

Event Report

On 29 October 2018, the CEU **Center for European Neighborhood Studies** (CENS), and the **Budapest** office of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) jointly hosted an international conference entitled “Regional Security in Central and Eastern Europe: Trump’s NATO vs PESCO?”

In his introductory remarks, **Jörg Bergstermann** (Co-Head of Office, FES-BP) highlighted that both NATO and Europe are going through interesting times with a new Cold War and the challenges posed by President Trump’s politics. Problems that NATO members did not think needed discussion are (re)surfacing, so there is a heightened need for engagement.

Péter Balázs (Director, CENS) similarly drew attention to new problems in Europe. This part of the continent especially is facing problems now, like the conflict in Ukraine, despite having thought that the region was with the end of the Cold War. Another issue is the Syrian civil war, which led to an unprecedented flow of migrants into Europe, posing a “fantastic challenge” for the region. Beyond these new challenges, we are facing a new, systemic one as well: the challenge to the post-WWII system, a system that is based on common norms values and mutual agreement. As long as the system works we can manage conflicts on a lower level, but if the system does not work, conflicts get worse. Therefore it is pivotal to discuss these problems.

In his keynote speech, **Karsten Voigt** (German Council on Foreign Policy) invoked the idea of empire, that “haunts” Europe from the UK to Hungary. Most crucially, Russia is coping with its history as an empire which leads to problems in the region. Yet Voigt advises against drawing a parallel with Cold War Russia as such comparisons are misleading. The risks are not identical, and in some areas the risks are even higher. Consequently, Cold War logics do not work anymore, including Germany’s *Ostpolitik*. Instead, a new approach to a new situation is required. The USA is also dissimilar to its former, Cold War self. President Trump has a very narrow understanding of the national interest, one that is more similar to Russia’s than to that of Europe. This narrow understanding leads to the crisis of multilateralism: instead of multilateralism, Trumps thinks in terms of a hierarchy of states. In this hierarchy, European allies are relegated to a secondary role, for instance in the bilateral talks about the INF treaty, and this shift in US policy is both bad for European interests, and is actively fueling Russian behavior. In such an environment, the structure of cooperation that NATO offers is exceptionally important, Voigt argues. NATO has always had three goals: deter the Russians, integrate the Germans, and avoid rivalry among member states. Therefore, NATO structures integrate security and foreign policy. Maintaining these structures are of key importance for Germany in particular, along with the management of the EU. As for European security structures, Voigt claims that PESCO is a good step forward, but progress will be slow. Meanwhile, the US and Russia will need to be involved in discussion of all current problems.

In the first panel, **Marcin Terlikowski** (Head of European Security and Defence Economics Project, PISM - *Warsaw*) noted that in the past four years both the EU and NATO have responded to growing threats in Crimea, Eastern Ukraine, and regarding uncontrolled migration. Both organizations “acted and adjusted” to a changing environment. NATO’s response in particular has been gradual and meticulous, which is reflected in the Wales 2014, Warsaw 2016, and Brussels 2018 summits, where existing tools were updated and new tools were devised. However, NATO is facing a shortage of troops that could

be quickly moved to Eastern Europe due to the budget cuts of the past 20 years. This problem is to be remedied with NATO's readiness initiative. Moving US troops to Europe would be the next logical step, supplemented by European defense spending increases. Terlikowski sees no groundbreaking initiatives within PESCO, however. The initiative seems to be operating as a "grassroots" scheme that does not address the major challenges like the gaps in capabilities or e.g. cooperation of new technologies. Therefore, the cooperation mechanisms needed for PESCO to function are not yet tested.

Miroslav Mizera (Fellow, STRATPOL – *Bratislava*) also noted the continued successes of NATO summits in responding to new challenges. He considers the latest summit, often depicted as scandalous in the media, as successful due to NATO SG Jens Stoltenberg's and Angela Merkel's politics. Moreover, Mizera sees positive change in Europe since European spending on defense has increased, and it did so not just because of President Trump's demands.

Bence Németh (Adjunct Professor, King's College London, *London*) focused on the interplay between NATO and PESCO. Németh listed five factors needed for the success of successful defense cooperation on Europe. Five of these are structural factors: the existence of a European security community, the perception that individual armed forces do not have sufficient funds, and the presence of previous collaborations between the participating states. These are amended by two situational factors: the strong leadership of a group of enthusiastic officials, and the supportive political milieu towards security cooperation. Though there are quite the number of instances for successful cooperation in Europe, Németh noted the difficulties PESCO is facing. It remains an ad hoc cooperative framework of a group of elite member states like the UK and France, which continue to establish cooperative frameworks outside of PESCO. Therefore, PESCO remains an empty framework.

