

Between the Economic Agenda and the Need of Strategic Security: East-Central Europe in the Context of the Transatlantic Relation's Disruption

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Abstract: The end of the Cold War had opened for the first time after 1945 a window of opportunity for the East-Central European nations to express and fulfill their will of joining the Western system. The paradigm of integration was therefore the success story of the last two decades. Both NATO and EU enlargements to the East (1999-2007) are historic achievements that have been engineered and eventually decided in Washington, London, Berlin or Paris but (unlike the bitter experiences of the 20th century) the direction was in keeping with what people in the region really wanted to happen. This time, strategic decisions on East-Central Europe triggered positive developments in the whole region and got the support of an overwhelming majority. That make seven harder now for East-Central Europeans to understand and agree with the transatlantic divide.

Keywords: East-Central Europe, United States, West, transatlantic, crisis

Over the past decade, the vast majority of the analyses, theories and academic reflections with respect to the *decline of the Western order*¹ were based on the common idea that we are witnessing a rift of the post-1945 transatlantic relation and also the rise of Asia-Pacific region to the level of global pre-eminence. There are facts, evidences, surveys², political statements as well as policy papers³ which prove that America is turning its head towards China, India and all the emerging economies of the Pacific and Indian Ocean area while, for instance, Europe was not even a topic in the recent presidential campaign.

After years of setback, the beginning of Obama's second term at White House is finally bringing a bud of hope and good news as the EU-US High Level Working Group is to announce a draft of an "Atlantic Internal Market". The political message for investors as well as for strategists is however significant: the German

- 1 See Jeffrey Anderson, G. John Ikenberry, and Thomas Risse (editors), *The End of the West? Crisis and Change in the Atlantic Order*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008.
- 2 In 2011, being asked about the priority of the bilateral relation for the U.S. interests, Americans placed Asia on top (51%) followed by Europe (38%), while in 2004 the answer to the same question was Europe (54%) then Asia (29%).
- 3 In *Strategic Defense Review* we learn that "U.S. economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in the area extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian ocean region and South Asia, creating a mix of evolving challenges and opportunities. Accordingly, while the U.S. military will continue to contribute to security globally, we will of necessity rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region". (Department of Defense, Washington D.C., January 3rd, 2012).

Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle believes that “a transatlantic agreement holds potential that goes far beyond the strictly economic. This would send a strong political signal about the West’s ability to shape our world”.⁴ In his January 31st 2013 statement, Westerwelle also thinks that “our coordination and cooperation have grown even closer. Nonetheless, in the face of a pressing need for reform, both Europe and the US have become more inward-looking in their economic and financial policy than is good for us in a rapidly changing world”.⁵

The past decade was one of a shrinking partnership between America and Europe especially if we look to the Western continental countries. From Paris to Berlin and from Brussels to Rome, an attitude of Anti-Americanism has been insidiously looming, at least at the level of “Europe’s political and intellectual elites”.⁶ In his provocative book “Uncouth Nation: Why Europe Dislikes America”, Andrei Markovits sees a connection between anti-Americanism and growing anti-Semitism in Europe⁷ and consider both of them ideological products of the leftist elites, even more visible recently in Western Europe than in East-Central Europe. In the historical shift of world’s “gravity centre” from Atlantic to Pacific⁸, Europe doesn’t seem to be prepared for a major role. Somewhat paradoxically, even it is almost absent as a unitary political system in international relations or it only has a weak, hesitating voice in the global decision-making process, any malfunction of the European Union as a whole can seriously damage the world economy.

East-Central European countries take part in this global restructuring process in *triple capacity*: as a *component of the European Union* (using the narrow definition of the region, with ten post-communist member states), as *allies of the United States within NATO* (the group of ten EU member states plus Croatia and Albania) but also with respect to their *own national economic interests* (in fact, there are 20 countries in total, based on the largest, geographical perspective⁹ of the region) all of them with the concerns and troubles that any independent state has nowadays: dealing with the global recession, looking to emerging markets and searching for

4 Guido Westerwelle, *The Time has Come for an Atlantic Internal Market*, Atlantic Community, Berlin, January 31, 2013, <http://www.atlantic-community.org/-/the-time-has-come-for-an-atlantic-internal-market>, consulted on February 16, 2013.

