NATO’S ROLE FOR EUROPE’S SECURITY
EXPECTATIONS, EXPERIENCES, AND PROSPECTS

April 10, 2014 | Berlin

Venue: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)

In March 1999, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary joined NATO, and in March 2004, the Alliance welcomed Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. At this Aspen Germany conference, their fifteen and ten years of successful NATO integration are the occasion for discussing under the Chatham House Rule current and future challenges the Alliance is facing. The recent developments in and around Ukraine provide the backdrop for a critical review.

In cooperation with:

SWP
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for International and Security Affairs
Thursday, April 10, 2014

14:30 – 15:00  Welcoming remarks and opening of the conference

Speakers: Rüdiger Lentz, Executive Director, Aspen Institute Germany
Dr. Markus Kaim, Head of Research Division International Security, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)
Dr. Hans-Dieter Lucas, Political Director, German Federal Foreign Office

15:00 – 17:00  NATO membership: an anchor of stability

Moderator: Dr. Klaus Wittmann, Brigadier General (ret.), Senior Fellow, Aspen Institute Germany

Speakers: Ambassador Radi Naydenov, Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria to the Federal Republic of Germany
Ambassador Lauri Lepik, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Estonia to NATO
György Molnár, Director General for Security Policy and Non-Proliferation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary
Colonel Airis Rikveilis, Defense Counselor, Head of the Defense Section, Delegation of the Republic of Latvia to NATO
Ambassador Kęstutis Jankauskas, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Lithuania to NATO
Ambassador Stelian Stoian, Permanent Representative of Romania to NATO
Ambassador Tomáš Valášek, Permanent Representative of the Slovak Republic to NATO
Ambassador Andrej Benedejčič, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Slovenia to NATO

17:00 – 17:30  Coffee break

17:30 – 19:30  Quo vadis NATO? The Ukraine crisis and its impact on the summit

Moderator: Rüdiger Lentz
Speaker: Ambassador Alexander Vershbow, Deputy Secretary General, NATO

Commentators: Dr. Markus Kaim
Joseph Manso, Deputy Chief of Mission, United States Mission to NATO
Armin Staigis, Brigadier General (ret.), Vice President, German Federal Academy for Security Policy

19:30  Reception
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<td>Sándor Bakó</td>
<td>Counselor, Embassy of Hungary to the Federal Republic of Germany</td>
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<td>Ambassador Andrej Benedejčič</td>
<td>Permanent Representative of the Republic of Slovenia to NATO</td>
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<td>Olaf Böhnke</td>
<td>Head of Berlin Office, European Council on Foreign Relations</td>
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<td>Lieutenant General (ret.) Jürgen Bornemann</td>
<td>Former Director General, International Military Staff, NATO</td>
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<td>Colonel Charles E. Davis</td>
<td>Army Attaché, Embassy of the United States of America to the Federal Republic of Germany</td>
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<td>Eva Dvořáková</td>
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Colonel Zlatko Vehovar  
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Ambassador Alexander Vershbow  
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**Observers**

Ambassador Vera Joličić-Kuliš  
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Anton Troianovski  
*Germany Correspondent, The Wall Street Journal*
In light of the crisis in Ukraine and its implications for NATO member states and the Alliance itself, the Aspen Institute Germany hosted a conference in cooperation with the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) on “NATO’s Role for Europe’s Security” with the active participation of the member states of the first two NATO Eastern Enlargement rounds (1999 and 2004) as well as German and U.S. decision-makers under the Chatham House Rule.

**NATO membership: an anchor of stability**

Apart from their experiences with and expectations for NATO membership, discussions centered on the implications of the situation in Ukraine for the Alliance itself and its relations with Russia. It was clarified that the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation included the right of states to choose their security alliance freely and that NATO’s door remained open.

For the ten NATO member states that joined the Alliance during the first two rounds of NATO’s Eastern Enlargement, NATO membership was a positive experience. They found that solidarity within the Alliance was firm and reliable, and that NATO was a guarantor of peace and stability in Europe. The question whether NATO was still relevant today was therefore not perceived as salient. Moreover, it was mentioned that protection by NATO was not for free, but that it came with responsibilities in terms of contribution of capabilities.

At the same time, it was highlighted that NATO did not actively search for new members, but that countries came to NATO as they seek security. Many of the countries believed that the crisis with Russia was not over yet, and there were member states in which the majority of the population was afraid that Russia would attack at some point. It was therefore important that NATO invested in visible reassurance measures and a serious threat assessment, including an analysis whether NATO was in fact able to face these threats. Hence, a reassurance of the transatlantic bond was considered fundamental as well. NATO membership was still partially about deterrence and was said to have a calming effect on countries’ relations with Russia as it lowered chances of Russian intervention by raising the cost.

