

AUSTRIA'S MEMBERSHIP IN NATO FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF POLAND'S SECURITY CONCERNS

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I. POLAND'S INTERESTS IN THE NEW EUROPE

Poland's vital interests are to a large degree determined by its specific geographical position. The territory of Poland was a very important theatre of frequent wars fought in Europe in the last three hundred and fifty years, and this contributed to Poland's relative backwardness compared to the rest of the continent. The heavy damage inflicted on Poland, especially during the two genocidal wars of the twentieth century, is a direct consequence of its geographical position: it occupies a strategic area on the east-west axis, the easiest and the most direct access to Russia from the west (read: mainly from Germany), and vice versa. For this reason the whole area occupied by Poland has been dubbed as "the area between Germany and Russia" -sometimes a corridor, sometimes a buffer zone and sometimes an antemurale of sorts. Hence, Poland is particularly interested in every development that may secure peace and co-operation on the continent, especially on the axis where it is situated and in its immediate environment.

What are the factors that may effectively contribute to such a desired state of affairs?

Looking at the Polish security and foreign policy documents and the relevant statements of the most important politicians (both of the left and the right wing parties), these factors are:

further progress in European integration, which also means development and strengthening of European institutions,

promotion of political and economic co-operation along the north-south axis connecting the regions lying between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea to the south-east and the Adriatic Sea to the south;

the de-emphasising of the military concerns, preoccupations and priorities in bilateral relations;

prevention of a new or new divisions of Europe by fostering close co-operation with Central and Eastern European countries which either are not at the present moment and temporarily considered as candidates for membership in the European Union and in NATO, or do not stand such a chance in the foreseeable future.

I.1. Further Progress in European Integration

The progress of European integration means that Poland is no longer strategically (politically) situated and perceived as an area between Germany and Russia, the two historically contending powers, eager to hold more and more territory, and to forge tactical alliances with each other to reach this-dangerous for Poland and other, smaller countries (imperial) survival objective. Fortunately, today Poland's geographical position is going to be divorced from its menacing geopolitical context. If at the present time Poland is still perceived as an "undefined" area between the "ever closer" European union and Russia (or is defined in such a way by "non-reformable" Russian nationalists), it will be an integral part of Western Europe once it joins the European Union and NATO.

The prospects for such positive developments are quite good, especially as far Poland's membership in NATO is concerned. The frequently mentioned April 1999 is a realistic date. The accession talks Poland started with NATO in September are nearing a successful completion. Reaching the status of a membership of the European Union will probably be a much longer and arduous process involving sometimes painful societal transformations. However, also in this case, there are at present no reasons to worry-at least as far as the political will on both sides (Poland and EU member states) is concerned. The consequences of these developments are obvious. Poland's security concerns - if we concentrate our attention on this issue-will become directly those of the whole continent.

It should be stressed, however, that Poland is not interested in enlargement of NATO and the EU as well as other institutions for its own sake. Poland's stakes are higher and more ambitious: it is interested in the very high factual and legal status of these institutions in European politics and economy. This, in turn, depends on their ability to "project power" both in a strictly military sense and as a shorthand description of economic and political processes. Such "power projection" - which by its very nature involves enlargement but cannot be limited to it - is considered in Warsaw to be the best guarantee for a swift and successful postcommunist transformation as well as for a bright future of Central and Eastern Europe.

I.2. Promotion of Political and Economic Co-operation

Promotion of political and economic co-operation along the north-south axis would create a necessary complement and at the same time a badly needed counterweight to the historically understandable but at present clearly exaggerated preoccupation with the east-west axis and its role in the affairs of central Europe. Such shift in emphasis could bring the Nordic countries closer to the problems of the Black Sea and Adriatic regions, restoring at the same time the broken link in the system of European co-operation. It is obvious that such restoration of historical ties will help to stabilise the Central European region, and, what is equally important, will certainly increase its political and economic "value added. "

This at least partially explains why Poland is vitally interested in the successful completion of the peace process on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, in the return to a calm political and economic situation in the Balkans, and further to the east in southern Europe: in the Ukraine and the Caucasus. However, it should be borne in mind and added here that the increasing interest of Poland and other European countries in growing co-operation along the north-south axis has recently created a certain nervousness among the political elite's in Russia. Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin spoke firmly against such plans during the meeting of the heads of states from Central and Eastern Europe in Vilnius, early in September.

In terms of the old-fashioned imperial or post-imperial concerns and policies, such reservations on the part of Russia are obvious and understandable. On the other hand, they are unacceptable and hard to justify if our thinking and actions are based on and follow the "dictates" of integration and all-European co-operation. However, it should be stressed here that the task of strengthening the role of the north-south axis in the political and economic life of Europe should not be subjected to the purpose of eliminating Russia from European affairs. To the contrary, Russia's western regions, the Kaliningrad and the St. Petersburg oblasti (and Nizhny Novgorod for that matter), would be indispensable in the process.

