ill-defined position differs today very much from those in the periods 1921-1938 and 1948-1989. Today's security problems of the Central and East European states ought thus to be analyzed on their own merits and taking fully into account several entirely new circumstances.

There are some common elements in these states' overall international positions. These stem from the difficulties and challenges of transition from the previous communist authoritarian or outright dictatorial orders towards pluralist and democratic political systems as well as to market-oriented economic systems with a radically reduced role of the state

bureaucracy in day-to-day running of the economies. The commonness includes also very similar wishes of the Central East European elites to join as soon as possible the Western institutions and integrations such as EEC, NATO, WEU etc.

The Central East European countries remain, however, as it has been for a long time, without a clear regional focus and identity. The previous military, political and administrative economic links between the "real socialist" states failed to produce a durable and self-sustaining integration momentum and to overcome numerous differences and tensions between these countries. The world-wide political thaw has not made the region more homogenous. In some respects it even increased the distances between the states and opened the prospects for still greater and faster economic, technological and political differentiation. The latter is due e.g., to the varying capacity of adaptation to the newest wave of propulsive technologies. The recent shifts substituted the previous extra-regional focus of (imposed) integration with a new (and desired) point of attraction. With some simplification this movement could be described as "Brussels instead of Moscow."

The defence and security policies of Central East European states have changed considerably - in response to external impulses, to internal revolutions or accelerated political evolution.

In most states we saw the dismantling of authoritarian systems

retained it as far as their defense ministers were concerned. However almost everywhere the professional military became politically neutral (party-wise) or, at least, more neutral than used to be. Exceptions from this general trend are found in the "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" (Serbia and Montenegro) and in the states where the president leads a ruling party with a strong majority in the parliament.

The Central East European systems of civil-military relations have on the whole moved closer to the West European patterns, but in various degrees and with different speeds. Against this backdrop of shifts, more or less in the same direction we witness today a greater de facto diversity than used to be throughout most of the region during the period of Soviet dominance between 1948 and 1989. Unlike in the earlier period from 1921-1939 the diversity today is however mostly on the democratic side of the spectrum. Civilian rule has been reaffirmed as the norm. This time it is democratic civilocracy, contrary to the 1948-1989 period. An occasional military coup d'etat is still imaginable in the Balkans, but has become far less probable than between 1921 and 1939.

The reformed or barely refurbished institutions of defense and security decision-making and implementation have had to deal since 1989-1990 with a number of inherited and also of new problems and challenges. In a striking contrast with the previous decades defense and security matters in many Central East European states became nationalized in the fullest sense of the word. This is true of the former obedient Soviet clients

public scrutiny and parliamentary control and concentrated at the top of the respective communist party. The only country in the region where this system (initially imitated from the Russian Bolsheviki) was essentially preserved to-day is the "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" (Serbia and Montenegro). The system of civil-military relations in the dominant Serbia has been coupled with presidential rule by S. Milošević and a considerable internal autonomy of the professional military. The degree of the military's autonomy vis-a-vis local civilian politicians seems to be still higher in the Serbian satellite mini-states existing on the conquered and annexed parts of Bosnia/Herzegovina and Croatia. However the Serbian rebel warlords in these two states are ultimately dependent on and controlled by the civilian regime in Serbia proper.

The presidents in four Balkan states (Romania, Croatia, to a smaller degree in Albania and Macedonia) dominate defense and security decision-making, with little or no control exercised by the respective parliaments. Presidential supremacy in these states resembles the prerevolutionary systems but operates in politically pluralized political settings. Elsewhere coalition governments in parliamentary or parliamentary-presidential systems have provided for a higher degree of democratic parliamentary control and of public scrutiny through mass media.

The previous pattern of having uniformed generals as defense (and less often also interior and state security) ministers has been widely abandoned. Only Romania, Ukraine and Belarus

in WTO - CSFR, Bulgaria and Hungary and to a lesser degree also of Poland and Romania (whose autonomy within WTO was higher). Slovakia became a beneficiary and partly also a loser due to its double security emancipation - from Moscow and Prague. Nationalization of defense and security matters served as a proud hallmark of the emancipation and newly-acquired liberty in all smaller successor states of the USSR and SFR of Yugoslavia.

The nationalization expressed itself in establishing new national armies, reforming the previously existing military formations, introducing new uniforms, insignia and other symbols, revising the former postulates in conformity with new national security assessments and priorities, developing for the first time in history or after long decades of bloc politics true national defense doctrines etc.

This dramatic shift, cheered by the crowds during the first parades in many, but not in all states, has been marred however by a number of unpleasant corrolaries. In Croatia and Moldova it happened amidst armed conflicts and so far effective secessions in parts of their territories. In Bosnia/Herzegovina the "nationalization" did not come in one piece but spelled out this republic's triple partition, huge loss of life, sufferings and displacements of population as well as vast destruction.

