

It is extremely dangerous today to comment on Ukraine in a periodical; by the time the writing appears the situation might change radically, as it happened after the shooting down of the Malaysian aircraft on 17 July. But misunderstandings about the position of Hungary requires clarifications. From the outset Hungary condemned the violation of the sovereignty of Ukraine. Hungary supports the territorial integrity of Ukraine, and wants to continue close friendly relations with that neighbour, based on the bilateral Treaty signed on 6 December 1991. At the same time wants to continue and expand the friendly relations with the Russian Federation, based on the bilateral Treaty signed also on 6 December 1991. Hungary also adheres to the Declaration on the Principles of Cooperation between the Republic of Hungary and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic on Safeguarding the Rights of National Minorities signed on 31 May 1991, and to the Declaration on the Principles of Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Hungary on Safeguarding the Rights of National, Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities, signed on 11 November 1992.

A year ago NATO was growing in membership with several countries seeking admission, nevertheless it was facing serious problems about its future. Its mission in Afghanistan cost much money and many lives with very meagre results. There were divergent interests and threat perceptions among its constituent states. In times of financial austerity it was only Norway and tiny Estonia who acceded to the admonitions of the United States to members to spend 2 per cent of their GDP on defense. And then, almost as a *deus ex machina* came Russia's President Putin and restored unity in NATO. The annexation of Crimea and the undeniable intervention in eastern Ukraine was much more than a new chapter in the post-Cold War world, it was a wake-up call, the end of "reset," the end of illusions about a friendly and cooperating Russia. The alarm bells rang especially loud in Russia's "near abroad," a term less often used today but expressing a hard fact. The perception often heard, that Hungary's assessment of the actions of Russia differs from the rest of the alliance, is not true. Together with our Visegrad partners we were among the first to condemn the aggression and expressed our solidarity with Ukraine. But like so many countries, we have our special concerns and special interests in this crisis. The Baltic States, Poland and Romania perceive a security threat. Germany, France, Italy, Norway and Greece see their strong economic relations with Russia in jeopardy with sanctions imposed upon Russia. All the countries whose energy supply relies much on Russian exports are also wary about a serious quarrel with the source. Unfortunately Putin did not use the many avenues offered for a decent retreat. To its conduct in eastern Ukraine, its material and propaganda support for the "separatists" the European Union and the United States had no alternative but to proceed to the third

grade of sanctions, even knowing that sanctions would cause harm in both directions. This new East-West antagonism is bad enough, though it is not a full superpower confrontation yet. It would be far more dangerous if NATO enlargement had not taken place in 1999 and 2002 and the new members would lie defenceless.

Overcoming opposition to enlargement

Fifteen years ago, on 12 March 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland acceded to the 1949 Washington Treaty. With that three former members of the one-time Warsaw Pact, three nations who had several times showed their opposition to communism and Soviet domination, became members of the Atlantic Alliance. Three years later, with a “Bing Bang,” the Baltic States, Romania, Bulgaria and Slovenia followed suit. Those two steps were a boost for post-Cold-War peace and security. During the Cold War for the peoples of Central Europe, the 200 million between the Germans and the Russians, the US (and NATO) was the official enemy, but Americans were never and nowhere as popular as in those countries who were placed on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain. When after several attempts foiled by the Soviet Union in 1989 we managed to regain our freedom and independence we were still members of that alliance of the unwilling, the Warsaw Pact, and Soviet forces were still stationed on our territories. Prime Minister Antall of Hungary on 7 June 1990, at the last meeting of the highest body of the Pact, held in the Soviet capital, called for the immediate liquidation of the military organization of the organization, and proposed talks “to review the nature, the function and the activities of the Warsaw Treaty.” Whereas President Gorbachev still hoped that both military-political alliances can be dissolved, Antall contradicted him: „During the process of forging European unity, it is expedient to rely on stable Atlantic co-operation.” But he added that „the Soviet Union must be part of the process of European integration.”