The Black Sea region and the Balkans cannot be defined and treated as areas off-limits to the developing European co-operation. This is, by the way, why Poland has been sympathetic to the relevant concerns voiced by, among others, Ukraine and Rumania. One can only hope that the slowly emerging model of oil and gas deliveries to various regions of central, south and western Europe from Russia itself, from the Caucasus, from the Caspian Sea and from

Central Asia will have a healing effect on Russia's post-imperial behaviour. Heavy-handed dictates do not go very well with the stimulation of trade which requires mutual trust and certainty of deliveries.

I.3. Less Emphasis on Military Concerns in Bilateral Relations

Paradoxically although predictably, NATO enlargement could soothe strictly military concerns in bilateral relations between European nations. One can assume that these concerns will be moved to the multilateral level and institutions (for example, negotiations concerning the modernisation of the 1990 CFE Treaty are carried out under the OSCE auspices) and will preoccupy participants in the meetings of the NATO-Russia Joint Permanent Council. Even the area of the CSBMs, with the greatest potential for bilateral solutions, will be increasingly "multilateralized" (although in this case one should not forego utilising the idea and mechanism of the CSBMs in hot spots and areas of trouble involving limited numbers of actors).

As a consequence, within the framework of bilateral relations, governments will be able to better focus on issues potentially much less explosive, namely on the political and economic interests and co-operation. Next, and as a consequence of the declining importance of bilateral military concerns, it can be argued that NATO enlargement will not be the factor creating new divisions in Europe, but on the contrary, it will help halt and eventually prevent this tendency.

Some qualifications of these hypotheses are, however, in order. In the case of countries like Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, invited in Madrid (8-9 July 1997) to start the accession talks, the enlargement of NATO will, initially, exert a strong pressure on national defence budgets and especially on the pattern of military expenditures. All important reforms (and necessary reductions) effected in these countries in the last 5-7 years were but a beginning of major structural changes required by the membership in the Alliance. A vivid example of the possible direction of such processes is given by changes in Finland's defence posture after 1989.

This important (and relatively costly) factor, if we assume that Austria will be a member of the Alliance, will be definitely of much lesser importance to this country. Austria, although at present not a NATO member and a neutral state, has been in its military posture (including training, force structure, equipment, ROE, etc.) for years already a part of the broadly-understood Western defence community, like Sweden, Finland and Switzerland, (although some major improvements in C3 and mobility are clearly on the agenda).

NATO enlargement will also create a need for new members to establish growing military co-operation, not just between, say, Warsaw and Brussels/Mons. Such co-operation could involve, for example, air defence systems and military production and standardisation. In a word, enlargement could mean the lessening of the military concerns in bilateral relations but at the same time, during the transition period for new members, it will mean greater emphasis on restructuring, modernisation and adaptation to new institutional requirements of the NATO membership.

As far as the problem of new dividing lines, connected with NATO enlargement, is concerned, the response depends on the way the Russian political and military elite's are going to view new security arrangements emerging in Europe and Eurasia. This concerns especially the way Russians will see the role of NATO and the relations Russia-NATO in the post-enlargement period.

One should not forget that contrary to complaints frequently and noisily made in Moscow, Russia has many instruments at its disposal. For example, Russia is a member of various important international forums where it can represent its vital interests. The newly-formed

NATO-Russia Joint Permanent Council and Russia's, for all practical reasons, permanent membership in the G-7 belong to the set of such instruments and institutions. NATO's enlargement does not limit Russia's freedom of legitimate action; it limits, however, its freedom to intervene directly or indirectly in the affairs of other countries. Russian strategic elite's only slowly begin to understand this significant difference, nevertheless the process has already started. A firm but at the same time non-challenging and non-offensive posture of NATO and of potential NATO members is required as an important factor facilitating the painful process of Russia's adaptation to new security arrangements on the continent.

I.4. Co-operation with the "Not Haves"

Among the "not-haves" (RAND experts' term) one should distinguish two groups of countries. The group of potential candidates for membership in NATO, the European Union, or in both, includes Bulgaria, Rumania, Slovakia, Lithuania, and Latvia. Among those who stand no chance to be admitted in the foreseeable future are Belarus, Ukraine, Croatia, Serbia, Albania and Macedonia. Russia, for obvious reasons, is a case apart.

In both groups we find countries that actively try to improve their internal and international position with the aim of either shortening the path to membership in NATO and/or EU or at least improving their chances for being considered as a desirable and valuable "acquisition" to the European institutions. We also find countries which by their policies, in fact, tend to downgrade themselves.

