



## **DISCUSSION: IS THERE ANY REASON TO FEAR A NEW COLD WAR?**

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The Open Society Forum held in Tallinn on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008 provided a forum for a fascinating discussion between Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Martti Ahtisaari, Kadri Liik, Aleksander Smolar and George Soros. The discussion was moderated by Andres Kasekamp.

### **Andres Kasekamp: There has been much talk about a new cold war. How is it perceived in Russia?**

**Kadri Liik:** There are people who argue that a new cold war is impossible, because Moscow does not have a particular ideology. I believe that this argumentation is not to the point. Today's Russia is governed by former KGB agents, who have a very specific set of beliefs. They tend to believe in conspiracy theories, that the world is governed by power centres and smaller states and nations are simply pawns in their hands. I believe that this mindset inevitably leads to conflict.

Thus, Russia does not have an official ideology, that would clash with that of the West. Or maybe they have? Russia is characterized by a nationalist-chauvinist world view, that does not really help them win allies in Europe and therefore they are less dangerous than Communist Russia. However, we must bear in mind that today's Russia is wealthier than in the Soviet era. Thus the question is whether they need to bother with winning over the people, when they can just buy off politicians?

I believe that the root cause of it all lies in the fact that Russia failed to become a democracy in the early 1990s along with the rest of Eastern and Central Europe. Russia failed to change its identity. I like the concept put forward by Robert Cooper who has said, that states not only have interests, but also identities, which determine how states define their interests. And Russia tends to define its interests at the expense of its neighbours, because they did not rethink their position in the early 1990s.

### **Kasekamp: Do you believe that the election of Barack Obama as the new US President might have an impact on relations between the EU and Russia?**

**Aleksander Smolar:** There is a lot of uncertainty about the future and the policies of President-elect Obama. However, we may be certain that he will represent an entirely different style of America politics compared to his predecessor. He will not project Bush's benevolent hegemonic attitudes towards the rest of the world.

My guess is that he will strive for good relations with Russia. The problem is whether it will be possible. To a large extent it will depend on the behaviour and politics of Moscow. I believe that there are more profound reasons why such matters are difficult to predict and it touches on the question of a new cold war. Currently we are in an extremely complex international situation. Relations with Russia are very hostile, especially now.

**George Soros:** Right now there is no way of knowing what Obama is going to do. I believe it is a great opportunity, because the Western policy towards the Soviet Union and then Russia was really a failure, and we are now paying the price for that. I think that President Obama will perhaps be in a better position to recognise, that it was a failure and to build a better relationship.

The conflict between the Soviet Union and the West was two-dimensional. One was a geopolitical dimension and the other was the dimension of values. The West failed to live up to its values. On the other hand West pursued its own geopolitical interests by the enlargement of NATO and the EU. Estonia became a member of the EU. Thus the present leadership feels that it has been surrounded and has basically been pursuing a geopolitical policy rather than a policy based on values.

Now the tables have turned. The geopolitical strength is on the Russian side and they are playing that card. As a result, this aggressive use of geopolitical power poses a serious threat for Europe



which must be countered. At the same time it is very regrettable that the relationship should be based on this geopolitical exploitation of power rather than on the pursuit of common interests.

Thus, Europe must resist Russia's geopolitical aggression and for that purpose it should become much more united, because Russia's strength lies in its unity, whereas Europe is extremely divided. The source of Russia's geopolitical superiority lies in its ability to play off the national and commercial interests of European countries against each other.

**Kasekamp: President Ilves, do you see a shift in paradigm in international relations, or more particularly in the EU-Russia relationship?**

**Toomas Hendrik Ilves:** I'm not sure if there is a shift yet, but certainly the old paradigm has collapsed. You could say that the post-1990 settlement in Europe no longer holds. That is that countries will proceed along their path of development as democracies without interference or invasion.

That fundamental assumption of the past 20 years collapsed on August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008. It is now quite clear that the assumption that the borders of Europe are fixed and that no one will invade anyone are gone. Where it goes from here I don't know, but certainly we can identify some areas where Europe has been sadly lacking.

One of these areas is EU's policy towards the neighbourhood, the countries situated between EU and Russia. Europe has not given its neighbours the same privileges as have been given to Russia. The neighbours of Europe such as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia are basically democracies. However, rather than assisting those democracies with visa policies or with having an effective European neighbourhood policy, we have decided not to deal with them lest they think they might become part of the EU. I think that ultimately it is about whether Europe will defend democracies and democratic choice or not. We do not know the answer to that question.