The Visegrad Cooperation, established upon the initiative of Antall, greatly facilitated the final dissolution of the Pact. Having achieved that with Gorbachev’s agreement, we were convinced that the fundamental political changes of 1989/90 could be guaranteed only by membership in NATO, and that was publicly announced at the Prague Summit of the V3 in May, 1992. At that time NATO was still far from being ready to endorse the idea. What was needed was a strong campaign, primarily in the United States, to convince its leaders and the public that it was in the interest of NATO to expand eastward, and that Russia’s opposition should not prevent that. How difficult it was is shown by an op-ed in the Washington Post as recently as on 16 March 2014 by John Matlock, US Ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1987-91. He deplored that NATO admitted members of the former Soviet Bloc, since by that it violated “the

understanding that the United States would not take advantage of the Soviet retreat from Eastern Europe.” Fortunately most American decision-makers, including the Senate, respected the desire and determination of the Central Europeans. Ron Asmus, Steve Larrabee and others played a most important role in convincing the leaders and public opinion in the US about the wisdom of enlargement. The ongoing crisis in the Balkans helped – like the present crisis in Ukraine may help a further enlargement.

Ron Asmus, who left us far too early, about ten years ago explained that „the purpose of NATO enlargement was to help lock in a new peace order in Europe following communism’s collapse and the end of the Cold War. We wanted to promote a process of pan-European integration and reconciliation that would make the prospect of armed conflict as inconceivable in the eastern half of the continent as it had become in the western half. ...it was also our hope that new allies from Central and Eastern Europe, having fought hard to regain their freedom and independence, would also bring fresh blood, ideas and enthusiasm to NATO and help us transform it for a new era.”¹

NATO always stood for peace, unlike the Warsaw Pact. When the Cold War was over many observers feared that there would be serious tensions, even conflicts between the countries emerging from Soviet captivity. True, in the eastern half of Europe old animosities were put into a deep-freezer, and the thaw could release them, as the brutal war in Yugoslavia showed. If the August 1991 coup in Moscow had succeeded the lid would have remained on the restless populations, but we would still live under the threat of a nuclear conflagration. If a free Central Europe had been left in the no-man’s land between NATO and the Russian Federation, tensions over national minorities between Poland and Lithuania, Romania and Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia (and probably Turkey, too), not to mention Hungary and three of its neighbours, might be running high. Fortunately the strict observation of human rights, *including the rights of the national minorities*, was declared a prerequisite for NATO membership. The prospect of joining the Alliance proved a strong incentive for proper behaviour in the applicant countries. It helped to reach important bilateral accords, like the treaties Poland, Hungary and Romania signed with their neighbours. (I regret that later on NATO, like the EU, paid little attention to that issue.)

Russia, or more properly its opposition to expanding (more diplomatically enlarging) NATO was the biggest obstacle to be cleared by the Central European applicants for membership. My argument was then as it is today that the expansion of the area of stability and security in what the Russians somewhat alarmingly used to call “near abroad” did not harm Russian interest, let alone posed a threat to that country. On the

contrary, it helped to make the Western border zone of Russia safe and more prosperous – also to the advantage of Russia. Enlargement allowed Russia to concentrate on the real threats to its security: Islamic fundamentalism in its South, potential rivalry in the East, particularly around Siberia, and internal dangers like backwardness, criminality and poverty. I met many Russian politicians, and privately they agreed with me, but the official position of Russia did not accept that argument. (Except once, after a memorably cordial meeting between Presidents Yeltsin and Walesa.) It was obvious that there was a security vacuum in Central and South-Eastern Europe, and that had to be filled. “Kein Raum ohne Herrschaft,” there is no space without a master – that was a tenet held by a political monster, but it was valid in the sense that a no-man’s land is always likely to be coveted. Central Europe was not to be left as an attractive prize, also because such a prize was likely to whet the appetite of people who found it hard to acquiesce in the disappearance of the Soviet Union.

