

**4<sup>th</sup> Defence Königswinter Conference,  
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**Winding-up Report  
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Russia was on the minds of the participants for the two days of this conference; Vladimir Putin was the „guest of honour“ for the whole meeting.

Of course, it did not come as a surprise that Russia was the dominating topic. Perhaps this was not only a reflection of Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Perhaps it was also a reflection of the West neglecting Russia for almost two decades after the end of the Cold War.

There had been a lack of interest, a lack of understanding, and a lack of knowledge. Research Institutes were closed, intelligence was neglected.

**Session I: The Ukraine Crisis and our Relations with Russia**

The question was asked: How do we shape the future of Europe with a Russia that is not a partner anymore? And if Russia is not a partner anymore, what is it: A rival? An opponent? „The enemy“ again?

Why are we losing what we gained within the first two decades after the end of the Cold War: partnership with Russia? Is that only Putin's fault? Or is it our fault, too?

It was at least our failure analytically, one speaker said. We failed to grasp the extent of Russia's resentment. We took Russia's weakness as an agreement to our ideas. In the end, however, a stable European security order cannot work against or without Russia.

There was agreement that despite all the present problems and tensions, we should avoid entering a new Cold War. But we are, as another speaker said, in the deepest rift between Russia and Europe since the end of the Cold War. We will, he said, have a frozen conflict at our borders, and it could escalate.

We are engaged, it was said by several participants, in a „test of will“. Sanctions should be enforced, but it would be important to leave Russia some space.

A de-stabilized Russia, one participant remarked, would probably be an even more aggressive Russia.

How should we respond to Russia's policies? Is there enough dialogue with Russia? Are we keeping the channels of communication open? Does it really make sense to isolate Russia politically and diplomatically? Do we have to

overcome the silence between our military forces?

When it comes to the defence against possible further Russian aggression, the conference was reminded, there are no defence commitments to countries that are not Nato members. We should not fool countries like Ukraine, Georgia, or Moldova to expect we would be ready to bail them out. One participant warned that there could be „moments of madness“ or of misunderstanding for which we should be prepared.

Session II: How do we best cope with the situation in Syria and Iraq?

One speaker reminded us that the conflict in Syria and Iraq is not so much a terrorism problem, but a political problem. The responsibility to come to grips with it is first of all a regional one. There is no military solution from the outside. The rise of Islamism is a response to the failed policies of the regimes in the Middle East. Many of them simply have no legitimacy. Another speaker noticed the dimension of the conflict, the speed with which ISIS was growing. ISIS has already been spreading to Libya, it could spread further to Egypt and other countries in the region.

How to deal with this threat, if there is, as one speaker said, „no common ground to get into a conversation with ISIS“?

There was a lengthy discussion about Turkey's role in Syria and Iraq, and about Ankara's priorities: First, get rid of Assad. Second, deal with the PKK. Third, fight ISIS – if at all!

We are lacking, one speaker argued, not only a strategy in dealing with Russia, but also in dealing with the Middle East. The Middle East we knew no longer exists. ISIS is there to stay for some time, as is the Assad regime. „I think, we have to prepare for the worst“, the speaker said, echoing the warning of „moments of madness“ in the Ukraine-Russia crisis.

Nobody, one participant argued, should underestimate the threat from ISIS. They came close to overrunning Bagdad. That would have created a second Afghanistan.

So what, it was asked, is the bigger threat, Russia or ISIS? The majority seem to agree: Russia, of course. But does it really make sense to ask that question? Aren't these two completely different categories of threats? ISIS could never be a partner of the West, it has to be defeated. Russia, on the other hand, became a partner and should, if possible, become a partner again. Not the least a partner in fighting fundamentalism and Islamism in the Middle East!

Therefore, one participant recommended, we should not only be prepared for „moments of madness“, but also for windows of opportunity. The negotiations with Iran could be such an opportunity. So far, the West has been able to work together with the Russians – and the Chinese –

addressing the atomic conflict with Tehran.

### Session III: The Role of Nato / CSDP after Wales

One speaker offered six observations: First: In the plethora of crises this year, Europe did better than could have been expected. Second: Europe's strategic thinking is focusing again on the European neighbourhood, not on providing security in far away areas. The EU is not a global power, it is a regional power with a global outlook. Third: The US will remain a European power. Fourth: There seems to be a long-term inward turn of the European societies. Fifth: CSDP has been put into practice only on a limited scale. There have been no major missions as foreseen ten years ago. Helping others to provide security has priority. Sixth: Looking ahead the key question is: Do we need further integration steps in foreign and security policies? That is extremely unpopular. But individual member states cannot do the job.

At the summit in Wales, a second speaker said, we did the minimum necessary to commit ourselves to the crises we are facing. It is difficult to shift Nato's mindset from 20 years of „peace dividend“. Nato lacks important capabilities for new challenges, e.g. reconnaissance capabilities on its Eastern periphery.

Nato lacks readiness, lacks the doctrine of how to meet Russia's challenge and how to fight hybrid warfare. It has a long way to go in a world where we have to „think the unthinkable“ again. The West does not yet have the tools it needs in the „test of wills“ with Russia or Islamic extremism.

One British participant observed that Germany has become the „center of gravity“ in Europe, more than the United States. In Berlin today it was, he argued, to a large degree decided how the world will be shaped. The thinking in Germany is absolutely fundamental for Nato's policy. Germany's leadership role will grow! The US will only be engaged in Europe selectively.

No, one German participant replied, Germany has not become the new „center of gravity“. Another German stated: "we are not "the center of gravity", but – in - the "center of gravity". Pursuing Germany's foreign and defence policy as a European nation has become part of our political DNA. Accepting a leadership role in EU and Nato would be extremely unpopular. It would not happen.

## Session IV: Defence Procurement Cooperation

Defence procurement cooperation is, as one speaker remarked, primarily a political decision. Politics decides whether we want to cooperate and to what extent.

Procurement cooperation, he argued, is done case by case. It is done for international policy reasons – to build relationships. It is done to sustain capabilities, and to sustain interoperability among allied forces.

But because crises in Europe have become the „new normal“, defence procurement cooperation is important. It can work if there is the political will to make it work.

But, as another speaker showed, multilateral defence cooperation in Europe is extremely complex. There are too many frameworks. A consolidation of frameworks is needed.

Returning to the question of Germany becoming the new „center of gravity“, one participant remarked, with 1.3 % of the German GDP being spent on the military and no raise in sight – that puts the idea of a shift of the center of gravity from the United States to Germany into question and eventually to rest for some time.