



TOUČE NATO-RUSSIA RELATIONS JUNILE JE

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Pražský studentský summit

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Autor je spolupracovníkem Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky a členem přípravného týmu Pražského studentského summitu.

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Vydala Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky (AMO) pro potřeby XXIV. ročníku Pražského studentského summitu.

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1 Introduction

In recent years, and especially after the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, there has been a great divide between NATO and Russia. Nevertheless, NATO-Russia relations go back as far as the creation of the Alliance in 1949 and it may come as a surprise that they entail much more than mere confrontation. Throughout the years, the West, which the Alliance symbolizes,

and Russia also tried to find common ground and to some extent they succeeded. The following text will attempt to present how Russia, then the Soviet Union, went from the number one foe of NATO during the Cold War, through thoughts of Russia actually joining the Alliance in the 1990's, to the potential security threat it is nowadays.¹

2 Beginnings of NATO and the Cold War (1949-1989)

First Secretary General of NATO, Lord Hastings Lionel Ismay, famously said that the Alliance was created to “keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.”² It was a reaction to the geopolitical situation in Europe after World War II. An institutional “life-line” across the Atlantic Ocean was needed to tie the United States to the security of Europe while also enabling the safe and

monitored rearmament of then West Germany. In 1955, West Germany joined the Alliance and as a response, the Warsaw Pact was formed. During the Cold War these two stood firmly against each other as a representation of Western and Eastern Bloc.³ The division into two hostile blocs denied any possibility of independent relations between NATO and the Soviet Union.⁴

3 Following the Cold War era (1989-2000)

3. 1 Reaction of NATO

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and communist regimes in the whole Eastern Bloc, the Alliance had to decide the question of its future and at the same time redefine its position towards its former adversaries. In June 1990, the tenth NATO summit at the level of heads of states and heads of governments was therefore convened in London.⁵ The vision of the Alliance was mostly hopeful. Even in her opening speech, Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, stated that the Alliance should extend a “hand of friendship” to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.⁶ This

term was reiterated by George W. Bush Senior, President of the United States,⁷ and the whole Alliance in the final text of the London Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance.⁸

The London Declaration also formally invited countries of the former Eastern Bloc to establish permanent diplomatic relations with the Alliance. However, it repeated that NATO remains a defensive military alliance and “must maintain for the foreseeable future an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces, based in Europe.”⁹

3. 2 Inception of the Russian Federation

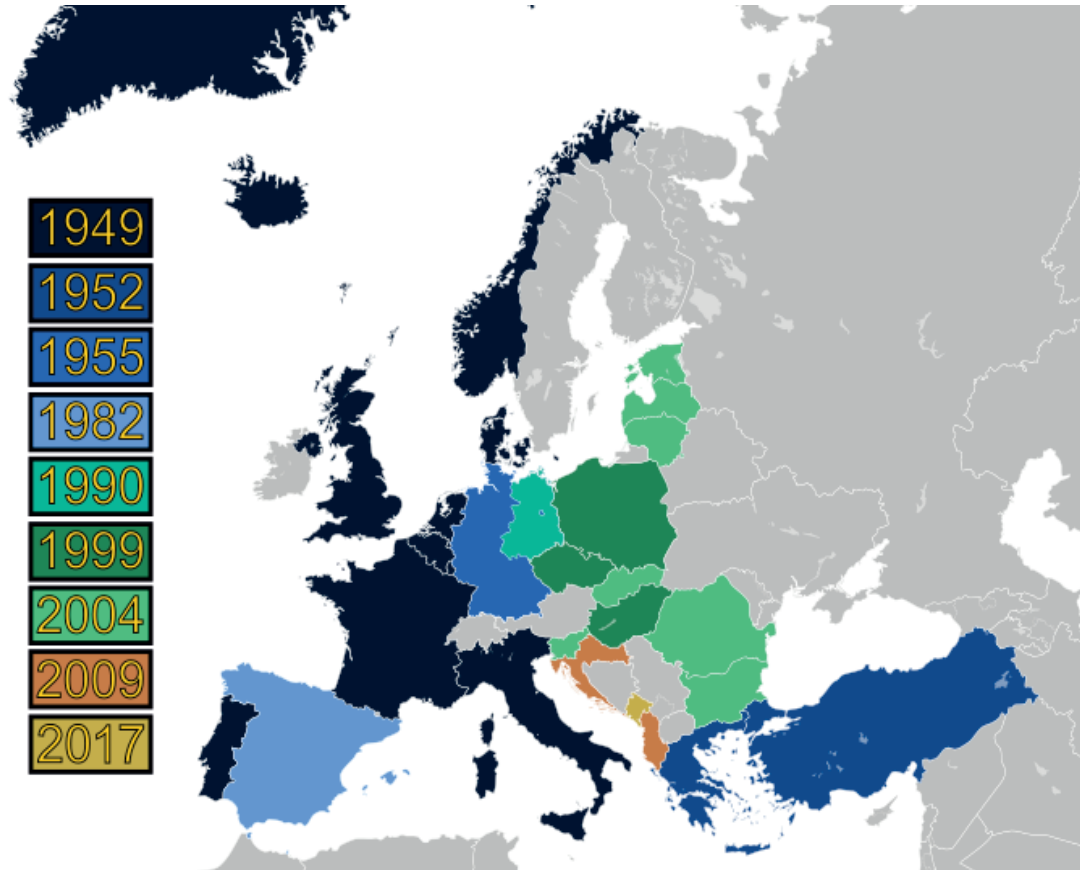
On 20 December 1991, officials of NATO and eastern and central European countries met at the NATO headquarters in Brussels for the first time. They established the first forum for continued cooperation and regular meetings at a ministerial and ambassadorial level, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council.¹⁰ More importantly, however, during the talks them-

