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EUROPEAN SECURITY CHALLENGES

by Ettore Greco

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1. The evolving security structure in Europe and Western dilemmas

The collapse of the Eastern bloc brought about fundamental changes in the security structure of Europe. Several models of international relations, often drawn from past periods of European history, have been used to illustrate these changes. However, the explanatory power of these models - their ability to capture the new realities - is challenged by the apparent fluidity of the security environment in Eastern Europe as well as by the clash between contradictory factors operating throughout Europe, chief among them the drive towards interdependence and integration and that towards political fragmentation.

According to a widely discussed scenario, the end of the bipolar system could lead to a mere return to the old balance-of-power games. Some analysts have drawn the conclusion that Europe is moving towards this scenario from the discouraging experience of the international response to the Yugoslav crisis. The sharp contrasts between the Western countries over the ways to deal with the crisis - contrasts manifestly prompted by conflicting interests - have indicated that the crises in Eastern Europe may easily become a major divisive factor within the West. However, Western countries have constantly sought to prevent their divergencies over the Yugoslav crisis from transforming into irreparable breaks in the alliance. In addition, the Western policy on other security issues that have emerged in the post-Cold War Europe - such as the crisis in the Baltic states, the management of the nuclear heritage of the former Soviet Union or the security links to be established with the Eastern countries - has proved to be more consistent and effective. One should thus not underestimate the importance, as cohesive factor, of the political and institutional links established both within the West and at the pan-European level.

It is nevertheless clear that the security structure of Europe is characterized by a greater diffusion of influence and power among states. Furthermore, if the current security vacuum in the Eastern part of the continent should persist, the temptation of the most powerful countries to pursue policies aimed at establishing, or re-establishing, hegemonies and spheres of influences may increase.

The Unites States will probably remain a key actor on the European scene, but it lacks the means to exercise the same equalizing and pacifying influence on the whole continent that it had on the relations among the Western countries after the Second World War. Rather, there is much evidence that Washington is moving towards a partial disengagement from Europe. The only alternative is a collective Western leadership based on a new form of partnership between the US and the EU contries.

The extent to which the Western countries will be able to project stability eastwards will depend on two critical factors: their capacity to overcome the anti-integrationist forces operating within the West itself; and the creation of effective security arrangements with the Eastern countries.

Indeed, profound differences exist in the security structures of the individual zones of Europe. A first distinction has to be made between Western and Central-Eastern Europe. The former is an area of stability, benefitting from a considerable level of integration, a common institutional framework and proven conflict prevention and crisis menagement mechanisms. In this area the risk of armed conflicts is very low. The latter is an area of instability, where rivalries and contrasts of interest have already led to the eruption of open conflicts. Referring to these higly

different degrees of security,Lawrence Freedman has argued that «Europe still remains divided along the line of the old Iron Curtain» (1).

But remarkable asymmetries also exist in the Eastern part of the continent, where three different areas can be identified. In the first area, which includes the four countries of the Visegrad Group, the process of internal reform hs achieved significant results and the security challenges appear to be manageable. In particular, Poland, The Czech Republic and Hungary are on the right track for a gradual integration in the Western institutional framework, although it is still unclear how much time this integration will take. In the second area, the Balkans, the security situation is much more unstable. The risk of a spillover of the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia to the other areas of the former Yugoslavia is very high. This may, in turn, precipitate an all-out Balkan conflagration. Even if the international efforts manage to contain and stop the war, the re-establishment of a secure environment in the Balkan region would remain a very demanding task. Finally, the European part of the former Soviet Union continues to be subject to strong drives towards further political fragmentation. A variety of ethic conflicts, often involving boundaries, make this third area disturbingly conflict-prone and it is likely to remain so for some time to come.