In the upwardly mobile group there are possibly Ukraine and Croatia, although with very mixed practical results of policies pursued in these countries. Especially Croatia, ruled by President F. Tudjman, can hardly be considered to be a serious candidate for membership in NATO and the European Union; its claims for democratic credentials are dubious. Ukraine, on the other hand, does not at present request membership in either institution, although it does not exclude such a move in the future. Furthermore, the shape of Ukraine's economy is causing great concern to its friends. It seems that the reform process in Ukraine is once again in danger of being derailed. The political consequences of the economic situation can soon become grave indeed. The results of the next parliamentary elections, due to be held within the next six months (March 1998), could be an unpleasant surprise to democratic forces.

Among the downwardly mobile group there is Slovakia which had been until a relatively short time ago, along with other nations belonging to the so-called Visegrad Group (V-4), an unquestionable candidate for membership in the European Union and NATO. However, due to rather erratic policies under the present government (especially in the area of democratic rights and procedures) and nationalist orientation, Slovakia has excluded itself from this group. At the same time, one should not forget that Slovakia's economic policy is following a general pattern adopted by such rapidly reforming countries as Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, although with some important differences concerning the directions of the foreign trade flows and a rather heavy dependence on Russia.

Within this group, the most striking instances of failure in fulfilling the task of post-communist transformation, are the New Yugoslavia (mainly Serbia) and Belarus-although for quite different reasons. One doubts whether any fast improvement in the political and economic situation of these countries is possible. The political deadlock into which Serbia and Belarus were manoeuvred by their leaders (and the non-existence or nationalistic degeneration of civil society) seems self-supportive and self-perpetuating. What is badly needed, indeed, is the bold Ostpolitik and Balkanpolitik on the part of the European Union and NATO together to break the stalemate, to support the weak and dispersed democratic forces, and to encourage the present elite's to think in terms of accommodation and alternatives.

Poland's interest in the New Europe is both selfish and altruistic in nature. It is a combination of values we do not want to discard when under-taking political actions and agreeing on compromises, and of vital national interests we do not want to threaten. The new Europe we strive for should secure the proper mix between these two goals, allowing place both for global and regional concerns. Polish politics, as indicated by our attempts at joining European Union and NATO, considers all-European problems and Europe at large. At the same time however, Poland's politics puts an increasingly sharp focus on our own region, our small, regional Europe-not on the Mitteleuropa that used to menace Poles, Czechs and others but a co-operative, increasingly political Central Europe.

II. THE ROLE OF AUSTRIA IN CENTRAL EUROPE AND HER MEMBERSHIP IN NATO

II.1. The Third Step in Austria's Integrative Approaches

Austria has traditionally played an important role in Poland's foreign policy and, to a lesser extent, in Polish security considerations. Over the years our interest in Austria may have varied in nature and intensity, but it has never fallen to the level of indifference.

Due to historical and geopolitical factors, Austria is one of the important actors in the politics in (and of) Central Europe and whatever strategic choice it makes, is of concern to its neighbours. From the perspective of Warsaw, it is important that Austria (a) is an important neighbour of some of Poland's immediate neighbours (the Czech Republic and Slovakia) and political allies (Hungary); that (b) co-operation and stability in this part of Europe is important for us, and that these goals are impossible to achieve without Austria's collaboration; and that (c) we perceive Austria as a country with similar - if not identical - concerns. Last but not least, roughly one fifth-in terms of territory-of the present-day Poland has shared a certain period of its history with Austria, and has quite fond memories of that time. All these factors together can be seen as a proper point of departure for defining Austria's role in Central Europe.

Austria borders on four post-communist states in Central Europe: Slovenia, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. All these countries had been until 1918 part of the Habsburg empire. The common past creates cultural ties that, in the long run, often promote co-operation and understanding. At least this seems to be the case of Austria and its neighbours. Because Austria does no longer pose a threat to their sovereignty, these states see it as an important potential arbiter and partner in soothing the erupting regional conflicts and in clearing up misunderstandings.

At the same time, however, one encounters an opinion among the Polish foreign-policy establishment that, as regards European affairs, Austria's potential has been under-utilised. Austria, as an important political partner, is no doubt present in Warsaw, Budapest and Prague (is it equally strongly present in Bratislava, Kiev or Bucharest?). The potential is surely there, but it is not exploited. Even in non-political spheres such as cultural contacts and events, and language training (to mention only these two areas) the role of Austria seems to have been relatively reduced. Some of the reasons for this situation are obvious (e.g., the bigger role of Germany and German institutions in the region after 1989 cannot be underestimated) but one would wish to see more effort, interest (including self-interest) and dedication on the part of the government and other public institutions and people in Vienna.