5 *Ibid.*

6 Jeffrey Kopstein, “Anti-Americanism and the Transatlantic Relationship” in *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2009, p. 368.

7 Andrei S. Markovits, *Uncouth Nation: Why Europe Dislikes America*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, p. 45.

8 See Valentin Naumescu, “From the Atlantic Order to the Pacific Pre-Eminence: A Historical Shift?” in *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai/Studia Europaea*, no. 2/2012, Cluj-Napoca: Cluj University Press, 2012, p. 67-82.

9 The geographical “list” does not include the Russian Federation and Turkey (because of their large non-European territories and significantly different profiles) but it counts all states resulted from Yugoslavia’s disintegration and three of the former Soviet republics: Belarus, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

new resources and business opportunities. In the post-1989 process of (re)defining and setting the boundaries of this part of the continent, there were political leaders, theories and authors who suggested that a “resurrection” of the old German concept of *Mitteleuropa* could be a good approximation of the region with a real potential to be integrated in the West. That was obviously a more cultural and historic approach considering only the territories of Central Europe sharing the common heritage of the Habsburg Empire in the Dualist Era¹⁰. The debate with regard to other countries was proposed to take place “outside the accepted boundaries of Central Europe: in the Balkans or in the Far Eastern Europe (Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova)”¹¹. The *Visegrad Group* was thus in the early 1990s a political attempt of recreating cleavages in the region, based on historic and identity reasons. For the present paper, in order to avoid any theoretical confusion, the ECE region will be considered as including the ten former communist countries which already joined the European Union.

The foundation of the Western system (which shaped, regulated and led the world as we know it¹²) has begun recently to weaken, due to economic recession, political disagreements, and also structural deficits affecting the competitiveness of the highly developed countries: ageing of population, public pensions’ crisis, more money needed to sustain expensive health-care systems, increasing rates of unemployment, high costs on the labour market, incredible levels of public debts, frustration within the middle class which can eventually ruin the social order that has been in place since World War II, as George Friedman believes. Being a fragile and sophisticated political structure of 27 countries, the European Union seems more exposed to risks of dissolution than the U.S. Comparing America with Europe in terms of possible effects to long economic slowdown, George Friedman believes that “the United States does not face political disintegration from unemployment, whatever the number is. Europe might”¹³.

Prestigious scholars from both sides of the Atlantic have focused in the past decade on the issue of the “transatlantic divide” and its multiple consequences: John Ikenberry, Jeffrey Anderson, Thomas Risse, Robert Kagan, Richard Kupchan, Jeffrey Kopstein and Svein Steinmo are just a few authors among those whose works had emphasized a variety of reasons and “nuances” for this split.¹⁴ From divergent economic visions in relation to markets and limits of government inter-

10 Guido Franzinetti, “Mitteleuropa in East-Central Europe: from Helsinki to EU Accession (1975-2004)” in *European Journal of Social Theory*, Sage Publications, 2008, p. 229.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 226.

12 Naumescu, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

13 George Friedman, *The Crisis of the Middle Class and American Power*, Stratfor, January 8, 2013, <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/crisis-middle-class-and-american-power> consulted on January 9, 2013.

14 Jeffrey Kopstein and Sven Steinmo (editors), *Growing Apart? America and Europe in the 21st Century*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

vention to cultural, religious or immigration different approaches, from military power and “think big” perspective to small, local and temporary adaptations or regional approaches, America and Europe had (re)discovered after the end of the Cold War the taste of being different. There are ten years now since Robert Kagan said that *Americans are from Mars and Europeans from Venus*. In his short but famous book “Of Paradise and Power”, he added: “When it comes to setting national priorities, determining threats, defining challenges, and fashioning and implementing foreign and defense policies, the United States and Europe have parted ways”.¹⁵ In simple words, Kagan wanted to point out that America is strong and Europe is weak which is to a certain extent true. But because the year was 2003, the month when the book was published was March (the beginning of the U.S. campaign in Iraq) and the author is a well-known conservative pundit we can easily understand that it was all about the American frustration caused by Franco-German reluctance to join the military invasion project. As we know, some of the East-Central European new allies supported the Bush-Blair costly adventure to Bagdad, searching in vain for Saddam’s weapons of mass-destruction.