The Western countries look at the security situations in the East with mixed feelings. On the one hand, there is a widely diffused fear of becoming strategically embroiled in intractable ethnic and intra-regional conflicts. This fear is reflected, at the institutional level, in the concern that an enlargement of the existing Western cooperation arrangements eastwards could lead to their weakening or could even threaten their survival. The destabilizing potential of a closer integration with the Eastern countries has been made evident by the problems created within the EC by German unification. On the other hand, there is a growing awareness that complete dissociation from Eastern security problems is not feasible, as the instabilities in the East cannot be fully contained. They would in any case have significant repercussions on the Western countries. As has been noted, during the Cold War the threat of a general war in Europa, coupled with the isolation of Eastern Europe paradoxically made West Europeans feel less exposed to the developments in the East, and this contributed to nourish a sense of security (2).

The individual Western countries are not equally exposed to the crises in Eastern Europe. This factor considerably complicates the efforts to develop a coordinated response to those crises. Institutional inaction may indeed prompt the countries which feel more vulnerable to engage in unilateral moves. This, in turn, is destined to disrupt the climate of confidence within the Western institutions as illustrated by the row over Germany's readiness to recognize Croatia and Slovenia unilaterally.

More generally, the role of Germany appears to be crucial. Given its geographic location and its close links with several Eastern countries, it is directly affected by many of their problems. It has thus a keen interest in a stabilization of the security environment east to their borders. For the German government there are no viable alternatives to growing involvement in the problems of Eastern Europe. To characterize this German attitude a group of American scholars have spoken of a «Zwang nach Osten» as opposed to the much feared, but actually absent, «Drang nach Osten» (3). Far from being attracted by the prospect to establish its own hegemony on the East, Germany has so far shown a keen interest in a concerted Western effort to integrate the Eastern countries. It is also providing by far the largest share of economic aid to Eastern countries. However, the lack of an effective common Western policy towards the East may induce Germany to become increasingly unilateralist, thus damaging its relationship with its allies and partners (4). On the other hand, some European countries oppose the German idea of a rapid integration of the Eastern countries - in particular, those of the Visegrad group - into the EU. France and the South-European countries are concerned about the economic competition on the part of the Eastern countries, as well as about a further shift of the EU towards the centre of Europe.

As the experience of the Yugoslav conflict is showing, the Western countries are facing

even more acute dilemmas with regard to military intervention options. The major Western powers have rightly been defined «reluctant interveners» (5). This is particularly true for the current and potential crisis contingencies in Eastern Europe. The choice of limited intervention in the Yugoslav case has proved to be ineffective. The Western countries have abstained from any serious threat to engage in military escalation for fear of indefinite involvement in an intractable quagmire. The prospect of an «enlarged humanitarian intervention» which has re-emerged from time to time was not more than an illusory attempt to escape from the logic of military intervention, which necessarily entails escalation readiness. During the last year, the opposition has grown in the US to a dispatch of American forces for intervention abroad in the absence of a set of guarantees: sufficiently limited strategic objectives to permit a rapid withdrawal once the mission is accomplished; the involvement of vital interests; a substantial participation of the allies; the establishment of a chain of command ensuring a central role for the US or NATO. In the end, the Clinton administration has accepted this approach. The emphasis placed by George Bush at the end of his presidency and by Bill Clinton himself on the importance of humanitarian intervention has thus gradually faded.

The US seems to have renounced playing a systematic leadership role in the security issues of the European continent. It has demonstrated a clear wish to concentrate only on those problems which involve direct American interests. It is emblematic, in this respect, that Washington opted to leave the initiative on the Yugoslav crisis to the Europeans, while developing an intense diplomatic action on the problem of the nuclear arms dispersed in the territory of the former Soviet Union (6).

The multiplication of crises and trouble spots has induced the US to place growing emphasis on the need for a more active and substantial contribution of the European allies to crisis management activities. This explains the US insistence on the concept that the Yugoslav crisis represents a problem of primary European responsibility. On the other hand, the Yugoslav crisis itself has made it evident that the US role remains decisive. All the parties involved have in fact looked more to Washington than to the European governments as the actors which could actually change the situation. Whenever the possibility of a US intervention seemed to become concrete, the negotiating flexibility of the Serbs has substantially increased. In the final analysis it seems clear that the Europeans have to accept a greater burden for the promotion of European security, if they want to obtain the more active involvement of the US they have repeatedly invoked.

