A new world order? European security after the war in Ukraine

Sabine Mengelberg

‘During an interview with Russia Today, 85-year-old Vladimir Putin grinned while looking back on his success of restoring the empire of Tsar Peter the Great. This success started with his special military operation in Ukraine in 2022. After the Turkish and Hungarian Parliaments blocked the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO membership, the road was open to invade these two traitors to Russia. Though NATO members declared that they would individually assist Finland and Sweden, they were not yet protected by NATO’s article 5, just as Ukraine had not been. After Russia had successfully occupied Finland and Sweden, and after that the Baltic States, and cut off Europe from any gas supplies, Europe ended in an economic crisis, fragmentation, and finally disintegration. Today Europe has become a museum for Chinese tourists, under the protectorate of China, which simultaneously deals with millions of Europeans who are fleeing their homes’.

The devastating scenario described above is one that haunts politicians and academics who deal with European security. In light of the war in Ukraine that surprised Europe on the 24th of February this year, there are consequences for peace and security in the whole of Europe, and the battle for spheres of influence is ongoing again. Not only Ukraine is under attack; the complete European security order and with that the European political agenda have changed 180 degrees. Likewise, partnership and enlargement are back on the political agenda, from which they had more or less disappeared. This article will focus on the creation of the European security architecture after the end of the Cold War, initiated by the OSCE and NATO, its main developments, and future perspectives.

THE NEW INTERBELLUM: THE CREATION OF THE EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

At the end of the Cold War, the idea arose of a European security architecture that would house all the states of NATO and the collapsed Warsaw Pact (WP). Back then, the questions underlying peace in Europe were the position of the Soviet Union (SU) and the (former) WP states, the reunification of Germany, a partial American withdrawal of both interest and troops from European security affairs and consequently from the transatlantic relationship, and the possibility of a European security and defense identity situated in the EU or NATO.1

This idea of a European security architecture was driven by the SU, France, the United Kingdom (UK), Germany and the United States (US) with President George H.W. Bush campaigning for ‘A Europe whole and free’.2 The interests were scattered at the beginning of the 1990s. However, all key actors were coming to the same conclusion: Europe had to be rebuilt by a forum within a pan-European house. For some, this would include NATO and the WP. For others, this pan-European house would replace both alliances. What was needed was a framework that would rebalance the power relations in Europe. Especially the states in the West pleaded for a new European architecture based on concepts of the liberal world order and multilateralism. The organizations that finally were included in this security architecture were the Council of Europe (CoE), the CSCE, the EU, NATO and, its Russian opposite, the Collective Security Treaty organization (CSTO).
The idea of a European security architecture was coined by the NATO Summit in London in July 1990, followed by the CSCE’s Charter of Paris in November and NATO’s Strategic Concept of 1991 in Rome. In Rome NATO declared that dialogue and cooperation between NATO and non-NATO states and organizations was necessary, while simultaneously strengthening the OSCE. And although US Secretary of State James Baker stated to SU leader Mikhail Gorbachev that NATO would not move one inch eastward, the first step towards cooperation between NATO and former adversaries was initiated by the US with the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC, 1991) and labelled as NATO’s cooperative security task.

In anticipation of NATO’s first enlargement round in 1999, Russia and NATO signed the NATO-Russia Founding Act. The Act declared that neither party had intentions to place nuclear weapons, military forces or infrastructure permanently within the new member states. In that same year, the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between NATO and Ukraine was signed, which established the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC).

The CSCE Charter of Paris in 1990 defined an inclusive pan-European framework, from Vladivostok to Anchorage. The Charter was based on shared values and commitment to active cooperation among its members. This framework aimed at a division between the functional and geographical security roles of the security organizations, by promoting interlocking and mutually reinforcing organizations. It was based on the idea that the security organizations had a complementary, not competitive, nature.

Soon after ‘Paris’, the OSCE was built institutionally, transforming it from a conference to an organization under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. The organization was mandated to conduct election observation missions in the whole OSCE territory. Furthermore, a High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) and an office for democratic institutions and human rights (ODIHR) were installed as a result of the many
The idea of a European security architecture was coined by the NATO Summit in London in July 1990, followed by the CSCE’s Charter of Paris in November and NATO’s Strategic Concept of 1991 in Rome. Pictured is NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner and International Staff leading a press conference during the 1990 London Summit (photo: NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization)

ethnic minority tensions and frozen conflicts exemplified by Russian minorities in the Baltic states. Likewise, the OSCE’s mandate was broadened and strengthened with mechanisms for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management, and containment of a possible confrontation within the OSCE area. Hence, in those days the OSCE was labelled the most legitimate organization in the European security architecture, except for peacekeeping operations.

Apart from the institutional initiatives of the separate organizations to establish a security architecture, cooperation between the organizations started as well in the beginning of the 1990s. Already in 1994 NATO launched the European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) to offer the possibility of a European pillar within NATO for European states to initiate operations with the consent of all NATO states, but without their participation. Furthermore, in the same year NATO launched the Combined Joint Task Forces Concept (CJTF) to create flexible military structures and enhance the possibilities for willing and able European member states.

