



The Impact of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict on the Diplomacy of CEE Countries

Chief Editor:
LIU Zuokui

Published by:

China-CEE Institute Nonprofit Ltd.

Telephone: +36-1-5858-690

E-mail: office@china-cee.eu

Webpage: www.china-cee.eu

Address: 1052, Budapest, Petőfi Sándor utca 11.

Chief Editor:

Dr. LIU Zuokui

ISBN: 978-615-6124-73-9 (pdf)

Cover design:

Brád Grafika

Copyright: China-CEE Institute Nonprofit Ltd.

The reproduction of the study or parts of the study are prohibited.

The findings of the study may only be cited if the source is acknowledged.



Impact of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict on the Diplomacy of CEE Countries

Chief Editor: Dr. LIU Zuokui

CHINA-CEE INSTITUTE

Budapest, December 2022

Content

Albania’s Positioning on the Ukraine Crisis (March)	4
Does BiH Follow EU Position on Ukraine or Not? (February)	11
Strengthening the Partnership Between Bulgaria and the United States and Deteriorating Relations with Russia (March)	19
NATO’s “Slow Response” to Crashed UAV in Zagreb (March) ..	26
Czech Foreign Policy and the Ukrainian Crisis (March)	32
Adopting to a New Reality, but Trying to Get on with the Routine... (March)	39
The Ukrainian Crisis and Greek-Turkish Relations (March)	45
Hungarian Foreign Policy in the First Days of Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine (February)	52
Finland and Sweden to Join NATO: How It Affects Latvia (May)	57
Montenegro 's International Relations in the Context of the War in Ukraine (February)	63
Initial Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict (February)	69
Poland in the Face of Russia's Aggression against Ukraine (February)	76
Romania’s Achievements after the NATO Summit in Madrid and the Black Sea Security Summit (July)	84
Serbia and General Assembly Resolution on Russian Operations in Ukraine (March)	89
The Slovenian Parliamentary Election in 2022, and the International Response to the Results (April)	95

Albania's Positioning on the Ukraine Crisis (March)

Marsela Musabelliu

Summary

From February 24th, 2022, Europe is not the same. The outburst of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is not an event concealed only within their respective borders; its ramifications are unprecedented for the entire continent of Europe, and beyond. Besides the tragic human toll involved, this crisis threatens to disrupt the global economy, global supply chains, and redefine geopolitical imbalances. For the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) members, the positioning has been predefined; however, some are more vocal than others in their stance. Albanian leaders have been extremely outspoken in support of Ukraine, and their alignment in this conflict. There were no surprises in their behavior, it was somehow expected, and the only unknown was the extent of their compliance.

Introduction

Since Albania became a NATO member in 2009, this membership has been one of the matters where each politician takes pride and refuge when needed. It was no new revelation that in the Ukraine crisis, Albania would side with their strategic partners of the Organisation. For Albania's political establishment, since the outburst of the conflict, a unanimous stance in support of Ukraine was omnipresent. This is one of the rare cases where local politicians all agree on a given issue. Nevertheless, more than advocacy for Ukraine this was dictated by Western allies of Albania and the internal need for security guarantees.

A timeline of the Albanian official stance

Albania's position even before the conflict was clear. Since February 5th PM Edi Rama stated that the United States (US) and Albania will be co-chairs concerning the Ukraine issue in the United Nations (UN) Security Council. In short, Albania will co-sign everything the US puts on the table

of negotiations. Rama played it as a win for Albania on the international stage and as a momentum of increasingly close partnership with the US.¹ On February 15th, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEFA) stated that their position on the situation in Ukraine is very clear and is 100% aligned with Albania's allies. Albania's membership in the Security Council for the period 2022-2023 as a non-permanent member is giving Rama's government some notoriety and they are using this medium quite often. MEFA also stated that Albania firmly supports the sovereignty, territorial integrity of Ukraine, and upholds Ukraine's sovereign right, like any other country, to choose its path.²

On February 24th, the Albanian Ambassador to the UN, at an urgent meeting of the Security Council urged Russia to stop the attack, expressing support for Ukraine's sovereignty. He stated that many nations called for and hoped for a reversal of the Russian Federation from this senseless destructive and self-destructive act. On the same day, the Security Council failed to adopt a draft resolution on ending the Ukraine crisis, as the Russian federation wielded the veto. The draft was submitted by Albania and the United States, garnered support from 11 members but was vetoed by the Russian Federation.³

In the early hours of the outburst of this conflict, PM Rama, on behalf of the Albanian government, expressed solidarity with the Ukrainian people, joining NATO and European Union (EU). *"We join NATO and its allies in strongly condemning Russia's aggression. Our thoughts are with the*

¹ Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania (2022 February 5). SHBA dhe Shqipëria bashkëpenëmbajtëse të çështjes së Ukrainës në Këshillin e Sigurimit të KB. Available at <https://kryeministria.al/newsroom/shba-dhe-shqiperia-bashkepenembajtese-te-ceshtjes-se-ukraines-ne-keshillin-e-sigurimit-te-kb/>

² Albanian Telegraphic Agency ATA (2022, February 15). Xhaçka: Pozicioni i Shqipërisë për situatën në Ukrainë, i linjëzuar 100% me aleatët tanë. Available at <https://ata.gov.al/2022/02/15/xhacka-pozicioni-i-shqiperise-per-situaten-ne-ukraine-i-linjezuar-100-me-aleatet-tane/>

³ United Nations Security Council, 8979th Meeting (2022, February 25). Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Ending Ukraine Crisis, as Russian Federation Wields Veto. Available at <https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sc14808.doc.htm>

Ukrainian people” – Rama stated. Soon after this declaration, the MEFA confirmed that Albania has joined the economic sanctions against Russia.

1

The President of the Republic also weighed in by holding a meeting of the National Security Council on February 24th to re-evaluate the national situation of Albania in security terms. *"Albania, as a member of NATO, and a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), joins the calls of the alliance and the international community to Russia to immediately abandon the path of violence and aggression"* - President Meta is quoted in the press release. Later civil society activists held a protest in front of the headquarters of the Russian Embassy in Tirana. On February 25th, Albania's airspace closed for all Russian air operators or any aircraft registered in Russia, except for emergency, humanitarian, medical, or interstate flights. Authorities also decided to ban travel to Albanian territory for persons listed by the EU and considered the cancellation of facilitation policies for the movement of diplomats, other Russian officials, and business representatives.

On February 27th Albania applied restrictions for 654 individuals and 52 entities for freezing the assets connected to the Russian President, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, and other Russian officials.

Furthermore, Albania stopped the sale, supply, transfer, or export to Russia of specific goods and technologies for oil refining, in the aviation and space industry, technology, etc. ²

On March 4th Albania is active again in the UN Security Council, where the latter decided to hold an emergency meeting after the Russian forces captured Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Ukraine.

¹ Klan (2022, February 24). Shqipëria dënon agresionin rus ndaj Ukrainës. Available at <https://tvklan.al/shqiperia-denon-agresionin-rus-ndaj-ukraines/>

² Ministry of foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania (2022 February 27). Ministrja Xhaçka prezanton sanksionet e Shqipërisë ndaj Rusisë. Available at <https://www.punetejashtme.gov.al/ministrja-xhacka-prezanton-sanksionet-e-shqiperise-ndaj-rusise/>

According to diplomatic sources, the meeting was requested by Albania, Great Britain, the USA, France, Ireland, and Norway. ¹

On March 5th Ukrainian President Zelensky publicly thanked Albania's help in this crisis. He had a phone call with Albanian PM Rama and the latter revealed some parts of its content. Zelensky wrote on Twitter that he spoke with Rama about the occupation of Ukraine by Russia. He said that he appreciates the practical help and support of Albania in this difficult time, adding that everything is being done to end the war. ²

On March 7th, Russia declares Albania an “unfriendly country” with a decree signed by Putin. Albania was not alone in this stance, there was a list made public, that includes Albania after the attitude that the Albanian government maintained towards Ukraine. According to local media, this designation came after the Albanian government has condemned Russia and has offered its support to Ukraine and also because Albania has also voted in favor of the UN Security Council resolution against Russia. ³

On the same day (March 7th) The Albanian Parliament voted on in the plenary session the draft resolution in support of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and the protection of the principles of international law and European security. The resolution, which was adopted by consensus by all the 140 members of the parliament, “*condemns Russian military aggression against Ukraine and the Russian Federation's grave violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as an act violating the international order*”.⁴ The same day the Honorary Consulate

¹ Anadolu Agency (2022. February 4). Këshilli i Sigurimit i OKB-së mban mbledhje urgjente pas sulmit rus në centralin bërthamor në Ukrainë. Available at <https://www.aa.com.tr/sq/bota/k%C3%ABshilli-i-sigurimit-i-okb-s%C3%AB-mban-mbledhje-urgjente-pas-sulmit-rus-n%C3%AB-centralin-b%C3%ABrthamor-n%C3%AB-ukrain%C3%AB/2524229>

² ABC News Albania (2022 March 5). Zbulohet biseda, çfarë i tha Rama-Zelensky-t në telefon. Available at <https://abcnews.al/video-zbulohet-biseda-çfare-i-tha-rama-zelensky-t-ne-telefon/>

³ Dosja (2022 March 7). Rusia shpall Shqipërinë vend armik, dekreti firmoset nga Putin. Available at <https://dosja.al/putin-shpall-listen-e-zeze-me-armiqte-e-rusise-pjese-e-saj-dhe-shqiperia/>

⁴ Argumentum (2022 March 7). Rezoluta në mbështetje të Ukrainës miratohet me konsensus nga parlamenti Shqiptar. Available at

of the Republic of Albania in Kharkiv was attacked. Via Twitter Albania MEFA strongly condemns the occurrence by stating “*Perpetrators must be held accountable!*”¹

On March 13th the summit of European Union leaders was held in Versailles, Paris, where it was made clear that membership of Ukraine in the European bloc would not be a reality. The Netherlands, one of the countries that is an obstacle to Albania’s membership for years, strangely enough, advocates for Albania. The Dutch PM, Mark Rutte, defended the countries of the Western Balkans, including Albania, which have applied for years to join the common European economic market. Rutte stated for the media when asked “*Ukraine in the EU? It would be a slap in the face for Albania.*”²

On March 16th the Minister of Internal Affairs held a meeting with the Ambassador of Ukraine in Tirana. The minister guaranteed the support of Albania for the citizens of Ukraine who have come to the country or who may arrive in the future due to the war. There are currently 351 citizens from Ukraine staying in Albania, who will be treated with temporary protection according to the Albanian legal framework on asylum.³

<https://argumentum.al/lajmi/2022/03/rezoluta-ne-mbeshtetje-te-ukraines-miratohet-me-konsensus-nga-parlamenti-shqiptar/>

¹ Albanian MEFA Twitter (2022 March 7). Albania strongly condemns the Russian aggression which led to the destruction of the Honorary Consulate of Albania in Kharkiv. Available at <https://twitter.com/AlbanianDiplo/status/1500862581547929601?s=20&t=066Dxv5A1TZcj3vhd7hfXA>

² Gazeta Sot (2022 March 12). Shqipëria “bllokoi” Ukrainën për anëtarësimin e shpejtë në BE, reagon Holanda dhe merr në mbrojtje vendin tonë: Available at <https://sot.com.al/aktualitet/shqiperia-bllokoi-ukrainen-per-anetaresimin-e-shpejte-ne-be-reagon-ho-i499390>

³ Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Albania (2022 March 16). Çuçi pret ambasadorin e Ukrainës: Shqipëria shembull solidariteti, 351 shtetas ukrainas janë në vendin tonë me mbrojtje të përkohshme. Available at <https://mb.gov.al/cuci-pret-ambasadorin-e-ukraines-shqiperia-shembull-solidariteti-351-shtetas-ukrainas-jane-ne-vendin-tone-me-mbrojtje-te-perkohshme/>

On March 24th from Brussels, at the extraordinary NATO summit, PM Rama shared for his followers in social media moments of the summit by making clear where he and his government stand on the issue. ¹

To this situation, former Albanian PM Sali Berisha also weighed in. It is a time when everything Russian is condemned in Albania and Berisha had to go with the flow of times. He stated that while he was a PM he had rejected a dizzying offer from the Russian Gazprom. Berisha said that he had done such a thing in the interest of the country while adding that he had preferred to sign the agreement with Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), which today is a great liberation for Europe involved in gas fever. Soon after the Russian Embassy in Albania reacted to the statement of Berisha by ironically noting: *“We were surprised by Sali Berisha's words that he refused the bribe allegedly proposed by Gazprom for the development of energy projects in Albania...The question naturally arises: how much did Mr. Berisha ask that even Gazprom could not collect those”* ² Ironically, even the person who is the most ostracized by the West in Albania, Sali Berisha, is now unveiling how his allegiance to the West is unshaken.

Conclusion

The entire political establishment of Albania (right, left, and center) is unanimously condemning Russia and standing with Ukraine. This intensity of declaration, their pathos in expression, and their almost blindly alignment with the partners appear somehow fake to Albanians. The PM states “we are at war” – but the only war Albanians are facing is the struggle to survive. The rising prices of food and basic commodities, disguised as a casualty of this conflict, is most probably a direct result of internal abusive market practices makes rather than a direct and sole implication of this

¹ Edi Rama Facebook page (2022 March 25). Bruksel - Në samitin e jashtëzakonshëm të NATO-s. Available at <https://fb.watch/bZrw113zZO/>

² Argumentum (2022 March 18). Gazprom më ofroi një shumë përrallore”/ Ironizon ambasada ruse: Sa kërkoi Berisha që as Gazpromi nuk arriti t’i mbledhë dot? Berisha publikon mesazhin. Available at <https://argumentum.al/lajmi/2022/03/gazprom-me-ofroi-nje-shume-perrallore-ironizon-ambasada-ruse-sa-kerkoi-berisha-qe-as-gazpromi-nuk-arriti-ti-mbledhe-dot-berisha-publikon-mesazhin/>

conflict. Albanian politicians express that they care and are concerned for Ukraine, yet Albanians have been shown time and again that the only interests local politicians are concerned about are their own.

Does BiH Follow EU Position on Ukraine or Not? (February)

Faruk Borić

Summary

After the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina did not adopt a resolution that would oblige the state government to harmonize its positions regarding Ukraine with that of the European Union, questions about who "plays" for Moscow have reopened. While the ties of Serbian political parties from Republic of Srpska are public, clear and transparent, the spotlight is on the Croatian politics and its leader, Dragan Čović, most reliable political partner of Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik. All this affects the foreign policy of BiH as a state, which shows signs of inconsistency and party-determined particularism.

Introduction

House of Peoples (HoP) of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH PA) refused to support “the proposal of conclusions on harmonization of the positions of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the positions of the European Union on the aggression against Ukraine”. At a session of the House on March 24, delegates voted on this proposal proposed by Denis Bećirović, a senior official of the opposition Social Democratic Party (SDP), which demand the Council of Ministers (CoM) of BiH to fully align policies, measures and attitudes with official European Union (EU) positions on aggression against Ukraine.

Serbs and Croats against

The draft text states, among other things, that the HoP of the BiH PA emphasizes that the BiH authorities have defined foreign policy goals and that the BiH CoM has an obligation to harmonize policies, measures and attitudes with EU foreign and security policy; that the HoP PA emphasizes the importance of respecting the European security order, the key principles of which are contained in the United Nations (UN) Charter and the core documents of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), including the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter; as well as that "the HoP strongly condemns the aggression against Ukraine and its sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence, and calls on the Russian Federation to immediately stop the military attack and withdraw its armed forces from Ukrainian state territory."¹

Out of 15 delegates, six voted in favor of the proposal, seven were against, while two abstained. The adoption of the proposal was supported by all five delegates from the Bosniak Club² and Zlatko Miletić (former member of the Democratic Front of BiH, today an independent delegate from the Croat Club). Two delegates from Croat club, members of Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* - HDZ BiH), Lidija Bradara and Bariša Čolak, abstained. Seven delegates voted against, all five delegates from the Club of the Serbian People and two delegates from the Croatian people club – Marina Pendeš (HDZ BiH) and Dragan Čović (President of the HDZ BiH). A positive decision required a simple majority, eight votes³.

¹ HDZ voted against harmonizing BiH's positions with the EU on Russian aggression against Ukraine. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/hdz-glasao-protiv-uskladjivanja-stavova-bih-sa-eu-o-ruskoj-agresiji-na-ukrajinu/220324106>

² The House of Peoples of the BiH PA consists of 15 delegates, five from each of the constituent peoples, Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. In the Club of Bosniaks in the 2018-2022 convocation, in addition to Bećirović, there are also SDA President Bakir Izetbegović, SDA officials Asim Sarajlić and Amir Fazlić, and Alliance for a Better Future (*Savez za bolju budućnost* - SBB) cadre Munib Jusufović. More about the House of Peoples at <https://parlament.ba/Content/Read/36?title=Op%C4%87ipodaci>

³ *Ibid.*

The stances of delegates from the Serbian People's Club in HoP, which includes four senior officials from Milorad Dodik's party, the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (*Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata* - SNSD), are nobody's surprised¹. However, lack of support from the HDZ BiH produced certain reactions. The President of the HDZ BiH and the decades-old leader of the BiH Croats, Dragan Čović, said at the press-conference after the session that the HDZ supports all EU positions when it comes to the suffering of the Ukrainian people.

"Conclusions coming from Europe will be adopted, and laws coming from the opposition so that they can catch some points, everyone will go through the same thing as that," Čović said, while behind him, besides the flags of BiH, EU and Croatia, fluttered the flag of Ukraine².

