

Roundtable "Current security developments in Central and Eastern Europe region. Regional context, international players, Romania's interests"

Multilateral efforts to address regional security challenges

The Association of Romanian Career Diplomats
«ProDiplomatia» and CMI Martti Ahttisaari Peace Foundation

**Keynote by
Thomas Greminger, Director, GCSP**

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Mr Secretary of State,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to share my reflections on current security developments in Central and Eastern Europe.

I think I state the obvious when I say that the security situation in Europe is grim.

The weaponisation of everything

Within the span of a generation, the new era of democracy, peace and unity declared in the 1990 Charter of Paris has come under threat from authoritarian and illiberal regimes, kleptocrats, and instability.

While until recently war in Europe was considered “unthinkable”, in the past two decades there have been conflicts in Kosovo, Georgia, and Ukraine, and between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Borders have been changed unilaterally by force. The dream of a Europe whole and free has been replaced by the reality of new dividing lines, even barbed wire fences and walls.

Everything has become weaponised: information, cyberspace, energy, even migrants.

A deficit of trust and imagination

Distrust is both a cause and a victim of these developments.

States don't trust each other. People don't trust their governments or the media. States and their citizens don't trust inter-governmental organisations to deal with the problems of the day.

Insecurity about pandemics, cyber attacks, terrorism, migration, organised crime, and climate change, not to mention energy and job security, causes fear.

There is also a deficit of imagination: governments and international organisations are taking old approaches to new problems – and it is not working.

As Albert Einstein is quoted to have said: “doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results is insanity”.

Therefore, it is time to rethink European security.

Inclusive dialogue

To start with, we need dialogue – and not just among friends. I think it is great that there is a Summit for Democracy this week. Democracy is under threat in so many parts of the world and needs to be bolstered. I applaud the work done by Romania as Chair of the Community of Democracies, particularly the recent Bucharest Declaration.

But what do we do about countries that are not democracies? Do we ignore them and hope that one day they will become more like us?

Or do we engage with them, even if we don't share the same values?

I would argue that we need to rediscover the arts of dialogue and diplomacy ... of constructive engagement ... of agreeing that we can talk to each other respectfully even if we do not agree with each other ... of actually listening to each other and trying to understand others' perspective and interests.

This is the approach that we take at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP): providing a safe place for inclusive dialogue, even – or perhaps especially – among non-like-minded people or groups. And I know this is very much the approach of the Crisis Management Initiative. As Desmond Tutu said, “If you want peace, don't talk to your friends, talk to your enemies”.

But when it comes to security in Central and Eastern Europe, what should we talk about?

Conflict resolution

I think the priorities should be conflict prevention, crisis management and conflict resolution.

The continuation of protracted conflicts not far from here is a threat to security for the entire continent.

The conflict in and around Ukraine has dragged on for longer than the Second World War. Until recently, this simmering conflict had been forgotten: now there are once again signs of a potentially dangerous escalation.

The Normandy Format has not been able to give any positive political impulses lately; most of the work of the Trilateral Contact Group is at an impasse; political will seems to be lacking among the opposing sides to implement the Minsk Agreements.

While the crisis continues, there are still people living in a grey zone and trying to get on with their daily lives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We must guard against complacency about what may appear to be “frozen” conflicts. Remember how quickly the crisis flared up over Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2020. If three permanent members of the UN Security Council (France, the United States and the Russian Federation) could not prevent a war that broke out in slow motion, who *could* stop it? Is it time to rethink the Minsk Group format? And is the crisis an opportunity to take a fresh look at improving relations between Armenia and Turkey, and promoting greater regional cooperation in the South Caucasus? I realise I am asking more questions than providing answers, but I hope that this will provoke discussion. Besides, as Eugene Ionesco said: “It is not the answer that enlightens, but the question.”

A situation that gets less attention is the “5+2” process in neighbouring Moldova. Imagine: within that negotiation framework you have the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the United States, and the European Union (EU) (among others). Those parties who are at loggerheads in Ukraine can manage to work together on confidence-building measures in Moldova. It demonstrates that the negotiation framework can be as much a trust-inducing process for the mediators as for the parties. I realise that the situation is fragile. Progress in implementing the Berlin(+) package and additional confidence- and security-building measures has slowed down over the last two years. The opposing sides are not yet prepared to tackle the status-related issues. Yet, measures

have been agreed and implemented to the benefit of the populations on both sides of the Dniester. Indeed, it is telling – actually quite remarkable – that one of the only decisions taken at the recent Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Ministerial Council in Stockholm was a rather positive statement on the negotiations on the Transdniestrian settlement process.

Less encouraging is the situation in the western Balkans. Bilateral squabbles, like between Belgrade and Pristina and between Sofia and Skopje, as well as internal power struggles in Bosnia and Herzegovina are holding the region back from greater cooperation and EU integration. The longer this process goes on, the more people living in these countries lose hope of EU accession, and forces at home and abroad offering alternatives start to look more attractive. Again, dialogue is vital, but also concrete measures that provide a realistic future perspective.