**Kasekamp: Is there any way to balance these value and interests by making them more comprehensible to the other side?**

**Liik:** I think that we ought to stop pretending that we have any shared values with Russia. It is quite clear that Russia does not subscribe to the values of liberal democracy. The question is whether the West still does? I hope it does.

I think that the problem for Europe has been that we have often reacted very sharply and forcefully toward Russia, but we have not been sufficiently consistent in our actions. Usually we give up rather easily if our policy or course of action does not pay off in a couple of months. That is what is happening right now. We seem to have forgotten the conditions of the six-point plan for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia.

That plan is now gone, hardly anyone mentions it anymore, because everyone knows that Russia is not going to abide by it. We have no authority to make Russia adhere to that agreement. However, we should make it absolutely clear that non-compliance with concluded agreements is not acceptable. We should change our position towards Russia and state very clearly that we do not see Russia as a partner anymore. Of course we will continue dealing with Russia. However, we must keep in mind that Russia treats international relations as business deals, including the fate of other countries.

**Kasekamp: Finland has been often held up as one of the few countries that has successfully managed its relationship with Russia. Yet I believe that today there is a debate in Finland on possible changes to that approach and if I understand correctly you are one of the advocates of doing things in a new way?**



**Martti Ahtisaari:** Actually, what I have argued for many years now is that we should not put so much emphasis on changing the policy, but that Finland should join NATO for the simple reason that we should be party to all organizations where all the other Western democracies are members. However, it is not based on any Russian threat.

First of all, let's be realistic. This talk about a new cold war is utter nonsense. The West does not pose a threat to Russia in any way and I can't see Russia threatening the West either. We must tone down the rhetoric and deal with the fears that exist in Russia right now, because I can't see on what sort of treat perspectives they are based on. It is very difficult to cooperate with Russians if they have an *a priori* anti-Western attitude. In my opinion the cooperative relations with Russia depend more on the Russian behavior than on the European or American behaviour.

**Smolar:** If you listen to people like Medvedev and Putin, it is quite obvious that they are counting on the West for the modernization of Russia's economy. However it is true that historical heritage plays a significant role, especially in a large country such as Russia. We do not need to accept their history or world view, but we must take them into account, because those are the driving forces motivating them.

Currently the term "sphere of influence/interest" has gained much popularity. Medvedev has used the term openly, but there is not reason for the West to accept it. However we must bear in mind that this is a very general term in international relations. The effect of the Russian usage of this term begs the question what is Russia's sphere of influence/interest. Paradoxically, today it is much more difficult to recognise Russia's sphere of interest compared to 10 years ago. Backthen it was implicitly recognised, whereas today it is almost impossible to do that.

Of course the countries can be obliged to tolerate the current situation that cannot be changed, because Russia is there, Russia is strong and nobody wants to send its troops to fight. But morally and politically this is not recognised.

**Ahtisaari:** We here in the West must recognise that none of us wants the kind of confrontation that characterized the cold war. Therefore states should tone down the rhetoric that has no basis in reality. I believe that it is important we approach our societies from that perspective.

### **Kasekamp: President Ilves, is the solution a new security architecture?**

**Ilves:** We can think about new institutions once we get our current institutions in shape. It is absolutely right that there is no cold war, because there is no ideological conflict and nobody wants a new cold war, certainly not the kind based on power relations. However, there is an ideological conflict, but it is no longer about the form of ownership. It is between authoritarian capitalism and democratic capitalism and that is a very different situation.

Too many people in the so-called Old Europe care much less about democracy. Most of them think that we should rather focus on the export potential of those markets and they are quite willing to overlook the invasion of a sovereign country. Therefore I believe that there is an internal conflict within the European Union and we do not need a new institution.

To be more specific on the prospect of a new security architecture is that any genuine security organization can only be based on common values, not simply on geographic proximity. Because a security organization ultimately means that a country is willing to send its citizens to war and we can do that only if it is in the name of something we believe in. That is why we are in NATO, and it works because it is based on common valued, and EU should also be based on common values.



### **George Soros**

Member of the European Council on Foreign Relations, Chairman of Open Society Institute

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### **Martti Ahtisaari**

Co-chair of the European Council on Foreign Relations, former President of the Republic of Finland, 2008 Nobel Peace Prize winner

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### **Toomas Hendrik Ilves**

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Member of the European Council on Foreign Relations, Professor of Political Science, Chairman of the Board of the Stefan Batory Foundation in Poland

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### **Kadri Liik**

Director of International Centre for Defense Studies in Estonia

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