Some may object that Austria belongs to the group of relatively small (hence unimportant), albeit highly prosperous, European states. Thus, its impact may not be as great as suggested by this analysis. Yet, the relatively small size may be an advantage, for other states will not fear Austria's dominance in regional affairs.

It is obvious that Austria's adhesion to NATO will strengthen its Position in the region and will offer it an opportunity to play the important role of the arbiter and the strategic partner to the nations of the region (certain Czech politicians and security experts are, for example, quite explicit as far as this issue is concerned). Austria's position has already been made stronger by its admission to the European Union. One cannot forget that in the not so distant past Austria played the role of the "bridge" between ideologically and politically defined (and divided) East and West. The major still relevant dividing lines are different, be it geographic (east, west, centre, north, etc.), political (democracy, autocracy/dictatorship) and/or economic (developed and less developed regions and countries of the European continent, advanced and underdeveloped market economies). These are serious and potentially explosive lines of division. Along these lines Europe will be structurally divided if a special effort is not made to counter these tendencies

At the same time, when propounding the concept of a more committed Austria, one should realise that for many Austrians the tradition of more than forty years of neutrality, which served Austria extremely well in the bipolar world of the Cold War, is a value in itself Twenty or thirty years ago neutrality ("Finlandization", as it was called in Poland) was an idea cherished by anticommunist rebels from the ranks of both intellectuals as well as blue-collar workers. Felix Austria, this historical term gained under communism in Poland a new, modern meaning, reflecting both history and the more fortunate Austria's present.

However, today we ask ourselves and our Austrian (and, for that matter, also Swedish and Finnish) friends a different question. It is felt in Warsaw that the very concept of neutrality is obsolete, that it belongs to a different, historical epoch. The word "neutrality," it seems, has no place in the vocabulary of the European Union which at least from 1994 has been speaking about European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) or about Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). If properly and strictly understood, neutrality can mean today self-isolation and self-marginalization.

Commitment is the call of the present day and of the days to come. One cannot remain neutral when facing the challenges of the present; one is forced to act when confronted with Bosnia's, international organised crime, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, etc. The real question is the level, direction and institutional forms of commitment.

Austria's possible increasingly important commitment to Central European and Europe-wide affairs is also in Poland's national interest. To act constructively and efficiently in the region (and beyond it), one needs good, experienced and reliable partners. Austria's well developed economic and political potential aided by a numerically modest but of a very high quality, armed forces should be added to the common European pool, to be a part of a new European synergy.

Austria already made the first step when, together with Sweden and Finland, it joined the European Union. Austria made the second step when the country signed the Partnership for Peace in 1995 and involved its military in IFOR and next in SFOR operations.

Today the third step, i.e. NATO membership is desirable and, at the same time, an active role in giving more flesh and blood to the activities of the Western European Union (WEU) and to the strategically crucial concept of the Combined Joint Task Forces (CJTF). At a strictly military and operational level, Austrian armed forces can help, if need be, in executing the tasks of power projection to the most troublesome region of Europe, namely the Balkans. However, one should add here immediately that the projected power will not only be that of its own, but rather that of an international defence community and, ultimately, of the United States

The strictly military and operational approach is, needless to say, insufficient when trying to explain reasons for the third step. To describe the case in a more satisfactory manner, it is appropriate to make a few remarks on Poland's view on the role of NATO.

II.2. The Polish View on the Role of NATO in Contemporary Europe

In Polish discussions on NATO enlargement and on the present and future role of the Alliance in European security architecture one can discern certain basic threads which indicate the importance of this discussion. The weight attached to the items listed below is different but as a whole they represent an "organic" mix of the so-called old and new NATO tasks. The Alliance is seen and defined in Polish discussions

- a) as a deterrent,
- b) as political and military data being a requisite of a swifter political and economic transition in post-communist societies,
- c) as a pillar of the emerging new European security architecture, d) as an element of the emerging European Defence and Security Identity,
- e) as a factor eventually fostering secondary, regional security arrangements. In all these roles, the justification and rationale of the present and future NATO depends to a great extent on the efficacy of its European dimension (and European members involvement). It is clear that NATO today and tomorrow should mean an increasingly close (and equal) American-European partnership and co-leadership. However, such a result cannot be achieved by simply reducing the role of the U.S.A. in NATO and in European affairs in general, by an amputation of sorts. We need a new synergy, not American disappointment and the growing feeling of its political obsolescence on the continent. This is why Poles look with anxiety and concern at the French-American misguided dispute concerning the Southern Command in Naples, and at the recent decision of France not to rejoin the Alliance's military structure.

