



## HOW RUSSIA HAS CHANGED THE EUROPEAN SECURITY?

Róbert ONDREJCSÁK

**The Russian invasion to Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea Peninsula changed not only the previous political reality of Eastern Europe, but also the strategic balance, that there had been since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The situation so far was based on the following assumptions: the territorial integrity of Ukraine as absolutely touchless affair, the absence of the Russian armed forces near by the Central Europe, or more precisely Central Europe out of the strategic sphere of the main Russian armed forces (except Kaliningrad), and way of thinking, which eliminates the war as a way to solve problems in international relations in Europe.**

Over a period of one month, Russia's actions changed all three basic assumptions: the territorial integrity of Ukraine, perhaps the most crucial thing for the strategic independence of Central Europe, is no more "sacred", the Russian armed forces will approach the Central Europe, mainly due to future Russian air bases in the Crimea, and war is no longer a "taboo" for Russian foreign policy in enforcing the interests of power in Europe. What NATO, Central Europe and in particular Slovakia can do and what are they obliged to do in this upcoming situation?

Credibility is the most important thing that any alliance has. Credibility inwards, to its members, to feel that the alliance will protect them, and credibility in the eyes of our challengers, in order to take us, NATO, seriously. To realize, that we are serious about what we say and what we think and of course, that we are able to make sacrifices for our interests. There is no need to draw red lines every week, one is enough, but it must be observed. So what should NATO do?

Strengthening the Alliance's military presence in Central Europe, which was announced one week ago, is a right step and it should come up earlier, after the first signs of the Russian invasion to the Crimea. However, it should be more real than formal. For example, delocalization of two brigades (for about 10.000 troops) mainly from the German bases to the Central Europe, eventually to the Baltic region. Moreover, there would be also permanently enforced the constant Allie's air wing in the Baltic countries, which means permanent augmentation of the number of aircrafts from four to triple. The alliance must have a permanent mari-

Papers  
Policy

---

time presence in the Black sea, the Romanian and Bulgarian ports, eventually some small force of marine corps and air force, what would compensate a reinforced Russian presence in the Crimea. The second step should be further expansion and building new partnerships with Moldova and Ukraine, but also with the others, who will be interested in. Within the Alliance, Slovakia would become an initiator of creation a new group of “friends of enlargement”, which would be a drafter of this topic and would actively persuade other members about the need of expansion. There is already a successful initiative of Slovak diplomacy within the international organization, although in a completely different context and situation, but it’s useful as inspiration. Slovak diplomacy has been present at the formation of a “friends of security sector reform” at the United Nations.

The very first and fundamental step, that Slovakia, especially the political elite and professional community, has to do, is the appreciation of strategic depth of these changes and their consequences for our security. Because, on the ground of previous statements – in contrast to the other Central European countries – it does not seem, that our elites fully realized the consequences of these changes and they have mentally remained in a situation before January 2014. The second step, they must act on it. We do not live in an isolated island, but in geopolitically exposed Central Europe, which forms a coherent geographical chain from the Baltic region, through the Visegrad countries to Romania and Bulgaria. Strengthening military infrastructure and presence of NATO in this space affects us too and we should welcome, encourage, and even ask that from our allies. It is promoted by Poles, Baltic inhabitants, Romanians and all of them know why. No one is

led by some abstract russophobia but simply by the understanding of the basic rules of strategic thinking and by ambition to strengthen its own security. For us, the most important reference point is Poland, which is the only country with deep-rooted responsibility for the security of our region and with relatively adequate strategic culture. How we will act in possible extreme existentialist situation, that is the most serious test of perception of our region in the eyes of the Polish elite. Our actions today will affect the long-term Polish thinking about the region, about us as a relevant and reliable ally. If we do not join Poles - and not just us, but also Czechs and Hungarians – it will be the end of real strategic and security cooperation in the Visegrad region. Even EU battle group and other projects will be just ephemeral, without a deeper strategic importance. Poles can turn to the other partners, who have sense for their own security and we will be only second-class ally in the field of security even in our region.

So, there must be said the following: we will provide our training areas for training the alliance troops and these exercises will be regional and will include more countries in the region. We will provide our airspace, for AWACS aircrafts or overflights. And yes, if NATO planners experts will find it necessary, we welcome the locating of the alliance military forces on our territory. And even if not, there should be a political ambition to dislocate at least a symbolic element here. There is no time to politicking, it is about our long-term security. We should wake up to the new geopolitical reality and not to perceive the security policy as a abstract, specific affair, and security threats as something distant, not related to us. It concerns all of us.

**CENAA Policy Papers**

No. 11/2014, Vol. 3

Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs

Tolstého 9, 811 06 Bratislava

[www.cenaa.org/publikacie/policy-papers/](http://www.cenaa.org/publikacie/policy-papers/)