Čović does not want an opposition proposal

Considering that the media in BiH and Croatia continued to report on this case, Čović made an additional announcement through a statement from his Office. He pointed out that the information that he voted against the sanctions against Russia in the HoP is not true. In statement from the Office, it was also reminded that the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Joseph Borrell, confirmed in early March that BiH had complied with the decision to impose sanctions on Russia.

¹ Serbian club members are Sredoje Nović, Dusanka Majkić, Nikola Špirić and Lazar Prodanović, and former leader of Serbian Democratic Party (*Srpska demokratska stranka* - SDS) Mladen Bosić, <https://parlament.ba/Content/Read/42?title=Klubovinaroda>

² Čović called on the EU and announced the possibility of a new round of negotiations for the BiH Election Law. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/covic-se-pozvao-na-eu-i-najavio-mogucnost-novog-kruga-pregovora-za-izborni-zakon-bih/220325064>

“He (Borrell, noted by F. B.) stated that in the Declaration on the harmonization of certain countries regarding restrictive measures with regard to Russian actions that destabilize the situation in Ukraine. Countries that have complied with the sanctions policy will ensure that their national policies are in line with the EU decision” it was said. They add, however, that decisions related to harmonization in BiH are practically difficult to implement because Serbs sit in all bodies, both in the CoM and in the BiH Presidency, and that they block in alignment¹.

“This proposal, which came from the SDP delegate, Denis Bećirović, is cheap populism and outwitting that has nothing to do with reality... Because BiH follows the EU policy, even in the case of sanctions, and has complied with the decision! - they say in statement, adding that the attitude of HDZ BiH speaks best of the fact that refugees from Ukraine came only to the area where Croats live and where HDZ BiH is in power - to Mostar and Medjugorje. Čović's office also reminds that HDZ BiH President visited refugees in Medjugorje on March 8th and invited Croatian officials in BiH and anyone who can help get involved to make life and stay easier for refugee families and mothers with children².

EU disappointed, opposition retaliates

The Head of the EU Delegation to BiH, Johann Sattler, expressed his disappointment with the session results. He wrote on his Twitter profile: "Yesterday was a disappointing day in parliaments... Non-compliance with EU measures against Russia.... Another day of missed opportunities³."

¹ Covic: It is not true that I voted against sanctions against Russia in the House of Peoples <https://www.dnevnik.ba/vijesti/covic-nije-istina-da-sam-u-domu-naroda-glasovao-protiv-sankcija-rusiji-2629747>

² *Ibid.*

³ Sattler: They want candidate status and vote against the rule of law and sanctions against Russia. <https://nap.ba/news/91680>

The Embassy of the United States of America in Bosnia and Herzegovina said that some political parties in BiH are not sincere in their commitment to the country's European path¹.

Among those who criticized HDZ BiH President was former Croatian HDZ president and former Croatian Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor.

"Will Plenković (Andrej, President of HDZ and Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, cit. F.B.) brag to his colleagues in Brussels that a friend who admires a friend who denies genocide and who constantly consults with him voted against sanctions against Russia, or we will to continue to watch Čović being photographed at meetings of the Government in Croatia, which is a member of the Union and has imposed sanctions on Russia for its brutal aggression against Ukraine," Ms. Kosor asked on Twitter, as reported by the media².

Prime Minister Plenković answers he would not support something proposed by the opposition either³.

The President of SDP, Nermin Nikšić, also reacted. He said that the text of the resolution has no party connotation and that it is fully harmonized with similar EU acts. He sees this as the difference between the Balkan political left and the right.

"We from the SDP would vote for the text of the resolution if anyone proposed it, because it is fair in relation to the heroic people of Ukraine,

¹ US Embassy: Parties calling for a European path while overturning European laws are not honest. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/ambasada-sad-a-stranke-koje-pozivanje-na-evropski-put-dok-obaraju-evropske-zakone-nisu-iskrene/220325103>

² Dragan Čović is the target of criticism - from Brussels to Sarajevo. <https://ba.n1info.com/vijesti/dragan-covic-na-meti-kritika-od-brisela-do-sarajeva/>

³ *Ibid.*

because it is choosing the right side when it comes to the democratic world," Nikšić emphasized¹.

He added that the HDZ did not refuse to vote because the SDP proposed a resolution, but because they think it is an armed conflict, as well as because of their policy of not confronting to Dodik's SNSD. Whether there are still any special ties and specific interests that Čović realized in his frequent trips to Serbia, Nikšić added: time will tell².

"HDZ BiH has once again confirmed they are only the backing vocals of Milorad Dodik and his Russian policy, which strives to create new conflicts and parastate territories", said the president of the SDP BiH.

Some media reminded that Dragan Čović was on an official visit to Moscow in February 2020, where he met with the President of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of Russia Valentina Matviyenko, and that on that occasion he spoke highly of the irreplaceable and fundamental role of the Russian Federation. On that occasion, Čović also said that BiH there is very little of Russian influence, wondering if there is at least one company with capital from the Russian Federation, Russian investment, or other types of activities that would connect the two countries more strongly.

"We really need that," Čović said on that occasion³.

In an interview with Rossiyska Gazeta, the HDZ president added that the Russia is a huge market, and a wise policy within BiH would make it

¹ Nikšić: In the HDZ BiH, they confirmed that only the backing vocals of Milorad Dodik. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/niksic-u-hdz-u-bih-su-potvrdili-da-su-samo-bek-vokali-milorada-dodika/220326026>

² *Ibid.*

³ Holder of "European values" in action: Dragan Čović voted against the initiative to impose sanctions on the Russian Federation. <https://istraga.ba/nositelj-evropskih-vrijednosti-na-djelu-dragan-covic-glasao-proptiv-inicijative-za-uvođenje-sankcija-ruskoj-federaciji/>

possible to discern this, ignoring the sanctions imposed by anyone and the obstacles created¹.

An article published by the Al Jazeera Balkans portal says that Milorad Dodik speaks very clearly and publicly that he enjoys Russia's support and points out Russia as a friend. The interlocutor in the article, analyst from Banja Luka Tanja Topić explains that this means that Russia has decided to support the policy coming from the RS, but also that a kind of support for Dragan Čović has been won in those relations².

Messages of the Russian ambassador

The session of the BiH PA HoP took place only a few days after the television appearance of the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to BiH, Igor Kalabukhov. In the leased term, Ambassador Kalabukhov spoke about the possible entry of BiH into the NATO alliance, explaining that it was a decision of the state of BiH, but that Russia would strategically assess the situation as well.

"I clearly think you have the right to enter anywhere, but when you ask if it is a threat: isn't it interference in Russia's internal affairs? You are solving our possibilities..." , Kalabukhov underlined³.

¹ *Ibid.*

² 'Russian influence' created real chaos in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. <https://balkans.aljazeera.net teme/2022/2/2/ruskim-uticajem-stvaran-je-haosu-u-bosni-i-hercegovini>

³ Russian Ambassador: We do not mind BiH joining NATO. Not a threat, maybe a warning. <https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/ruski-ambasador-nama-ne-smeta-da-bih-udje-u-nato/450827>

This interview provoked numerous reactions not only in BiH but also in the region¹.

Conclusion

The example of voting in the HoP s of the BiH PA once again showed that BiH does not have a single foreign policy. Also, it can be seen how internal political dynamics determine the external one. What further complicates the whole picture is the fact that relations with the EU break down on several levels, of which at least three are important in the context of BiH's foreign policy towards Ukraine: BiH is a neighbor of the EU, BiH is a candidate for EU membership, and BiH is a security issue both for NATO and the EU. Domestic political strife's that have been manifesting on a broad scale in the context of "EU v. Russia", Brussels, the reactions of senior officials show, will not overly understand.

¹ Numerous reactions after Kalabukhov's guest appearance on FACE TV: Russia will attack BiH and Croatia? <https://www.face.ba/vijesti/bih/brojne-reakcije-nakon-gostovanja-kalabuhova-na-face-tv-rusija-ce-napasti-bih-i-hrvatsku/137297>

Strengthening the Partnership Between Bulgaria and the United States and Deteriorating Relations with Russia (March)

Evgeniy Kandilarov

Summary

In terms of Bulgarian foreign policy, the war in Ukraine led to a sharp intensification of two interrelated processes. Bulgaria's membership in NATO and the US-Bulgaria Strategic Partnership has led to an intensification of relations between Bulgaria and the United States. Indicative in this regard was the visit of US Secretary of Defense to Sofia Lloyd Austin on March 18-19. At the same time, relations between Bulgaria and the Russian Federation are deteriorating sharply. Signs of this are the sharp remarks exchanged between the Bulgarian prime minister and Russia's ambassador to Bulgaria Eleonora Mitrofanova, and especially Bulgaria's decision to declare ten Russian diplomats persona non grata on espionage charges.

From the very beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Bulgaria has taken a firm position against Russian aggression in support of Ukraine and has shown solidarity with all actions by its EU and NATO partners. Bulgarian government condemned the Russian attack, supporting the common line within the European Council and at the NATO Summit. At the session of the UN General Assembly, Bulgaria voted together with all EU member states on the resolution condemning Russia.

Strategic partnership between Bulgaria and the USA in the field of defense

The war in Ukraine motivated the Bulgarian government to intensify and expand the dialogue between Bulgaria and NATO, and in particular between Bulgaria and the United States on security and defense issues in the Black Sea region and NATO's eastern flank.

This was based also on the fact that since 2020 the United States and the Republic of Bulgaria announced strategic partnership and signed a 10-year “Roadmap for Defense Cooperation,” establishing a framework to strengthen their joint commitment to mutual defense. The same year both governments launched a high-level bilateral Strategic Dialogue, a forum for consultation and cooperation on global, regional, and bilateral issues of mutual interest.

An expression of the intensified rapprochement and intensive dialogue between Bulgaria and the United States was the visit of the Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to the country on March 18-19. This is the first US visit to Bulgaria in the last 25 years at the level of Secretary of Defense. According to the US Embassy press release the point of the visit was to discuss US strong security partnership with Bulgarian counterparts and to reaffirm US shared resolve in the face of Russia’s unjustified and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

Secretary Austin met with Prime Minister Kiril Petkov and Defense Minister Dragomir Zakov, and visited U.S. and Bulgarian troops at Novo Selo Training Area.

During his meeting with Prime Minister Petkov, Secretary Austin praised Bulgaria as a valued security partner, both bilaterally and through the NATO Alliance, and noted that US-Bulgaria security partnership has never been stronger. Secretary Austin affirmed U.S. appreciation for the U.S.-Bulgarian strategic partnership and reiterated U.S. commitment to the security of NATO's Eastern Flank during this critical time.

After their meeting Lloyd and Petkov announced that the US is providing Stryker company to be staged in Bulgaria. The Stryker is an armored

combat vehicle unit. The US Stryker army contingent is to be part of a NATO battle group in Bulgaria. The position of the US Department of Defense is to help NATO bolster its Eastern Flank amid Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

Despite efforts to boost NATO's eastern flank, Bulgaria and the US clarified that they do not plan to provide lethal military equipment to Ukraine. The issue of sending troops to Ukraine has not been discussed, Kiril Petkov stressed. *At the moment, we are only talking about humanitarian aid, a common strategy, the strengthening of the Eastern Flank. A decision on military aid at this stage is not possible and it can only be taken by the National Assembly*, said Kiril Petkov in response to a question.

Bulgarian Prime Minister was firm that Bulgaria will continue to provide humanitarian support to Ukrainians. Bulgarian government promised to continue sending humanitarian assistance to Kyiv and to accepting thousands of Ukrainian refugees.

The other topic discussed between Petkov and the US Secretary of Defense was military mobility - the idea of connecting Constanta, Alexandroupolis with the Black Sea - by road, train, and bridge over the Danube. The two governments will work in this direction, because logistics is also key to a functioning defense.

During Lloyd Austin's visit to Bulgaria, the priority issues for Bulgaria related to the acquisition of new capabilities and modernization of the Bulgarian Armed Forces, as well as the prospects for cooperation in the field of cybersecurity were discussed. The two countries outlined the next steps for the development of the US-Bulgaria strategic partnership.

During the visit of the US Secretary of Defense to Bulgaria, mass protests were organized against the potential possibility of Bulgaria's involvement in the war in Ukraine. Hundreds of Bulgarians expressed their position for Bulgarian neutrality over the war in Ukraine, shouting "*NATO, out!*" and

"No to war!" in front of the Ministry of Defense. The protest, organized by the Vazrazhdane Party, was attended not only by supporters of the party, but also by many Bulgarians who oppose involvement in the military conflict.

Deterioration of relations between Bulgaria and Russia

Simultaneously with the demonstrated cooperation between Bulgaria and the United States against Russia's war in Ukraine, there has been a sharp deterioration in relations between Bulgaria and the Russia.

As early as March 7, the Government of the Russian Federation approved a list of countries and territories that carry out "hostile actions" against Russia, its companies and citizens. The list includes the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, all countries of the European Union, including Bulgaria. The states and territories in the "black" list of Moscow imposed or joined the sanctions against Russia, after it started a war against Ukraine.

Bulgaria's Prime Minister Kiril Petkov summoned Russian ambassador in Bulgaria, Eleonora Mitrofanova, on March 6, calling on her to adhere to the norms of diplomatic communication, show proper respect and to stop using offensive language towards Bulgarian institutions.

This followed a succession of posts on the Facebook page of the Russian embassy in Sofia, in the context of Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine and Bulgaria's expulsion of two Russian diplomats that it said were spies, that used insulting epithets towards Bulgaria and Bulgarians.

According to a Bulgarian government statement after the meeting, Mitrofanova apologized to the Prime Minister.

Petkov also expressed his indignation that in its official message on March 3, Bulgaria's Liberation Day, the Russian embassy had likened the war in Ukraine to the 19th century liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule.

“Our gratitude to the Russian people for the Liberation cannot be devalued by comparisons with today’s fratricidal war in Ukraine,” Petkov said.

He insisted that the Russian embassy should not interfere in Bulgaria’s domestic policy, in accordance with international conventions.

Meanwhile, on the eve of the visit of US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to Bulgaria, on March 18, Bulgaria declared 10 Russian diplomats in Sofia persona non grata, giving them a 72-hour period to leave the country. According to the information of the competent authorities, the said employees of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Bulgaria have carried out on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria activities incompatible with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

Russia’s Foreign Ministry reacted sharply. *“We qualify this move as yet another provocation, an attempt to win the competition on the speed at which relations with Russia can be destroyed without giving any thought to the consequences, national interests or aspirations of the Bulgarian people,”* Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said in a statement. Zakharova warned that *“this unfriendly act will receive an appropriate response”*.

During these events Russian Ambassador in Bulgaria, Eleonora Mitrofanova, has also sharpened her tone towards the Bulgarian government. On Russia 24 television, quoted by RIA Novosti, Mitrofanova said *“The Bulgarian people do not support either the rhetoric or the actions of the Bulgarian government against Russia”*.

In response to that, Bulgarian Prime Minister announced that Bulgaria will summon its ambassador to Russia to Sofia for consultations. Petkov said that he consider Mitrofanova’s statements as “undiplomatic, sharp and rude”. *“It is not acceptable in any way for a foreign ambassador to speak on behalf of the Bulgarian people against the Bulgarian government,”* the prime minister said. After summoning the Bulgarian Ambassador in Russia to return in Sofia, Kiril Petkov stressed also that he expects the Russian

government to take similar steps against the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Bulgaria.

Conclusion

The war in Ukraine and the growing strategic relations between Bulgaria and the United States in the field of defense against Russia put Bulgaria in a particularly difficult position. The difficulty comes from the fact that Bulgaria is one of the few EU member states that traditionally show strong sympathies for Russia. They are historically motivated by the fact that Russia made a decisive contribution to the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule. Apart from the emotional proximity, there is also a strong economic connection — Bulgaria is highly dependent on Russian energy supplies.

At the same time, Despite Mitrofanova's suggestion that many people in the country support Moscow, trust in the Kremlin has been falling dramatically in Bulgaria after the start of the war.

A representative sociological survey by Trend agency showed that only 16% of Bulgarians believe that the Russian military invasion of Ukraine is justified, while 61% are of the opposite opinion.

Immediately after the Russian attack on Ukraine, Alpha Research found that the rating of Russian President Vladimir Putin in Bulgaria had fallen to 30%. A much more recent Trend study also suggests that Putin's rating has continued to decline during the war.

However, 77% of all Bulgarians believe that NATO should not interfere directly, with military participation on Ukraine's side in its conflict with Russia.

However, the Bulgarian government's expulsion of 10 Russian diplomats in one go is an unprecedented political decision. It seems that relations

between the two countries will continue to deteriorate, and what the consequences will be is difficult to predict at this stage.

NATO's "Slow Response" to Crashed UAV in Zagreb (March)

Vanna Ćurin

Summary

In late hours of 10 March 2022, after flying over three European NATO-member states, a Soviet-made military drone crashed in a broader centre of Zagreb, the Croatian capital. Fortunately, the crashed unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) did not cause any human casualties although it crashed in a populated area. The event has posed many questions regarding NATO alliance military preparedness, or at least its operations in context of certain member-states. Is NATO defence vulnerable, decentralized and inefficient? Absence of response to UAV in NATO airspace and its subsequent crash revealed alliance's stance towards smaller member states and proved to be yet another evidence of double standard approaches the alliance is pursuing in times of deepening East-West cleavage.