American-European defence partnership and co-leadership means to Warsaw , first and foremost, greater European political, military and financial responsibility. In others words, the lesson of Bosnia, of IFOR and SFOF, should be learned properly, and a proper answer should be given to the following question- Why, in solving this, clearly European, bloody affair, were Europeans, by their inaction or clumsy actions, forced to ask for (and accept with gratitude) American leadership?

Because security is a deadly serious matter, people in Warsaw cannot simply join unreservedly the modish cry for a more prominent role for Europe. Full stop. Like the French and others, we would like to see NATO as an equal partnership between Europeans and Americans, but we should be aiming at this goal through a relatively slow learning-by-doing process. One should start with deeds, not words.

At the end of the day, however, European countries will be forced to act in a more coordinated manner and to strengthen their role in NATO as well as in solving Europe's own affairs. The European strategic space should therefore be prepared for fulfilling such a role (its relative uniformization facilitating interoperability, without communication and transportation breaks). NATO will be more European the moment Europeans and their political and military leaders demonstrate their will and preparedness to defend themselves and to face new challenges.

This short summary of some Polish views is, it seems, also pertinent to Austria, inasmuch as it calls for a more active and committed stance, oriented towards succeeding in national goals but as parts of a larger whole and joint endeavours.

II.3. Austria in NATO: Europe Gains, but Who Will Lose?

NATO membership Will help Austria to better exploit its geopolitical position for the benefit of its own position in European and world politics, and for the benefit of the region and the continent as a whole.

The most characteristic feature of the change that has occurred in the realm of international politics is the move away from the "pure" balance-of-power and sphere-of-influence approach (and politics). It means that to a large extent the security interests of individual states have ceased to be a zero-sum game: an improvement of the security of one state is no longer achieved at the cost of the security of the others.

The way to ensure security of particular nations is to ensure security at the regional level either through a collective security system ("soft measure") or through a defence alliance that can effectively deter a potential aggressor ("hard measure"). These developments coincide with the point 4 on our list of Poland's interests in the security and foreign policy area (chap. 1), that is, they will foster close co-operation with the states of Central and Eastern Europe which for the moment are not considered to be candidates for membership in the European Union and NATO. Thus, from the point of view expounded here, Austria's membership in NATO could significantly contribute to military security, and political and economic development in the region.

Last but not least, the Alliance remains what it has always been: a self-defence organisation of democratic nations serving the preservation of their particular civilisation. As such, it should be given due support. In this sense Austria is a direct and immediate "net consumer" of NATO's very existence and deterring potential.

And finally, it seems a hard task to find those who can claim losses because of Austria's move to join NATO. Even Russia, vehemently opposed to Polish membership in NATO, seems neutral on this issue (or at least its reservations are expressed in a more gentle manner). On such assumption, the degree of freedom in Austria's politics seems very large indeed. It means also that the most important factors determining Austria's choice are internal; external pressures preventing the positive answer to the question about NATO membership are relatively weak and of a secondary nature.

III. THE MAIN SOURCES OF POTENTIAL INSTABILITY IN EUROPE, THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF AUSTRIA IN REGIONAL CONFLICT PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT AND ITS ACCESSION TO NATO

There are three major potential sources of instability in Austria's immediate environment on which it may have a moderating influence. Austria's influence is not properly used now because it is perceived by major players as a neutral state, outside the main stream of European (security) politics, its membership in the European Union notwithstanding.

If, however, Austria joins NATO, it will act in all the regional conflicts on behalf of the community of nations: through it, NATO political and military power will be projected to the region. At the same time, Austria may still preserve the image and play the role of an impartial arbiter.

One can list the following potential sources of conflict in Austria's immediate surrounding. first, relations between Hungary and Rumania; second, developments in Slovakia, and third, Slovakia's relations with Hungary. But significantly more important in the larger perspective are sources of conflict which are farther away from Austria's borders, where, if it joins NATO, Austria could make a serious impact because of its place, expertise, and position in regional politics: the Balkan and the Black Sea rim, which involves relations between Albania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey and Russia.

Even more indirectly, Austria can play a role in working out a way to include the Black Sea region in international co-operation, which is, among others, in the strategic interest of Ukraine's survival. The southern rim extends farther west, along the Mediterranean . It is potentially the most explosive area in (and around) Europe (where, for example, the OSCE tries without much success to play an appeasing role). This means that not being a party to the conflicts, but being in the proximity, Austria can play a very important role in alleviating some of the main security concerns in Europe. Let us examine this issue in a summarised way.

