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Conference – 10th of February 2015

“RUSSIA, THE WESTERN WORLD AND THE ENLARGEMENT OF NATO”

Summary

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On the 10th of February, the European Institute of International Relations organized a conference called “Russia, the Western World and the Enlargement of NATO”, in the context of the Academia Diplomatica Europea 2014/2015. Given the prestige of the panel and the topical issue, it is essential to summarize it.

An introduction was given by **Carlo Facci**, PhD, political scientist and chairman of this conference. Dr Facci briefly recalled the main outcomes of ADE's previous conference on Eurasia. By such paradigm, he addressed some methodological recommendations to the room in order to better apprehend what was going to be discussed. Then **Professor Seminatore**, Director of the Academia Diplomatica Europaea, dealt shortly with the new prospects opened up by the international system reform in the 90's.

The first speaker was **His Excellency the Ambassador Grushko**, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to NATO. He started his intervention by talking about international instability both at a global and a regional level, the influence of terrorism in the Middle East and the risk of deeper interconfessionnal clash of civilizations. Later, the Ambassador described the situation in Ukraine stating that “in the case of the Ukrainian crisis, which has been presented as a new reality shaped by the so-called Russian actions in Ukraine. Consequently, Russia was immediately transferred from the list of partners to the list of aggressors”. Moreover, he insisted on the fact that President Putin, from the beginning of the crisis, has been very supportive to all attempts to seek political solutions and that starting a political dialogue has always been the goal of Russia.

Subsequently, the Ambassador analyzed the relations between Russia and the European Union. He maintained that since the end of the Cold War, there has been a host of opportunities to build a common space of stability and security between Russia and the European Union and he emphasized the commitment of Russia, in the past 15 years, to build partnerships with Europe. However, he regretted the lack of will to open all the “windows of opportunities” that could have improved the relations between Europe and Russia. This hesitation from the EU meant that the “EU was not prepared to engaged on equal footing with Russia”. Thence, he suggested that “if we have a real common interests we have all the necessary instruments to work together and this should be done without hesitations”.

According to him, the European Union and the Russian Federation are equally exposed to new global challenges and have a common interest in cooperating on security issues and external actions. From a military point of view, he reminded that the Russian Federation withdrew his troops from Eastern Germany, Central European countries and Baltic States

and let them become independent, because they thought this was the “best guarantee of security and stability”. Nevertheless, many countries demand more weapons and troops in this area, so “something is very wrong to all European architecture and security”.

To conclude, he claimed that « Europe without Russia is not Europe. We are prepared to build common cooperation on equal footing. A New Europe. An Undivided Europe. Where we all feel comfortable in the military and political aspects. »

The second speaker was **His Excellency the Ambassador Šedivý**, the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to NATO, who started his speech reacting to Ambassador Grushko's claim and clarifying that “there is no list of aggressors in NATO”. He mentioned, in this respect, the paragraph 16 of the Strategic Concept 2010, which validity has been confirmed by NATO. Therefore, he affirmed, “Russia is not seen or assessed as aggressor”.

Afterwards, he talked briefly about NATO enlargement, defining it as an important instrument of stabilization, conflict prevention, “de-nationalization of defense planning and building of mutual transparency and trust” in the Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, he underlined that the enlargement of NATO in this region has not entailed to “substantive military deployment”, to the construction of new basis and to the enlargement of NATO Command Structure.

As for Russian nuclear power, Ambassador Šedivý stated that in the last 12/18 months NATO noticed an increase of what they call “nuclear messaging” of Russia, i.e. nuclear exercises (where the nuclear damage is now more prominent) and rhetoric reiterating that Russia has nuclear power. However, they decided not to respond.

Then Ambassador Šedivý focused on the Ukrainian crisis maintaining that they “want to see political solutions” and that they are convinced that “the key to a ceasefire or to a political solution is in Moscow's hands”. According to Ambassador Šedivý, when Russia decreases or stops supporting the separatists (in terms of logistic, personnel, intelligence, heavy weaponry etc.), the Ukrainian forces gain ground and vice versa. So, without the support of Russia, the separatists would have not been able to react and the basis for a ceasefire would already have been laid. Therefore, since in the last 20 years the European Union and NATO have tried to build mutual trust between the West and Russia, they are disappointed by what happened in the past year.

Ambassador Šedivý concluded declaring that in today's world, where we can witness terrorism, militant Islamism and so forth, “having this kind of deep friction between the West and Russia is counterproductive”. Furthermore, he mentioned an “historic paradox” in the current situation: the western neighborhood of Russia has hardly ever been that “democratic, stable, peaceful and cooperatively incline vis a vis Russia as it used to be a couple of months ago”.

His Excellency the Ambassador Joachim Bitterlich, former European, diplomatic and security counselor of Chancellor Helmut Kohl, then took the floor and portrayed the current situation of crisis and deterioration of Russia-NATO relations, which he considered to have started in the middle of last decade, as a “vicious circle”. If we continue not to break this cycle, it will be more and more difficult to build a new cooperation. However, according to him, Minsk meeting offers a glimmer of hope, despite the absence of the American President.