Introduction

Shortly after 11 pm on Thursday, 10 March 2022, UAV, later identified as the Soviet-produced military Tupolev Tu-141 Strizh, crashed in the midst of the Croatian capital, Zagreb.¹ Crashed UAV had left damage on about 40 parked cars; however, no one was injured. Had the UAV crashed few dozen meters differently, it could have fallen onto a student dorm, hosting around 4,500 students, or densely populated nearby neighbourhood. An investigation revealed that the drone was launched from the territory of Ukraine. Ukraine is being invaded by Russia and it is still unclear who

¹<https://hr.n1info.com/english/news/croatias-pm-nato-members-failed-to-react-to-drone-incident/>

launched the drone. Before it crashed in Zagreb, the drone flew over the Romanian and Hungarian airspace, therefore, experts think the Ukrainian army forces sent drone, probably by accident. Though Croatian authorities responded timely, immediately launching an investigation conducted by Croatian military, police and the State Attorney's Office, question remains why did NATO and its member states fail to provide a response, especially in a current international security climate. UAV crashing in the capital of NATO and EU member state leaves the rest of the small member states fearing for their security and doubting the alliance equal support for all members. The flight of drone through three NATO member states without any response from the Alliance leaves many questions in the air regarding legitimacy of the NATO.

“Slow Response”

Croatian authorities found themselves baffled by the event, as the UAV was able to fly from Ukraine all the way to Zagreb without being interrupted or attained for. Tu-141 has been used by Ukrainian and Russian military, yet both have persistently and indisputably denied the launch. Some military experts stated how Ukraine is the only known current operator of Tu-141; nevertheless the red-star demarcations have usually signalized Russian military. Investigation has uncovered that drone, originally used in reconnaissance missions, had been modified and, as ballistic examination concluded, was in this case an aerial bomb with a fuse.¹

What Croatian officials criticized as a “slow response”, proves to be no response at all. Though the drone spent only three minutes in Romania, making it hard to intercept, it had spent over 40 minutes flying over Hungary. Gordan Akrap, from Hybrid Warfare Research Institute in Croatia, believes that the whole event could have been avoided, had the

¹<https://balkaninsight.com/2022/03/24/crashed-drone-in-croatia-contained-fuse-investigation-says/>

Hungarian authorities sent surveillance aircrafts to check the UAV.¹ Croatian Defense Minister Mario Banožić agrees, stating how with a better response in neighbouring countries, situation could have been detected and resolved so the drone never threatens safety of Croatian citizens.² Prime Minister Andrej Plenković stated how it is not possible for Croatia to “tolerate the situation, nor should it have ever happened”.³ The Prime Minister openly criticized the lack of response, and called on Hungarian authorities to carry out an investigation, as Croatian and Romanian ability to react was limited with short scope of time UAV spent in their airspace. There is only so much Croatia could do in event of the crash, so at least in front of media, authorities chose to focus on dealing with the consequences and eventual prevention of similar incidents, rather than on how was it possible in the first place.⁴ Government officials maintained a careful approach, criticizing the lack of cooperation and centralization within the alliance, without naming names or deliberately putting the blame on NATO, that is, within the context suitable and tolerable to the condescending NATO.

The Realist Renaissance

NATO alliance, at least in this case, seems to be ruptured and ineffective in smaller, bordering member states. An insufficient coordination, both with the alliance command and within the member states are not only dissatisfactory, but also disadvantageous and dangerous. Due to what President Zoran Milanović calls “unsatisfactory” investments in the

¹ <https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/dr-gordan-akrap-da-su-madari-digli-lovce-koji-bi-vizualno-identificirali-letjelicu-cijela-situacija-s-dronom-se-vjerojatno-mogla-izbjeci-1176054>

² <https://hr.n1info.com/english/news/croatias-pm-nato-members-failed-to-react-to-drone-incident/>

³ <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-andrej-plenkovic-romania-nato-hungary-964f59e35e53bfbbba1e8805fd9f64de6>

⁴ <https://hr.n1info.com/english/news/croatias-pm-nato-members-failed-to-react-to-drone-incident/>

Croatian military in the past, Croatia lacks air defence and is left fully dependent on the Western allies until it receives 12 French Rafale fighter jets that it bought last year.¹ In other words, Croatia is not able to protect its territory and its borders on its own, and according to what happened, will not be safe. Romania's, Hungary's and Croatia's airspace are not the matter of the state's only, but are a NATO's airspace as well.

Interestingly enough, almost every public address held by Croatian government officials, explicitly or implicitly, addressed "both we (Croatia) and others (EU, NATO states)" underlined how this might as well happen in "other cities in any NATO or EU member state".² On the other hand, President Milanović insists how the crash is not a fault of NATO, but rather a responsibility of Hungarian authorities.³⁴

Between the lines of aforementioned addresses, it is possible to understand that Croatian officials are well aware that a crash in the middle of Zagreb is not of the same concern as the crash in the middle of large member state capitals, especially if no injuries occurred. Seemingly, Croatia should raise an issue to NATO, and Hungary, after the state security had been compromised, rather than NATO joint command, or Hungary, alarming the Croatian authorities, to avoid or minimize threats compromising it. What comes as yet another surprise is NATO's position about the whole situation, where the drone crash has been rapidly minimized or trivialized. Alliance and Western media tried to depreciate the scale or the event itself or didn't bother to do a further research on the topic, stating how the UAV crashed

¹ <https://hr.n1info.com/vijesti/policija-se-oglasila-o-eksploziji-u-zagrebu-pronasli-smo-krater-dva-padobrana/>

² <https://hr.n1info.com/english/news/croatias-pm-nato-members-failed-to-react-to-drone-incident/>

³ <https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/regija/milanovic-neki-nato-zvanicnici-nisu-niznali-da-je-dron-pao-u-zagrebu/451474>

⁴ <https://www.aviation24.be/miscellaneous/russo-ukrainian-war/unmanned-military-tu-141-strizh-drone-flies-through-nato-member-countries-and-crashes-near-zagreb-croatia/>

“near the capital”, in the “suburbs” and “outskirts” of the city.¹² Moreover, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg’s statement that the drone was unarmed and crashed when it ran out of fuel had to be dismissed by Prime Minister Plenković himself, after the ballistic investigation results released prior to Secretary-General’s statement suggested otherwise. Even after such an event, the alliance offered little to no help in investigation and identification of the UAV’s launching country.

Conclusion

Crash of the UAV in Zagreb raised number of issues for Croatia, and surprisingly a very few if NATO is concerned. Even though an airspace of a full-scale NATO member state was compromised, alliance failed to react, manage, or even label the clear security threat. Croatia is a vulnerable member, fully dependent on allies’ help in protecting Croatian skies. While slow and not very transparent investigation of Croatian authorities reveals not much about whether the attack was a deliberate mistake or an actual test, NATO alliance seems, for the time being, to downplay the danger posed by a crashed drone. During the deepening concerns over the future of the NATO, role of small member states has been contested on numerous occasions. Many criticized NATO for admission of small states, as they prove to be a setback rather than a contribution, and their manpower and material contributions fall far shorter than what the alliance provides for them. Nonetheless, one of the alliance’s fundamental motivations for admission, and simultaneously small states’ motivation for application, was dealing with Soviet threat, and later, after the fall of Communism, to be a defence alliance against any military threats to sovereignties of

¹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-12/drone-likely-flying-from-ukraine-war-zone-crashes-in-croatia/100904952>

² [https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/soviet-era-drone-believed-ukraine-crashes-croatia-zagreb-says-2022-03-11/#:~:text=ZAGREB%2C%20March%201%20\(Reuters\),deaths%20or%20injuries%20were%20reported.](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/soviet-era-drone-believed-ukraine-crashes-croatia-zagreb-says-2022-03-11/#:~:text=ZAGREB%2C%20March%201%20(Reuters),deaths%20or%20injuries%20were%20reported.)

member states. Today, after Russia's aggression on Ukraine, the motivation seems to have experienced its revival of the purpose, and the small, bordering states seem to be a perfect buffer, containing Russia and safeguarding well-situated large member states. Whether the UAV came from Russia or Ukraine officially still remains unknown. Nevertheless, NATO continues to have a reasonable , desperately seeking not to provoke Russia into direct conflict with NATO members, even when their own space has possibly been both penetrated and provoked. However, one cannot help but go back to think that the space provoked, does constitute a perfect buffer, that protects the core, and according to NATO, demands no reaction. Lack of responsiveness in case of UAV crash in Zagreb, revealed how NATO is fiercely stepping away from the liberal peace, values and cooperation, towards realist goals, survival and interest, and small states could possibly be the toll of the road they decided to take.

Czech Foreign Policy and the Ukrainian Crisis (March)

Ladislav Zemánek

Summary

The present study inquires into the present agenda of the Czech foreign policy in relation to the Ukrainian question through discursive analysis of the speeches made by Prime Minister Petr Fiala and Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Lipavský. It reveals the nodal points as well as origins of and external influence on the dominant discourse. Even though a broad political consensus has been formed in response to Russia's military operation in the Ukraine, dissenting views also exist notwithstanding the open efforts of the state authorities to eliminate them.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the year, the highest political representatives of the Czech Republic have made a lot of public statements regarding the country's foreign policy and a reformist vision of the international order as such. They corroborate the disrespect for the principles of peaceful coexistence which are fundamental in terms of securing just and legitimate international order at this stage of development, characteristic of a rise of multiple power centres and competition of different political and social models. The liberal democratic elites seek to introduce the so-called rules-based order and discourse based upon the dichotomy of „democracies“ vs. „autocracies“. Both concepts are to justify external confrontation, and internal repressive policies moving towards a form of liberal authoritarianism at the same time.¹

¹ See Zemánek, L. (2022). Metafyzické předpoklady liberální demokracie. *Filozofia*, 77 (2), pp. 71–84.

<https://www.sav.sk/journals/uploads/02202013filozofia.2022.77.2.1.pdf>

Militarisation and securitisation

Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Lipavský has emphasised the Russian (as well as Chinese) agenda from the very beginning of his tenure. On February 17, 2022, Lipavský publicly supported the interest group called „Friends of the Free Russia“ in the Senate, which has been active in interfering in Russia’s internal affairs. Not surprisingly, Minister called on to support „democratic activists and independent journalists“ in Russia in order to undermine the legitimate government.¹ At the 9th National Security Conference called „Our Security Cannot Be Taken for Granted“, held on March 10 at the Prague Castle, the incumbent Foreign Minister warned against the „revanchist and neo-imperial Russia“, against „Putin’s criminal regime“. Jan Lipavský put forward an idea of the establishment of a new security system in Europe based on NATO and the EU as opposed to Russia and other „autocracies“ wherever they are. Arriving at a conclusion that the security model based upon „openness, transparency and disarmament“ has failed because of Russia, Minister probably prefers militarism, exclusivity and a cold-war-type bloc that would disseminate and assert the so-called liberal democratic values and rules-based order. In internal terms, such a model would intensify repression against what is usually called the „fifth column“ and mobilise society with reference to the image of the external enemy.

This vision corresponds with Lipavský’s emotional words, according to which liberal democracies must „get rid of [Russia’s and China’s] malign influence that has been gaining strength here under the guise of influence operations, opaque trade ties, cyber-attacks, social networks and all-encompassing propaganda and disinformation machine.“² At a conference

¹ *Projev ministra Lipavského na setkání Přátel svobodného Ruska v Senátu* (2022, January 18). Ministerstvo zahraniční věcí České republiky. https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/o_ministerstvu/archivy/clanky_a_projevy_ministru/clanky_a_projevy_ministra/projev_ministra_na_setkani_pratel.html.

² *Projev ministra Lipavského na konferenci Naše bezpečnost není samozřejmost* (2022, March 10). Ministerstvo zahraniční věcí České republiky.

at the MFA headquarters on March 23, Minister followed this narrative and depicted Russia as a country that fights against liberal democracy, subverts the West as well as global security architecture, supports extremism and carries out attacks, sabotage and terrorist acts. It should be stressed that this rhetoric is common among the members of Petr Fiala's ruling cabinet so the discourse can be perceived as official. The roots of the narrative could be seen in the notorious concepts of „rogue states“ and „axis of evil“ as a part of the contemporary US state discourse which has been typical of extensive moralism and dualist *Weltanschauung*. These features are hardly compatible with real pluralism, polycentrism or peaceful coexistence. Such a context, therefore, helps to explain the nature and existence of the present conceptual antagonism between „democracies“ and „autocracies“ which has been so strongly promoted by the Biden Administration.

Political consensus and dissenting views

Some Czech experts including former chief of the military intelligence service Andor Šándor, on the contrary, admit that the collective West has denied the legitimacy of Russia's interests in the CEE region and conducted arrogant policies since the 1990s whereas neutrality of the Ukraine and its peaceful economic development would have been a pattern acceptable both for Europe and Russia.¹ Military expert Martin Koller, who worked for the Czech MFA, Ministry of Industry and Trade or Ministry of Defence, maintains an opinion that government-supported extremism aimed against the population in the Ukraine and violation of fundamental human rights of the Russia-speaking people is a matter of fact, therefore, Russia's military operation is justified. Koller believes that the Ukraine should have been

https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/o_ministerstvu/archivy/clanky_a_projevy_ministru/clanky_a_projevy_ministra/projev_ministra_lipavskeho_na_konferenci.html.

¹ *Jak jsme mohli tak naskočit USA. Šándor obrací kauzu Ukrajina* (2022, March 22). Parlamentní Listy.cz. <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Jak-jsume-mohli-tak-naskocit-USA-Sandor-obraci-kauzu-Ukrajina-696651>.

neutral and demilitarised.¹ Such balanced attitudes are, however, very far away from the opinions of a majority of the Czech political representation. Among the Czech political elite, a broad anti-Russian consensus has emerged, which has enabled the Czech Republic to become one of the most „hawkish“ countries in the current campaign. There are several reasons for that. First, the October election to the Chamber of Deputies reshaped the political landscape since it led to a debacle of the Communist Party that belongs to the opponents of NATO, the EU and the idea of Euro-Atlanticism. For the first time, Communists gained no seat in the lower chamber of the Parliament, whereas the majority of mandates got five liberal forces that formed a government coalition eventually. Second, it has entailed liberals' dominance in decisive bodies – both chambers of the Parliament and Government as well as security forces.² The position of President Miloš Zeman has consequently deteriorated substantially. Third, the recent anti-Russian actions build upon a campaign from the last year that was connected with the alleged „terrorist act“ carried out by the Russian Federation in Vrbětice in 2014. The present policies are a culmination of this longer-term tendency, the aim of which is to eliminate Russian (and also Chinese) activities and influence in the Czech Republic, strengthen liberal democratic institutions and repress the system opposition, be it political, intellectual or civic one. The internal agenda has overlapped with the international events related to the Ukrainian crisis.

Goals of the foreign policy

At the abovementioned security conference in March, Prime Minister Petr Fiala formulated basic points of the state anti-Russian policy: (1) imposition of harsher sanctions on Russia, for those approved so far have

¹ *Koller Martin: Není všechno v pořádku* (2022, March 18). YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sY2IL-2GhQk>.

² Zemánek, L. (2022, February 23). *The New Government and Changes in the State Security Agencies*. China-CEE Institute. <https://china-cee.eu/2022/02/23/czech-republic-political-briefing-the-new-government-and-changes-in-the-state-security-agencies/>.

not been sufficient; (2) supplies of arms and material aid to the Ukraine; (3) massive support of emigrants; (4) de-Russification of the Czech and European economy, particularly energy industry; (5) increase in expenditures to military affairs and army within the NATO framework.¹ Other features were specified by Minister of Foreign Affairs who stressed (i) the need for a radical restriction of entry of Russia's intelligence officers and journalists to the EU; (ii) adoption of measures aimed at the utmost isolation of Russia possible; (iii) militarisation and resilience-building of both the EU and other countries that are to be incorporated into the Euro-Atlantic structures such as Georgia or Moldova; (iv) punishment of the alleged „war crimes“; (v) preparation of reparations for the Ukraine to be paid by Russia; (vi) adoption of a strategy aimed at the withdrawal of Russian troops from Abkhazia, Belarus, South Ossetia and Transnistria; (vii) revision of the five principles of the EU's Russia policy.² The guiding principles were formulated in 2016 as follows: full implementation of the Minsk agreements as a condition of lifting the economic sanctions, closer ties with Russia's neighbours, strengthening resilience to „Russian threats“, selective cooperation in chosen areas (counter-terrorism, climate change), and support for Russian civil society and people-to-people contacts.³

Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský wants to address these issues within the Czech presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of this year and it is probable that the agenda pushed forward by the ruling Czech liberal democrats will be radical and confrontational. It contradicts both to Czech Republic's long-term national interests as well as to the interests of

¹ *Projev předsedy vlády Petra Fialy na konferenci Naše bezpečnost není samozřejmost* (2022, March 10). Vláda České republiky. <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/clenove-vlady/premier/projevy/projev-predsedy-vlady-petra-fialy-na-konferenci-nase-bezpecnost-neni-samozrejmost-194927/>.

² *Úvodní slovo ministra zahraničních věcí Jana Lipavského na semináři „Kde jsou hranice?“* (2022, March 23). Ministerstvo zahraniční věcí České republiky. https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/o_ministerstvu/archivy/clanky_a_projevy_ministru/clanky_a_projevy_ministra/uvodni_slovo_ministra_zahranicnich_veci.html.