2. The nuclear issue

As a result of the dramatic changes in the geo-strategic environment, the importance of nuclear weapons has radically reduced. With the withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Central Europe, NATO no longer needs nuclear weapons to avoid the risk of being defeated by a massive conventional attack. However, NATO nuclear forces mantain a stabilising function. They can contribute significantly to preserving an overall military balance in Europe.

There is still a need in Europe for a system of deterrence that only nuclear weapons can ensure. The main source of concern for Western countries, as well as for many Central and Eastern European Countries, is a new political upheaval in Moscow leading to an authoritian and ultra-nationalist regime which may be tempted to use nuclear weapons as a means of intimidation and coercion against other states. Western nuclear forces can certainly be a crucial deterrent against the risks associated with a resurgent Russian hegemonism.

NATO continues also to hold onto the principle that the presence of US nuclear forces in Europe is essential to maintain the strategic link between the two sides of the Atlantic. An effective and credible participation of the US in the deterrence system in Europe indeed seems to require

the maintenance of some US theater nuclear capabilities in Europe (7). The adoption of a «reconstitution strategy», based on the idea of a prompt redeployment in Europe of the US nuclear forces in times of crisis (8) would present the insuperable disadvantage of complicating crisis management efforts at both the diplomatic and military levels.

The US nuclear guarantee is also of crucial importance against the risk of nuclear proliferation in the West. Admittedly, this risk is negligible today, but it could grow in the future, if the security environment in Europe deteriorates further. The possible alternative is the establishment of a new form of nuclear deterrence based on West-European cooperation. This option is, however, rather irrealistic in the foreseeable future.

France has repeatedly emphasized its interest in a systematic intra-European consultation on nuclear matters. But its proposals do not in fact go beyond the level of consultation. Furthermore, the UK remains strongly reluctant to accept any nuclear arrangement which could weaken the strategic and political link with the US. Finally, the other European countreis show a pronounced preference for the US nuclear umbrella. They are sceptical of an extended deterrence based on the two national deterrents of the UK and France. Germany, in particular, has so far shown that it is by no means eager to acquire a nuclear status. It has, at the same time, reaffirmed its desire for a nuclear protection provided by the US.

During the Cold War, the nuclear non-proliferation regime remained highly stable in Europe (the nuclearization of the UK and France had no destabilizing effects). Today, however, the risk of its progressive erosion, or even collapse, is far from negligible. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, this risk was regarded mainly as being associated with the possibility of a chain reaction fuelled by the acquisition of nuclear status by one or more Soviet successor states other than Russia. At the moment Ukraine is the greatest cause for concern. Even after the recent agreement with the US that Ukraine would give up nuclear weapons on its territory, serious doubts remain about which choice Ukraine will finally make, as the parliamentary opposition to the agreement is likely to be strong. In addition, it cannot be excluded that states involved in open conflicts or acute disputes could also try to acquire nuclear weapons in the future as a means to protect their security.

Applying to this situation the neo-realist Waltzian arguments in favour of nuclear proliferation (9) some analysts have argued that the West should adopt a policy aimed at ensuring a «well-managed proliferation» (10) or at establishing «a system of distributed deterrence» (11). This school of thought moves from the assumption that the drives towards horizontal nuclear proliferation, in the post-Cold War era, can be at best controlled, but not completely stopped. It has also been suggested that, in some circumstances, the availibility of nuclear forces can play a useful role in reducing or eliminating the security dilemmas connected with the newly emerging ethnic or nationalistic rivalries (see par. 3) (12).