III.1. Slovakia and Hungary

The problem of Slovakia is first of all an internal one: in terms of the political regime it seems to be closer to Ukraine or Croatia than to Hungary, the Czech Republic, or Poland. Although its economy seems to be in a better shape than its politics, nevertheless it seems premature to make a final judgement on this question. The economic growth of Slovakia, although quite impressive, owes a lot to the cheap fuel and energy it gets as a political favour from Russia. The situation may change when Russia demands world prices in its domestic market. Slovakia still profits from co-operation with Russia in arms production and sale, but it seems rather difficult to build the future of the whole national economy on the arms industry alone.

Slovakia's main internal political problem is its inability to build a stable democratic system. The symptom of this inability is the clear evolution of the regime away from parliamentary democracy towards a democradura, a kind of a semi-autocratic system. The less successful the system is compared to developments in the neighbouring countries, the more propensity to blame the outside world and its "agents" inside for the Slovakian rulers' failures. Considering that in all probability the internal political developments in Slovakia will not help the international integration of its economy (as witnessed by NATO and EU decisions), and that this will lead to noxious consequences to the internal political situation in the country, one would also expect the relative worsening of (or at best the stalemate in) Slovakia's relations with Hungary.

Symptoms of such behaviour have manifested themselves already in the aggression against the Romany (quite a new development as far as intensity of aggression is concerned), and in the tendency to discriminate against Hungarians

The first problem must lead (like in the case of the Czech Republic) to difficulties in Slovakia's relations with the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the European Union. One can hope that both the prime minister and the coalition around him, and the disintegrated opposition will try together to put an end to aggressive attitudes and to attacks against the Romany population. Let us note here that such behaviour was until recently more typical of the Czech Republic than Slovakia.

The Slovak government's policies towards the Hungarian minority in the country, if not effectively challenged by the international community, can whip up a wave of nationalism in Hungary and create a truly explosive situation in this part of the world. But one should also bear in mind that segments of the Hungarian political elite and government try to overexploit Slovakia's bad international reputation for their own, not always legitimate, interests. The most drastic case demonstrating such ill-will is Hungarian disregard for the ruling of the International Court of Justice in the Hague in favour of Slovakia in its conflict concerning the Gabčíkovo dam.

One should strongly emphasise that if the relations between Slovaks and Hungarians get out of control, this very fact will have damaging repercussions for Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria and Ukraine (the growing negative image of countries located,

unfortunately, in the region torn by open national conflicts). Also, such developments could attract Russia, always ready to profit by such circumstances.

Thus, a strong NATO presence in the area may sober the minds of some politicians with the penchant for exploiting national feelings in their countries, and keep foreign troublemakers where they belong-far away

III.2. Hungary and Rumania

Relations between these countries have improved in the last year and there seems to be no threat on the horizon. The prospect of Hungarian membership in NATO and its accession to the European Union in the next couple of years, and Rumania's prospect to be considered at the next stage of NATO and EU enlargements, are certainly a factor contributing to the growing co-operation between the two countries. Unlike Slovakia, Rumania has demonstrated after the last parliamentary and presidential elections which removed from power the post-communist party, a strong will to adopt European standards in its internal regime and external policies.

Having said this, it is rather obvious that security analysts must look for potential risks and threats, and it is possible to imagine a situation where the present liberal-democratic coalition loses the next elections, and the reigns of power in Rumania return to the more authoritarian and nationalist party of the neo-communist brand. Such prospect cannot be ignored in view of the increasingly loud social protests in Rumania, provoked by the reform-oriented austerity policy of the present government. One should cherish no illusions: the cost and pain of transition in Rumania will be much higher than in Poland and the Czech Republic. To the waste and diseconomies caused by the communist regime one should add the mismanagement and involution during the rule of Mr. Ilescu and his post-communist government.

III.3. The New Yugoslavia

The New Yugoslavia, which is primarily Serbia, probably presents one of the most difficult problems of the present-day Europe. It is ruled in a dictatorial fashion by the communist nomenclature which has turned nationalist. The economy of the country is in ruin. Yugoslavia's relations with all its neighbours are strained. It exerts the most disturbing impact on the Bosnia and Herzegovina quagmire. Serbia is also in conflict with Albania, with no solution in sight, over the treatment of the Albanian population in the Kosovo region. There is also the enduring discord with Bulgaria over the long-drawn-out issue of Macedonia.

The international isolation of New Yugoslavia has been eased by Greece, a traditional supporter of Serbs, and by Russia which tries to find a way to the Balkans-a traditional "sphere of interest" of Moscow's. If we take into account the interest of Turkey (not mentioning other Muslim states) in the fate of Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, then it becomes clear that the involvement of foreign powers is a factor that makes the situation in the Balkans even more critical. The Balkans have become a scene of rivalries between Greece and Turkey, and Russia and Turkey with other major players staying near the arena.