**NATO’s transatlantic bond**

Furthermore, the question of the U.S. role was raised. However, participants believed that the transatlantic relationship was not just about security and therefore very hard to break. At the same time, the U.S. continued to demonstrate its sustained commitment to Europe during the Ukraine crisis despite some peoples’ believes that its engagement in NATO had decreased due to its engagement in Asia. Nonetheless, it was pointed out that previous U.S. requests for Europe to take on more responsibilities in terms of military capabilities might be voiced even more strongly now. The question of European capabilities and ability to take up the challenge was considered more relevant by some participants than the question whether the U.S. remained engaged in Europe and NATO.

**NATO-Russia relations**

Discussions further mentioned the joint NATO-Russia Council statement on Syria, which had been unthinkable before. However, the relationship had completely changed again. While the media had repeatedly asked at which point the West or NATO had lost Russia, one participant pointed out that we had never had Russia. Nonetheless, he believed that had NATO lost Russia at some point in the past years that it was probably in the beginning of the 1990s during the violent dissolution of former Yugoslavia. Moreover, it was mentioned that not only had the West failed in Yugoslavia, it also just stood by when Russia established effective control of Chechnya, Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.

Most participants believed that NATO has repeatedly tried to engage Russia and demonstrate that NATO was not hostile towards it, but that the main reason for Russia’s current policies was about domestic politics as a catalyst for neo-imperialism on which NATO has no influence. Finally, it was highlighted that the most important change required in international politics was to overcome zero-sum thinking.

**Quo vadis NATO? The Ukraine crisis and its impact on the summit**

The second part of the conference focused on “Quo vadis NATO? The Ukraine crisis and its impact on the summit”. It was pointed out that it was important for NATO to reaffirm its commitment to collective defense. As direct support from NATO for Ukraine, assistance for the improvement of the ability of Ukrainian forces was mentioned. Ukraine could, for example, participate in NATO training and operations.

As a result of the situation in Ukraine, relations between Russia and NATO were all but business as
usual. Common projects were mostly put on hold, but NATO was nonetheless trying to keep the lines of communication open. Still, a participant identified a need to review NATO’s assumptions about its relationship with Russia, possibly including the commitments from the 1990s, which included the renouncement of nuclear weapon deployment in Eastern Europe.

Russia as a threat?

A Russian map that showed Russians and Russian speakers in other countries that also included the Baltic states was mentioned. The participant shared his view that this should be noted by NATO and seriously considered as possible threat. Russia was seen to be actively orchestrating the protests in Eastern and Southeastern Ukraine to challenge the legitimacy of Ukraine’s national unity. Moreover, it was mentioned that over seven years, Russia planned to invest 30% of its GDP in the modernization of its troops, while considering NATO as an adversary. Overall, Russian propaganda was described as the pursuit of 19th century goals with a 20th century narrative by 21st century means, referring to President Putin’s successful use of both, traditional and social media. It was pointed out that NATO, too, should improve its strategic communication in the world to counter Russian propaganda.

It was underlined that NATO remained important for international security through both, collective defense and crisis management. Nonetheless, NATO needed to review its contingency plans to ensure that it has the capacity to respond to crises or even attacks on members. While Russia was able to move considerable forces in minimum time, NATO, too, needed to ensure it is alert and has the power to respond.

NATO Summit in September

Regarding the impact of the situation in Ukraine on the September Summit it was stated that the goals and issues set for the summit still stood, but that member states certainly looked at some of the issues in a different light. One the one hand, there was still hope for an agreement for the post-2014 training mission in Afghanistan with the Afghan government, as there would be no mission without the Afghan government signing the agreement.

On the other hand, it was hoped that the situation in Ukraine might lead to a renewed impulse to address the capability development gap, and develop a serious approach to smart defense and pooling and sharing. A participant identified a need for a more balanced cooperation between NATO and the EU, as the EU needed to become more self-reliant. One option in his view was to revisit the 1996 Berlin Plus agreement, as the European neighborhood both to the East and the South was not likely to become stable soon.

Another issue for NATO’s agenda in September were NATO’s partnerships, in particular those with like-minded countries such as Sweden, Finland, and Australia. At the same time, there was a need to identify a common NATO strategy to support its Eastern Partners. For Ukraine, for example, not only military support, but also economic stabilization and the fight against corruption were considered essential. In the eyes of a participant, this was a field where the EU could lead.

NATO enlargement

It was stated that a clear signal should be sent to partners and Moscow alike that NATO member states alone decided on enlargement and that the NATO open door policy was still valid. At the same time, NATO should clearly communicate that it did not pose a threat to anyone. It was recommended that NATO should invite Georgia to sign a Membership Action Plan, as this would be the clearest signal to Moscow. However, if there still was no consensus about Georgia in September, NATO would need to be creative to ensure Georgia that NATO stands by it and that membership remains an option. One participant also reminded the others of the unfinished Western Balkan integration. Western Balkan applicants will need to have a fair review of their progress of reforms in June.