This line of reasoning has been applied, in particular, to the Ukrainian case (13). For Kiev, so the argument goes, the acquisition of nuclear capabilities is the only effective ways to deter a possible Russian aggression because the provision of credible security guarantees by the Western countries is unlikely. In addition, the tensions between the two countries are destined to deteriorate in the future, given the large number of controversial bilaterial issues still unsolved. An Ukrainian nuclear arsenal would thus have a stabilizing effect on the relations between Moscow and Kiev and indirectly on the sorrounding area, whose security largely depends on the future evolution of those relations.

However, the arguments against the denuclearization of Ukraine and, more generally, any enlargement of the nuclear club in Europe and elsewhere are, on balance, much more compelling. First, the idea of a «managed» nuclear proliferation is very controversial. Any increase in the number of nuclear powers entails the risk of seriously undermining the global non-proliferation regime, particularly the prospect of the extension of the the NPT in 1995. Furthermore, looking

back to the history of the East-West relations during the Cold War, it appears evident that strategic stability was ensured not so much by the existence of nuclear weapons in itself, as by the fact that the nuclear factor operated in a bypolar sustem. In a non-bipolar environment, however, it is very doubtful that a diffusion of nuclear power would have a stabilising effect (14). Finally, account should also be taken of the fact that the period of transition in which the development of nuclear capabilities takes place very often entails a variety of dangers, especially if the proliferator state is surrounded by a hostile environment. The acquisition of a nuclear status by Ukraine, for example, could have two dangerous implications. First, it could induce Russia to take back the commitments undertaken under the START disarmament process. Second, it could provoke negative reactions also in other countries, such as Poland (15).

It is true that the Western countries are not ready to offer Ukraine all the security guarantees it is seeking. Nevertheless, their action could prove decisive in convincing Kiev to relinquish the nuclear assets on its territory. They can effectively use economic leverage by making the economic aid Ukraine urgently needs conditional on the ratification of the NPT. Furthermore, they can create a climate of confidence by developing the cooperative denuclearization programmes which are already being implemented with Moscow. Some measures included in these programs, such as an international supervision on the storage of dismantled warheads, the assistance to Moscow for an accelerated START implementation timetable and the establishment of an international plutonium depository can contribute significantly to alleviating Kiev's security concerns (16).

3. The rise of nationalism and ethnic conflicts

According to a rather widely held interpretation, rising nationalism in the Eastern part of Europe has to be regarded as an historically unavoidable development resulting from the political and cultural vacuum left by the fall of the communist regimes. It would thus derive basically from an «emancipatory thrust» of societies whose national identies had been suppressed for decades. Nationalism would represent the only ideological resource at the disposal of Eastern countries for the development of modern civil societies. The scholars who hold this view prefer to speak of «national awakening» or «national rebirth», a phenomenon which would be very similar to the historical movement leading to the formation of nation-states in Western Europe during the nineteenth century: «As experienced by the Western part of the continent in an earlier phase in history, the countries of Eastern Europe must go through the development of nationalism before they can work towards goals which lie further afield» (17).

Many authors, however, do not share such a benign interpretation of the current rise of nationalism in Eastern Europe; rather, they insist on the elements of ethnicism and tribalism present in such phenomenon. Referring to its disgregative effects, Pierre Hassner has used the term «neo-medievalism» (18). Far from being a natural phase in the process of the formation of new nation-states, the nationalistc tendencies in the East would be an aspect of a more general crisis of the traditional nation state concept.

Two main elements make nationalism a major factor of instability in Eastern Europe. First, it manifests itself in areas where many ethnic groups live in the same state and where, therefore, the basic principle of nationalism - the congruence between nation and state - can only be realized after bloody and prolonged ethnic conflicts. A second but clearly related point is that the concept of nation-state which prevails in Eastern Europe is based more on ethnic elements than on political and constitutional values. In fact, the «official nationalism» is generally weaker there than the other, more ethnically characterized, forms of nationalism (19). However, there is clearly a complex interaction between the two. Governments can, for istance, appeal to patriotism and

mount propaganda campaigns against alleged external threats with the goal of counterbalacing the ethnicist drives.