In the former Soviet republics, other than Russia the nationalization of defense and security matters remained clearly limited or symbolic due to the continued presence of

Russian troops on their territories. In Ukraine and Belarus this aspect was further complicated by the nuclear-tipped strategic missiles and other elements of the former Soviet arsenals, still under tight Russian control. The de facto Russian military and less visibly also security umbrella clearly downgrades the ability of the former smaller Soviet republics to conduct their own defense and security policies. The recent agreement among the CIS members to maintain further, under Moscow's patronage the common system of security electronic protection underscores the limited de facto sovereignty of Belarus in military and security matters. The same, to a smaller degree, is true also of Ukraine, of the three Baltic republics and of Moldova.

On the other hand, the nationalization led to a highly uneven distribution of military assets, defense industrial capacities and the burdens of maintaining parts of the previously integrated military-industrial complexes. These complexes had absorbed in the past huge investment funds, the best-skilled labor force and a good deal of R&D allocations. Although constituting technologically the most modern segments of national economies these systems became a heavy burden and a source of strong headaches both economically and socially as the demand for new weapons fell down world-wide.

The peaceful, orderly and equitable distribution of joint stocks of weapons, equipment and facilities among the new national armies of the states, with agreement of all parties took place only in CSFR. Yugoslavia

is : the opposite extreme since the Serbs grossly abused their central position, robbed the other successor states of most inventories, used these weapons and facilities to prosecute a war against three other republics, destroyed or sold some of them etc. So far the Serbs refused to divide and distribute the remaining stocks. The division of military assets among the former Soviet republics was closer to the Czechoslovak pattern, at least, in the European part of ex-USSR. It remained so far mostly peaceful, but was uneven and only partly based on agreements. The lack of equitability applies both to the actors (the exclusion of the Baltic republics and Moldova) and to weapon systems (with Russiaⁿ retaining fully under its control all strategic weapons, as well as most air force and navy).

The need and desire to develop one's own national defense doctrines led to reevaluations of the countries' geopolitical positions, potential or real security threats, defense capabilities and optimal organisational and technological solutions. The reassessments led to a realization that in the new, post-cold war strategic environment the salience of external and military threats has generally diminished. Correspondingly economic, social, ethnicity - and religion-related ecological, health and other non-military challenges to the states' viability and internal stability gained substantially in importance. These shifts require integrated security policies with a greater stress on non-military challenges as well as, lighter, leaner and more mobile military and security forces, with multiple capabilities and a different organizational set-up. In many respects this analysis runs

The radical geopolitical change in and around the region, the new internal configuration of the region and its altered external borders, the removal of Soviet/Russian troops, the reassessment of each state's international position, interests, priorities and means resulted in considerable shifts in location of standing military forces and in the spatial distribution of major weapon systems. The relocation has been softened by high costs and limited funds available. Instead of the previous westward-pointed deployment of the WTO members' strong offensive potential came a defensive and more geographically balanced configuration. The second strong reason for partial relocation and redesignation of military units stemmed from the dissolution of the three multinational conglomerates, from the armed secessions within three successor states and from the Balkan war. The altered profile of the armed forces and their partial redeployment produced a considerable internal social and economic impact, notably in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovenia, not to mention the three successor republics of the former SFR of Yugoslavia involved in the war (Croatia, Bosnia/Herzegovina and Serbia/Montenegro).

The transition to pluralist political orders and advances in the human rights field resulted in the decriminalization of conscientious objection region-wide and to creating civilian substitutes to military service. These reforms, economic dislocations and reductions in military manpower strengthened the trend toward a more professional military and a shorter duration of the draft. Also in this respects many Central East

their regulations and practice closer to the predominant West European pattern and are now on the whole more liberal in this respect than two NATO members (Greece and Turkey) as well as Switzerland.

The most burning security issues in the region have been faced obviously by Croatia, Bosnia/Herzegovina and Moldova. These states had to deal not only with armed rebellions and secession but, in the first two cases, also with an aggression from the territory of the "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" (Serbia and Montenegro). These armed conflicts and the unleashed large-scale violence caused estimated over 200'000 deaths and huge material damage, mostly in Bosnia/Herzegovina and Croatia. Operating under emergency war conditions these three states as well as the "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" (Serbia and Montenegro) increased from 1991 on their military manpower and expenditure. The states immediately neighbouring the Balkan war theater took on their part precautionary measures and incurred thus additional expenses. Elsewhere in the region we saw an opposite downward trend in practically all elements of the states' military potential -- manpower under arms, inventories of heavy weapons, defense expenditure, military industrial production, military exports etc. The relative demilitarization of the region has been in line with the "neo-detente", with the obligations of the former WTO states under the CFE agreement and with these state's pressing economic needs. However the conversion of military-industrial complexes has run into numerous difficulties, demanded (the lacking) additional investment funds, contributed to a rise in unemployment and

proclaimed intention of the ČSFR democratic leadership to stop arms exports altogether proved to be a pacifist pipe-dream.