With Slovakia under a difficult leader dropping out, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary staged a strong campaign for NATO membership. From 1993 until the final decision to invite the three Central European countries to sign the Washington Treaty one of my central theme was an ancient Latin warning: „*Vincere scis Hannibal, victoriam uti nescis*,” you know how to win but don’t know how to utilize victory. In the referendum held in Hungary over NATO membership in 1997 85 per cent supported membership. Hungarians understood that a country which had so many times been invaded by nearby great powers, which lost so vast territories after the First World War, and a nation that lost one tenth of its members in the Second World War needed peace guaranteed by a strong alliance.

„All is well that ends well.” With further enlargement in 2002 and in 2009 NATO now has 28 members. Most of them fought wars against each other in the past, now that is almost unimaginable. NATO has indeed brought peace and stability to the eastern half of Europe, including the proverbial powder-keg, the Balkans. That is why I am quite serious in suggesting that NATO deserves the Nobel Peace Prize for having prevented a third World War after 1949, having prevented local tensions and conflicts in Europe, in general for making a stable new Europe.

Yes, I think it was victory what the West, or more properly its values, primarily democracy, won at the end of the Cold War. It was not over the Russians, but over communism, over dictatorship, and for freedom and democracy. Victory was achieved by the Solidarity movement in Poland, by Gorbachev trying to modernize the Soviet Union and making peace with the West, by Hungary allowing thousands of East Germans to

¹ NATO Review, Summer 2003.

escape, and foremost by the attraction of Western prosperity, the hope that it would spread to the poorer half of Europe. The hopes of 1989/90 have not been fully fulfilled but now it is up to each country how to make good use of freedom and membership in the EU. NATO is there to provide security.

I could never see any valid reason for Russia having opposed NATO coming close to its borders, it was only an obsession born out of an out-dated concept of spheres of influence. No sane Russian can imagine that NATO would ever attack Russia. But then the only logical explanation for the opposition of Russia to enlargement was a secretly harboured desire to restore the Soviet Bloc. Yeltsin, with all his shortcomings, and his excellent foreign minister Kozirev, did not want that; their vision, too, was a “Europe, whole and free,” and democracy and the market economy to spread until Vladivostokh. The dead weight of corrupt Soviet “socialism,” the seamy side of wild capitalism, greed and the rise of the oligarchs destroyed that dream. It was replaced by reborn suspicion about the West aiming to paralyse and exploit Russia. Both the U.S. and the EU did their best to dispel Russian fears. Terrorism was rightly seen as a common threat demanding common action. But too much power, without controls, tends to corrupt visions, too. If Putin had been only concerned about the rights of the Russians in Ukraine he could have guaranteed that with peaceful means. Even a genuine referendum by the inhabitants of Crimea over their status could have been achieved. But what happened could not be swallowed. Countries bordering Russia see a dangerous precedent. But those who are members of NATO are safe. Everybody must believe that.

How to eliminate new interventions?

A year ago the fear persisted among many Central Europeans that they may be regarded by the U.S. as dependable. It would have been difficult to drop them as allies, but they were on the point of being neglected. As Ryan Miller, a research analyst at the Center for European Policy Analysis in Washington, D.C., wrote in 2008: “From Moscow's perspective, Central Europe sits at the center of the chessboard, because the area between the Baltic States and the Black Sea are vital for Russia to re-establish its sphere of influence. Overstretched and confronted with a host of challenges requiring the Kremlin's cooperation, Washington may, under the right circumstances, find itself tempted to trade away Central Europe's security interests to win Russian cooperation on issues it considers more pressing. Besides Georgia and Ukraine, the issue of Iran's nuclear program could provide another opportunity for a trade-off with the Kremlin.”² Whether there was such a danger of a trade-off or not, today, thanks to Putin, it is out of question. But many countries, with a substantial Russian-speaking minority, fear that

“separatists” one day may ask for friendly help from Mother Russia. How to reduce the danger of further Russian moves, and how to settle the root of the controversy over Ukraine?