Ultra-nationalistic political parties with strong xenophobic attitudes have been gaining ground in many Eastern European countries. Although they have so far failed to win a majority of the votes, they have become central political actors in many of those countries. A further growth of their political and electoral weight could hinder democratic development, jeopardize domestic stability and compromise relations with neighbours and Western countries. On the economic plane, these parties oppose a rapid transformation to a market economy, favour a strong role of governmental bodies in economic activities - advocating a third way between capitalism and communism - and warn against the risks associated with the openness to the international market and with the involvement of foreign capital and enterprises in the economy. Furthermore, in some countries they have shown the propensity for building alliances with the former communists.

The political fragmentation following the collapse of multi-ethnic states (such as the Soviet empire and the Yugoslav federation) has created the conditions for the emergence of security dilemmas among the new political units. If a country is in a more advanced stage of state formation than a neighbour with which it has hostile relations, this can easily «create window of opportunity and vulnerability» (20). The new states inevitably tend to concentrate on self-defense, and this is often seen as a sign of an aggressive attitude.

Another major source of instability connected with the disintegration of the multi-ethnic poltical units is irredentism. In some cases, the sense of solidarity with minorities living abroad is stimulating expansionist tendencies and territorial claims in their countries of origin, particularly in the case of the Russians and the Serbs which had benefitted from an hegemonic position over neighbour peoples in the past. But a similar phenomenon is also visible in much weaker countries, such as Hungary and Albania. In turn, the new states in which large minorities live feel their political integrity threatened. This can induce them to adopt repressive policies towards those minorities. A spiral of actions and reactions, extremely difficult to stop, can thus occur.

Some analysts see nationalism as a phenomenon which, far from being confined to the Eastern countries, is spreading to the whole continent. Some new forms of regionalism in the Western countries present evident elements of ethnicism and tend to transform into secessionist movements. Western countries however appear to be in a far better position than the Eastern ones to contain these drives. Given the greater solidity of their political and institutional systems, they are able to develop an effective action from above, adopting, for istance, a policy of decentralization of powers.

A more concrete risk in Western Europe is a progressive renationalization of foreign and security policies. A traumatic event, such as the collapse of the West-European and trans-Atlantic institutional framework is highly unlikely. The West could however be threatened by a progressive erosion of its internal solidarity, which would undermine the effectiveness of its institutions, in particular their role as a pole of stability for the whole Europe.

4. Concluding remarks

The crucial challenge the Western countries are facing is the transformation of their institutions from instruments for promoting their own stability and well-being into instruments for projecting stability and the fundamental features of the Western world, such as democracy and market economy, into the Eastern part of the European continent.

The first key condition to achieve this goal is that a new form of partnership be established between the EU countries and the US. The Europeans have a strong interest in having the US continue to play a central role in dealing with security issues in Europe. To this end, they should

commit themselves to taking over a greater responsibility and to bearing a larger share of the costs associated with the promotion of security in Europe. NATO will have to concentrate on crisis management activities. At the same time, NATO forces - in particular, the nuclear ones - will have to provide, by virtue of their deterrent capacity, an overall guarantee against possible acts of aggression or coercion.

The second condition is a relaunching of the project of the European Union after the serious crisis of 1992 and 1993. The political unity of the West-European countries is probably the single greatest external factor which can contribute to maintaining or restoring stability in Eastern Europe, containing the drives towards further political fragmentation. The East-European countries have to meet a set of demanding requirements before being fully integrated into the West-European institutional framework. These requirements concern economic as well as security aspects. But the Western countries, in turn, should show a greater readiness to compromise on some of their immediate interests. In particular, it is essential for the stabilization of the Eastern countries that they can rely on a increasingly larger access to the West European market. Finally, it is also of crucial importance that the Western countries maintain and strengthen their lead in the efforts to deal with the new challenges connected with rising nationalism and ethnic conflicts. To this end, they should promote a further strengthening of the early-warning and crisis management instruments already existing at the pan-European level, especially in the CSCE framework.