The stability of the Balkans requires a stronger, probably semi-permanent Western presence in the subregion. Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria, as aspirants to NATO membership, do not provide such a strong presence. They themselves are in fact in need of assistance. But Austria, representing both the European Union and NATO, could change the geopolitical composition of the region in a way that can bring more peace and civility to Balkan affairs.

III.4. The Turkish-Russian Rivalry on the Black Sea: the Task of Opening Up the Black Sea to International Co-operation

The Black Sea is only one of several scenes of the Russian-Turkish rivalry that has sprung up again since the demise of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union. In fact, this rivalry extends from Central Asia, through the Caucasus, to the Balkans. In the east it involves the desire for access to the energy resources in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea basin. To achieve this, Turkey has built a series of pipelines connecting Central Asian oil and natural gas reserves, through Azerbaijan, with its own domestic pipelines. Russia, for its part, would like to have a fuller control over these resources and their distribution. Her determination in this respect is growing very fast.

The rivalry can be transposed to the Balkans which both Russia and Turkey, for historical and other reasons, consider to be of vital interest to them. Here Russia has found an ally in Greece which also feels threatened by the growing Turkish presence. In the meantime, Turkey has made some important inroads in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria and Macedonia. On the other hand, Greece has strengthened its ties with Cyprus, Syria and Iran, as well as with Serbia. It has also been accused by Turkey of supporting Kurdish separatists

The persisting enmity between Greece and Turkey, which has on a number of occasions led them to the brink of war, is a major problem for NATO and for the security in Europe. Moreover, it has been exploited by Russia to weaken NATO's southern flank. The process has not been halted; quite to the contrary, one should expect more nasty surprises in this geopolitical area.

It is obvious, that Austria's access to NATO could deprive the Balkan divisions of their bipolar character, putting a check on growing Turkish appetites, Greek slyness, and Russian subversive designs. Moreover, countries which have developed a firmly pro-Western orientation, like Bulgaria and Rumania, will have a potential ally in their proximity, deserving the confidence and respect of other Western powers and institutions while at the same time considered impartial and objective. This would effectively help the liberal-democratic transformations in east-southern Europe.

Yet, potentially the most important development in European affairs in this part of the continent could be the strengthening of the already mentioned north-south axis in European relations. A part of it could be a direct co-operation between the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Black Sea Economic Co-operation Area, and the Central European Initiative and SECI. Some elements of this co-operation are already present in the plans to construct communication systems linking the northern and southern parts of the continent. Particularly Ukraine, with the support of Turkey and Poland, has been active in promoting this line of thinking. It seems that Austria could also benefit from such developments.

IV. CONCLUSION: AUSTRIA'S ROLE IN FOSTERING THE INTEGRATION OF POLAND, HUNGARY, AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC WITH EUROPE, AND IN INTEGRATING THE SUBREGION: THE TASK OF DEMARGINALIZATION

A short summary of the present position (and problems) of some countries in the region and the following conclusion concerning Austria's position on NATO membership should conclude this report.

Hungary is in a very specific sense a "frontline" state. At present it has common borders with six post-communist states: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Rumania, Ukraine, and Slovakia. Hungary is made vulnerable to developments in these countries by the fact that each of them has a fairly large Hungarian minority. Thus, Hungary has become a hostage of a kind to internal developments (including quarrels) in the neighbouring countries. In some of them the

leaders of the Hungarian minority try to exert a very strong and not always well thought-out impact on the governments both in Budapest and in the country of their residence.

Two of Hungary's neighbouring states, namely Slovenia and Slovakia, present no particular problems (with all the reservations, already indicated concerning the latter), but that still leaves four that do.

Croatia, in terms of its democratic credentials, shows features similar to those observed in Slovakia: a strongman in control of the government ready to suppress democratic institutions interferes with the work of the legislature, and restricts the freedom of the mass media whenever it suits him. Furthermore, Croatia's interests are directly bound up with Bosnia and Herzegovina (and in a strange way, with NATO and the USA as well). Yet Croatia's behaviour there has been far from exemplary.

Serbia is a post-communist state that has undergone a transformation in a semi-fascist direction. At the moment, Serbia is facing a direct threat from the growing Muslim population's dissatisfaction not only in Kosovo but also in Montenegro (as indicated by the results of recent presidential elections).

Ukraine is a potential regional power whose future can be most decisive for the whole region. At the moment, however, Ukraine's state structures and institutions, and economy are in a deep crisis - verging on catastrophe - and it will take years before the country stands on its feet firmly. The internal situation in these countries is to some extent dependent on external factors (and interests) involved in the area.