The initial plan for EU-NATO cooperation was launched in 1996. And, in the NATO Strategic Concept of 1999 European autonomy was first mentioned. This resulted in a Joint EU-NATO Declaration and the Berlin Plus agreements (2003), including a NATO-EU Capability group and EU access to NATO planning capacities for EU crisis management operations.

However, not only cooperation between the EU and NATO was established; the two organizations also cooperated with the OSCE. NATO-OSCE cooperation was launched in 1999 as part of a necessary revival of the European security architecture. This cooperation mainly comprised commitments to reinforce inter-organizational cooperation and a plea for democracy and stability in Europe. EU-OSCE cooperation start-
ed in 1999 with the OSCE Charter for European security and was more deeply institutionalized, in comparison to NATO, when an EU delegation was situated within the OSCE. However, the EU's preferred choice for cooperation was the UN as a global conflict prevention and crisis management partner.

**CRACKS IN THE EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE: TOWARDS THE END OF THE INTERBELLUM 2.0**

After the bipolar European order of the Cold War, the aim was a Europe whole and free to be built on a framework of interlocking institutions. However, this goal was never achieved. Instead of strengthening the OSCE, Enlargement of the EU and NATO had become one of the pillars of this aim. After the first enlargement round in the 1990s, the US remained the driver behind enlargement and even strived for a global NATO. One of the reasons behind this was an urge to replace the UN and its UN Security Council with China and Russia as permanent members. The US programs included the Istanbul Cooperative Initiative, the Mediterranean Dialogue, and Partners across the Globe, which brought in more than 50 partners leading to a differentiation in partner programs, but also a variety of partner states. Likewise, the EU created a labyrinth of potential candidates and strategic partnerships. These partner countries contributed to EU and NATO operations, as Ukraine did to the NATO ISAF operation and the Battlegroup (eFP) in the Baltic States to defend NATO territory after the Russian annexation of Crimea (2014). However, from 2010 enlargement fatigue hit the European states, and enlargement then turned into engagement.

During the glory days of Western enlargement, Russia wanted to strengthen the OSCE as a countermeasure to NATO's worldwide enlargement and partner programs. However, Russia regarded the OSCE as an adversary as well because most OSCE missions were situated in former SU territory. Hence, after 2010, Russia's interest in strengthening the OSCE in a genuine pan-European security organization diminished. The lack of interest in the West in strengthening the OSCE also played a role. After 2000, the US was not in favor of strengthening the OSCE due to Russian military offensives in Chechnya, the presence of Russian Forces in Moldova and the Russian invasion in Georgia. Among the European states, strengthening the OSCE was always disputed between the transatlantic-oriented states and the more neutral states within the OSCE area.

The traditionally neutral states, such as Switzerland, Austria and Finland, followed by Turkey and Germany, were in particular involved in supporting the OSCE. Even during the annexation of Crimea these states remained proponents of putting the OSCE again at the center of the European security architecture. This was also the result of the many crises in the EU, like Brexit and cracks in the transatlantic link caused by the Trump Presidency.

Furthermore, some European states considered the OSCE as the only organization that could provide assistance in conflicts where NATO and the EU were not welcome. As a result, both enlargement and engagement resulted in a grey zone for states which were situated between Vienna and Vladivostok and not yet a member of NATO or the EU or fell under Russian protection. These states remained under the security umbrella of the OSCE and could put their concerns on any European political agenda. The European security architecture that was still in place offered a safe haven until the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the 24th of February.

Hence, from 2010 cracks in the European security architecture increased. States were suspended from organizations, exemplified by expelling Russian representatives from the Parliamentary Assemblée of the Council of Europe in 2015, as a result of the annexation of Crimea. Or states stepped out of treaties and organizations themselves, exemplified by Russia's ceasing to participate in the CFE Treaty in 2007, amongst others, in reaction to the NATO membership of the Baltic states. Finally, the CFE and the Open Skies Treaty were abandoned by all parties due to distrust and a lack transparency.

Furthermore, cracks also appeared within the EU and NATO, due to hesitation about existing memberships, exemplified by Greece during the financial crisis in EU's Schengen zone after 2008 and Turkey's NATO membership as a result of the response of President Erdogan to the coup in 2016. States even stepped out of organizations, like the UK from the EU. Additionally, though the EU, NATO and OSCE were usually present in the same areas of operation, as in Kosovo, competition between the organizations evolved due to the enlargement of NATO and the EU in relation to the status of the OSCE as the axis of the wider European security order. Furthermore, although the OSCE had been mandated for peacekeeping operations, this had never become reality under the OSCE flag, because of lack of consensus among the states.

A final crack in the idea of interlocking institutions was the strengthening of the EU as a security actor in relation to the OSCE, accompanied by a much larger budget, institutional framework and assets. This resulted in a takeover and competition between the EU and the OSCE for crisis management in the wider Europe. Hence, until the 24th of February this year the organizations left in the European security architecture were still linked, although the relationship between the EU and NATO was strengthened the most. This relationship indeed approached interlocking and became complementary instead of competitive. Instead, the relationships between the OSCE and the EU, on the one hand, and NATO, on the other, became more competitive and even ‘interblocking’.
EUROPE WHOLE AND FREE: THE BATTLE FOR SPHERES OF INFLUENCE – RETURN OF THE COLD WAR

The impact of the 24th of February on the organizations of the European security architecture has been enormous.