We might disagree with the severity of the diagnosis with regard to Europe’s global influence in the coming years but some analytical demarches are to be done in order to understand the directions of a changing world. Having in mind the global or regional transformations following Western political, diplomatic and military crisis of 2003 as well as the international implications of the financial crisis of 2008, we have to admit *the end of the American unipolarity*¹⁶ with reference to almost twenty years of U.S. hegemony after the demise of the Soviet Union as well as a certain fading of the European-American strategic alliance. The crisis of the Atlantic system was further deepened in 2009-2010 by divergent ideological visions regarding solutions to economic crisis: European austerity (basically inspired by Germany and France) vs. American bailout, meaning conservative vs. liberal programs.

Since 2003, East-Central Europe has faced the provocation of managing a strategic partnership with the United States in the context of fulfilling the EU economic agenda. While the national economic programmes follow European benchmarks and aim to work properly with the common legislation, the need of strategic security makes the alliance with the United States a political priority. If the above mentioned cleavage between the old Western partners is still valid today, when the Iraqi issue is over (though it has somewhat receded, got a chronic form and switched to a risky lack of interest for the transatlantic alliance), we can only imagine the diplomatic pressures and challenges in 2003, when most of the ECE countries were still candidates, both to NATO and EU, except Poland, the Czech

15 Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 2003, p. 102.

16 Fareed Zakaria, *Post-American World*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008.

Republic and Hungary, already in NATO since 1999. To give just an example, Donald Rumsfeld's "division" between *Old* and *New Europe*¹⁷ had prompted a wave of indignation in Germany and France and satisfaction to Warsaw, Prague or Bucharest. "You're thinking of Europe as Germany and France...I don't. That's old Europe. Look at the vast majority of countries in Europe. They are not with France and Germany. They are with the U.S...If you look to the entire NATO Europe today, the gravity centre is shifting to the East"¹⁸ tried to explain his approach the unpopular Secretary of Defense, followed by reactions like these: "Rumsfeld is not exactly a diplomat and it is not very wise to say something like that..." (Volker Ruhe, former German Minister of Defence) or "If you knew what I felt telling Mr. Rumsfeld..." (Roselyn Bachelot, French Minister of Environment). French criticism continued at the highest level with then-President Chirac telling that Romania lost a good opportunity to "shut up" in that affair, while President Bănescu responded in 2005 that Chirac's comment on Romania was an offense to the dignity of the country and Romania will continue to work with Washington and London in main security issues. We also find French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier declaring that President Bănescu did not have a "European reflex".¹⁹ In Poland, probably the flagship of the "new Europe" and also a devoted Atlanticist ECE country (especially in the 90s and early 2000s) the mainstream politicians, both conservatives and liberals, fully enjoyed Rumsfeld's appraisal of the Polish strategic affiliation to the U.S. foreign and security policy. Pretty similar reactions animated political leaders in Hungary and the Czech Republic, although public rates of approval for Iraqi invasion were quite low in all these countries.

As a symbolic political move, the "Letter of Eight" was signed by Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary together with UK, Spain, Italy, Denmark and Portugal to ask for European unity in supporting the enforcement of the UN Security Council Resolution 1441.²⁰ That was a new step in dividing Europe along the "fault line" created by the issue of military intervention in Iraq, though we can understand from this alignment that *new and old Europe* were not actually

17 In January 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had introduced the political term "new Europe" related to the allies in East Central Europe, as a transparent message of the U.S. frustration caused by German and French lack of support in Iraq. The term stirred a huge controversy in politics and media and eventually was considered as a gaffe of the American high ranking dignitary.

18 BBC News, *Outrage at 'Old Europe' Remarks*, 23 January, 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2687403.stm>, consulted on January 15, 2013.

19 George Parker, *Romania hits back at French 'lecturing' (We love America!)*, in Financial Times, April 19, 2005, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/d6a84882-b02f-11d9-ab98-00000e2511c8.html#axzz2LuIwviEk> consulted on February 1, 2013.