Capabilities gap

In the context of the crisis, it was referred to the transatlantic bond within NATO, which in the eyes of most participants was clearly reaffirmed through U.S. deployment in Eastern Europe as a response to the situation in Ukraine. Nonetheless, the imbalance between the U.S. and Europe within NATO as well as the imbalance within the EU in terms of military capabilities remained an important issue for NATO. It was stressed that a better balance could only be achieved with adequate defense spending in European member states, supported by smart defense. The Baltic states were mentioned as good examples, as Latvia had already achieved the targeted defense spending of 2% of its GDP, while the other two Baltic states were planning to reach this target by the end of 2014. A participant therefore called upon larger NATO member states to follow this example, as
NATO needed to rise to the challenge should Russia continue to choose confrontation instead of cooperation. In this context, a strategic surprise had to be avoided through strategic foresight. Overall, the participant was of the opinion that there was no need for NATO to reinvent the wheel, but rather strengthen the tools the Alliance already has.

Rethinking NATO’s strategy?

Another participant asked whether there was a need to rethink the paradigm of strategic partnership and cooperative security with Russia. Since Russia considers NATO as a threat, there might be no room for cooperation. Moreover, it was asked whether the world order should rather be seen as multipolar instead of multilateral.

As another expectation for the NATO summit an emphasis on the normative part of NATO membership and its commitment to certain values and ideas was mentioned. Moreover, the question was asked whether further NATO enlargement could even be avoided. In the case of Ukraine, it was doubted that the existing offer of partnership would be sufficient, as the scenario of a neutral Ukraine as partner or Ukraine as NATO member might in the end look the same, as the country needs a security guarantee either way. A participant expressed his view that the West could not accept Russia’s insistence on its right to a sphere of influence.

One participant asked why the West was taken by surprise again by the situation in Ukraine after the events in Georgia only a few years ago. He believed that the question needed to be asked whether NATO is on the right track in terms of strategic forecast. Moreover, NATO in his view needed to ask itself the question of its objective: does NATO want Putin to return to cooperation? Either way, Putin could not be allowed to divide the Alliance. The same was true for NATO and the EU. Both institutions in his eyes needed to stand together and not allow for a situation like in Libya again. Deterrence could only be underpinned by unity.

On the other hand, participants considered it important not to terminate all cooperation with Russia. As examples for fields in which cooperation remained essential, Iran, the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria, and Afghanistan were mentioned. However, a full strategic partnership with Russia was no longer considered realistic, at least not under the current leadership. One participant pointed out that Russia was not able to offer any real alternative to NATO, but rather only threw around its weight regionally. Nonetheless, while no one wanted a new Cold War, a participant expressed his view that there were certain rules that everybody needed to play by, including Russia, and that NATO needed to defend its system of rules. Again, discussions focused on the importance of defense capabilities, as the political and normative credibility of NATO nonetheless depended on credible defense capacity as strategic framework for the Alliance.

However, participants were not too optimistic that the Ukraine crisis would have a positive impact on European defense spending, as not all European countries felt threatened by Russia, while European public opinion remained critical of the military, in particular in Germany. One participant nonetheless called upon European governments to finally stop wasting money on defense spending in the way it was currently done, and believed that a smarter way of investing in defense capabilities might also gain populations’ support. Another participant pointed out that capability initiatives had already been launched at previous NATO Summits under different names, but had had little success. He believed that if the September Summit was not more successful in light of the current political situation, progress in this field would not occur at all.
“We should be grateful to the Aspen Institute Deutschland for constantly reminding us that our North-Atlantic community cannot do without its founding ideas and ideals; that these are not a luxury cargo to be thrown overboard but to be cherished as a comparative advantage in the 21st century”
János Martonyi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary

“The United States is Germany’s closest ally outside Europe – we share common values and jointly pursue common interests in a rapidly changing global environment. Aspen Germany has contributed to fortifying these strong transatlantic ties and reinforces them by putting our shared values at the heart of its mission.”
Dr. Guido Westerwelle, Former German Federal Foreign Minister

“The Aspen Institute epitomizes the transatlantic community in all its many aspects – political, economic, cultural”
Dr. Javier Solana, Former Secretary General of NATO

“Whenever radical changes take place, such as the end of the Cold War; whenever crises occur, as happened with the Gulf War, and whenever unexpected events hit the headlines, as was the case when the Wall came down, the Aspen Institute Berlin springs into action.”
Marion Countess Dönhoff, The late publisher of Die Zeit

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Madeleine Albright, Former U.S. Secretary of State