³ *The EU's Russia policy: Five guiding principles* (2018, February 08). European Parliament. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)614698](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2018)614698).

the EU as a whole, especially if the latter is seeking to gain real actorness and become an independent power centre as the concept of strategic autonomy suggests.¹ At the same time, the anti-Russian agenda is shared by the adjacent Poland that has played the US card for a long period, being the crucial pillar of NATO in the CEE region. Not by coincidence, it was Petr Fiala with his Polish counterpart Mateusz Morawiecki, leader of the ruling party Law and Justice Jarosław Kaczyński (and also Slovenian PM Janez Janša) who held talks with Volodymyr Zelenskyi in Kiev.² Although presenting the visit as an EU mission, it was rather an action motivated by particular interests of Polish and Czech leaders.³ It can be connected with the strategic aim of strengthening Polish influence in the Ukraine in conformity with the geopolitical vision of the Three Seas Initiative.

Conclusion

The Czech foreign policy including policies towards Russia has started to be formed by liberal actors only. President Zeman has conformed to the anti-Russian political consensus despite the fact that his stances were typical of balance and absence of bias for a long time. After the military operation was launched, Miloš Zeman compared the events to the outbreak of WWII, calling the operation „unacceptable aggression“.⁴ In response,

¹ Borrell, J. (2020, December 03). *Why European strategic autonomy matters*. European External Action Service. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89865/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters_en.

² *Premiér Fiala jednal v Kyjevě s ukrajinským prezidentem Zelenským o další pomoci i o sankcích vůči Rusku* (2022, March 17). Vláda České republiky. <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/media-centrum/aktualne/premier-fiala-jednal-v-kyjeve-s-ukrajinskym-prezidentem-zelenskym-o-dalsi-pomoci-i-o-sankcich-vuci-rusku-195118/>.

³ *Premiéři neměli na cestu do Kyjeva mandát EU, všímají si Němci* (2022, March 17). iDNES.cz. https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/zahranicni/kyjev-ischinger-ukrajina-premieri-polsko-ischinger-cesko-slovinsko-fiala-valka-eu.A220317_131853_zahranicni_jhr.

⁴ *Světnička, L. (2022, March 10). Ruská invaze přiblížila svět k jeho konci, řekl Zeman a vyzval ke zbrojení*. iDNES.cz. <https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/nato/zeman->

President awarded state honour to the Ukrainian counterpart and supported the country's immediate candidacy to the EU.¹ A less one-sided attitude can be observed in the case of oppositional Freedom and Direct Democracy movement and some non-parliamentary political subjects. These, however, do not influence state policies at the moment.

[bezpecnost-konference-jagello-ukrajina-rusko-
valka.A220309_191400_zpr_nato_inc.](#)

¹ *Open letter by Presidents in support of Ukraine's swift candidacy to the European Union* (2022, February 28). President of the CR. <https://www.hrad.cz/en/for-media/press-releases/open-letter-by-presidents-in-support-of-ukraines-swift-candidacy-to-the-european-union-16316>.

Adopting to a New Reality, but Trying to Get on with the Routine... (March)

E-MAP Foundation MTÜ

Helping Ukraine has become a global trend these days. In general, the vast majority of countries managed to work it out regarding who is who in the Russo-Ukrainian War, and there is no real ‘but’ in narrating an analytical story on what is currently going on. At the same time, it is almost unknown that the biggest ‘helpers’ of Ukraine are not the most powerful economies or the most populated countries. For example, on the level of the Estonian society (by the middle of April), as indicated by the country’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the “people, public and private sector [donated] more than EUR 13 million in total in humanitarian aid”, and it is known that “at least one in three people in Estonia have made a donation in support of Ukraine”¹.

On the level of the state, on the per capita basis (as reported by *Kiel Institute for the World Economy*), the list of Ukraine’s main supporters consists of Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia and Sweden, but it is led by ... Estonia!² Out of the country’s GDP of USD 30.65 billion (2020), “Estonia’s support for Ukraine totalled 0.8 per cent of it [...] during the first month of the war”, placing the Baltic/Nordic state on the top. Commenting on the finding, Prime Minister Kaja Kallas noted that “[w]hile Ukraine has not won, we haven’t done enough”³. Factually, the latter statement was in the same line

¹ ‘Foreign Minister Liimets at the Estonian Parliament: at least one in three Estonians have donated to Ukraine’ in *Välisministeerium*, 12 April 2022. Available from [<https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-liimets-estonian-parliament-least-one-three-estonians-have-donated-ukraine>].

² ‘Estonia sent Ukraine aid worth 0.8 percent of GDP in first month of war’ in *ERR*, 20 April 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608570313/estonia-sent-ukraine-aid-worth-0-8-percent-of-gdp-in-first-month-of-war>].

³ Kaja Kallas as cited in ‘Estonia sent Ukraine aid worth 0.8 percent of GDP in first month of war’.

with what the Estonian Prime Minister delivered a few days after, speaking at the *Friedrich Naumann Stiftung*:

[I]t is equally necessary we get the message through to our people – what is our neighbo[u]r’s problem today will be our problem tomorrow. We are in danger, when our neighbo[u]r’s house is on fire.¹

Evidently, this position of Estonia is very well noted on the Ukrainian side. A sizeable delegation of the Ukrainian parliament, *Verkhovna Rada*, visited the *Riigikogu* as well as the refugee centre in Tallinn, and Olena Šuliak, a Ukrainian MP, publicly praised Estonia’s efforts in the process of recognising the main points of Ukraine’s foreign policy. During her interview to an Estonian TV programme, Šuliak noted the following:

Estonia was the first country in the world to recognise the *Holodomor* as a crime and it could become the first to recognise Russia’s genocide against Ukraine by calling it what it is. It matters a great deal to us, as what Putin is doing is not just war, it is the destruction of the Ukrainian nation. [...] The war might not end just like that. It could spread to Europe and affect the entire world order. It is important for Estonia to set an example for the world and the EU with its position on the destruction of the Ukrainian people by the Russian Federation.²

The ‘Estonian theme’ has also been noticed on the EU-wide diplomatic platform. It happened in April when Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the President

¹ Kaja Kallas as cited in ‘Kaja Kallas: ‘Our neighbor’s problem today will be our problem tomorrow’’, *ERR*, 26 April 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608578038/kaja-kallas-our-neighbor-s-problem-today-will-be-our-problem-tomorrow>].

² Olena Šuliak as cited in ‘Ukrainian MPs in Estonia: Russian actions in Ukraine genocide’, *ERR*, 21 April 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608571333/ukrainian-mps-in-estonia-russian-actions-in-ukraine-genocide>].

of Ukraine, handed over his Government's answers to the EU accession-focused questionnaire to the entity's top representative in Ukraine, Ambassador Matti Maasikas¹. The Estonian diplomat, while immediately noting that he was "honoured to receive" the documents that can be considered "another step on Ukraine's EU path", later commented on social media that "[e]xtraordinary times take extraordinary steps and extraordinary speed"², reflecting on how quickly Ukraine completed the European Commission-submitted questionnaire.

Objectively, considering the very lucid position of Estonia and the rest of the Baltics on what goes on in Ukraine, the Russian Federation's attitude towards the Baltic states is predictable. Closer to the end of April, the Kremlin advised Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania that Russia had decided to shut down the Baltics' consulates in the country, and it is considered "a retaliatory measure after earlier moves made"³ by the Baltic trio. Locations wise, as reported, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated that the consulates in St. Petersburg and Pskov must be closed, and their "non-Russian staff have been labelled *persona non-grata*"⁴ to leave Russia. Eva-Maria Liimets (*Center*), Estonia's Minister of Foreign Affairs immediately issued her extended statement of the development, underlining that the Russian Federation's action was not "not completely unexpected" (on 5 April 2022, Estonia ordered to close Russian consulates, expelling 14 people):

¹ 'Zelenskyy hands Ukrainian EU accession answers to diplomat Matti Maasikas' in *ERR*, 19 April 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608569107/zelenskyy-hands-ukrainian-eu-accession-answers-to-diplomat-matti-maasikas>].

² Matti Maasikas as cited in 'Zelenskyy hands Ukrainian EU accession answers to diplomat Matti Maasikas'.

³ 'Russia shuts Baltic states' consulates in St. Petersburg, Pskov' in *ERR*, 21 April 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608571876/russia-shuts-baltic-states-consulates-in-st-petersburg-pskov>].

⁴ 'Russia shuts Baltic states' consulates in St. Petersburg, Pskov'.

Estonia's decision to reduce its diplomatic contacts with Russia is the result of Russia's war against Ukraine and the horrendous crimes that have been uncovered in the areas of Ukraine occupied by Russia. It has also been established that Russian diplomats were directly and actively undermining Estonia's security in Estonia and spreading propaganda justifying Russia's war. [...] Our position is unequivocal – by continuing its extensive war against Ukraine, Russia is violating in the gravest possible way both international law as well as the international commitments it has voluntarily taken upon itself.¹

This position is, arguably, in the line with the EU Global Gateway strategy, when it comes to the EU's approach on Ukraine and the entity's prospective "contribut[ion] to post-war rebuilding efforts in Ukraine – as noted, "[t]he aim of the Global Gateway initiative is to advance high-quality and sustainable infrastructure projects according to the principles of trusted connectivity"². In addition, the fundamental basis of the process has the following two operational parts: firstly, "the EU must keep up its united and severe pressure on Russia for the country to end its war against Ukraine" and, secondly, "Russia must account for the destruction and suffering it has caused"³. From the Estonian side, as suggested by Minister Liimets, the country "has proposed imposing restrictions on the main sources of income of Russia's state budget, mainly oil and gas imports" and "some of the money paid for Russia's energy carriers should be frozen in an escrow account that could be used for rebuilding efforts in Ukraine in the future"⁴.

¹ Eva-Maria Liimets as cited in 'Russia shuts Baltic states' consulates in St. Petersburg, Pskov'.

² 'Foreign Minister Liimets at the Foreign Affairs Council: Russia must rebuild what it has destroyed in Ukraine' in *Välisministeerium*, 11 April 2022. Available from [https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-liimets-foreign-affairs-council-russia-must-rebuild-what-it-has-destroyed].

³ Eva-Maria Liimets as cited in 'Foreign Minister Liimets at the Foreign Affairs Council: Russia must rebuild what it has destroyed in Ukraine'.

⁴ Liimets as cited in 'Foreign Minister Liimets at the Foreign Affairs Council: Russia must rebuild what it has destroyed in Ukraine'.

Without any doubts, for this proposal to be implemented, the unified effort of the entire EU needs to be articulate, and the upcoming summit of the European Council (scheduled for 23-24 June 2022) can clarify plenty of important issues, including the one of Ukraine's prospects to ever become a Member State of the EU.

In the meantime, in April, a range of noticeable protest was organised by different societal groups in front of the Russian Embassy in Tallinn. It was very graphic and expressive, since the protesters' claim was that "Russian soldiers are raping and killing innocent women and children in Ukraine"¹. On 13 April, Kaja Kallas, the Prime Minister of Estonia, praised the participants on her social media account, describing the event as a "[v]ery powerful protest"². Evidently, both the Estonian society and the state are on the same page, understanding wise, on the very nature of the Russo-Ukrainian War. Reflecting on this conflict in a distinctly practical manner – Estonia simply treats it as a security threat for the European politico-strategic architecture – the Baltic/Nordic country quickly became a leading help-provider for Ukraine and its needs. In its immediate neighbourhood, Russia is becoming increasingly isolated as a partner in communication. If there was ever any diplomacy-bound trust between Russia and Estonia before, the Kremlin objectively did an excellent job in ruining every feature associated with its own adequacy and capacity to be a responsible member of the international community of nations. From this point onwards, any prospective effort to stop the war will have to be 'dealing' with a desire of many countries, including Estonia, to hold the Russian Federation fully accountable for its aggressive behaviour.

¹ 'PHOTOS) Protests at the Russian Embassy against crimes of Russian soldiers' in *Postimees*, 19 April 2022. Available from [<https://news.postimees.ee/7503521/photos-protests-at-the-russian-embassy-against-crimes-of-russian-soldiers>].

² Kaja Kallas, *Twitter*, 13 April 2022. Available from [<https://twitter.com/kajakallas/status/1514291347372625933?lang=en>].

The Ukrainian Crisis and Greek-Turkish Relations (March)

Evelyn Karakatsani

Summary

This briefing presents the current status of Greek-Turkish relations in the light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The emergence of a new world balance and unprecedented challenges could potentially create an opportunity for Greece and Turkey to establish channels of cooperation and improve bilateral relations. Efforts to create more friendly conditions in the relations between the two countries have been monitored. However, thorny issues are diachronic, and it is unlikely for them to be solve in the near future.

Introduction

Greece and Turkey have made efforts to stabilize their relations, despite the tentative disputes at the Aegean, as well as the Cyprus issue. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has created a new geopolitical environment. The current circumstances demand the NATO members to cooperate along the same lines. Thus, both countries have called Russia to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Greece, considering its membership to the EU as well, has openly condemned the Russian invasion and taken sanctions against it. However, Turkey, follows a more independent policy, by balancing between Russia and the West and mediating in Russia-Ukraine dialogues. Despite this rather neutral position of Turkey, the demand for a NATO cohesion could potentially generate the momentum for the two countries to increase their cooperation. The recent meeting of PM Mitsotakis and President Erdogan, signals the intention to create a positive climate in the relations of the two countries. However, critical issues are still in place and more effort will be needed in order to reach a settlement.

The visit of PM Mitsotakis to President Erdogan

In March, the Greek PM visited Istanbul to celebrate the Feast of Orthodoxy at the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Fanari. On the 13th of March PM Mitsotakis, during his visit, met with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Istanbul to discuss the regional consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The meeting was held at the Vahdettin Mansion and lasted for approximately an hour and a half. The Greek PM noted “With all that is occurring, we have many things to discuss about our region” and Turkish president added “we’ll discuss everything”. At the completion of the meeting, the Turkish presidency, through a statement declared that, despite the existing disagreements, the two countries agreed to improve bilateral relations and keep the communication channels open, since both Greece and Turkey can play a key role in the changing security situation in Europe after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the improved cooperation of the two countries would benefit the region (1).

It should be mentioned that concerning the Russian invasion both Greece and Turkey, as NATO members, have declared their objection to Russia’s violation of the international law and urgently called for a peaceful resolution to be reached. Greece, which traditionally enjoys good relations with Russia, has openly taken sides against Russia after the invasion. The government condemned the war actions and decisions of Vladimir Putin and proceeded to economic sanctions against Russia, in the framework of its membership at the EU. Further, Greece decided to send to Ukraine humanitarian and military aid. On the other hand, Turkey is strategically balancing between the West and Russia and seeks to mediate in the conflict. In particular, Ankara has opposed the sanctions taken by the West to isolate Moscow. Nevertheless, it has closed the straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles, as per the Montreux Convention in order to prevent the crossing of Russian warships from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea.

On 10th of March the first talks since the start of Russia’s invasion between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Ukrainian Foreign Minister

Dmytro Kuleba took place in Antalya, a Turkish resort town. The meeting was attended by the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, as well. However, no breakthrough was monitored. Moreover, the Ukrainian negotiator David Arakhamia, recently announced that the second round of talks between Moscow and Kyiv will take place on 28-30 March in Turkey. Despite the failure of reaching an agreement and the difficulties presented, Ankara considers the arrangement of the talks itself as a success. Turkey's position can be explained by the close relations and cooperation in energy, defence and tourism sectors with Russia, as well as Ukraine. Erdogan believes that the ability to talk with both sides is an asset for his country and has numerous times emphasised during his talks that Turkey will not dissolve the relations either with Russia not with Ukraine.

Greece pays close attention to all these initiatives of Turkey in each interest to analyze whether Turkey will succeed in upgrading its position in the West. Against this backdrop Greece is relatively satisfied with the content of the new strategic compass document. This reads as such "Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean remain, due to provocations and unilateral actions against EU Member States and violations of sovereign rights in breach of international law, as well as the instrumentalization of irregular migration, and have the potential to escalate quickly; ensuring a stable and secure environment as well as a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship, in line with the principle of good neighbourly relations, is in the interest of both the EU and Turkey". Turkey by contrast deep complained.

Greek-Turkish relations

Since last month Greece has closely observes the balancing strategy of Turkey. On the one side, the two countries, as NATO members and regional powers of stability and security, need to find a common ground on the Ukrainian crisis, but on the other critical issues between them still remain. Moreover, Turkey's ambiguous external strategy, by not openly been in line with the West and against Russia, raise doubts in the West.

However, the meeting between the two leaders in Istanbul is considered an opportunity for the creation of a positive climate between the two countries and a way to come closer to the ending of disputes.

Both sides, since 2021, cultivate a “positive agenda” towards achieving a fertile ground of cooperation. The Greek Deputy Minister for Economic Diplomacy and Openness recently stated that the positive agenda concerns the promotion of bilateral relations between Greece and Turkey with emphasis on issues of economy, such as transport, environment, tourism, small and medium-sized enterprises. The results brought so far are the reactivation by both countries of the Joint Economic Committee with the aim of overcoming problems that hinder trade, the Forum for the promotion of tourism and the increase of tourist flows from both sides, the impetus for the construction of a new border bridge in Evros (Kipi - Ypsala) and the cooperation between ferry companies for the maritime connection Thessaloniki - Smyrna, with the relevant decisions to be announced at the next meeting of the positive agenda. Thus, all these are steps towards promoting bilateral economic relations that only mutual benefits can bring. Furthermore, he stressed that Greece's positions in national issues are clear and non-negotiable, and as long as Turkey chooses to make provocative statements and raise issues under international law, this obviously complicates the resurgence of relations. Nevertheless, the Deputy Minister argued that by creating a positive climate, in whatever area this is possible, could alleviate tensions in other areas as well (2).