Despite Putin’s aggressive actions I think it is beyond doubt that Russia does not want war with NATO, only wants to restore some of the authority (and the fear) it once commanded. As long as the aim was economic expansion it was accepted, even welcome. But territorial expansion is unacceptable. That’s why the 2002 Big Bang was so important, it made the Baltic States safe, it guaranteed their independence with a good insurance policy called Article 5. But what about the rest of the “near abroad,” Georgia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, and the biggest prize, Ukraine? Understandably they all want protection and guarantees against outside interference and aggression.

With all the indignation caused by Putin’s behaviour towards Ukraine it was prompted by the fear of “losing” that country if it is allowed to move towards the European Union. It might be too much to ask from Russia to accept the eventual NATO-membership of Ukraine, but why not accepting a neutral EU-member Ukraine, with the perspective of some special arrangements for trade with Russia?

Russia’s military intervention took place purportedly in defence of Russians in Ukraine. It is very probable that the annexation of the Crimea would have taken place without the pretext of answering a request from its Russian population. I do not think that the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine (at least ten million!) had really serious grievances, but that was alleged. It should be made even more difficult to commit a new violation of international law by removing all possible causes, any pretext for that. So the wise course would still be to deny the appearance that there is any justification for Russian concern about the rights of Russians – in Ukraine and elsewhere.

Here I must return to my *ceterum censeo*, to my plea and warning of 25 years standing: the issue of national minorities, which I recently set forth also in this periodical.³ How to prevent ethnic conflicts, leading to war, suppression or separation? There are some obvious examples. Setting aside such valid and well-working arrangements like the one in South Tyrol there are more recent cases, too. Turkey has started to accommodate its Kurdish population, ending decades of terrorism and repression. Georgia suffered aggression, but before that disregarded the demands of its Abkhaz and Osset minorities, giving a handy pretext for their Russian occupation. In Moldavia the Turkish-speaking Greek Orthodox Gagauz community has territorial autonomy since the mid-1990s, but

² *Moscow Times*, March 28, 2008

³ Géza Jeszenszky: The Need for Satisfied Minorities. ...

that is threatened by the Moldovan-Romanian majority. We see that the Gagauz now turn to Russia for protection. With autonomy and extensive rights for the Russians in Transnistria and elsewhere in Moldova, that country could be re-united and stabilized.

Even after the horrors in Croatia and Bosnia caused by Serbian aggression, purportedly in defence of local Serbs, and despite the catastrophe in Iraq and Syria largely due to one religious group dominating another, the world is pursuing the chimera of multiculturalism without self-government, autonomy of a sort. Territorial autonomy is not a Hungarian preoccupation. In the early phase of the war in the one-time Yugoslavia the international community, presided by Lord Carrington, came up with the proposal of offering a special status for the Serbs of Croatia (and, by implication for the non-Serbs in Serbia).

“Areas in which persons belonging to a national or ethnic group form majority, shall enjoy a special status of autonomy. Such a status will provide for the right to have and show the national emblems of that group; an educational system which respects the values and need of that group; a legislative body; an administrative structure, including a regional police force; and a judiciary.”⁴

A settlement along such lines would satisfy any minority community living in the eastern half of Europe, certainly the Russians, Romanians, Poles and Hungarians in Ukraine. It would be impossible for Russia to refuse peace with Ukraine with such rights guaranteed for the Russians in East Ukraine. It is high time for the EU and the US to propose talks between Russia and Ukraine on such a basis. Today there is war in the east of Ukraine. It may have elements of a civil war, but also elements of a war by proxies. NATO or the EU is not involved in that war, they do their utmost to bring about peace. But without talks, without pressing not only Russia but also the victim, Ukraine, for negotiations for a compromise solution, one fears only further escalation. On the hundredth anniversary of the First World War all the diplomats and the political leaders must keep their heads cool.

⁴ Treaty provisions for a convention between the republics of Yugoslavia, 1991, in my possession.