selves the Soviet ambassador announced that he no longer represented the Soviet Union but only the Russian Federation.¹¹ The Soviet Union was dissolved the next week.¹²

Moreover, in an official letter to the North Atlantic Cooperation Council Boris Yeltsin, the President of the Russian Federation, proclaimed that the possible Russian inclusion

into NATO is a long-term political aim. This surprised the Allies and Manfred Wörner, Secretary General of NATO, quickly calmed the situation commenting that Russia did not officially apply for membership.¹³ It was, however, not

the last time this idea was considered¹⁴ and the possibility of Russia joining NATO was allegedly in the discussion as late as 2001 by the United States President Bill Clinton and Russia's Vladimir Putin.¹⁵



Picture 1: European members of NATO and the year of their ascension⁸⁹

3. 3 NATO Enlargement as the Point of Contention

Up to this day, one of the grudges that Russia holds against the NATO is the question of its enlargement into Eastern Europe.¹⁶ Throughout the 1990 negotiations about the reunification of Germany following the Fall of the Berlin Wall, western officials needed to calm down traditional Soviet concerns. Therefore, they repeated on many occasions that NATO would not expand towards the Soviet Union, most famously U.S. Secretary of State James Baker stated the phrase “not one inch eastward”.¹⁷ However, these assurances were never made official.¹⁸ At that time Central and Eastern European countries were still part of the Warsaw Pact and had substantial Soviet garrisons. There was also no consensus among NATO Allies about the en-

largement policy so their possible NATO membership did not seem plausible.¹⁹ Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Soviet Union at that time, also denied in an interview in 2014 that any discussions happened in regards to NATO expansion.²⁰

This topic was opened once again in connection with the creation of the Partnership for Peace in 1994; a programme for bilateral cooperation between NATO and its partners.²¹ The Allies saw the Partnership for Peace as a possible stepping stone for some countries to become future members.²² The Russians, on the other hand, strived for a new platform for cooperation outside of NATO that would entail the whole Europe.²³ They worried that NATO would try to isolate them²⁴ and demanded

special treatment as a nuclear superpower.²⁵

In 1997, the Founding Act, which formally set grounds for NATO-Russia relations, was executed. It created the Permanent Joint Council,²⁶ a body which provided a level of cooperation unprecedented by other Partnership for Peace partners.²⁷ More-

over, it was set out in the Founding Act that NATO has “no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members.”²⁸ However, Russia could not stop the ascension of Partnership for Peace partners to NATO as to this day almost half of them became members of the Alliance.²⁹

3. 4 Civil Wars in Yugoslavia

Following the end of Cold War, the Alliance had to accommodate for newly arising security challenges and started to perform so-called “out of area” missions, deployment of forces outside of the territory of member states.³⁰ It first intervened in former Yugoslavia during the Bosnian War, a conflict between ethnic Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs in today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina.³¹ Under the United Nations mandate, NATO enforced a no-fly zone over Bosnia.³² The following air raids were firstly denounced by the Russians.³³ However, after the truce and signing of the Dayton Accords at the end of 1995, both sides joined their forces in facilitating peace in Bosnia and stationed peacekeeping troops there. The Russian soldiers were even under indirect command of US commanders.³⁴