The French President Emmanuel Macron, after European Council's Summit, announced the coordinated efforts between France, Greece and Turkey to organize an initiative for assisting people evacuate Mariupol, the city most severely hit by Russian bombardment, with thousands of people believed to be still trapped in poor conditions and limit access to food and power. Macron also mentioned that he hopes to have a conversation with President Putin as soon as possible to finalize the relevant details. The initiative clearly demonstrates the good will of the two countries, under the coordinating framework of France, to cooperate towards a common goal, by helping Ukrainian citizens in these difficult times (3).

On the 16th of March Greek Minister of National Defense Nikolaos Panagiotopoulos and Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, held a meeting, on the sidelines of NATO Summit. The Turkish Minister, following the meeting stated at the Turkish media “We have honest, transparent and clear talks with the Prime Minister to promote a positive atmosphere. Aiming for the peoples of the two countries to prosper. To share the treasures and beauties of the Aegean. There is tourism, fishing and various other resources. We are in favor of the common use” and added “...we saw a positive response from our Greek counterpart. We expect them to move in this direction in the next period”. In the aftermath of the meeting, Minister Panagiotopoulos in his comments stressed the importance of reducing tensions and consolidating the security climate in the Eastern Mediterranean under the rules of international law and the principle of good neighborliness (4). However, it should be mentioned that the Greek Minister in response to the statements of his counterpart for co-exploitation of the Aegean denied that the two Ministers discussed the issue and stressed that the discussion focused on the conditions and possibilities of consolidating a climate of calm and security in the Aegean region, away from tensions, provocative behaviors and statements of impression and that a good climate in bilateral relations can be extremely beneficial for both countries, especially in view of the upcoming tourist season (5).

Apparently, Greece and Turkey make steps towards achieving a positive climate of cooperation. The Russian invasion of Ukraine crisis may work as a catalyst. The current circumstances demand for a strong-cohesive NATO, which arguably impacts on Turkey’s alleged revisionist agenda. The Greek government needs to be prepared to seize the momentum and defend the country’s sovereign rights, as well as stabilize the relations with Turkey (6). Such goal is not easy to be achieved since the issues at stake are of a high importance for both countries. However, channels of dialogue should remain open, as well as the positive cooperation of the two countries, for the benefit of its people.

Conclusion

The recent meeting between the leaders of Greece and Turkey following the Russia invasion of Ukraine, is a step towards the cultivation of a positive climate between the two countries. In addition, the two countries recently engage in numerous initiatives of cooperation. Thus, the current crisis has created a window of opportunity for Athens and Ankara to establish better relations. Nevertheless, the new geopolitical environment does not itself solve Greek-Turkish problems especially the issue of maritime zones delimitation which remains at the core of disagreements in the Eastern Mediterranean. Without bilateral steps towards this direction Greek-Turkish relations will continuously suffer by pre-existing disagreements.

References

- 1) TO BHMA (2022) “Mitsotakis, Erdogan conclude high-profile meeting in Istanbul, amid shadow of war in Ukraine” Available in Greek at <https://www.tovima.gr/2022/03/13/international/mitsotakis-erdogan-conclude-high-profile-meeting-in-istanbul-amid-shadow-of-war-in-ukraine/>
- 2) TO BHMA (2022) «Ελληνοτουρκικά: Το στοίχημα της θετικής ατζέντας – Ο Κώστας Φραγκογιάννης στο ΒΗΜΑ» Available at <https://www.tovima.gr/2022/03/26/politics/ellinotourkika-to-stoixima-tis-thetikis-atzentas-o-kostas-fragkogiannis-sto-vima/>
- 3) Ekathimerini (2022) “Macron: Coordinating with Greece, Turkey over Mariupol evacuation” Available at <https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/1180694/macron-coordinating-with-greece-turkey-over-mariupol-siege/>
- 4) Η ΚΑΘΗΜΕΡΙΝΗ (2022) «Ελληνοτουρκικά: Για συνεκμετάλλευση του πλούτου στο Αιγαίο μιλά ο Ακάρ» Available in Greek at <https://www.kathimerini.gr/politics/561766492/ellinotourkika-gia-synekmetalleysi-toy-ploytoy-sto-aigaio-mila-o-akar/>

- 5) ΠΡΩΤΟ ΘΕΜΑ (2022) «Παναγιωτόπουλος διαψεύδει Ακάρ: Ασφαλώς και δεν συζητήσαμε θέμα «συνεκμετάλλευσης του Αιγαίου» Available in Greek at <https://www.protothema.gr/politics/article/1223276/panagiotopoulos-diapseudei-akar-asfalos-kai-den-tethike-thema-sunekmetalleusis-tou-aigaiou/>
- 6) Protagon (2022) George N. Tzogopoulos «Το τετ α τετ στην Πόλη: τα ελληνοτουρκικά μέσω NATO» Available in Greek at <https://www.protagon.gr/themata/to-tet-a-tet-stin-poli-ta-ellinotourkika-mesw-nato-44342461431>

Hungarian Foreign Policy in the First Days of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine (February)

Csaba Moldicz

Russian military forces launched an offensive against Ukraine on February 24, 2022. After World War II, this is the first time we have seen a war between two sovereign states in Europe. (The Yugoslav war can be considered a military conflict that started as a civil war and led to the disintegration of the country.) Under international law, 'war' is not one of the permissible means countries may use in their conflicts. This may sound trivial, but before 1945, war was considered a legal means of settling international conflicts between states. In other words, the military invasion of Russia may be explicable, but it is neither acceptable legally or morally.

Introduction

Hungary is a member of NATO and thus has obligations if the common security of the NATO members would be threatened. This is now the case because the war is raging in a neighboring country and other NATO countries (Romania, Poland, Slovakia) are also neighboring countries. The security of the Baltic countries is also fragile, even though they do not border Ukraine but Russia. In addition, as we experienced during the Yugoslav civil war in the 1990s, waves of migration can hit the country and Hungary needs to be prepared. This briefing looks at Hungarian reactions to the war in Ukraine.

Preparation for humanitarian crisis and foreign policy steps

The most important principle of Hungary's foreign policy is that Hungary must not be involved in this military conflict, at the same time – as a member of NATO and the EU – it must support joint efforts to restore peace in Ukraine and implement humanitarian measures and protect its borders.

This principle does not contradict the principle of pragmatism, which seeks economic benefits for the country. This approach was already followed in the period before the war. However, the war overrides this former policy as Hungary seeks to ease the pain and help its neighboring country.

The Hungarian Embassy in Kiev and the consulates in Uzhhorod and Berehove had to make a special effort last week to expedite paperwork to help Hungarian and non-Hungarian citizens. Hungary has also promised to speed up the border crossing of humanitarian transports. Unlike migrants from the south, refugee claims can be made here in Hungary, while migrants from the south must wait outside the country for a decision. The main reason for this difference is that migrants from Syria and Afghanistan have traveled through so-called safe countries, while this is not the case here. The first safe country for refugees from Ukraine is Hungary. The Hungarian government acts accordingly and people from Ukraine are granted temporary protected status. According to media reports, while a large proportion of these people now crossing the border are ethnic Hungarians, the arrangement also includes people with Ukrainian citizenship and residents of Ukraine. These decisions were made by the recently established National Security Staff.

At the EU summit last week, the leaders of the EU member states adopted a package of sanctions against Russia. Hungary was accused of not supporting the decisions, but these accusations turned out to be false. Moreover, the decision to exclude Russia from the SWIFT system was also supported by Hungary, while it was Germany that initially prevented this decision. (The Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications [SWIFT], the world's largest clearinghouse for cross-border payments, dominated by the United States. When sanctions are imposed on a country, it is extremely difficult for that country to trade with the rest of the world. This is what happened to Iran in 2021. It is estimated that the cost to Iran's GDP of the full implementation of sanctions was 16.2 percent of what its GDP actually was during that period and 13.9 percent of what it would have been had sanctions not been imposed). Over the

weekend, it emerged that the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the EU have agreed to exclude Russia from the SWIFT system.

The Hungarian Foreign Minister told the media the following information about government measures:

- Hungary supports Ukraine by sending food and other necessary goods to the neighboring region of Transcarpathia.
- At the request of the region's governor, Hungary sent 100 thousand liters of gasoline to the region.
- The Hungarian government and the Hungarian Interchurch Aid have already sent 28 tons aid to the region.
- Next week, the Ministry will allocate 100 million euros to Hungarian Interchurch Aid for the purchase of goods to be sent to the region.
- The minister also told the media that Hungary will open six aid stations near the border. (Beregsurány, Tiszabecs, Záhony, Barabás, Lónya and Beregdaróc were mentioned as possible locations for the aid stations). Regarding the number of people who left Ukraine because of the war, the minister mentioned that since the beginning of the invasion on February 24, 2022, about 66 thousand people have crossed the border. (It should be added that the European Union must be ready to receive millions of refugees from the crisis region, according to the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson. On February 27, 2022 she said that about 300 thousand people have already arrived from Ukraine).

The minister confirmed the government's position that war is never a solution, and that Hungary has a high interest in maintaining peace and providing security for its citizens. At the same time, we know that Hungary offered Budapest as a place for negotiations between the two countries. The offer was neither accepted nor rejected by Ukraine and Russia.

Impact on the Hungarian economy

Even if we hope that the war will not last long, we must take a look at the economic impact of military actions in Ukraine. Before the war started, the HUF exchange rate was 361. (This means that one had to pay 361 forints to get one euro.) Immediately when it became clear that war was breaking out, the HUF weakened by 5 forints and the exchange rate was 371 in the evening. On February 24, the Hungarian currency weakened by about 2.7 percent. Since then, the forint has strengthened, and its exchange rate is 365 on Friday (February 27, 2022).

The real impact of the war is that international investors begin to divest from Hungary and stop buying Hungarian bonds. In this respect, the duration of the war does not matter, because even if the war would end or negotiations would start soon, the political solution of the situation will take time and the uncertainty will continue for several years. The continued uncertainty will most likely keep energy prices high in the European region, and we do not yet know if the energy will be supplied by Russia. These factors will fuel high inflation, which will not subside in mid-2022 as it otherwise would have.

Summary

We have argued in our previous briefings that Hungary's foreign relations are easy to forecast because they are characterized by economic pragmatism. Hungary cannot and will not participate in the superpower power game and focuses mainly on economic opportunities in shaping its relations with other countries. Relations with Russia were characterized by the same principles until the war, but war takes precedence over economic benefits. Hungary has always respected the obligations arising from its NATO membership and its membership in the European Union. Hungary has followed the same path in this case as well. It implemented economic sanctions against Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and tried to maintain economic relations within the framework set by those sanctions, even though economic pragmatism would urge the country to diversify its

trade and investment relations and expanding economic relations with Russia would have contributed to this process.

The same happened this time, it supported economic sanctions against Russia, including Russia's exclusion from the SWFT system. It has also provided substantial human assistance to Ukraine, including helping people coming from Ukraine. It should be added that this is not only state or church aid, but also the Hungarian people have voluntarily provided assistance. Based on the Nézőpont Research Institute's survey, 80 percent of Hungarians (eligible voters) does not support the idea of shipping military equipment to Ukraine. The poll was carried out between February 18 and March 2, 2022, and involved 1.000 people. The public opinion is shared with the Hungarian government which does not support the involvement of Hungary into the conflict but focuses on humanitarian assistance.

Finland and Sweden to Join NATO: How It Affects Latvia (May)

Institute of Economics at the Latvian Academy of Sciences

Summary

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 dramatically changed the security of the Baltic Sea region, including Latvia. Following high security threats in the Baltic Sea region, Finland and Sweden applied for NATO membership on 18 May, 2022. Given that Latvia's security and defence policy is based on NATO, this is an important event that will affect Latvia's security. The main security threats arising from the accession of the countries are Russia's potential aggression and the deployment of a military arsenal in the Baltic Sea region, as well as the actualization of hybrid warfare through cyber-attacks and propaganda materials. However, the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO is the most significant improvement in the security situation in the region since NATO enlargement in 2004, and the Baltic States will strongly benefit from it.

Introduction

At the NATO Summit in Prague in 2002, 7 countries were invited to start NATO accession talks, including Latvia. This process ended in 2004 with the accession of the countries. Finland and Sweden have long abstained from joining the alliance. Sweden has had close bilateral cooperation with NATO throughout the post-war years. Its leading army officers are trained in NATO, its weapons and technical equipment are harmonized, and so on. In recent years, Sweden has spoken out against NATO, citing its traditional policy of neutrality. However, despite the policy of neutrality and abstinence, after the high security threats in the Baltic Sea region, on May

18 this year, both countries applied for NATO membership. In this Latvia External briefing of May 2022, the benefits and disadvantages of Finland and Sweden's joining NATO and the impact on Latvia will be presented.

I Latvian Security Policy

At the core of Latvia's security policy is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but at the regional level the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), which has historically existed as a strategically important point between the wider Arctic and Black Sea. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, launched in February 2022, is a major threat to NATO and the Baltic Sea region's potential aggression in the form of cyber-attacks and military attacks. In May, Russia announced its withdrawal from the Council of the Baltic Sea States, as the organization was becoming an *"instrument of anti-Russian policy"* and *"increasingly engrossed in Russophobia and lies"*. As a result of these tense political developments and concerns that Russia's aggression could spread to the Baltic Sea region, the governments of Sweden and the Finland decided to apply for NATO membership. A letter of formal notice was submitted to the NATO Secretary General on 18 May this year. These are fundamental changes in the security bloc of NATO and the Baltic Sea region, which directly affects Latvia's security, with positive and negative consequences.

II Benefits for Latvia

The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO is the most significant improvement in the security situation in the Baltic Sea region. Firstly, it means a stronger Allied presence, more important security guarantees for the whole region and Latvia. Second, it would mean more joint military training, the possible creation of new NATO bases, and the facilitation of the transport of equipment and units in the event of an attack. In turn, in the future, the presence of Finland and Sweden as full NATO members would

result in a faster response capability, which would significantly improve the security of the region. Given NATO's current hierarchy, the military powers - Germany, France, and the United States - would not be able to react quickly enough in the event of a potential attack, so the support of Poland, Finland and Sweden is fundamental to preventing a potential military threat. The “anti-access/area denial” in the Kaliningrad region, which is a significant military threat to the Baltic States, plays a fundamental role here. Sweden is one of the world's largest manufacturers of military equipment and weapons. Latvia's proximity to Sweden and being in a common alliance is a great benefit. Of course, this is also Russia's deterrence mechanism, it is less willing to show aggression here if there are even more strong allies nearby.

In addition to the benefits of the security spectrum, the economic sector would also improve significantly. The question of the region's perception of security is topical. As the Baltic Sea region becomes safer, it will be easier to attract investment, as purely psychologically investors will be more confident that the region is safe. So far, Russia's proximity and potential aggression from its eastern neighbours has deterred greater investment in the Baltics. Thus, military co-operation between the Baltic States and the Scandinavian countries has the potential to develop economic growth.

III Potential Threats

As a reaction to the supposedly fundamental changes in the Baltic Sea region, or NATO enlargement, Turkey's reaction is the complete opposite: it has announced that the alliance will block the accession of Finland and Sweden. This is a negative aspect, which in the worst case will shake the NATO alliance and negatively affect the security of Latvia and the region. Turkey is the second largest NATO member of the military after the United States, so Turkey's membership is fundamental to the Alliance as a whole. According to Turkey, it does not matter whether NATO has 30 or 32

members, but in relation to Latvia's security, this proximity of the Allies to the Baltic Sea region is very important. Political experts point out that Turkey's position is not a surprise, but a traditional bargaining for advocacy.

Regarding Russia's reaction to the Scandinavian countries' accession to NATO, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has said that the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO would force Russia to think about strengthening its western border. Russia's deputy chairman of the Security Council, former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, has warned that if Finland and Sweden join the NATO alliance, Russia will have to deploy nuclear weapons in the Baltic Sea region to "restore the balance of power". Already in 2018, Russia announced that it had deployed Iskandar missile complexes in the Kaliningrad region. These missiles have a range of up to 500 km, so they can reach their targets in the Baltics. Experts have described Medvedev's threats as strange, because it is no secret that Russia's nuclear weapons have already been deployed in the Kaliningrad region, which does not significantly change the level of the existing threat.

With regard to the hybrid threat, it is important to assess the consequences of NATO enlargement for the internal society of Latvian society. The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO would significantly increase NATO's presence in Latvia, which would result in the spread of false news. As a result, when Latvia's domestic policy is aimed at eliminating the Soviet legacy and foreign policy at deploying a wider Allied military in Latvia, Russia could potentially respond with sanctions against Latvia, exacerbated by NATO enlargement. In addition, cyber attacks on Latvian Internet sites such as "ziedot.lv" and "draugiem.lv" have been observed, and the proportion of such attacks may increase as military security in the Baltic Sea region improves. Although this scenario is not widely supported and is unlikely to pose a major security threat to the activities of Kremlin supporters in Latvia, it will certainly open up a wide range of propaganda in both Russia and the Baltic States.

Conclusions

Considering the potential scenarios for the consequences of Finland's and Sweden's accession to NATO, the invasion scenario in Latvia is unlikely. Although such a topic is appearing more and more often in political discourse, in the event of NATO enlargement, the above-mentioned security block of the Baltic Region and the security of the NATO Alliance in general will be strengthened, which directly reflects Latvia's defence policy. The assumption that Latvia's security will be adversely affected by Turkey's position not to support the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO is not a cause for concern, but, on the contrary, paves the way for a political debate that will benefit both the Baltic States and Turkey. In the event of NATO enlargement, a nuclear attack is also an unlikely outcome, and Russia's threat to deploy nuclear weapons in the Baltic region is only a deterrent, as missile complexes are already in the Kaliningrad region, which would not significantly change the current security situation.