The states not involved in the Balkan armed conflicts have still had a number of understandable defense and security concerns. The former WTO members (particularly those bordering on ex-USSR), the three Baltic republics and Moldova remained or became at some point deeply worried about the still existing huge Russian military potential on their territory or in the immediate vicinity. A horror scenario for these states was enacted, in a bad joke at a CSCE meeting in Stockholm, by nobody lesser than the Russian Foreign Minister A.Kozyrev.

Having become de facto militarily unaligned the Central East European states have been eager to enhance their security within the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). All of them showed an increased interest in further development and institutionalization of the CSCE mechanism, including the Conflict Prevention Center, as well as in further arms control (CFE Ia) and confidence and security-building measures (CSBMs). Several countries of the region actively supported and participated in CSCE observer missions and in UN peace-keeping and humanitarian operations on the territory of the former Yugoslavia (Poland, CSFR, Ukraine).

A complimentary activity with indirect security implications concerned regional economic, transportation, environmental, cultural etc. cooperation within several groups of neighbouring countries. The "Central European Initiative", the "Alps-Adria",

the proposed "Carpathian Euro-region", the bilateral free-trade and cooperation agreements between the three Baltic republics and the Nordic countries and obviously the "Višegrad group" ought to be mentioned.

The latter grouping, still uninstitutionalized, had entailed for some time regular information exchanges between foreign and defense ministries of Poland, ČSFR and Hungary. Apart from common geopolitical disquiet the Višegrad group (now numbering four countries) has had the problem of large military-industrial segments which used to be closely tied up to the Soviet military-industrial complex and to Soviet/Russian military technologies. The Višegrad group was initially conceived largely or also as a mechanism which would speed up and ease these countries' collective entry into EEC and consequently also into WEU.

Faced with geopolitical uncertainties most Central European and some Balkan countries sought however the ultimate refuge in NATO security guarantees. The new elites mostly echewed the stance of armed neutralism and displayed more ardent and emotional Atlantism than at least some of their colleagues in NATO itself. From these preferences folowed requests for admission into full membership and offers of military facilities for NATO use.

The NATO response to these unwanted solicitations was extremely prudent, polite but in substance negative and disappointing. However it was understandable in terms of Realpolitik. The

West's main concern still remains Russia's uncertain future. By admitting all or almost all Central East European states NATO might run the credible risk of a great power nationalist backlash in Russia. The admission of some countries would produce negative reactions in the countries which would be left out. The NATO enlargement would greatly increase its obligations, possibly embroil the organization in intraregional conflicts while contributing very little or nothing to security of the present NATO members. Faced with this predicament NATO squared the circle by creating a consultative North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), to which all former WTO members were invited. (This formula included Albania with a difficulty but excluded the successor states of the former SFRY). NATO's intent has been to project its interest and concern for the new and fragile democratic orders, making it look larger than in fact is, and without committing itself militarily.

The geopolitical change in the last five years has diminished or removed altogether several credible threats to the security of Central East European states. However other challenges have remained and even gained in acuteness. These include:

- conceivable interstate conflicts within the region and with the neighboring states over unsettled borders, national minorities, natural resources, access to international communications (primarily seas and rivers);
- infiltration of mercenaries, incursions of paramilitary formations, terrorism;

- drugs, mass smuggling and other criminal activities;
- ecological dangers, large industrial accidents, epidemics, massive threat to public health;
- financial bleeding and collapse, "brain drain" on mass scale.

Instead of clear-cut enemies, opponents and choices the countries of Central East Europe are confronted today with an unsettling and worrying situation of flux, uncertainty and insufficient self-confidence."

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Central East Europe is too heterogenous and in many respects too weak to create and maintain its own credible system of regional security. There is no leader(s) within the region who would initiate such a grouping. And no country seems to be interested in even trying. A viable all-European system of security would be a highly attractive proposition from many angles. However the ineffectiveness of the CSCE bodies when dealing even with small aggressors (as in the case of ex-Yugoslavia) has placed this welcome perspective into a relatively distant future. A world-wide and UN-centered system of "peace-keeping" has shown in Bosnia/Herzegovina and Croatia its good sides (in humanitarian matters) and its severe limitations (with the "blue helmets" standing by, observing atrocities and counting the dead victims). The eastward extension of NATO membership might well not be in the cards for quite some time, if ever. Having put themselves or being left outside any effective system²⁹ of collective security many Central East Europeans seem either to dislike or disparage a

defensive association among themselves. They mostly also have no real trust in self-reliance and in making the best and a virtue out of the necessity.

Considerable social and economic stresses, the still infirm steps of young democracies and the haunting geopolitical limbo mark Central East Europe at the threshold of the twenty-first century.

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n° inv. 13901
1 MAR. 1994

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