In 1999, the Alliance used force for the second time. In re-

sponse to the deteriorating situation and disproportionate actions of Serbs during the Kosovo War between ethnic Kosovar Albanians and Serbs, NATO issued airstrikes against Serbian forces. This time the military action was not sanctioned by the United Nations³⁵ but the Security Council Resolution proposed by Russia condemning it was not enacted either.³⁶ Sergey Lavrov, the Russian ambassador to the UN, famously accused NATO that it wants to become a “global policeman”.³⁷ In response to the airstrikes, Russia also recalled its military representatives from NATO headquarters and severally diminished any ties and cooperation with NATO.³⁸ Nevertheless, once the situation calmed down again Russia became a valuable partner when it joined the Alliance in peacekeeping forces following the war,³⁹ although its involvement was not without issues.⁴⁰

4 One decade after the Fall of the Berlin Wall (2000-2014)

4. 1 The pinnacle of cooperation

Vladimir Putin became president of the Russian Federation in 2000⁴¹ and throughout his first term strived for cooperation with NATO.⁴² This was first demonstrated in the aftermath of the 11 September terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre. Vladimir Putin was the first world leader to call George W. Bush, United States President, following the attacks,⁴³ gave consent to the United States to use key Central Asian airbases in its campaign in Afghanistan⁴⁴ and shared intelligence regarding Taliban.⁴⁵

The effort culminated in 2002 with the establishment of the NATO-Russian Council, which replaced the Permanent Joint Council and serves as a forum for discussion and

cooperation to this day.⁴⁶ Under the Rome Declaration, also called “NATO-Russia Relations: A New Quality”, new ways of cooperation were established and all members of NATO and Russia stood as equal partners. During this time, the Alliance and Russia cooperated on an unseen standard. They coordinated anti-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan, attended joint disaster-response and military exercises,⁴⁷ worked together on a missile defence system and more.⁴⁸ One of the objectives was even the establishment of a joint military training centre.⁴⁹ During the peak of its activities, the NATO-Russian Council met at one level or another almost every day.⁵⁰

4. 2 Drop in the relations

The relationship between Russia and NATO started deteriorating again in the mid-2000 s. In 2004, seven countries joined NATO, among them Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, three former Soviet republics sharing a border with Russia.⁵¹ The expansion was denounced by the Duma, the lower chamber of the Russian parliament, and Sergei Lavrov, Russia's Foreign Minister, called it a mistake.⁵² There were, however, no official diplomatic consequences.

The discrepancies continued in 2008 during the events surrounding Georgia. At the Bucharest summit in April, the Allies agreed that Ukraine and Georgia will become members of NATO.⁵³ A few months later Russia invaded parts of Georgia in an effort to support militant separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. The Alliance opposed the use of force and provided humanitarian aid to Georgia.⁵⁴ George Bush commented that „Russia has invaded a sovereign neighbouring state and threatens a democratic government elected by its people. Such an action is unacceptable in the 21st century.“⁵⁵ As a response cooperation between the NATO and Russia and meetings of the NATO-Russia Council were suspended for half a year.⁵⁶

The relationship worsened even further during the upris-

ings against totalitarian governments mainly in North African and Middle Eastern Arab countries that came to be known as the Arab Spring.⁵⁷ In the case of mostly peaceful revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, Russia's and western views still aligned. Nonetheless, in March the United Nations Security Council authorized intervention in Libya after an extensive use of force against civilians by the Libyan government,⁵⁸ it was executed by NATO.⁵⁹ Russia did not veto the Security Council resolution⁶⁰ but Vladimir Putin afterwards likened the Libyan intervention to a crusade.⁶¹ Nevertheless, Russia joined the communique of G8 countries and agreed that Muammar Gaddafi, Libya's dictator, should leave.⁶²

Much graver conflicts came in the case of Syria. The situation in Syria was very similar to that in Libya, Bashar al-Assad, President of Syria, did not hesitate to use force against civilians and violently cracked down on protests.⁶³ The Russian approach was, on the other hand, completely different. The Syrian regime was firstly a close ally of Russia and secondly looking at the state of Libya Russia feared another NATO intervention. Therefore, Russia mostly blocked the discussion about Syria at the United Nations.⁶⁴