Uwe Optenhögel (Vice-President, Foundation for European Progressive Studies – *Brussels*) started with the observation that the relationship between NATO and the EU has never been better. Any conflict in the relationship pales in comparison to the EU's other problems, most notably migration, the rise of populism, and Brexit. Security has traditionally been in the background in EU politics, and it only came to the fore in these previous years, producing a relative unity of voices. All these changes are unfolding in a new and complex security environment: with new and different kinds of threats (cyber, hybrid, and asymmetrical threats), as well as with new conflicts and problems. Optenhögel argued that PESCO is a complementary initiative: it is useful, and not an elite club. He sees Brexit as less of an issue when it comes to security, claiming that the Brits would never completely abandon common security structures. Within the NATO-EU relationship, Optenhögel notices possibilities for complementarity, mostly because soft power and anti-terrorism are policy areas that more suited for European defense structures than for those of NATO. Therefore, a common European security strategy is actually strengthening NATO, Optenhögel concluded.

In the Second panel, **Michał Baranowski** (Director, Warsaw Office, GMF US – *Warsaw*) emphasized the consensus in otherwise politically divided Poland when it comes to security, with Russia being the main focus. The issue of Russia's aggressive policies will continue to stay on top of the strategic agenda for a good while, he noted. Even though Poland participates in the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, these are much less important, along with the threat of a terrorist attack. Poles are mostly interested in capabilities: who can deliver protection from Russian aggression? NATO and the US in particular is key here of course. Baranowski argued, quoting SG Stoltenberg, that NATO is now strong militarily, but

weak politically, with even Americans torn on the issue. While the president is openly critical towards the alliance, Congress seems strongly committed to upholding NATO structures.

Pauli Järvenpää (Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Defence and Security – *Tallinn*) argued for the importance of hybrid threats in the current security environment. Noting examples for Russian activities in Finland, Järvenpää repeatedly emphasized the importance of NATO in countering such threats, even though Finns remain skeptical of a potential NATO accession.

András Rácz (Associate Professor, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, *Budapest*) asserted that it is increasingly hard to research security and defense policy in Hungary. There are fewer available sources, and much fewer reliable sources due to fake news and manipulations, a shrinking independent media, and widespread classification. When it comes to NATO and Russia, Rácz mentioned that there are two elite groups within Hungary. The first group consists of people from the security apparatus that are concerned about Russia, and realize the threat that it poses. They understand that successful answers can only be given in a cooperative framework, mostly transatlantic. The second group is essentially the top of the political elite: they are concerned about Russia, and are not pro-Russia on a value basis, however, members of this group are convinced that it is possible to do pragmatic cooperation with Russia in terms of business and domestic politics. This group is willing to make concessions, and has a very poor understanding of threats and risks. This split within the elite leads to problems with the civilian oversight of armed forces, and may lead to inter-group confrontation during the drafting process of the new national security strategy. What will be included in the public text? The views of which group? Naturally, this split also negatively affects Hungary's performance within NATO.

Hanna Shelest (Editor-in-chief of UA: Ukraine Analytica – *Kyiv*) argued that NATO needs transformation, but is not in crisis. This transformation is crucial for Ukraine, she noted. Now, NATO is facing challenges from outside and outside, but there is still hope. For instance, Shelest highlighted the fact that even though Hungary continues to block the NATO- Ukraine Commission due to Budapest's opposition to the Ukrainian law of education, Hungary did not block the declaration at the end of the Brussels summit. Crucially, Shelest emphasized, Ukraine is not primarily interested in the capabilities of NATO, but sees the alliance as part of the process of transformation on the road to Europe, and a role model for the reform of the Ukrainian military. This perception is widespread among Ukrainians. Between 2014 and 2018, support for membership has increased from 13% to 42% among all Ukrainians, but this number is now around 70% for the Western parts. NATO is seen without alternative, as the perception in Ukraine now is that neutrality will not help in solving the conflict. A crucial element with NATO-Ukraine relations is the Black Sea, Shelest claims. Currently, NATO has no Black Sea Strategy, but Ukraine would really needs one that would incorporate both Ukraine and Georgia as NATO-aspirants. With PESCO, Shelest noted a lack of understanding among Ukrainians, as well as fears that cooperation with PESCO would be a good excuse for countries who oppose Ukrainian membership in NATO to block accession.