20 Bezen Balamir Coskun, "Old Europe, New Europe and the European Union's Middle East Policy between Old and New Europe", in *Reflecting on Wider Europe and Beyond*, Tartu: Central and East European Studies Association, 2006, p. 6.

working as East-Central vs. Western Europe but rather as *Atlanticist* European countries vs. *France and Germany*, while Berlusconi's government was quite hesitating and oscillating between "yes" and "no". Needless to say that former President of France, Jacques Chirac, threatened in 2003 the ECE candidates to EU accession in an "old European" manner: "...this is not a responsible attitude...they have not well brought up...Beyond the fact of being infantile, this attitude is also dangerous. One must not forget that...enlargement will not work if one member state blocks it. These countries were both not well brought up and ignorant of the dangers of aligning themselves too closely to the American position".²¹

The underground legacy of the neo-conservative Bush-Cheney-Rice-Rumsfeld doctrine still erupts in East-Central Europe. Years after the most tensioned period of the so-called "war on terror", a huge scandal with regard to secret CIA prisons in Europe had shaken the political establishment in Poland and Romania, two of the mentioned countries. Unveiled firstly by Washington Post, later developed by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and especially the Council of Europe, the sensitive issue was obviously put to rest by national authorities. Nevertheless, the existence of secret American detention centres in Poland between December 2002 and September 2003 (hosting torture procedures against at least 11 prisoners flown by CIA in disguised aircrafts²²) erupted in open and virulent critics against then-Prime Minister Leszek Miller and former President Kwasniewski. Miller later named the journalists who investigated the issue "two useful idiots who invited Al-Qaeda to Poland".

The most recent chapter of the East-Central Europe's strategic alliance with the United States is the project of the American anti-missile shield. Components of this defence system (including sea and land-based batteries of SM-3 interceptors) will be deployed in Poland, Romania and Turkey and will be "operational by 2015, plan known as Phase Adaptive Approach...will defend forward-deployed US troops and allies in the region from Iranian missiles".²³ The Czech Republic withdrew from the initial project while Polish President Komorowski decided to work on a European Missile Defence system, integrated in the one operated by NATO, after President Obama had announced in 2009 that the U.S. interceptors' deployment in Poland will be "delayed a few years", a stance interpreted in Warsaw as an effect of the Washington-Moscow "reset". Needless to say that Russia is still opposing the project after a few years of sensitive talks, arguing with

21 Coskun, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

22 Stare Kiejkuty, *Poland's secret CIA prisons*, in The Economist, August 28, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2012/08/poland-and-america>, consulted on February 4, 2013.

23 John Reed, *Nations Scramble to Erect Missile Shields* in Defense News, Springfield (USA): March 22, 2010, <http://www.defensenews.com/print/article/20100322/DEFBEAT06/3220312/Nations-Scramble-Erect-Missile-Shields>, consulted on February 2, 2013.

a decrease of its potential of ballistic deterrence and threatening with political and military counter-measures, “including possible deployment of Iskander missiles in the neighbouring Kaliningrad region”²⁴, according to Voice of Russia.

From political to economic dimension and from strategic to military issues, the “*post-American world*”²⁵ which Fareed Zakaria had described so accurately in 2008 is moving to a *multipolar architecture* with several centres of growth and influence that are competing for resources and pre-eminence. Accordingly, global economy and international politics are rebalancing from Atlantic to Pacific, from West to Asia. According to Fareed Zakaria, “by most estimates, China’s economy will become the world’s largest between 2016 and 2018... Beijing’s defense spending is likely to surpass America’s by 2025”.²⁶ For one reason or another, several American authors like Thomas P. M. Barnett²⁷ or Thomas Friedman²⁸ deny the possibility of a definitive loss of America’s supremacy and also the fact that Asia’s ascension will continue with the same spectacular speed in the next one or two decades. Despite the optimistic theories, none of the European governments can ignore the actual trends of the Western economy. In August 2012, for instance, chancellor Merkel and half of the German government had paid an important two-day visit to Beijing, amid the crisis of the sovereign debts in Europe. International media saw in that move a clear sign of looking for economic solutions in China rather than in the West, even with the price of tempering criticism in relation to Beijing’s lack of consideration for human rights.²⁹ We see therefore a nascent political and economic approach on our continent, still Brussels-oriented but way more open and flexible in drafting scenarios, enlarging in fact the perspective of all member states beyond the frontiers of the European Union. Five or ten years ago, that was almost impossible to imagine, especially for the new EU member states or candidates, whose political dialogue and trade relations were almost *in integrum* connected with the Euro-Atlantic community.