Notes

(1) Lawrence Freedman, «The Politics of military intervention within Europe», in Nicole Gnesotto (ed.), *War and Peace: European Conflict Prevention*, October 1993, Paris: WEU Institute for Security Studies, 1993 (Chaillot Papers 11), p. 37.

(2) François Heisbourg, «L'Europe condamnèe a l'insécurité», *politique internationale*, n° 61, automne 1993, pp. 286-287.

(3) Ronal D. Asmus et alii, «Building a New NATO», *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 1993, p. 34.

(4) See on this point Juergen Noetzold, «The Eastern Part of Europe - Peripheral or Essential Component of European Integration?», *Aussenpolitik*, Vol. 44, No 4, 1993, p. 330; Jan Zielonka, *Security in Central Europe*, London: Brassey's for the IISS (Adelphi Paper 272), pp. 55-56.

(5) Lawrence Freedman, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

(6) See Marc Brenner, «Les Etats Unis et la crise yougoslave», *Politique Etrangére*, 57e année, n. 2, été 1992, pp. 329-338.

(7) See on this point David S. Yost, «Europe and Nuclear Deterrence», *Survival*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Autumn 1993, pp. 97-120; Walter B. Slocombe, «The Continued Need for Extended Deterrence», *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 1991, pp. 157-172. For the opposite view, see Ivo H. Daalder, «Nuclear Weapons in Europe: Why Zero is Better», *Arms Control Today*, Vol. 23, No. 1, January/february 1993, pp. 15-18.

(8) See Karl Kaiser, «From Nuclear Deterrence to Graduated Conflict Control», *Survival*, Vol. 32, No 6, November/December, 1990, pp. 483-496.

(9) Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better*, London: Brassey's for the IISS, 1981 (Adelphi Paper 171).

(10) John J. Mearsheimer, «Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War», *International Security*, Vol. 15, No 1, 1990, pp. 5-56.

(11) Gordon Adams, Paul Taibl, «Share Technology for 'Safer Weapons'», *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 48, No 4, May 1992, pp. 38-40.

(12) See Barry R. Posen, «The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict», *Survival*, Vol. 35, no 1, Spring 1993, pp. 27-47.

(13) See John J. Mearsheimer, «The Case for a Ukrainian Nuclear Deterrent», *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No 3, Summer 1993, pp. 50-66.

(14) On this point see Steven E. Miller, «The Case against a Ukrainian Nuclear Deterrent», *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 72, No 3, Summer 1993, p. 69.

(15) On the Ukrainian case see also Yost, *op. cit.*; William H. Kincade, «Nuclear Weapons in

Ukraine: Hollow Threat, Wasting Asset», *Arms Control Today*, Vol. 23, No 6, July/August 1993, pp. 13-18.

(16) For an analysis of cooperative denuclearization programmes see Graham Allison et alii, *Cooperative Denuclearization. From Pledges to Deeds*, Cambridge, MA: Center for Science and International Affairs, 1993; Peter Bardehle, «Kooperative Denuklearisierung. Ein Neues Konzept der amerikanischen Sicherheitspolitik und seine Probleme», *Europa-Archiv*, 48. Jahr, 10. März 1993, 5. Folge, pp. 140-148.

(17) Gerhard Wettig, «Shifts Concerning the National Problems in Europe», *Aussenpolitik*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 1993, p. 70. See also Noetzeld, *op. cit.*, pp. 327-328.

(18) Pierre Hassner, «Beyond Nationalism and Internationalism», *Survival*, Vol. 35, No 2, Summer 1993, pp. 49-65.

(19) See James G. Kellas, *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, London: MacMillan, 1993, chapt. 10.

(20) Posen, *op. cit.*. See, also, Dieter Senghaas, «Ethnic Conflicts, or the Revival of Nationalism», in Gnesotto, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-24.