Threats to the Security of Central and Eastern Europe

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The end of the Cold War as a form of rivalry and confrontation between East and West, or more specifically, between the United States and the Soviet Union, did not make the world a more stable or more secure place. The same can be said about the dissipation of the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Treaty, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) and the entire formerly huge territory under Soviet dominance or in its sphere of influence. As the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security put it: the end of the Cold War resulted in more instability, more challenges for security and more hotbeds of international conflict. The feeling of "fear and hope" dominant in the Cold War, has only been replaced by a feeling of "hope and fear."

Thanks to changes which have taken place in the past five years we can now claim to have a new world, a new Europe, but certainly there is neither a new world nor a new European order.

Throughout Europe's modern history, international orders were shaped through wars. The Napoleonic Wars, for instance, resulted in the Vienna Order, the First World War in the Versailles Order, and World War II in the Yalta-Potsdam Order. The present order, which is being shaped now, and which will continue to evolve in the near future, is going to reflect evolutionary change, even though it is shaping as a consequence of ending a specific kind of war, designated as the Cold War. Unfortunately, the world so far has not become any more secure and even has seen the emergence of new sources of tensions and international conflicts. In effect, it has become necessary to evolve mechanisms for resolving problems in a new international environment, and also to guide the world in shaping a desirable new international order, and on our continent, a new European Order.

When Francis Fukuyama in 1989 dubbed the collapsing global order as an "end of history," the claim initially received an enthusiastic welcome. It soon

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turned out that, rather than witnessing an “end of history” in the post-Cold War world, we have come to see a return to history, i.e. a relapse to traditional, historic sources of international tensions and conflicts. This trend has been ironically described as “return to the future.”

Let us now examine some of the present challenges and threats, without going into detailed analyses or hierarchy of gravity.

Global nationalism is gaining, rather than weakening. Instead of single “global village” we have countless villages around the globe, aware of each other, manifesting various prejudices against each other, thereby increasing the risk of conflict. Here and there one sees a relapse to territorial claims. There are mounting disintegrative tendencies in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies. There is flourishing international trafficking in drugs, of terrorism, spreading AIDS and possible other, earlier unheard epidemics.

The entire complex of ecological threats is a factor destabilizing the world: erosion of the ozone layer, the greenhouse effect, acid rains, pollution of air, pollution of water in seas and oceans, deforestation, soil erosion, etc. Gradual exhaustion of non-renewable resources (such as oil) could intensify the rivalry between the main consumers for the remaining reserves.

There are growing threats inherent in the possible further proliferation of nuclear arms, sophisticated military technologies, trade in fissionable materials and access to weapons of mass annihilation for not only newly-emerged states but also terrorist groups.

Borders are becoming increasingly permeable, which combined with instability or lack of economic perspectives in the poor countries, leads to intensified migration processes, fueling fears of other states and serving as a source of hostility and ethnic strife. Religious fundamentalism, strife, and religious prejudices all thrive. This is a source of both domestic and international conflicts.

These conflict-prone situations are matched by a variety of economic and commercial conflicts of interest throughout the world. There is a widening gap between the rich and the poor countries, increasing protectionism, mounting debt, and growing economic dependencies. All this is anything but conducive to political stability.

Such conflict situations and processes exist in an international system characterized by increased weakening of decision-making power among an increasing number of states and the gradual shift of political authority from national governments to trans-national organizations, multi-national corporations, and integrated institutions.

Central/Eastern Europe is neither insulated against nor immune to global threats. In effect, global threats also represent threats to that region.

Let us consider the specific threats to the security of Central and Eastern Europe inherent in the present and the potentially probable situation of states in that region.