24 Dmitry Babich, *Poland’s own ABM System: A fruit of victimization complex*, The Voice of Russia, August 6, 2012, http://english.ruvr.ru/2012_08_06/Poland-s-own-ABM-system-a-fruit-of-victimization-complex/ consulted on February 3, 2013.

25 Zakaria, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

26 Idem, *The world has changed, Mr. Romney*, The Washington Post, February 01, 2012, <http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-02-01/opinions> consulted on January 3, 2013.

27 See Thomas P. M. Barnett, *Great Powers: America and the World After Bush*, New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2009.

28 See Thomas Friedman, *That Used to Be Us: How America Fell Behind in the World It Invented and How We Can Come Back*, New York: Picador, 2012.

29 Wieland Wagner, *The Domesticated Chancellor: Merkel Shies Away from Direct Criticism in China*, Spiegel Online International, August 31, 2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/german-chancellor-merkel-avoids-criticism-during-visit-to-china-a-853185.html> consulted on January 17, 2013.

What is essential to notice within this historic game of global influences and continuous power rebalancing is the fact that *East-Central Europe has never been a major actor or at least the maker of its own destiny, but only part of a larger, changing drama*. Starting with the Great War, continuing with World War II and the Cold War, later the transatlantic divide over Iraq invasion, the global crisis of 2008 or the shift of the gravity centre to Asia-Pacific, the ECE region was caught in contemporary history in various conflicts, tensions, sometimes hidden agreements or simply in the dynamics of the political and economic relations between Western European powers, the Soviet Union (Russia respectively, after 1991), the United States and nowadays the emerging economies from Asia. All ideological frenzies that Europe faced in the 20th century, from Nazi and fascist regimes to the Bolshevik Revolution and its consequences were actually major events and international movements which flooded in East-Central Europe, from one side or another, not local innovations. Those disastrous political ideas that served as foundations of the authoritarian regimes just came and spread in the region, finding supporters, militants and opportunists. In very simple words, we only had here some busy apprentices, while the masters were in Berlin and Moscow. The political decisions regarding state frontiers, world wars, division of the continent and rival blocs were always adopted out of the region, most frequently without the consultation of the involved East-Central European countries. Between Germany and Russia, basically the entire history of the region until the successful Euro-Atlantic integration consisted in a series of “traumas” as well as a polygon of invasions, fragmentation, and conflicting interests. Although Germany had successfully implemented an intensive policy of reconciliation with ECE nations, the German reunification in the early 1990s still left a number of unsolved issues and unhappy memories in the region. “Poland’s animosity toward Germany was matched by its hatred of Russia”.³⁰ The Poles know probably the best of all what East-Central Europe used to be and many of us living today in territories “loaded” with the burden of past tragedies fully understand why Poland and other countries in the region chose to be firm Atlanticists after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

The end of the Cold War had opened for the first time after 1945 a window of opportunity for East-Central European nations to express and fulfill their will of joining the Western system. The paradigm of integration was therefore the success story of the last two decades. Both NATO and EU enlargements to the East (1999-2007) are historic achievements that have been engineered and eventually decided in Washington, London, Berlin or Paris but (unlike the bitter experiences of the 20th century) the direction was in keeping with what people in the region really wanted to happen. This time, strategic decisions on East-Central Europe triggered

30 Ann L. Phillips, “The politics of reconciliation revisited: Germany and East-Central Europe” in *World Affairs*, Volume 163, Issue 4, Spring 2001, Washington: Heldref Publications, p. 173.

positive developments in the whole region and got the support of an overwhelming majority. That make seven harder now for East-Central Europeans to understand and agree with the transatlantic divide.

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