Thus, the accessions of Finland and Sweden to NATO is the most significant improvement in the security situation in the Baltic Sea region since NATO's 2004 enlargement. Firstly, it means a stronger Allied presence, more important security guarantees for the whole region, incl. to Latvia. Second, with the help of the Swedish and Finnish military arsenals, military bases and systems to prevent potential attacks can be significantly improved. Thirdly, in addition to the benefits of security spectrum, the economic sector will also improve significantly, the Baltic Sea region will become more secure, it will be easier to attract investment and expand economic cooperation with the Scandinavian countries.

References

1. A. Tomsons; E. Unāma.(LSM.lv). (2022). *Azoviešu glābšana. Zviedrijas un Somijas ceļš uz NATO. ES nespēj pieņemt 6.sankciju paketi.* <https://lr1.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/divas->

[puslodes/azoviesu-glabsana.-zvedrijas-un-somijas-cels-uz-nato.-es-nespej.a160745/](https://www.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/krustpunkta/krustpunkta-liela-intervija-starptautiskas-politikas-petniece-si.a160745/)

2. E. Unāma; M. Jansone. (LSM.lv). (2022). *Krustpunktā Lielā intervija: starptautiskās politikas pētniece Sigita Struberga.*
<https://lr1.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/krustpunkta/krustpunkta-liela-intervija-starptautiskas-politikas-petniece-si.a160466/>
3. U. Ņezberis (LSM.lv ziņu redakcija). (2022). *Krievija draud izvietot kodolieročus Baltijas jūras reģionā.*
<https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/arzemes/krievija-draud-izvietot-kodolierocus-baltijas-juras-regiona.a452515/>
4. J. Lasmanis. (nra.lv). (2022). *Edgars Rinkēvičs: Latvijas drošības interesēs mums ir būtiska gan Turcijas, gan Zviedrijas un Somijas dalība NATO.*
<https://neatkariga.nra.lv/intervijas/381996-edgars-rinkevics-latvijas-drosibas-intereses-mums-ir-butiska-gan-turcijas-gan-zvedrijas-un-somijas-daliba-nato>
5. R. Spalvēns. (DELFI). (2022). *Valdība atbalsta Somijas un Zviedrijas pievienošanās NATO.*
<https://www.delfi.lv/news/national/politics/valdiba-atbalsta-somijas-un-zvedrijas-pievienosanos-nato.d?id=54380796>
6. O. Krenberga. (Latvijas Televīzijas Ziņu dienests). (2022). *Somijas un Zviedrijas pievienošanās NATO stiprinātu arī Latvijas drošību.*
<https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/somijas-un-zvedrijas-pievienosanas-nato-stiprinatu-ari-latvijas-drosibu.a452388/>

Montenegro 's International Relations in the Context of the War in Ukraine (February)

Milika Mirkovic

Summary

Montenegro condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine. As an EU candidate country and as a NATO member, it has supported EU sanctions against Russia, which shows that its policy is in line with the EU's common Foreign and Security Policy. However, there is a division among political parties in their views on the war in Ukraine, where there are political parties that support Russia and those that condemn aggression against Ukraine. In any case, the events in Ukraine will reflect Montenegro, as there is Russian influence in the Western Balkans. The issue arising from current geopolitical developments relates to EU integration, which is of particular importance for Montenegro. Thus, additional EU efforts can be expected in the implementation of enlargement policy in the coming period.

Introduction

The war in Ukraine inevitably affects a small country in the process of EU accession negotiations. These developments also concern Montenegro as a member of the NATO Alliance. The complexity of Montenegro's international relations can be seen in the fact that we have always been in a divided area of the Western Balkans, where the interests of Russia and Western countries traditionally overlap. Disagreements of political parties over the course of Montenegro's international policy during the previous period could be noticed several times. And now it is visible through Montenegro's reaction to the war in Ukraine. Official Montenegro has condemned the war, but essentially nothing is being done.

What is the attitude of Montenegro towards the war in Ukraine?

Montenegro, as a member of the NATO Alliance and an EU candidate country, has joined countries that have condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro condemned Russia's decision to attack Ukraine, but also condemned Russia's decision to declare part of Ukraine's territory an independent republic, because in that way Russia "violates the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine." Therefore, Montenegro has joined the restrictive measures adopted by the European Council against Russia.

As Montenegro joins the sanctions imposed on Russia, as well as closes the airspace for Russian planes, Russia has made a list of "enemy countries", including Montenegro, which will further complicate relations between the two countries.

However, condemnation of Russia's aggression against Ukraine has been lacking from some political parties and politicians in Montenegro's ruling coalition. In fact, Montenegro formally condemned Russia's attack on Ukraine, but essentially nothing has changed significantly. The division within political parties and among Montenegrin officials can be seen in several directions. So, there are political parties that openly support Russia, parties and ministers that openly support the reaction of Western countries to the war in Ukraine, but also those that formally support the attitude of the EU and Western countries, but essentially support Russia. Therefore, the question remains, when and whether Montenegro will make a decision on imposing sanctions on Russia.

The division can also be seen through the organization of a rally against Russia and aggression against Ukraine and a rally in support of Russia. This indicates the presence of Russian influence among decision-makers and its desire to be involved in Montenegro's internal affairs. The Draft Report for Montenegro by the European Parliament states "Russia's persistent interest

in destabilizing the country", pointing to protests in support of Russia that were organized in Montenegro by a political party that is part of the ruling coalition. However, on the other hand, the same report praised Montenegro's international policy, as "Montenegro continued and full alignment with EU common Foreign and Security Policy, including its announcement of support for the latest EU sanctions against Russia, and its active participation in EU Common security and Defense Policy missions and operations"¹.

The connection between Montenegro and Russia: where did the Russian influence come from?

Montenegro has always had strong relations with Russia, so there is a Russian influence on Montenegrin politics. The connection with Russia did not exist only in the diplomatic sense, but the economic connection is also important. During the 2000s, especially after independence in 2006, a significant number of Russians invested in real estate on the Montenegrin coast, resulting in large numbers of Russian tourists, as well as a significant inflow of investment from Russia in Montenegro. Tourists from Russia are still one of the most important for the tourism industry of Montenegro, and FDI from Russia are also very important.

However, good relations have been strained by Montenegro imposing sanctions on Russia in 2014, following EU policy, because Russia annexed Crimea. In fact, leading the EU integration process has distanced Montenegro from a policy that is close to Russia. Russia's interference in Montenegro's internal affairs could also be seen during the parliamentary elections when Russian citizens were involved in a coup attempt, all with

¹ European Parliament (2022) Draft Report on the 2021 Commission Report on Montenegro (2021/2247(INI)), Committee on Foreign Affairs, available on: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/AFET-PR-703221_EN.pdf

the aim of overthrowing the government and preventing Montenegro from joining NATO. Thus, the additional separation between these two countries occurred with the accession of Montenegro to NATO in 2017, for which Russia expressed great opposition.

However, regardless of the distance from Russia, Russia's influence on Montenegrin politics can still be seen in some segments and accusations by Russia against the Montenegrin government for pursuing a Euro-Atlantic policy are still present today. The change of government in Montenegro in 2020 has affected Russia's greater presence, as a number of members of the current Montenegrin ruling coalition are proponents of Russian policy. But, regardless of that, Montenegro is pursuing the policy of EU integration, so that the sanctions against Russia, which were introduced eight years ago, remain in force.

Can the war in Ukraine accelerate the process of EU integration of Montenegro?

The severance of relations between the Western countries and Russia, the introduction of sanctions and condemnation of Russia for its aggression against Ukraine, on the other hand, raises the question of the possibility of intensifying the EU integration process of the Western Balkans. This is due to the fact that Russia's presence in this area is pronounced, and in addition there are strong traditional relations between countries (such as Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro) with Russia. Therefore, the inclusion of the Western Balkan countries in the EU community would thus reduce Russia's influence in this area.

Events in Ukraine can spill over into the region through Russian influence in the Western Balkans (including Montenegro). So, any further distance from Russian influence would be of great importance for the stability of the region, and thus of Europe. Regardless of the fact that Montenegro is a member of the NATO Alliance, the spillover of instability to the region

(where Bosnia and Herzegovina is at greatest risk) would have major consequences for all countries.

The United States emphasized the importance of turning to the Western Balkans and the need to step up efforts towards EU integration in the region. To that end, the US Special Envoy for the Western Balkans, Mr. Escobar emphasized the importance of the Western Balkans joining the EU, which would prevent instability from spilling over and spreading from Ukraine to the Balkans

However, regardless of the importance of EU integration throughout the region and the importance of stability in both the region and Europe, one cannot expect the EU accession procedure and methodology to be simplified, nor to reduce the number of goals and targets that candidate countries must meet to join the EU. Conditions and criteria for connection are clearly defined. It is a process that has a course and a clearly defined route, so we cannot expect accelerated accession of Montenegro and other countries in the EU. However, on the other hand, a greater commitment of EU member states to enlargement policy can be expected. This would mean greater engagement and effort in implementing the reform process in the candidate countries. On the other hand, Montenegro and other candidate countries would be more motivated to meet the requirements and conditions for EU membership, which is of particular importance given the stagnation of the integration process in the previous period.

Montenegro has sided with countries that are against Russia and have supported Ukraine. Support was given to all measures imposed on Russia. However, the current government has only formally condemned the war in Ukraine, but there are disagreements within the ruling coalition over imposing sanctions on Russia. This is also shown by the organization of the gathering of support for Russia by the supporters of one part of the government. Given this situation in domestic politics, the question remains whether and when Montenegro will make such a decision. Therefore, the determination and orientation of Montenegro in conducting foreign policy is of great importance in this part. On the other hand, opposition to Russia

will reflect on already bad diplomatic relations with Russia, but also on economic cooperation, where a reduction in the number of tourists can be expected, as well as a reduction in investment inflows.

Initial Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict (February)

Gjorgjioska M. Adela

Summary

Since its escalation at the end of February, the war in Ukraine has been in the spotlight of European and global attention. In the Macedonian context, the initial reactions revealed the positions taken by the state, as exposed in various statements and actions taken by the institutions and Government officials in the first week of the conflict. Whilst the official positions of the state demonstrated a close alignment with the line adopted by the NATO and EU, on the socio-political level a more heterogeneous picture emerged.

On 21 February 2022, the State Duma of Russia passed a bill to officially recognize the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic in Eastern Ukraine as independent states. Foreign Affairs Minister, Bujar Osmani, condemned the move on the same day: “We strongly condemn the recognition by the Russian Federation of the Ukrainian areas Donetsk & Lugansk as independent. Such acts represent a severe violation of international law. North Macedonia reiterates its unequivocal support for sovereignty & territorial integrity of Ukraine”, Osmani wrote in a Twitter post.¹ Two days later, in a telephone conversation with Prime Minister of Ukraine Denys Shmyhal, PM Kovachevski expressed his support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine.² Kovachevski described

¹ Twitter post by MFA Bujar Osmani, posted on 21.02.2022, available at: https://twitter.com/Bujar_O/status/1495858809222402051?cxt=HHwWhsC43avqrclpAAAA

² “Kovachevski in conversation with Shmyhal: You have our support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine”, published on 23.02.2022, available at <https://vlada.mk/node/27881> accessed on 02.03.2022

Russia's actions as a direct attack on Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty and as a flagrant violation of international law. Moreover, he confirmed that “North Macedonia is in line with the EU and NATO foreign and security policies regarding the sanctions against the Russian Federation, in response to its unprincipled actions”.¹

The military escalation on the 24th of February was met with similar reactions. On the 24th of February, PM Kovachevski received the Ambassador of the Republic of Ukraine, Natalia Zadorozhnyuk. “The Republic of North Macedonia condemns the act of open military aggression by Russia against Ukraine”, Kovachevski stressed and added that the Russian Federation's direct attack on Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty was a flagrant violation of international law.² On the same day, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a press release in which it stated that “the Ministry most vehemently condemns yesterday's decision of the official Kremlin setting into motion a military intervention by Russian forces against Ukraine”.³ It added: “By taking such unprovoked and unwarranted military action, Russia grossly violates international law, the UN Charter, and the principles and commitments of the OSCE, hence undermining European security architecture, as well as global stability.”⁴ The press release also outlined a set of actions which the Ministry had decided to undertake “in alliance with other NATO member states”. Thus, it announced that North Macedonia had taken a political step forward by deciding to join the new set of restrictive measures of the EU relating to the

¹ Ibid

² “Kovachevski-Zadorozhnyuk: Russia's aggression against Ukraine is a threat to peace in Europe and the world”, published on 24.02.2022, available at <https://vlada.mk/node/27893>, accessed on 12.03.2022

³ Ibid

⁴ MFA Press Release, published on 24.02.2022, available at <https://www.mfa.gov.mk/en/page/13/post/2862/press-release>, accessed on 03.03.2022

situation in Ukraine, together with the recommendation to join all decisions of the Union on this type of measures. Furthermore, it stated that the country had decided to join the EU sanctions against the Russian Federation: “Acting upon a proposal by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia had decided to join the remaining set of 2014 EU restrictive measures falling under the set of EU sanctions against the Russian Federation still in force, thereby aligning the Republic of North Macedonia to the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy completely, i.e. to a 100%”.¹ The press release emphasized that these Government decisions are in line with the country's Euro-Atlantic commitment and its strategic and national interests.² On the 24th of February the building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was illuminated with the colors of the Ukrainian flag. “Today we illuminated the building of the Ministry in the Ukrainian flag colors as an expression of North Macedonia’s solidarity with Ukraine and support for its sovereignty and territorial integrity. In these difficult times we stand united with the friendly Ukrainian people”, wrote the MFA Osmani in a twitter post.³

The position of President Pendarovski was in line with the above. On the 24th of April, the President’s office published an announcement titled: “Position of President Stevo Pendarovski on the Russian invasion on Ukraine”. The statement read: “I strongly condemn the military actions that Russia is taking against Ukraine, which will unavoidably lead to irreparable human loss and material damage. The Russian invasion on Ukraine is an attack on the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, blatant violation of the basic principles of international law, attack on the

¹ Ibid

² Ibid

³ Twitter post by MFA Osmani, published on 24.02.2022, available at https://twitter.com/Bujar_O/status/1496950130477518854?ext=HHwWjMCy2cyNnsYpAAAA accessed on 03.03.2022

democratic order and a threat to the stability of Europe.” Furthermore, Pendarovski added that as a NATO member, the country joins the Alliance’s call on Russia to end the military actions on Ukraine’s territory.”¹

The President elaborated on his views further in an interview given on the 25th of February. “I have no communication with the Russian ambassador, and probably neither does the government, but since we joined the sanctions as a NATO member state, I expect reciprocal measures from the Russian side. In the political aspect, I also expect measures, since the relations have not been good for two years.”² Pendarovski also noted that whilst the majority of political parties have a demonstrable Western orientation, the positions taken by the citizens are different. “It is indisputable that the Macedonian people have sympathy for Russia because of their religion, language and Slavic ethnicity. What worries me is that in the political sense, ethnic Macedonians are sympathetic to Russia's political views. It is especially worrying that over 40 percent of the public thinks that the Eurasian Union is an alternative to the EU, and some of the parties are predominantly in favor of this option, which could create a problem with future processes”, Pendarovski stated in the interview.³

Indeed, the findings of a public opinion poll published on the 7th of March 2022, revealed a growing discrepancy between the positions of the political establishment and the people. The poll found that in terms of foreign policy,

¹ Position of President Stevo Pendarovski on the Russian invasion on Ukraine, published on 24.02.2022, available at https://pretsedatel.mk/en/stav_24022022-2/, accessed on 03.03.2022

² “Pendarovski worried that Macedonians support Russia”, published on 25.02.2022, available at <https://nezavisen.mk/pendarovski-zagrizhen-shto-makedoncite-se-vrtat-kon-rusija/> accessed on 26.02.2022

³ Ibid

64 percent of Macedonian citizens agree that strong relations with China serve their interests, and 60 per cent think the same for Russia, which is an increase of 11 per cent for China and six per cent for Russia since last year.¹ In line with the poll findings, the positions espoused by ethnic-Macedonians on social media in reaction to the conflict in Ukraine, revealed a tendency to either support a neutral position in the war in Ukraine or to show an understanding and justification for Russia's actions.