First, when it comes to the European security architecture, the OSCE has become the greatest victim of the Russian assault against Ukraine, as the break came from states within the organization and violated all founding rules and principles of the Helsinki Final Act (1975). OSCE staff have been intimidated and detained in Donetsk and Luhansk. Furthermore, a special monitoring mission had to be ended, because of the lack of consensus in the OSCE Permanent Council, due to the position of the Russian Federation. Hence, the idea of the OSCE as the axis of the European security architecture has shattered.

Second, unlike the other security organizations of the European security architecture, the Council of Europe has the possibility to suspend members. In addition to its condemnation of the Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine (OSCE, EU and NATO also issued condemnations), the Council of Europe decided to initiate the procedure of expulsion of the Russian Federation. Although the Council of Europe has no military means for conflict resolution, the idea of the Council as the guardian of human rights, rule of law and democracy in the wider Europe will remain.

Third, with regard to the EU and NATO within the European security architecture and their partnership and enlargement programs, these take place under a completely different constellation than they did in the decade before. Enlargement and partnership are top priority again on the EU and NATO political agendas and will probably lead to enlargement and strengthened partnerships for both NATO (Sweden and Finland) and the EU (Albania, Ukraine, and the Balkan states). The question is whether European unity will stand or give way to concepts like ‘a Europe à la carte’ and more differentiation. Furthermore, the NATO-Russian Council did not cease to exist but is definitely on hold as Russia poses the most direct threat to NATO’s security as stated in the recent Madrid Strategic Concept.

Fourth, with regard to EU and NATO cooperation and their strategies, the organizations strengthened their cooperation and, according to NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, the unity and a division of labor are clearly demonstrated.

Fifth, both NATO and the EU adopted new strategies in 2022, which were already planned before Russia’s invasion.

However, the focus of NATO on collective defense together with NATO’s cooperative security task (enlargement and engagement) has become even stronger, which inspired Finland and Sweden to apply for NATO membership, though they were already protected under the EU’s mutual defense clause of
In reaction to the war in Ukraine the EU devised its largest sanctions package towards Russia ever. Furthermore, the EU is supplying military support to a non-member state at war under the European Peace Facility (EPF). Both measures, led to a ‘belated birth of a geopolitical EU’, as claimed by EU High Representative Josep Borell (March 28, 2022).

FUTURE SCENARIOS

Instead of European peace and security, one could claim that the organizations of the European security architecture have become a battleground. However, claiming that geopolitics and national power have simply replaced multilateralism and interdependence is not accurate either: different games require different rules.10

Political and academic debates analyzing or even predicting a future European security architecture are roughly distributed between those that claim Putin has to be offered a seat at the table versus those who see the return to a Cold War 2.0, calling Russia the biggest threat to European security. Though the war in Ukraine is far from over and could continue for years, it is far too early to draw conclusions on a future European security architecture. However, below are offered some scenarios for a future security architecture aimed at inspiring further debate and research.

The first scenario describes a return to the Cold War, where the Berlin Wall will be replaced by a Minsk Wall. As a result, the focus of the EU and NATO will be on the regions ‘East of Vienna’, which results in moving the institutional center from the West to the center of Europe. The Council of Europe will be included, and the OSCE will be a relic of a past. On the other side of the wall Putin’s Eurasian order will emerge, including a political, organizational, military and economic link with China.

The second scenario includes enlargement of the EU and NATO flanked by parallel processes of single European states continuing to pursue relations with Russia. This is the result of economic, historic, and cultural ties together with economic and energy dependence. Likewise, relations with Russia have to be retained, because of Russian minorities within state boundaries, which could cause rebellion or even inter- and intra-state conflicts. In this scenario the unity between NATO and EU member states is strong, but, due to these parallel processes, not as strong as it was in the first few months of the war in Ukraine.

The third scenario paints a completely different picture, derived from the devastating scenario portrayed at the beginning of this article: a fragmented Europe, where the unity between the transatlantic states as well as EU-NATO cooperation is shattered, because national state interests vanquished the idea of multilateralism and interdependence.

In conclusion: the European security architecture is in crisis. Whilst new international orders are emerging, it is too early to predict a future European security architecture. After the 24th of February the uncertainty of a security architecture for the wider Europe influences not only the security position of Ukraine in the OSCE area, but many more states that are not directly under the EU or NATO flag and will not be in the forthcoming future. Hence, the future framework is more likely to be conflictual rather than cooperative, one of political diversity and plurality.

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5. Exemplified by: the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight 17 on July 17, 2014 in Ukraine, where the OSCE was admitted.
7. On March 16, 2022 the Committee of Ministers decided that the Russian Federation was no longer a member of the Council of Europe according to Article 8 of the Statute of the Council of Europe. See: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=090001680a5da51.
8. Macron’s proposal for an ever-enlarging EU: An EU with ring states – a Europe of different speeds, speech at European parliament, May 9, 2022.