

European Conference on European Security: Reasons and Arguments

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In 2008, the then president of Russia Dmitri Medvedev proposed to the EU, NATO, OSCE, CIS and Common Security Treaty Organisation to conclude the European Security Treaty. The idea was to create a common Euro-Atlantic security space based on the legally binding idea of indivisibility of security. NATO, EU and OSCE have never replied to it. The draft of the new treaty was a part of Russia's efforts to revive the spirit of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and to draw a final line under the Cold War. "Helsinki 2.0" was coined as a shorthand of this and other attempts to find a common security denominator between Russia and the West.

By 2019, against the backdrop of grand destabilization, growing systemic risks in Europe and in the neighbouring regions, the necessity of the European security system has become an existential demand.

In the long and complicated history of the Cold War, de-escalation had its peaks and troughs. One of profound achievements of peace making in old times was The Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, signed in Helsinki in 1975. That was the highest point of detente, the embodiment of a new *modus vivendi*, first of all in the relationship between the Soviet Union and the USA. The state of strategic stability was imbedded in the fundamental

international treaty. Later, due to the Helsinki process, Europe got its most representative organization – the OSCE.

In the 1970s, the premise for a success of the Helsinki project was the solution of the German question. The Moscow treaty of 1970 was a decisive step in that direction. And again, in the XXI century the position of Germany in the joint efforts to prevent a new cold war is of a significant importance as well as in the joint efforts to create a durable and comprehensive European security system.

The Helsinki treaty has not become outdated judging from the high demand of the OSCE, especially since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis. Moreover, the course of events has put into sharp relief the necessity of a new big treaty. The idea is to reconfirm the principles of 1975 and of the 1990 Paris Charter, taking into account huge historical changes, which have happened since then. It is not about copying from the past but about reapplying of fundamental principles of the balance of interests, compromise, mutually beneficial solutions, based on the international law and the supremacy of the UN Charter. In the absence of any positive signs in this sphere, the spill over of the new arms race into the nuclear domain is a stark

reality. The readiness of the USA to leave the 1987 INF treaty can have dramatic consequences. Several attempts to move in the direction of Helsinki 2.0 were made in the past. As a repercussion of Medvedev's proposal, in 2009 the OSCE launched the Corfu process. In 2010, Russia and Germany put forward the Meseberg initiative. Providing that the political will is expressed, there can be various modalities of Helsinki 2.0. It can be a permanent Conference, covering all four Helsinki baskets. Or it could concentrate on politico-military issues, taking into consideration the urgency of de-escalation in this particular area.

Participants of such a permanent Conference can be both states and international organizations, provided with a proper mandate. The Final Act of 1975 was signed by 35 states. Potentially, the number of participants of Helsinki 2.0 may be significantly higher in view of the sharp increase in the number of European states after the breakup of the Soviet Union. However, it does not mean that all of them should be expected to join the Conference outright. On the basis of the multi-speed principle the initiative can be launched by a coalition of the willing, intended to make this process as inclusive as possible. A host nation for the Conference can be one of internationally recognized mediators such as Finland, Austria or Switzerland.

Among the arguments against Helsinki 2.0 is the reference to sufficiency of the existing international treaties, including the UN Charter, The Final Act, The Paris Charter, etc. Indeed, numerous recognized principles of international behaviour were proclaimed at different points in history. However, their interpretations vary and new historical circumstances impose upon us new challenges and problems. If mutual claims and counterclaims mount and tensions rise, the opposing sides should be prepared to meet and conduct structured and serious dialogue.

Another argument is that prior to negotiations the opposite side should comply with preliminary conditions. As a result, we get a vicious circle of blames and counter blames. In the past key international treaties were concluded after major wars, the outcome of which divided nations into the victors and the defeated. Today, it is impossible to expect any leading centre of power, especially a permanent member of the UN Security Council, to admit its defeat or to yield to ultimatums. Therefore, to put forward preliminary

conditions to launch talks on transregional security is in effect to torpedo the settlement of international disputes through diplomacy.

The main criticism from NATO regarding such ideas as the European Security Treaty consists in vehement opposition to anything that can limit the ability of the Alliance to enlarge. However, this is a weak position. Firstly, indivisibility of security does not automatically prohibit enlargement of any military organisation. Secondly, it does not kill the open door policy of NATO, SCTO or other alliances but put it on the basis of pragmatism instead of ideology and propaganda. Thirdly, it implies that all sides become reciprocal stakeholders in the common security sphere and the dividing lines between opponents start to blur. The more this process is advanced, the more it gets unnecessary for military organisations to grow territorially.

Common sense and dangerous situation in the sphere of arms control and strategic stability dictate the necessity to launch dialogue among coalitions of the willing in the spirit of Helsinki. It is highly desirable that all states in the space from Vancouver to Vladivostok participate in this endeavour. However, in the near future it would be unreal to expect such an idealistic scenario to unfold. At the same time, merely waiting for a favourable moment to arrive in the future means letting the chances of a new great war increase.

Nations which suffered most from the wars of the 20th century should bear the responsibility for initiating a new permanent Conference on European security. What can be a nobler task than to save the world?