Other socio-political reactions

The majority of political parties followed the official state line. The main opposition party VMRO-DPMNE on the 24th of February issued a statement in which it expressed its full support for NATO's position in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. "VMRO-DPMNE, in accordance with its ideological, programmatic and strategic assurances and actions, fully supports the views of the parties of the European People's Party (EPP) in connection with the latest escalation of the conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation," the statement read. Moreover, it added: "Once again, we reiterate that for VMRO-DPMNE, respect for the norms of international law, whose main part is the territorial sovereignty, integrity and independence of Ukraine, are fundamentally important. "VMRO-DPMNE, as in the past and now, but also in the future, fully supports NATO's positions regarding the challenges facing the world today."²

¹ Public Opinion Poll: Residents of North Macedonia, November 27 – December 23, 2021, published on 07.03.2022, available at <https://www.iri.org/resources/public-opinion-poll-residents-of-north-macedonia/>, accessed on 07.03.2022

² VMRO-DPMNE: We fully support NATO's position on the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, published on 24.02.2022, available at <https://360stepeni.mk/vmro-dpmne-vo-tselost-go-poddrzhuvame-stavot-na-nato-za-konfliktot-megu-ukraina-i-rusija/> accessed on 03.03.2022

The only political party which dissented from the official line was “The Left” (Levica). On the 24th of February they issued a statement titled: “Sanctions against Russia would only harm the Macedonian economy.”¹ Although the Republic of Macedonia is not part of the European Union, the Government blindly stands behind the back of this organization, the statement read. Moreover, it added: “Bujar Osmani has already said that the country will be part of the EU sanctions against Russia, without saying that the Republic of Macedonia will face losses of more than \$60 million as sanctions will be imposed on the export of Macedonian products to Russia.”² Furthermore, the statement underlined that the Left, moving away from its anti-imperialist positions, is against the sanctioning of any nation by the United States, NATO, the EU and countries close to them. Citizens should not suffer the accidental or collateral damage from sanctions - this damage is the main purpose of the existence of these sanctions. Finally, the statement argued against the country blindly following NATO and the EU, because as they stated, this will affect the Macedonian economy.³

The early reactions to the war in Ukraine revealed a homogeneous line on the level of the political establishment. The official statements and actions adopted by the Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the President of the state demonstrated explicitly that the state is fully aligned with the policies adopted by NATO and the EU. Whilst the official positions of the state demonstrated a close alignment with the line adopted by the NATO and EU, on the socio-political level a more heterogeneous

¹ Sanctions against Russia would only harm the Macedonian economy, published on 25.02.2022 available at <https://levica.mk/2022/02/25/sanktsii-za-rusija-edinstveno-bi-nashtetile-na-makedonskata-ekonomija/> accessed on 10.03.2022

² Ibid

³ Ibid

picture emerged. The ethnic-Macedonian population in particular demonstrated a tendency to either support a neutral position in the war in Ukraine or to show an understanding and justification for Russia's actions. Thus, in the context of the Ukrainian conflict the rift between the official positions adopted by the state and the views held by the public, was once again made visible.

Poland in the Face of Russia's Aggression against Ukraine (February)

Konrad Rajca

Summary

For Poland, Russia's aggression against Ukraine represents a high level of immediate security threat. Ukraine is a Polish neighbor with whom Poland currently enjoys exceptionally friendly relations. These relations have their historical roots (until World War II, part of Western Ukraine was part of the Polish state) and result from geopolitical conditions. For Poland, a threat to the independence and integrity of Ukraine means a weakening of its security and an increased threat from Russia, which is why Poland has strongly condemned Russian aggression and is taking very active measures on the international arena to support Ukraine and impose possibly severe sanctions against Russia by the West. Poland is a frontline state on NATO's eastern flank. In response to the Russian invasion, the number of U.S., British, and Canadian troops stationed in Poland has increased to approximately 10,000, as well as the amount of military equipment of NATO allied countries. In response to the Russian actions against Ukraine, a trilateral Polish-British-Ukrainian alliance was formed in mid-February, with the aim of responding to the Russian threat. A joint declaration of solidarity in the face of Russian actions was also adopted by the governments of Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania. For Poland, the war in Ukraine also means a challenge related to a possible influx of up to 1.5 million Ukrainian immigrants and a weakening of Polish economic growth.

Introduction

After the Russian invasion in Ukraine, Poland took extraordinary measures, and the aggression was met with a very strong condemnation from the Polish government. "Ukraine was the victim of a brutal, unprovoked and

unjustified Russian assault," President Andrzej Duda wrote on Twitter. "We are working together with our NATO and EU allies, together we will respond to Russian brutal aggression, and we will not leave Ukraine without support," the Polish president noted. "This is an unprecedented act of rape against the norms of international law. Russia excludes itself from the international community," the Polish President stressed after a special meeting at the National Security Office with the government, commanders of the Polish Armed Forces and heads of special services.

The message on Ukraine was also issued by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). "The Russian Federation has consciously made a decision to destroy the foundations of the modern security architecture and attempt to forcibly change the borders, for which there can be no consent in the 21st century. Poland, in cooperation with its allies, will take all measures prescribed by international law to support Ukraine and stop Russian aggression". - The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized in the communication.

Special level of readiness of the Polish army

The Polish Committee on National Security and Defense Affairs has instructed the Permanent Representative to NATO to request the activation of Article 4 of the Washington Treaty, which states that "the parties shall consult jointly whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any Party is threatened."

The command of the Polish army introduced the first level of combat readiness. Soldiers were ordered to return to barracks and their leaves and tours of duty were withdrawn. The government also announced that in connection with the war in Ukraine has prepared 120 hospitals ready throughout the country and several thousand places for the wounded - including severely. There are also medical supplies and a special medical train transporting the injured from Ukraine to Poland. Two additional

brigades of the Territorial Defense Forces have also been formed along the border with Ukraine.

The President Duda's Message and special session of Polish parliament

Putin's decision unleashed war in Europe," said President Andrzej Duda in a special message to Poles. He called for solidarity and help for Ukrainians. Polish President stressed that "not only Europe but the whole world has stood at a historical moment and in this hour of trial we must pass an exam of maturity and solidarity". That is why, Andrzej Duda said, the "strongest possible reaction to the criminal moves of Vladimir Putin is necessary". "The future of the free world depends on how we jointly respond to the evil that is happening before our eyes. These days we answer a key question: do the values we share really mean anything, or are they just fine slogans?" – says Polish President.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki addressed the Polish parliament after Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine. - We are not surprised by what is happening today. We have already warned about this in talks with our colleagues in December. Putin has chosen the path of terror and it depends on our joint response whether we can restore Ukraine's integrity. Today is a special moment in our history because it has caused everything to change. These demons from European history have just been revived. Our attitude must be a firm one," Morawiecki said. - This barbarism, which we face behind our eastern border, must meet with resistance from the whole world. Today Ukraine is fighting not only for its freedom and independence, but also on behalf of the whole Europe - he said.

- Today Poland is a fully safe country. Our services have been raised to a state of heightened readiness. Our recent joint actions have served to strengthen defence,' assured the Polish Prime Minister.

- From this place I would also like to address our neighbors, the Ukrainians: we will not leave you in your time of need. We are together with you. This

morning changed everything. This is a kind of memento for us [...] Today we are together with Ukraine. Long live free Ukraine," Morawiecki concluded, and thunderous applause rang out in the hall after his speech.

The Polish Sejm unanimously called on Russia and Belarus to cease hostilities. Polish political forces announced joint work on a "homeland defense" bill to double the size of the Polish army, modernize it and increase funding.

The Americans are increasing their military presence in Poland

Since mid-February, NATO's military presence in Poland, which is the frontline country of the Alliance's eastern flank, has increased due to Russia's actions. Currently (February 25) there are about 10 thousand soldiers of the Alliance stationed in Poland. They are accompanied by, among others, specialists in logistics and medicine. These are mainly American soldiers, but also British, Estonian and Canadian. These forces are to "reinforce the Polish armed forces in military operations conducted on Polish territory in peacetime". In connection with the situation in Ukraine, 12 AH-64D Apache helicopters of the US Army will also come to Poland. NATO has said it will further strengthen its presence in Poland depending on the escalation of the threat.

The Bucharest Nine Summit took place in Warsaw too. It is impossible to accept aggression in Europe, which survived the I and the II World War. I believe that thanks to our actions and our support for Ukraine in every possible way, we are able to stop it," The President Andrzej Duda said after the Bucharest Nine summit. The B9 summit was attended by European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen. The Bucharest Nine (B9) was formed on the initiative of Poland and Romania. It comprises countries on NATO's eastern border - Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

"Tripartite Agreement" - Poland, Ukraine, United Kingdom

Russia's actions against Ukraine back in mid-February led Poland, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom to agree and announce the creation of a "trilateral agreement." "Our three countries will increase joint efforts to protect the stability and build the resilience of Ukraine, strengthening democracy on the border of Eastern Europe. To this end, we, the Foreign Ministers of Poland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom, have today unanimously expressed our intention to develop a Trilateral Agreement on Cooperation. The Trilateral Agreement will demonstrate our commitment to further strengthening the strategic cooperation and commitments of our three countries on key issues in support of Ukraine," - reads a joint statement by the heads of diplomacy of Poland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

It declared that the Republic of Poland and the United Kingdom "will continue to provide assistance to Ukraine, standing united with Ukraine in the face of ongoing Russian aggression, fully committed to standing with the Ukrainian people in their efforts to defend Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders."

Joint declaration of solidarity of Poland and Lithuania with Ukraine

Also, in February, before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Presidents of Poland and Lithuania Andrzej Duda and Gitanas Nausėda visited Kiev and met with President Volodymyr Zelenski as a sign of solidarity with Ukraine against Russian actions. They adopted a joint declaration condemning the Russian Federation's decision to recognize separatist "people's republics" in the occupied territories of Ukraine.

- All three of us, as we stand here, are Presidents of neighboring countries with Russia, a Russia that today poses a real threat to Ukraine, but for us is also a neighbor to whom we appeal for peace and tranquility," argued Andrzej Duda. The President assessed that "in front of our eyes the security

system in Europe, which for the past decades guaranteed peace, is visibly collapsing. - This is a time of great test for European solidarity, but also for the unity of the EU and NATO," he stressed.

Poland persuades Germany to adopt common severe sanctions against Russia

I came to shake the conscience of Germany, so that they finally decide on really crushing sanctions that will influence the Kremlin's decisions, Putin's decisions to stop attacking Ukraine, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said during his visit to Berlin, where he met with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. - 5,000 helmets? I think this is a joke. There has to be real help. We have to understand this. Ukraine is fighting for us, for our freedom. If we do not stop Russia, it will go even further. We must stop it - said the head of the Polish government (in mid-February, Germany declared aid to Ukraine in the form of 5,000 helmets).

The prime minister Morawiecki stressed that the sanctions package "must be crushing". He emphasized that "we cannot buy oil from the Russians, we cannot buy gas or coal from them. We must become independent of them, but we must also cut off all Russian oligarchs who support Putin and who are on his side (...) from all financing, he said. We also have to shut down Nord Stream 1 and 2, finally become independent of Russian resources, cut off Russian financial institutions from financing on the capital markets, confiscate the oligarchs' assets, and get away with SWIFT for Russia, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said in Berlin.

Ukrainian refugees and economic growth is a challenge for Poland

The war in Ukraine poses a challenge for Poland also in terms of the influx of Ukrainian immigrants, for whom Poland may be a top destination. There are approximately one million Ukrainians living in Poland today. The

Polish government estimates that an influx of about one million Ukrainians is expected because of the war. Until today (28.02), about 200,000 Ukrainians have fled to Poland. It may have an impact on the Polish economy and e.g., education. Poles and the Polish government actively and massively help to Ukrainian refugees and send aid to Ukrainians.

Russia's war with Ukraine could lower Polish GDP growth by about 1-1.5%, with its effects also heralding a further rise in inflation and possibly a larger scale of interest rate hikes, according to analysts at Poland's Bank Pekao. "From an economic point of view, this is the realization of one of the worst scenarios. The cumulative impact of the halt in trade with Russia and Ukraine (these two countries account for about 5% of Polish exports) should be estimated at 1-1.5% of Polish GDP, but the main channel of impact on the Polish economy is price-based and is related to the increase in prices of energy resources and agricultural crops. We should expect a further increase in inflation this year, as well as a larger scale of interest rate hikes," - the bank's daily report reads. According to economists, the slowdown in trade with Russia and Ukraine may cost Poland between 12 and 14.5 billion euros.

Conclusion

Russia's aggression against Ukraine radically increases the threat to Polish security. In this situation, Poland is taking active steps in the international arena to strengthen NATO's eastern flank militarily and is working towards a joint, strong response from the entire West towards Russia. Countries on the eastern flank of NATO, such as Poland, the Baltic States and Romania, fear aggressive actions by Russia. As a result of the aggression, the U.S. has increased its military presence in Poland, which has become one of the most active countries advocating for the strongest possible sanctions against Russia. A prolonged war could affect the mass influx of Ukrainian immigrants to Poland and weaken Polish GDP growth.

Romania's Achievements after the NATO Summit in Madrid and the Black Sea Security Summit (July)

Oana Popovici

Summary

Romania hosted for the first time the Black Sea Security Summit organized by the Helsinki Commission, in which aspects related to the Black Sea security were discussed. Following the event, a draft law on Black Sea Security was introduced in the US Senate, calling for a more robust US policy towards the Black Sea region. The document targets a permanent and sustainable presence on the Eastern Flank and increased economic relations with the countries in the region. The NATO Summit in Madrid established the Black Sea as a strategic area of interest for NATO. Further developments are expected regarding this area, for continuing the transformation of the posture of deterrence and defence on the Eastern Flank and supporting the partners of the Alliance in the neighbourhood.

At the beginning of July, Romania host the “Black Sea Security Summit” round table, organized by the US Congressional Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission). The event took place in Constanța, the major port of Romania at the Black Sea, and was co-chaired by the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bogdan Aurescu, and the US Senator Roger Wicker, member of the US Congress. The event was organized for the first time in Romania, under the format of a multilateral dialogue between regional allies and partners, on the topic of security in the Black Sea region. The Helsinki Commission's initiative to organize the Black Sea Security Summit comes in the context of the significant deterioration of the security situation in the Black Sea region, as a result of the Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. The objective of the

Helsinki Commission is to draw attention to the worrying developments in the region, with significant negative impact, on multiple levels, for the entire international community. The US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission) is an independent government commission established in 1976 to monitor the compliance with the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, gathering representatives of the US Administration and promoting respect for human rights, international security and economic cooperation. Following the meetings, different congressional reports and resolutions are drafted.

The achievements for Romania following the Summit were stated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who appreciated the solid and bipartisan support of members of the US Congress for the security and stability of the Black Sea region. The main topic was focused on the strategic issues related to the Black Sea, insisting on maintaining transatlantic unity, solidarity, and joint action as allies in the face of the threats from the Russia, as “the war in Ukraine has fundamentally changed the security parameters we are working with”. He started by presenting the role Romania has in this context, showing that it shares the longest border with Ukraine, while the Black Sea coast is “the first line of defence for the Euro-Atlantic community and the first line of support for our partners in Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia”. The Minister emphasized that the challenges related to the Black Sea must be dealt with in a broader framework of the transatlantic partnership. This could also lead to the diversification of the Strategic Partnership with the US. Discussions also reflected the actual problems, such as the energy and food security. At the end of the meeting, Minister Bogdan Aurescu addressed the proposal to create a Support Group for the Black Sea in the US Congress, which would support the policies of the Congress regarding the security of the Black Sea. On the occasion of the “Black Sea Security Summit” round table, the deputy general secretary of NATO also declared that NATO will continue to support Ukraine and that the Black Sea area remains a strategic objective in the current military context.

The Black Sea Security Summit could be seen as a continuation of the NATO Summit in Madrid, in which major decisions were adopted to strengthen the deterrence and defence posture on the Eastern Flank, from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, according to the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs³. NATO Summit in Madrid at the end of June was of an utmost importance in the view of the decisions adopted. The most important was the approval of the programmatic document that defines NATO's security vision, threats, areas of interest, while preserving the collective defence, as it represents the second most important act of the Alliance after the Washington Treaty. Romania's strategic objectives have been achieved, including the adoption of the Strategic Concept after a process launched in 2021, which adequately reflects the current security situation, and the inclusion of the Black Sea as an area of strategic importance for NATO in this new Strategic Concept

From Romania's point of view, several priorities were accomplished:

- Reconfirmation of the importance of the region for the Euro-Atlantic security, in the current context marked by multidimensional security threats (military, food, transport). Defining the Black Sea as a strategic area of interest for NATO reflects the fact that the Black Sea is at the centre of the aggressive action of Russia, with high potential to deteriorate the security situation not only in the region, but also in the entire Euro-Atlantic area. Therefore, NATO will continue to focus on this region as a priority. This means that more resources will be allocated in the future, having a central place in the strategic projection of NATO in the period of ten years from now, in which the new Strategic Concept will work.
- Consolidation and efficiency of the Allied presence on the Eastern Flank, especially at the Black Sea. The Summit decision was to supplementing the troops on the territory of Romania in the following period. In addition, the new concept regarding the strengthening of the defence and deterrence posture on the Eastern Flank was also accompanied by measures that make this posture more efficient. In a

first phase, this is related to the allocation of precise forces, which will strengthen the presence on the territory in case it is necessary. The term of “Forward Defence” was introduced in the NATO Summit’s documents, promising subsequent developments that will be discussed within the process of fundamental transformation of the posture of deterrence and defence on the Eastern Flank.

- Reaffirmation of the NATO’s commitment to collective defence and strengthening NATO relations with partners in the region. A consistent non-lethal support package was adopted for Ukraine, an adapted support package for Georgia, a similar one for the Republic of Moldova, which involves support for structuring the security concepts of the respective states, support for more effective combating of hybrid threats, substantial support deliveries in areas such as secure communications, anti-drone systems and fuel⁷. There is a whole series of measures that support the military adaptation and modernization of the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, respectively, according to the needs of each of these states.

In addition, the leaders of the NATO countries agreed to establish the NATO Innovation Fund, the first multinational venture capital investment fund in the world. The fund will invest EUR 1 billion in early-stage start-ups and other venture capital funds that develop NATO-priority dual-use technologies. The investment targets are start-ups focusing on: artificial intelligence, big data processing, quantum technologies, autonomy, biotechnology and human enhancement, new materials, energy, propulsion and space. Romania will participate with two test centres, two institutes that were selected based on the criteria established by the NATO authorities. This means that Romania will also be involved in this process of technological modernization and advancement of NATO.