In addition to dialogue among diplomats and senior officials, there is an urgent need for military-to-military dialogue. Indeed, there is currently less military-to-military dialogue than during the Cold War.

Experts should be making sure that measures are in place to prevent and deal with accidents and incidents around the Baltic or Black seas.

The Vienna Document on confidence- and security-building measures should at a minimum be implemented and, if possible, modernised. It was created precisely to reduce the risks of the types of military exercises and manoeuvres that we are witnessing at the moment.

We also need to repair the safety net of arms control agreements that are so vital for increasing transparency and predictability, and for reducing tensions and the number of weapons. And there should be greater transparency around the development of new and destabilising weapons systems.

In all of these processes dialogue is necessary, but not sufficient. There must also be negotiations, and a willingness to compromise – and to compromise on the basis of existing principles and commitments, not at their expense.

Thinking wider

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Rethinking European security should involve widening our horizons in terms of what is considered to be “Europe”, what threatens our societies, and what we mean by security.

At the moment, there is a tendency to conflate “Europe” with the EU, and to focus on Euro-Atlantic security.

For example, the current process of developing an EU Strategic Compass is designed to provide a sense of direction for the EU and identify common priorities. Thus far in the consultation process there has been little mention of the OSCE.

But most of the issues that have been identified relate to threats and challenges within the OSCE area, including conflicts in the EU neighbourhood, challenges from state actors, threats by non-state actors, and hybrid threats. Therefore, while the OSCE may have been off the EU’s radar when it was developing the Strategic Compass, once the compass is ready it will no doubt point straight to the OSCE area.

We also need to think wider in terms of what is meant by security and threats to it. Despite the tendency towards deglobalisation and states focusing on national solutions, most emerging threats and challenges transcend borders and therefore require multilateral cooperation. Brexit, the idea of making America great again or even the EU's search for "strategic autonomy" are all attempts to regain control over issues that affect sovereignty. But in an interconnected world, all countries, including great powers, have a national interest to work together on issues like climate change, pandemics, organised crime, terrorism and migration. Indeed, they *have* to work together. Therefore, cooperation is realpolitik, not altruism.

Furthermore, we will need to engage a wider set of actors to work on security issues – not just diplomats, politicians, or experts from the security sector, but also scientists, the private sector, civil society, academia, and youth to explain and prepare for the possible impact of disruptive technologies like artificial intelligence, advanced robotics, blockchain, and nanotechnology. We also need to ensure that global governance keeps pace with innovation, for example in terms of crypto currencies, the peaceful use of outer space, cyber crime or automated weapons systems.

Towards 2025

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When one looks at the volatile situation in Ukraine, the tensions on the border between Belarus and the EU, the ongoing COVID pandemic, or the dire situation in Afghanistan, now is not the time for grand strategising about the future of European security.

However, if this crisis can be turned into an opportunity for Europe to build back better, then we need to start thinking about how to restore order, the rule of law and cooperative security in Europe.

At the moment, I see no vision for pan-European security. And in the past twenty years almost all of the ten basic principles of the Helsinki Final Act have been violated. Before it is too late, we need to start thinking about how to identify and build on a few islands of cooperation, how to design a process to de-escalate tensions and restore trust, and then work on a future-oriented cooperative security agenda.

In the current political environment I do not see too much appetite for such a discussion among OSCE Participating States. The time is simply not ripe – but we need to start somewhere. Therefore, the GCSP has launched a Track 1.5 process to explore options and test ideas for promoting a more cooperative approach to security in Europe. In 2022, our intention is to bring together experts from around the OSCE area, particularly from the United States, the Russian Federation and the rest of Europe, to look at process design and identify security issues in which countries have a common interest. Our hope is that this can feed fresh ideas and a more constructive approach into the inter-governmental process, building up to a high-level meeting on European security to correspond with the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2025.

I know that Romania is a staunch NATO ally. Nevertheless, the idea of détente has in the past been part of NATO doctrine. The 1967 Harmel report asserted that "military security and a policy of détente are not contradictory but complementary". Today, I hear a lot of talk about deterrence in Moscow, Kyiv, Washington and Brussels, but not much about détente or dialogue.

Some of the few opportunities for constructive dialogue arise at informal meetings, like the Chambesy dialogue hosted by the GCSP at the end of October. The meeting gave officials like NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoana a rare opportunity to meet with Russian Federation Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko. We need more such opportunities. I attend too many security conferences where like-minded people talk *about* and not *to* their opponents.

In conclusion, as a matter of urgency, measures must be taken to de-escalate tensions and get all sides in every crisis situation to exercise restraint. In the medium term we must rebuild a common basis of commitments and principles – without eroding the existing ones – and take strong, effective measures to rebuild trust.

Furthermore, we need to keep making the case for why multilateral cooperation is in all states' self-interest. Looking to the future, we should work towards a cooperative security agenda that enables states to manage their relations peacefully and work together on issues of common interest.

Thank you for your attention.