Picture 2: Countries and the outcome of the Arab Spring⁹⁰

4. 3 Crisis begins

In 2013, protests against pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich broke out in Ukraine after he refused to sign the

European Union Association Agreement which would foster closer ties between the European Union and Ukraine.⁶⁵ In

March 2014, Russian forces entered Crimea. Russian official discourse promulgated three interdependent narratives justifying the annexation of Crimea. “Russia designated Crimea as always Russian, revived language from the World War II to demonize the post-Yanukovych Ukrainian government, and claimed the Crimeans were asserting their right of self-determination.”⁶⁶ Following a referendum in the next weeks, Crimea was effectively annexed by Russia.⁶⁷ The Alliance denounced the annexation as illegal and illegitimate at the extraordinary meeting of the NATO-Ukrainian Commission.⁶⁸ All military and civilian cooperation with Russia was suspended by NATO⁶⁹ and the NATO-Russia Council stopped its regular meetings.⁷⁰ On the other hand, the Alliance strengthened its ties with Ukraine.⁷¹

5 The Aftermath (2014-2018)

As a response to the deterioration of relations, NATO came at the Wales summit in 2014 with the Readiness Action Plan. It can be divided into two parts, the assurances and the adaptation. As for the former, the Allies increased the frequency of exercises⁷⁸ and the number of stationed soldiers⁷⁹ as well as intensified other military activities⁸⁰ at and around the NATO border countries. For the latter, new multinational NATO headquarters were established throughout Eastern Europe and the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, a force of about 5000 ground troops ready for almost immediate deployment, was created.⁸¹

Some of these measures, especially the increase in the number of troops in Eastern Europe, were not only criticised by Russia⁸² but also a point of content inside the Alliance.⁸³ It

The divide between the Allies and Russia was even widened in 2015, when Russia began, upon request of Bashar al-Assad, airstrikes in Syria. Officially, these are targeted at terrorist groups such as Daesh, also known as ISIS.⁷² However, Russia has been repeatedly criticized that it targets all rebels against the Syrian regime⁷³ and even civilians; the prime example being the Battle for Aleppo where hundreds of civilians fell victim to Russian bombings.⁷⁴ The United States and most other members of NATO, on the other hand, oppose the current government⁷⁵ and even directly struck the Syrian forces twice. Both times it followed an alleged use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime against civilians and the Russians were warned in advance.⁷⁶ In 2017 NATO even joined the Global Coalition against Daesh.⁷⁷

showed the divide inside NATO between countries considering the eastern flank a priority and those focusing on the southern border.⁸⁴

Russia did not stand idle either, organizing large-scale exercises which raised concerns among the Allies about the security of the Baltics.⁸⁵ On the other hand, a dialogue is possible too, as the NATO-Russia Council convened for the first time since the Ukraine crisis in 2016⁸⁶ and meets several times a year ever since.⁸⁷ A steep improvement in relations is nevertheless unlikely seeing that NATO reaffirmed its position on the illegality of the annexation of Crimea and pointed to Russia as the reason for instability in parts of Europe in the final declaration of the 2018 Brussels Summit.⁸⁸

Questions for the negotiations

1. What is your country's historical experience with Russia?
2. Does your country consider Russia an immediate threat to its security?
3. Does your country have any recent incidents with Russia? (violation of airspace, cyber attacks etc.)
4. What is your country's economic relationship with Russia?
5. Is your country in any way dependent on resources from Russia?

Recommended reading

NATO-Russia Relations

Here you can find simplistic and well structured official NATO article about the history of NATO-Russia Relations.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50090.htm

NATO enlargement

This website serves as a great source of additional materials regarding the enlargement of NATO and the controversies surrounding it.

<http://www.natolibguides.info/nato-russia/controversy>

Ukraine: Everything you need to know about how we got here; Nick Thomson

A simple timeline of the events that lead to and happened during the Ukraine crisis.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/10/europe/ukraine-war-how-we-got-here/index.html>

Crimea - Way Back Home; Andrey Kondrashov

A Russian documentary about the annexation of Crimea which provides an interesting view into the official Russian stance. It is also filmed in a very pro-Russian way, therefore, it can serve as a modern example of propaganda.

<https://sputniknews.com/russia/201503311020271172/>

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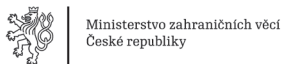
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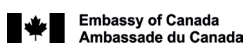


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