Croatia is both relatively isolated and at the same time, in certain areas strongly integrated (this concerns mainly military relations with NATO, and especially with the USA). This offers a chance for a bolder move of this country in the liberal-democratic direction, for its leadership must be more sensitive to external pressures which favour (or will favour more firmly after the stabilisation in the subregion is achieved) such an evolution.

Slovakia represents a different case because the interests of the ruling group are, it seems, opposed to further liberalisation. The group's position is politically supported and financially underwritten by Moscow. Hence, one should expect in Slovakia no major deviation from the present political line, although even in this case, the strong pressure from the European Union, combined with some growing internal problems seem to be bringing a modest change in the ruling group's behaviour.

Austria can perform a stabilising function by diminishing the conflicts of interests and old animosities in the whole area east and south of it. This impact can be particularly beneficial to a Hungary haunted by the sense of historical unfairness (the Treaty of Trianon and then post-World War II decisions concerning the territorial shape of the country), and having to deal with the problem of large Hungarian minorities in neighbouring states (some of which are not exemplary democracies).

The Czech Republic and Poland have normalised relations with all their neighbours. Prague may have some "post-divorce" disagreements with Bratislava, but these seem not to be very painful and do not pose any serious threat to regional stability. The former is the most westward country of all the post-communist world, and seems to have fully concentrated on its own particular problems, trying to cultivate its (crumbling) "exceptionalism." Poland, on the other hand, is the most exposed country in Central Europe by occupying the direct way of access to Russia, and having long common borders with Belarus and Ukraine. For Warsaw a partner with a strong footing in Western institutional structures could be of invaluable assistance in handling the issues derived from this particular geographic position.

From the very beginning of the new era of European relations, Germany has taken upon itself the role of the main supporter of the Central European states in their efforts to join NATO and the European Union. France, very active and supportive in 1989 and the first half of 1990, has resigned, for unclear reasons, from playing such a role, leaving room for American, and to a lesser extent-German, leadership. This result, coupled with France's leadership ambitions, has created serious problems for it as France is keen on keeping balance between itself and its eastern neighbour. At the same time the French force de frappe lost its political significance once the threat of the massive Soviet invasion disappeared; at the same time, French armed forces still have a long way to go before they develop a proper power projection capability necessary to play the role of America's real competitor in the European and Mediterranean theatres.

The first post-Cold War EU enlargement, comprising Sweden, Finland and Austria, has been viewed as a move strengthening the position of the "northern pole," and especially of the united Germany, within the united Europe. The prospect of the second enlargement, involving Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary is seen (wrongly and as a mechanical and exact repetition of the past experiences) as a further enhancement of the dominant position of Germany. To this "threat" France has reacted by trying to balance the Central and East-European with the Mediterranean security concerns, and to establish a special relationship with Russia. Thus, we seem to be heading back to the mild version of the old system of the balance of power politics.

One of the possible ways out of the dilemma is to make the position of Austria more central as an initiator and co-leader of a Central-European "caucus" within the uniting Europe. The need for such a "caucus" (and political Central Europe) is growing very fast, indeed. As a matter of fact, Austria is the only country that can safely and convincingly perform such a role. It has enough trust of the remaining states, and enough experience in the regional conditions to play the role. Moreover, Vienna already is one of the few points of entry into the region for the major financial and other economic interests. But the necessary condition for that would be NATO membership. Without it, Austria would remain politically too marginal to do the job.

The decision to join NATO means a crucial and strategic, indeed, a choice of irrevocable consequences for Austria. It is therefore obvious that such a choice cannot be made lightly, without "soul-searching" of a sort. Of course, Austria may decide to remain outside the Alliance and to stay as it is-a small, very rich but politically marginal European state performing some technical and organisational role in the European international system. If it joins the Alliance, it may move once again into the main stream of European politics as an important role-player.

Summary:

The article deals in depth with Poland's interest in the progress of European integration by promoting political and economic co-operation, emphasising particularly the pivotal role of Austria in integrating Central Europe and the significance of Austria's possible membership in NATO. It further examines the Polish view of the role of NATO in contemporary Europe stressing the importance of the commitment and efficacy of its European dimension in order to reach the goal of an equal America/Europe partnership in the future. In reviewing the main sources of instability in Europe, it points out the benefits that could be derived by Austria's membership in the Alliance, especially regarding stability and conflict prevention and management, by projecting NATO's political and military power to the region, while still retaining because of its historical role, the image of an impartial arbiter. This would be as well particularly true in the cases of Slovakia/Hungary, Hungary/Rumania and the New Yugoslavia, as well as in opening the Black Sea area to international co-operation. In

concluding, the article also touches upon the importance of Austria in fostering the integration into Europe of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and the Subregion.

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