In his opinion, there is a big problem of perception, and therefore responsibilities: on the one side, the Europeans believe “Russia has been violating the established European order” and on the other side, Russia has a growing mistrust towards the European Union and the United States. Russia, Ambassador Bitterlich explained, “feels it is not recognized as an equal partner by the United States as it was in the past”. Moreover, the Ambassador explained that he fears the basic ideas on which the OSCE, the NATO-Russia Council, the EU-Russia summit and the Russia-USA summit have been created are missing and that a very dangerous “feeling of Munich ‘38” might spread.

According to Ambassador Bitterlich, as far as Ukraine is concerned, the West and Russia, have failed to “develop a statehood” in the 90’s so today we need to make Ukraine become a “bridge between the West and the East”. It is possible to find a solution, to build a dialogue with Russia. The Minsk meeting is the first step towards a new cooperation that allows Ukraine to “develop itself in freedom and without anxiety”.

Dr Petr Lunak's speech followed Ambassador Bitterlich's. He is the Deputy Head of the Engagements Section in the NATO diplomacy division. First, Dr Lunak mentioned an article by Professor Mark Kramer from Harvard University on the famous meeting in the 90’s during which Soviet President Gorbachev was allegedly promised by the Western leaders that NATO would not expand into Eastern Europe. He read the last sentence of this article, which says: “The classified material shows unmistakably that no such pledge of NATO non enlargement was made.”

Then he answered the question: “Is NATO enlargement a threat to Russia?” underlining that, in the aftermath of the Cold War, NATO has put a lot of efforts in trying not to isolate

Russia (establishing for example the NATO-Russia Council in 2002), even if Russia decided not to be a member of the Alliance.

Dr Lunak continued his speech responding to the statement of Ambassador Grushko, according to whom Russia made a lot of “constructive proposals” to cooperate with NATO, stating that the current relations between Russia and NATO are “game changing in European security”. In fact, the attempt of NATO to transform its relation with Russia into a “strategic partnership” has always been unsuccessful because, as Dr Lunak reiterated, even if Russia makes good proposals of cooperation on paper, their concrete actions do not entirely reflect this attitude, so the efforts of NATO to cooperate with Russia seem vain. One of the examples Dr Lunak used to prove his point is NATO's Nuclear and Conventional Arms Control, in which Russia expressed no interest.

Even as far as Ukraine is concerned, Dr Lunak affirmed that “Russia violated their commitments” in the context of the UN, the OSCE and the Founding Act. Russia has, in his opinion, a contradictory behavior because although they talk about a “de-escalation of tensions”, they are present militarily on the ground and they provide heavy equipment to separatists. Therefore, according to Dr Lunak, if their commitment to end this crisis is true, they should not recognize the results of the elections in November and should stop military support to separatists.

At the end of his speech, Dr Lunak dealt again with the enlargement of NATO, seen as a “military danger” by Russian security and agreed with Ambassador Bitterlich as far as the beginning of the deterioration of Russia-NATO relations is concerned. In any case, the only solution for Dr Lunak is a true and concrete respect by Russia of the commitments made.

The last speaker was **Professor Emeritus at the Université libre de Bruxelles Robert Anciaux**. He began his intervention quoting Henry Kissinger, who said “an order which is not considered just will be challenged sooner or later”. According to Professor Anciaux, the international order created after the Second World War has always been contested during the past 70 years.

He continued his speech focusing on the Middle East and explained that it seemed possible to find solutions after the Cold War to stabilize this area. Eventually no decision was made and the Palestinian problem or, from a more general point of view, the Arab-Israeli conflict persisted in the 90's. Moreover, in his opinion, the successive policies of US Presidents Bush and Clinton failed to improve the situation in this region.

Russia “came back” in the Middle East in the 2000s. During this period, Russia had just one pied-à-terre in Syria, in other words it had harbor facilities to expand its influence in the Mediterranean Sea. Putin and Medvedev tried to improve their relations with various States like Egypt, Gulf monarchies and especially Iran. In the end, Russia and the United States are currently opposed in the Middle East as they were during the Cold War. Nevertheless, if during the cold war they entirely controlled their partners, today they are overrun by most of them.

In the audience, which was very receptive and discerning, there was **His Excellency the Ambassador of Ukraine Ihor Dolhov**, who took briefly the floor. Before starting his explanation of the title and subtitle of the conference, he commented the beginning of the conference, which, in his opinion, was overly academic and distant from the reality. Then, he pointed out that when the speakers were talking about NATO enlargement, they should have talked also about Georgia and Ukraine, as possible future members of NATO. He

expressed also the need of “nuclear guarantees” and clarified that, instead of saying “Ukrainian crisis”, it would be more appropriate to say “crisis of President Yanukovich and of the corrupted political system”, that led to a legitimate change of power. He concluded his speech maintaining that the annexation of Crimea and the presence of new Russian military bases in Crimea have been a source of destabilization for Ukraine.

The title of the next conference of the European Institute of International Relations, that will take place on the **24th of February**, is “**Moscow, Washington and Brussels tested with the Ukrainian crisis**”, which will allow to continue the debate on this central topic. Different speakers from different institutions will intervene: Yehor Bozhok, Minister-Counselor and Deputy Head of the Mission of Ukraine to NATO; MP Norica Nicolaï, Deputy Head of the Commission of Security and Defense in the European parliament; MP Cătălin Sorin Ivan, Member of the Delegation to the EU-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee; Olivier Vedrine, President of the Continental University Business School in Kiev and Pierre-Emmanuel Thomann, Director of researches in Geopolitics at the European Institute of International Relations.