Soon after, in mid-July, a draft law on Black Sea Security Act of 2022 was introduced in the US Senate. The draft legislation calls on the Washington Administration for a more robust US policy towards the Black Sea region, including increasing support for the region from the US, NATO and the

EU, ensuring a permanent and sustainable presence on the Eastern Flank, as well as developing economic relations between the US and the Black Sea region, respectively Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Turkey. The document calls for the development, within 12 months, of an inter-agency US strategy, aiming to increase US commitment to countries in the region, develop military assistance and coordination with NATO and the EU, deepen economic relations, strengthen democracy and economic and energy security. The inter-agency process must also identify the resources needed to implement the strategy for the period 2024-2026.

Romania appreciated the initiation of this measure, as the need for a close cooperation between Romania and the USA regarding the development of a US Strategy for the Black Sea was a constant theme promoted by Romania in recent years. The legislative project will go through the usual stages of the American legislative process.

Serbia and General Assembly Resolution on Russian Operations in Ukraine (March)

Ivona Ladjevac

Summary

All member states of the United Nations (UN) from the Western Balkans, including Serbia, voted on March 2, 2022 for the Resolution on aggression operations in Ukraine. The UN General Assembly adopted the resolution with 141 votes in favor, 35 abstentions. Russia, Belarus, Syria, Eritrea and North Korea voted against.

In the days before the vote, there was uncertainty as to whether Serbia, which has never complied with EU sanctions on Russia or all of the High Representative's declarations, will vote for the resolution. On the voting day, the uncertainty expired, Serbia voted in favor of the Resolution.

General Assembly Resolution on Russian operations in Ukraine

On March 2, the UN General Assembly held the rare emergency session.¹ Out of 193, a total of 141 countries adopted a resolution reaffirming “its commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders; deeply regretting the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the violation of Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter; urging Russia to immediately cease the use

¹Emergency sessions of the General Assembly are very rare, this was only 1th since the founding of the UN and the first after 40 years.

of force against Ukraine and to refrain from any further illegal threat or use of force against any Member State”¹.

In this manner, the General Assembly expressed its demand to Russia to immediately stop threatening and using force against Ukraine and “immediately, completely and unconditionally, withdraw all military forces from Ukraine's territory its internationally recognized borders”².

It also regrets Russia's decision regarding the status of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, with a request that Russia immediately and unconditionally annul that decision. The resolution calls for an urgent peaceful resolution of the conflict through political dialogue, negotiations, mediation and other peaceful means, as well as respect for the Minsk agreement. Besides, regret because of Belarus' involvement in the illegal use of force against Ukraine is also expressed while Minsk is called on to abide by its international obligations.

Serbian position on current events

The first reaction of the Serbian government to the operations in Ukraine and anticipation of tougher demands to take a side was that Serbia is between Scylla and Charybdis - but that it should try to follow just its own interests.

“We are not interested in the East or the West, we are only interested in Serbia. We have no problem with saying that we support the territorial integrity of Ukraine, but we ask what happens with the territorial integrity of Serbia that was so brutally crushed with the recognition of the

¹ General Assembly resolution demands end to Russian offensive in Ukraine, 2 March 2022, Peace and Security, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113152>, accessed on March 27/03/2022.

² Ibidem

independence of Kosovo,” said the outgoing speaker of the Serbian parliament, Ivica Dačić.

“Revoke the recognition of Kosovo first, and then you can pressure Serbia,” Dačić said.

On February 25th, the National Security Council of Serbia said that Serbia abides by the principles of international law and therefore was “extending full and principled support to the principle of territorial integrity of Ukraine.” It considers “the breach of the territorial integrity of any country, including Ukraine, to be very wrong.” But when it comes to sanctions against Russia, the document says that the country will act only according to its own vital and economic interests. “As a country which has experienced the sanctions of the West and whose kin in Republika Srpska is under sanctions now, the Republic of Serbia believes that it is not in its vital economic interest to introduce sanctions on any country, including its representatives or economic subjects.”¹

Along the same lines, Belgrade envoy to the UN, Ambassador Nemanja Stevanović, explained that Serbia will join the UN General Assembly resolution on the war in Ukraine condemning the Russian attack but only because it does not mention any sanctions.

Before the vote, Stevanović addressed saying that Serbia “sincerely regrets the events that are happening in Eastern Europe.” He added that the Republic of Serbia is committed to respecting the principles of territorial integrity and political independence of states and one of the basic principles of international law based on the UN Charter and the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, which guarantees the inviolability of state borders, such as advocating for the preservation of the sovereignty and integrity of their own territory.

¹ Zaključak Saveta za nacionalnu bezbednost Republike Srbije broj 1-10/2022 od 25. februara 2022. godine, <https://www.predsednik.rs/lat/pres-centar/saopstenja/zakljucak-saveta-za-nacionalnu-bezbednost-republike-srbije-broj-1-102022-od-25-februara-2022-godine>, 27/03/2022.

“The Republic of Serbia is also committed to respecting the territorial integrity of other sovereign peoples and, regardless of disagreement with all the wording stated in the Resolution, will vote for the Resolution,” said Mr. Stevanović.

He pointed out that he was obliged to point out preamble paragraph 13 and to remind that the first attack on a sovereign state on European soil after the Second World War took place in 1999, with the attack of 19 states on the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, primarily Serbia and at that time was no appropriate reaction of the UN General Assembly to that flagrant violation of the UN Charter. Despite the fact that Serbia continue to suffer the consequences of severe violations of the basic principles of international law by others, Serbia still does not give up on these principles and therefore continue to advocate for an end to the current conflict, expecting that the parties will make additional efforts to reach a diplomatic solution, in creating conditions for peace during the dialogue. Additionally, Serbia will provide all kinds of humanitarian aid to the endangered citizens of Ukraine and will remain committed to peace and consistent respect for international law, said Mr. Stevanović concluding its addressing.

The vote was followed by positive reactions from the EU and diplomats in Belgrade.

Vladimir Bilčík, the European Parliament's rapporteur for Serbia, welcomed Serbia's vote in the UN. “I welcome Serbia's vote in favor of a UN General Assembly resolution expressing 'regret' over Russia's 'aggression against Ukraine.' That result is another sign of Putin's isolation,” Bilchik wrote.

Positive reaction also came from the US Embassy in Belgrade. In a Twitter message on March 2 they posted: “We are glad that Serbia supported Ukraine in the UN, 141 countries supported this historic vote and

condemned Russia's aggression against one democratic country. We are all with Ukraine”.

Among those who reacted positively were the EU Delegation in Belgrade, embassies of the United Kingdom, Sweden, Italy and France.

President Aleksandar Vučić said on the same day, March 2nd, in his addressing public that in recent days, despite pressure, Serbia has maintained its position in relation to the Ukrainian crisis, but that it was important for it to condemn the collapse of the territorial integrity of any UN member. “From our side, it is important to condemn the violation of the territorial integrity of any country,” Vučić said. According to him, official Belgrade joined in every condemnation of territorial integrity “whatever they called it”. He mentioned that Serbia, due to history, did not dare to keep it quiet, and added that “the text does not mention any sanctions”. Vučić said that Serbia supported some 4 acts out of 13, explaining that it could not vote for the remaining nine, because they concern sanctions against Russian banks, airlines, but also individuals, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Sergei Lavrov.

When asked by journalists what kind of reaction he expects from the Kremlin after the vote at the UN General Assembly, Vučić said that Serbia is the only country in Europe that has not imposed sanctions on the Russian Federation. “If our Russian friends are angry with us because of that, then what should we do”, said Vučić.

Coalition NADA, Serbian Party Defenders, leaders of Dveri, People's Liberation Movement, enough is enough movement - Bšsko Obradović, Miroslav Parović, Sasa Radulović and Mladjan Djordjević, as well as the Serbian Radical Party condemned the fact that Serbia's representatives in the UN voted for a resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The candidate for the presidency of Serbia on behalf of the Serbian coalition NADA, Miloš Jovanović, assessed that by voting in the General Assembly, Serbia “was ashamed and threw a stain on the image of its state”.

“By voting in the UN, Serbia sided with NATO countries and the West in condemning Russia and thus endangered our national interests.” In all this, this government has shown that it does not have the courage to abstain from voting, as 34 countries around the world have done. “A government that does not have the courage and a nation that does not have ambition, have no future, nor can they have it,” Jovanović said in a statement.

With this statement agrees the majority of Serbs life-long traumatized by NATO air strikes campaign.

Conclusion

In spite of traditional relations and excellent political relations with Russia which ensures firm support towards Kosovo and Metohija issue in the UN Security Council, the fact that it is highly energetic dependent from Russia, Serbia supported adopting of the against Russia Resolution in the UN General Assembly. Although it is evident that western pressure on Serbian Government is growing on daily level, the question why Serbia simply just didn't abstain remains.

The Slovenian Parliamentary Election in 2022, and the International Response to the Results (April)

Gašper Pirc

Summary

While the 14th Slovenian government, led by the Prime Minister Janez Janša, has been active in its support for the action of the EU, and in direct support for the Ukrainian defensive cause and was given some praise for its economic performance, it has also been frequently (and heavily) criticized by the EU officials and the European media for its stance on the issues of the freedom of the press, its public communication, and its supposed attempts to politicize critical social institutions.

On April 24, 2022, the parliamentary election was held in Slovenia after which Slovenia will likely get a new government since the newcomer Freedom Movement handily defeated the ruling SDS. While a more devoted political analysis of the election will be given in the next briefing on recent development in the Slovenian politics, this briefing will question the effects of the election results on the status and the future performance of Slovenia in the international community and in its role as a member of the European Union, as well shortly discuss the latest effects of the still-ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war.

Background: Slovenia as a constructive member of the European Union and its international status before the parliamentary election

Slovenia has been a member of the European Union since 2004. In 2021, Slovenia took over the presidency of the Council of the EU for the second time in history after 2008. While the first presidency focused on implementing the Treaty of Lisbon, the critical agreement for the current

organization of the European Union, the integration of the states of Western Balkans into the EU, and the digital development and innovation. In many respects, the second presidency in 2021 continued the foreign affairs agenda set during the previous attempt at the presidency, despite different specific challenges and attempts at solutions to the pressing issues of the day.

During the presidency, Slovenia primarily focused on assessing the resilience, recovery, and strategic autonomy of the European Union, questioning the union of the European way of life, the rule of law and equal criteria for all, the work toward a credible and secure European Union, capable of ensuring security and stability in its neighborhood, and a pursuit of an ambitious neighborhood policy towards the East and the South, reaffirming the EU-perspective of the Western Balkans.

While most experts seem to agree that the Slovenian presidency in 2021 was generally successful and Slovenia has retained the status of a relatively dependable and productive member of the European Union, there are still many issues which Slovenia – along with the rest of the EU – will need to set its focus upon in 2022 and beyond.

As a recurrent theme, the communication between the Slovenian government, the European media, and EU officials were largely seen as problematic in the past years and may have a negative impact on the success of the Slovenian presidency and the international status of the 14th Slovenian government in the eyes of the concerned public.

The officials and the media of the European Union were also highly critical of the pressure on the media and the supposed lack of the freedom of the press in Slovenia as well as alleged attempts of the government to politically influence the work of critical public institutions such as the national broadcasting organization, the police, and even the legal system of Slovenia. Whilst commending the Slovenian economic performance, the

European media sometimes characterized the leadership of Prime Minister Janez Janša as being on a verge of autocracy (see e.g.: <https://euobserver.com/eu-political/154768>).

While particularly the right-wing governments of Slovenia and Poland have often clashed with the EU officials in regard to the political tendencies, migration policy, and the rule of law both were highly supportive of the people of Ukraine and distinctly condemned the Russian attack while blaming it mostly on the Russian President Putin and his (political and economic) inner circle. Along with their Czech counterpart, they were also the first heads of the state to visit Kyiv since the invasion began in the final week of February 2022.

While we still need to wait for the new government to be organized and reaffirm the Slovenian support for the (EU backed) people of Ukraine and the continued sanctions against Russia, both the general policy of the Slovenian international agenda and its support for the values of the European Union should remain similar to the current situation.

While Robert Golob, the president of the relative winner of the elections, the Freedom Movement, and the most likely candidate for the new Prime Minister of Slovenia, backed EU sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine he also accused Janša of seeking to exploit the war for his own political benefit and we may see a slightly less active role of the Slovenian government during the next stages of the war.

The parliamentary election in Slovenia, its immediate effect on foreign relations, and the response of the European media

On April 24, 2022, the Slovenian parliamentary election was held for the ninth time in the history of independent Slovenia. The elections were held

on the first possible date in terms of the regular political setting. Below are the unofficial results of the election.

The previous coalition leader and traditionally one of the largest Slovenian parties, the Slovenian Democratic Party, which is led by the (likely former) Prime Minister Janez Janša, conceded and was defeated by the newcomers, the Freedom Movement, led by Robert Golob who boasted as much as 34,56 % of the votes. Only 3 other parties managed to reach the 4% threshold and make gain parliamentary seats (NSA, SD, and The Left), with the latter two conceding losses. The strongest party in the coalition formed after the last regular election in 2018, the List of Marjan Šarec, was among many that failed to reach the threshold of the 4% of votes.

Turnout stood at 69% which is a substantial increase compared to previous elections and the highest turnout since the parliamentary election in 2000.

The defeat of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) and a middling result for its ally, the NSi, likely mean that a completely new government will be formed. The most likely candidate for the role of the Prime Minister, Robert Golob, has already announced the willingness to start the coalition talks and the attempt to form a government as soon as possible. It is believed that the Freedom Movement will form the government with the help of Social Democrats (SD) and possibly alongside The Left.

Regardless of how the final form of the new government will be shaped, it seems clear that Slovenia will make a sharp turn from the (often deemed populist) right-wing government back to the moderate left/center which seems to fit the general outline of the values of the European Union and has also been traditionally the most common orientation of the Slovenian government.

Although the foreign media on Sunday paid much more attention to the outcome of the second round of the presidential elections in France which

were held on the same day, they also devoted some space to the parliamentary elections in Slovenia.

The main Western media, such as AFP, Reuters, BBC, Guardian, and Politico, were united in the conclusion that Slovenia did not follow the path of Hungary and turned its back on right-wing populism.

The English BBC emphasized that the "populist Prime Minister" Janez Janša had suffered a "severe defeat" in the battle with the party, which was formed only in January.

They stated that the elections were marked by accusations that Janša had undermined the rule of law in Slovenia and that Golob had promised to lead the country "back to freedom".

The BBC points out that Janša is a vocal supporter of former US President Donald Trump and that critics accuse him of undermining democratic standards and restricting media freedom for many years while entering into long disputes with the EU over attempts to cut off STA funding.

An AFP article also quoted by the Guardian says that in the election, which was advertised as a "referendum on democracy", "liberal newcomer" Golob outwitted a "populist, conservative three-time prime minister".

AFP also states how divided the country is and how the opposition accuses Janša of trying to undermine democratic institutions and media freedom since returning to power in 2020.

For its report on the Slovenian elections, Reuters held talks with several voters on the Election Day, and many told the agency that they wanted the change in Slovenia.

Given the generally positive remarks coming from the other members of the European Union and the EEC, it is believed that Slovenia has got the confidence of the EU to continue its development and its specific political agenda under the aegis of the European Union.

The latest effects of the Russo-Ukrainian war

The critical current issue reverberating in European media remains the Russian invasion of Ukraine. While the EU is preparing for the new sanctions against Russia, Brussels also provided some additional information regarding the possibilities of the amelioration of the negative effects of sanctions across the EU.

With its Igram Action Plan, the European Commission is urging Union citizens to reduce their dependence on Russian energy. Suggestions include working from home, reduced use of air conditioning, and traveling by train instead of a plane.

Brussels suggested that if almost 450 million people in the European Union adhered to the action plan we would save enough gas to heat 20 million households and 120 oil supertankers.

In 2021, the EU imported 155 billion cubic meters of natural gas from Russia, representing about 40 percent of total consumption and 45 percent of imports. Russian fuel accounts for 27 percent of total imports and Russian coal for 46 percent of imports.

The European Union has already adopted a ban on imports of Russian coal, and French officials recently announced that an embargo on Russian fuel is also being prepared.

The European Commission has also said that EU companies can continue to buy Russian gas despite Russia's demand to pay in rubles for the new gas without violating EU sanctions against Russia.

While the recent parliamentary election took the headlines in most of the Slovenian media, the Russo-Ukrainian war and its effects on the Slovenian economy and society remain a relevant topic of discussion. With more Ukrainian refugees coming to Slovenia, new humanitarian shelters have

been administered Slovenia, and the Slovenian government made plans to curb the rising prices of energy and food products. So far, however, the representatives of the Slovenian government remained cautiously optimistic that the Slovenian economy can withstand the new crisis. It is believed that the new government will continue to work towards reducing the toll of the high prices that were put on the average citizens.

Conclusion

While we still need to wait to see what will the new government of Slovenia look like, it seems that the international community is confident that the voters made the right decision and believes that the new government will be more accessible in regards to the mutual coordination of the political goals, and the modes of public communication.

Likewise, it is believed that the Slovenian economic performance could remain steadily high due to a large number of economic experts in the relative winner of the election, the Freedom Movement.

So far, Slovenia has been proactive in its support for the people and the state of Ukraine. The economic and humanitarian consequences of the Russo-Ukrainian war are still a cause of significant concern for the people of Slovenia, but it is believed that the new government will continue to aid the people of Ukraine and support the sanctions against Russia.

